

Head of Canada's NDP auditions before US elite

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Party leader Thomas Mulcair and several other leading New Democrats travelled to Washington, D.C. and New York City last week for a series of closed-door talks with Obama administration officials, Democratic Party politicians, business leaders and other representatives of American and international capital. Mulcair used the opportunity to demonstrate to the U.S. ruling elite that the New Democratic Party (NDP) is dedicated to defending the interests of big business and a dependable ally of U.S. imperialism.

Canada's social democrats, who vaulted to the position of Official Opposition in the last federal election, have explained their political success as a result of their "moving to the centre." This slide to the right, accelerated by the late Jack Layton, has only deepened under his successor—a former minister in the widely-hated Quebec Liberal government of Jean Charest.

"It's the first time that the NDP is in a position to form a government and we're planning to do just that in 2015," Mulcair said before leaving. "Part of our work in the run-up to that is to get to know the Americans and have them learn who the NDP are and what our history is and what our positions are."

In a statement sent to party members after the NDP delegation returned to Canada, Paul Dewar, the party's Foreign Affairs critic, gushed that "the goal of this trip was to introduce the NDP to key American decision-makers. And I'm happy to tell you that we found a very receptive audience."

Dewar claimed that the NDP is "building a fairer, greener and more prosperous country for all—and bringing that vision to the world stage." In reality, the NDP, like the British Labour Party, France's Socialist Party, Greece's PASOK and social-democratic parties the world over, is a party of capitalist austerity and imperialist war and this was well-illustrated by those Mulcair chose to meet and the statements he made while on his 3-day U.S. visit.

Among others, the federal NDP leader met with Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic leader in House of Representatives, former Democratic National Chairman Howard Dean, the director of the Congressional Budget Office, and officials from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. He also addressed leaders of the Canadian-American Business Council.

Speaking directly to the US political and business elite, Mulcair sought to counter the rhetoric of Canada's Conservative government, which has launched Republican-type broadsides against the NDP, accusing of it being "dangerously radical" and "leftist."

Mulcair repeatedly assured his U.S. audiences and interlocutors that the NDP is as committed as the Harper-led Conservatives and the Liberals to eliminating the federal deficit and upholding "fiscal responsibility". The NDP leader pledged that if his party formed Canada's next government it would not raise personal income taxes on the wealthy, although these have been slashed by successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

Mulcair said that to help eliminate the deficit an NDP government would roll back some of the corporate tax cuts that the Conservatives have lavished on big business, raising the corporate tax rate from the current 15 percent to around the 2010 level of 18 percent. In 2000, the federal corporate tax rate was 28 percent.

Mulcair has refused comment on what was discussed in the many private meetings he held with U.S. leaders. But it is clear that one issue that figured prominently was the growing oil extraction operations in the Alberta tar sands.

Canada's corporate media, echoing the Harper Conservatives, have seized upon a statement Pelosi made after her meeting with Mulcair to accused the NDP leader of "trash-talking Canada" before foreigners and interfering with the massive investment being undertaken to transport bitumen from the Alberta oil sands to refineries in the southern US. When asked about the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, Pelosi had said that "Canadians don't want [it] in their own country."

In the face of the Conservative-corporate media furor over Pelosi's remarks, an anonymous aide to Mulcair rushed to inform the *Globe and Mail* that "those were Nancy Pelosi's words, not Mulcair's." The NDP leader did say on several occasions that he believed the first priority should be building a west-east pipeline within Canada, so as to strengthen the Canadian nation-state and assure more of the profits from the tar sands remain in Canada.

Later in an interview with Bloomberg News Service, Mulcair argued that oil companies looking to invest in Canada *would do*

better under an NDP government than under the Conservatives, because the social democrats would be better able to placate public concerns over unbridled tar sands development. In their 2012 budget the Conservative government made steep cuts to the Environment Ministry and gutted the environmental review process so as to push for rapid development of the oil sands and other resource extraction projects.

