

NDP platform mimics Liberal “Red Book”

A WSWS reporter
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Perusal of the NDP platform for the May 2 federal election confirms NDP leader Jack Layton’s admission that there are no substantive differences between the policies of his trade union-backed, social-democratic party and those of the big business Liberals. (See: Canada: NDP leader Layton concedes he has no substantive differences with big business Liberals)

Like the Liberals’ “Red Book, the NDP platform pledges to rapidly move toward a balanced budget.

Neither party is proposing to raise taxes on the rich. Yet the richest 10 percent of Canadians, and especially the top 1 percent of income-earners, have appropriated the lion’s share of real income gains over the past three decades, and have done so even as the rates at which their incomes have been taxed have been massively reduced. In fact, the richest 1 percent of Canadians now pay proportionately less of their income in taxes than do the poorest ten percent of income-taxpayers.

The NDP platform calls for modest increases in social spending. But many of the spending pledges—including the reversal of the massive cuts to Employment Insurance benefits and eligibility made by the former Chretien Liberal government—are qualified with the phrase “as finances permit.” The NDP, despite pre-election rhetoric, is not calling for pharmacare or any other major new social program.

Nor is it advocating a major program of public works to rebuild the country’s crumbling infrastructure and provide jobs. The NDP’s major “job creation” proposals are tax credits to businesses who hire new workers, a 2 percent cut in the tax rate for small businesses, the extension of a tax credit for manufacturers that purchase new machinery and equipment, a “buy Canadian” policy for major federal government investments, and a pledge to “keep Canada’s corporate tax rate competitive by ensuring that our combined federal/provincial Corporate Income

Tax is always below the United States’ federal corporate tax rate.”

The NDP is pledging to provide funding for 2,500 new police officers and to adopt a series of law and order bills to fight gang violence.

Under conditions where Canada is spending more on the military in real terms than at anytime since World War II, the NDP’s election platform declares, “We will maintain the current levels of Defense spending commitments” and provide the Canadian Armed Forces with “the best equipment.”

On foreign policy, like the Liberals, the NDP claims it will prioritize “peacemaking, peace-building and peacekeeping.” All the wars and overseas interventions that Canada has been involved in over the past two decades—the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 intervention in Somalia, the 1999 NATO bombing campaign against Yugoslavia, the ongoing US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan, the 2004 mission to Haiti, and the current campaign against Libya—have been justified as “peacemaking” or “peacekeeping” missions. And with the exception of the 1991 Gulf War, the NDP supported them all.

While the Liberals are proposing that the corporate tax rate be rolled back to last year’s rate of 18 percent, the NDP is advocating a return to the 2009 rate of 19 percent. The NDP, like the Conservatives, is pledging to balance the budget by 2014-15—a feat that will require continuing cuts in vital social services.

In his introduction to the platform, Layton is at pains to present it as “practical,” “affordable,” and “costed.” Moreover, the platform highlights five “practical first steps” that the NDP will act on “in the first 100 days.”

They are both vague and modest: 1) “hire more doctors and nurses,” 2) “work with the provinces to strengthen pensions,” 3) cut the tax rate for small businesses by 2 percent and give tax credits to companies that hire workers, 4) cap credit card fees, take the federal sales tax off home heating, and reduce cell phone costs and 5) end scandals and “work with the other parties.”

This meager 5-point “reform” agenda is clearly meant to serve as the NDP’s opening negotiating position in the event of another minority parliament. Significantly, the platform declares, “If the mandate we receive justifies it, we will work with other federalist parties, through informal or appropriate stable arrangements.” In other words, the NDP is offering to join a coalition government or enter into a governmental accord with the big business Liberals or even the unabashedly rightwing Conservatives. However, in a concession to Harper’s rightwing campaign, the NDP is promising to exclude the pro-Quebec independence Bloc Quebecois from any coalition or accord.



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