

NDP convenes in Montreal: a party of capitalist austerity and imperialist war

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At its biannual federal convention, held in Montreal this weekend, the New Democratic Party (NDP) will celebrate almost two years as the Official Opposition in Canada's Parliament.

Canada's social-democrats have responded to their unexpected success in the May 2011 federal election by lurching further right on every major political question. The leadership justifies this by claiming that it needs to demonstrate to Canadians that the "NDP is ready for government." In reality, it is seeking to demonstrate to the ruling class that the NDP is a "progressive" party akin to Barack Obama's Democrats or the British Labour Party—a party of austerity and imperialist war—and thus eminently suitable to supplant the Liberals as the bourgeoisie's "left" party of government.

This process was exemplified by the party's choice of Thomas Mulcair, a former cabinet minister in the Quebec Liberal government of Jean Charest, to succeed the late Jack Layton as federal party leader.

This weekend's convention will vote on a new preamble to the NDP Constitution, one that would eliminate the last vestiges of the social-democratic "anti-capitalist" rhetoric the party espoused at its founding in 1961. Mulcair has repeatedly argued for such revisions, asserting in his first speech as NDP leader that "We need to refresh our discourse, modernize our approach, and use language that pleases our supporters, but also attracts people who share our vision."

Ascending to the role of Official Opposition in midst of the most severe crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression and under conditions of growing popular anger over social inequality, the NDP proclaims its adherence to "fiscal responsibility."

Like the Conservatives and Liberals, it supports

balancing the budget through cuts to federal social spending. Genuflecting before the bourgeois elite, the NDP has pledged that it will not raise either personal income tax rates for the wealthy or capital gains tax rates—which have been slashed by successive Liberal and Conservative governments to their lowest levels in almost a century.

The NDP has worked alongside its allies in the trade union bureaucracy to smother the mounting popular opposition to the Conservative government of Stephen Harper and the job, wage and social-spending cuts being implemented by the ruling class as a whole.

The Conservative government has repeatedly intervened to illegalize strikes, then mandated arbitrators to impose employer concession demands. In every case—whether it be Canada Post, Air Canada, or CP Rail—the NDP has feigned opposition, while working with the unions to corral the workers back to work on the grounds that the laws of parliament cannot be defied.

In the case of last year's militant Quebec student strike, the NDP refused to offer even nominal support. As his former boss, Jean Charest, ordered the riot police to disperse demonstrating students and youth by mass arrests and the baton, the NDP leader cynically argued that "education is a provincial responsibility" and that he was focusing on the "fight against Harper." As if Harper and the Canadian ruling class as a whole were not egging Charest on.

On similar grounds the NDP refused to condemn Bill 78 (Law 12)—a draconian law that effectively illegalized the student strike and placed sweeping restrictions on the right to demonstrate over any issue anywhere in Quebec.

If the NDP was so hostile to the students it was because the social democrats, like their union allies,

feared the struggle against the university tuition fee hikes could become the catalyst for a broader working class challenge to the austerity program of the entire bourgeoisie.

The NDP has been no less anxious to demonstrate to the ruling class its support for Canada's participation in imperialist war.

Its first major act on becoming the official Opposition was to unanimously vote, alongside the Conservatives and the Liberals, to support Canada's participation in the NATO war on Libya. NDP Foreign Affairs Critic, Paul Dewar, was among the first to call for Canada to diplomatically recognize the Libyan National Transitional Council—the stooge regime of defectors from the Gaddafi regime, businessmen, and Islamacists cobbled together by US imperialism.

The NDP has also supported the Harper's government's decision to provide military aid to the French-led occupation of Mali, even calling upon Harper to “do more.” Significantly, both the war in Libya and the occupation of Mali were launched by governments the NDP holds up as its “progressive” brethren—the Democratic administration of Barack Obama and the Socialist Party government of Francois Hollande.

While the social democrats have in the past postured as “anti-war,” they have made it clear that such “opposition” is only a cynical ploy to win votes from the millions of Canadians who deeply oppose such acts of military aggression and to harness the anti-war movement to the bourgeois establishment. When called upon in Parliament, the NDP have supported and voted to sustain every major action by the Canadian Forces in the last two decades—in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Haiti, and Libya.

Like Obama and Hollande, Mulcair and the NDP justify these acts of military aggression as “humanitarian interventions”—dressing up in “democratic” colours the neocolonial wars fought by Canadian imperialism and its NATO allies for mercenary geo-political and economic interests.

The NDP leader has lavished praise upon Obama, using his recent trip to New York and Washington to argue that an NDP federal government in Canada would be the ideal partner for the Democratic administration. (See: “Head of Canada's NDP auditions before US elite”)

The preamble to the party constitution the NDP leadership has produced for this weekend's convention is meant to demonstrate, if anyone in the ruling class has any lingering doubts, that the NDP is a faithful instrument of big business and views the reformist politics it once espoused as anathema.

A vapid four paragraphs, that could have been spun by a speech-writer for Obama or former Liberal prime ministers Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, the preamble would replace references to “social ownership,” “social planning” and production for “social needs ... not the making of profit” with a frank and (far more honest) avowal of the NDP's support for capitalism. The NDP, it affirms, wants “a rules-based economy, nationally and globally, in which governments have the power to address the limitations of the market.”



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