According to Mulcair, an NDP government would do “a better job gaining public acceptance for infrastructure projects like pipelines because it would enforce a more credible environmental review process. ... You want to get people onside if you want to move product to market.”

Speaking through Bloomberg directly to US big business, Mulcair sought to stoke US fears over state-owned Chinese oil companies becoming major consumers of Canadian oil exports, thereby driving up prices, and becoming major investors in the tar sands, enabling them to reshape oil flows and potentially limit US access. In his anti-Chinese rhetoric and denunciations of “Communism,” Mulcair was making an explicit appeal to US imperialism and signaling that the NDP is supportive of the Obama administration’s “pivot to Asia.” Through the redeployment of US military power and the encouragement of China’s neighbours in pressing their territorial claims, Washington is seeking to isolate Beijing and thwart China’s rise.

Mulcair attacked the Harper Conservative government for being too welcoming of Chinese investment. He pointed to its recent approval of a \$15.1 billion takeover of Nexen, a Calgary-based oil company, by the Chinese National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and the recently concluded Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPA). By 2020, said Mulcair, “China will be Canada’s second largest investor, largely in oil and gas.”

“Taken together,” concluded Mulcair, “FIPA and CNOOC’s takeover of Nexen effectively limit the ability of Canadian governments to independently control our own natural resource policy, while ceding enormous control over our resources to a foreign power.” Invoking concerns about “energy security,” Mulcair argued that the NDP would be a better partner for the US oil giants and US imperialism than the Harper government.

In a lengthy speech at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Relations, Mulcair celebrated the longstanding strategic partnership between Canada and the US and repeated the claims that Washington and Ottawa stand for democratic and humanitarian values—fraudulent claims that have and continue to be invoked to justify imperialist intervention and war.

Said Mulcair, “We both enjoy modern, dynamic economies. We both respect fundamental labour, environmental and human rights. ... In the last century, our two countries served as a model of partnership and progress for a waiting world. We built that partnership on the strength of these values. In the 21st century, as we prepare ourselves for an increasingly complex set of

challenges, let’s re-commit to those same values, and to those who share them.”

While the NDP once postured as an opponent of NATO and NORAD, it has emerged during the past two decades as a strong supporter of Canada’s participation in a series of imperialist wars, including Canada’s leading role in the 1999 NATO war on Yugoslavia and the US-NATO occupation of Afghanistan. Its first major act as Official Opposition was to vote unanimously in favour of Canada’s participation in the US-led war against Libya. In recent weeks Dewar and Mulcair have urged the Harper government to “do more” to support the French-led invasion of Mali.

In recent years, the NDP has made it a priority to forge closer political and organizational links with the Democratic Party, Wall Street’s “left” party of government. Indeed, to make this association even more explicit, some NDP leaders have toyed with the idea of dropping the word “New” from the party’s name, meaning Canada’s social democrats would henceforth be known as the Democratic Party.

After meeting with the Democratic House Leader, Mulcair was effusive in his praise, tweeting that it “was an honour to meet with Nancy Pelosi—a strong leader and the first woman to become Speaker of the House.” Later, he told reporters that “there’s a lot of connectedness between a senior Democrat like Madam Pelosi and the New Democratic Party.”

While in Washington, the NDP leader spoke before a leading Democratic think-tank, the Center for American Progress. An attendee, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, “People took him very seriously. Even those in the United States who can’t figure out why the left in Canada, the Liberals and the NDP, can’t seem to get along, wanted to hear him out... Mulcair was viewed credibly and people were impressed.”

In fact, the NDP, while resisting calls for the two parties to merge, has repeatedly partnered with the Liberals, long the Canadian bourgeoisie’s preferred party of government. In 2008, the NDP agreed to be the junior partner in a Liberal-led coalition government committed to “fiscal responsibility,” implementing \$50 billion in corporate tax cuts, and waging war in Afghanistan. In Ontario, Canada’s most populous province, the NDP is currently propping up a minority Liberal government that is cutting billions from social spending and has imposed sweeping contract concessions on teachers by legislative fiat.



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