

NDP “prepares for government” by emphasizing its kinship with Obama

Keith Jones
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Canada’s official opposition, the trade union-supported New Democratic Party (NDP), touted last weekend’s party policy convention as a showcase of its “readiness to govern” and toward that end adopted “pragmatic” policies, “modernized” its rhetoric, and emphasized its kinship with other “progressive” parties like Barack Obama’s Democrats and the Australian Labor Party.

In other words, Canada’s social democrats used the convention as a fresh opportunity to demonstrate to the ruling class that they are a suitable replacement for the Liberals as its “left party” of government—a party that uses empty rhetoric about social justice and equality of opportunity as a smokescreen for implementing capitalist austerity and waging imperialist war.

The convention gave a resounding show of support for federal party leader Thomas Mulcair, voting 92.3 percent against a review of his leadership. A Quebec Liberal cabinet minister from 2003 to 2006, Mulcair toyed with a job offer from Stephen Harper’s Conservative government before agreeing in 2007 to serve as the Quebec lieutenant of the then NDP leader, the late Jack Layton.

In his address to the convention, Mulcair made anodyne criticisms of mounting social inequality and the Conservative government’s cuts to jobless benefits and attacks on workers’ rights. Needless to say, he made no mention of his own votes in favor of Quebec Liberal legislation facilitating the contracting out of work and imposing seven-year wage cutting contracts on a half-million public sector workers.

As proof of the NDP’s readiness to govern responsibly, he pointed to the record of provincial NDP governments, saying they have set the standard “for good public administration.” In reality, the NDP provincial governments of the past two decades have

presided over deepening social inequality and economic insecurity. They have rationed public services, hiked user fees, imposed wage-cutting public sector “restraint” programs, and lavished tax cuts and other concessions on big business.

For his part, Mulcair has vowed that a federal NDP government will not increase personal income or capital gains taxes for the rich and will match the Conservatives’ pledge to eliminate the annual federal budget deficit by fiscal 2015-16.

Mulcair boasted that the NDP’s unexpected sweep of 59 of Quebec’s 75 federal parliamentary seats in the 2011 election has strengthened federalist forces, emphasizing thereby that the NDP stands with the predominant faction of the Canadian ruling class in its reactionary power struggle with that faction of the Quebec elite that favors an independent capitalist *République du Québec*. Of course all sections of Quebec and Canadian big business are united in seeking to place the burden of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression on the working class. In his address Mulcair implicitly rejected calls from within his party and from its trade union allies for an electoral alliance with the Liberals, vowing that the NDP will stand candidates in all 338 federal constituencies in the 2015 election. But when asked about the possibility of an alliance with the Liberals on the convention’s sidelines, Mulcair noted that because the NDP “had made it our priority to replace Stephen Harper” it had pressed in 2008 for a coalition with the Liberals—a coalition under which the NDP was to have served as the junior partner in a government committed to fiscal responsibility, implementing the \$50 billion Liberal-Conservative corporate tax-cut plan, and waging war in Afghanistan.

In Ontario, the NDP is already in an alliance with the

Liberals, propping up a minority Liberal government that has slashed billions from social spending and imposed concession-contracts on the province's teachers by government fiat.

Under Layton and now Mulcair, the NDP has emphasized its close affinity with the US Democratic Party. The NDP leadership has gushing praise for the Democratic Party administration of Barak Obama—an administration that bailed out the financial aristocracy, has slashed trillions from social spending, waged predatory wars in Central Asia and the Middle East, and expanded the Bush administration's assault on democratic rights, including asserting the right to summarily kill U.S. citizens with drone strikes.

The NDP has also developed close organizational ties with the Democrats. "Obama for America" national field director Jeremy Byrd was a convention keynote speaker. So too, were the former Clinton advisor and economist Joseph Stiglitz, entrepreneur Ruma Bose, and a prominent member of Australia's Labor Party (ALP) government, Workplace Relations Minister Bill Shorten.

The ALP has spearheaded repeated rounds of capitalist restructuring that have seen wide swathes of the health care system privatized, wages slashed, and a huge growth in contract labor. Recently it adopted legislation that criminalizes almost all worker job action. The ALP government is also playing a major role in the Obama's administration preparations for war with China, recently agreeing to the stationing of U.S. troops in the country.

The old constitution preamble had never impeded the NDP, working with its trade unions allies to systematically suppress the class struggle, including invoking strikebreaking laws, or slashing social spending, or supporting Canada's participation in imperialist wars, most recently in Afghanistan, Libya and Mali.

Nevertheless, the party leadership was determined to jettison the old preamble as demonstrable evidence of its shift still further right. In a pre-convention editorial, the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece of Canada's financial elite, had urged just that, declaring, "The NDP's roots, as defined by its current constitution, lie in poisoned ground, and should be abandoned at all costs."

The corporate media gave considerable coverage to

the purported fight to defend the "socialist" character of the NDP that was mounted by pseudo-socialist groups like the Socialist Caucus and Fightback. These groups are tolerated by the NDP leadership because they work tirelessly to keep the working class under their political control and that of the pro-capitalist trade unions, propping up thereby the enforcers of capitalist austerity and policemen of the working class. Following their defeat, the pseudo-lefts quickly reconciled themselves, announcing that they would support the NDP and Mulcair at the next election. Declared Socialist Caucus head Barry Weisleder, "It would be insane to abandon this party to those who want to embrace capitalism in crisis." In other words, Weisleder and company want to continue to provide the big business NDP with a desperately needed political cover and thereby smother the mounting resistance of the working class.



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