

Toronto elite seeking to jettison right-wing populist mayor

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Toronto's big business elite has turned on Rob Ford—the city's rightwing populist mayor and their designated hatchet man in imposing social spending cuts and concessionary contracts on city workers— and now appears intent on forcing him from office.

On Saturday, the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece of Canada's financial elite, devoted five broadsheet-newspaper pages to chronicling allegations of drug use and trafficking involving Ford and his siblings. Most damning was the claim that Doug Ford, the mayor's older brother, chief advisor and a fellow Toronto City Council member, regularly sold drugs for a period of five or more years stretching into his early adulthood.

The *Globe* exposé came in the midst of a media furor over claims that a drug-dealer has been shopping around a cellphone video that shows Mayor Ford smoking from a crack cocaine pipe in the company of two “Somali gangsters” and making racist and homophobic comments. The US-based “Gawker” web site first brought the reputed existence of such a video to public attention; the very next day, May 16, the *Toronto Star* announced that two of its reporters have seen the video and believe it to be genuine. The *Star* accompanied its report with a photo, supplied by the drug-dealer said to be in possession of the video, showing Ford in the company of two men. One of them is a drug-dealer murdered earlier this year.

The *Star* further reported that it had declined an offer to buy the video for \$200,000. The Gawker web site is now seeking to raise the money needed to buy it and as of May 26 claimed to have collected over \$175,000.

Ford, a strident advocate of rightwing “law and order” politics, quickly dismissed the *Star* report as “ridiculous,” then fell silent. Clearly he hoped to brazen out this scandal as he has numerous previous

controversies, including a string of instances when he has been shown to have flouted city rules so as to advance his personal and political interests.

However, as Ford's silence stretched into the end of last week, he came under increasing media criticism and it became apparent that a consensus was forming within Toronto's financial and political elite that Ford had become a political liability.

The *Toronto Sun*, a rightwing tabloid that has unabashedly championed Ford and his crude attacks on city workers, the poor, immigrants and gays, urged him to step aside if he could not categorically state that the video is a fabrication. Various columnists at the neo-conservative *National Post*, for their part, expressed dismay at Ford's failure to provide a “serious explanation.”

On Friday, Deputy Mayor Doug Holyday, one of Ford's staunchest allies and his point-man in imposing concessionary contracts on city workers, led a mutiny of half of the members of Ford's own Executive Council, issuing a letter that demanded Ford “openly and transparently” respond to the allegations against him.

Other Ford allies, such as Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty and former Ontario Premier Mike Harris, have maintained an embarrassed silence.

On Sunday, Mayor Ford and his brother used their weekly radio show to attempt to mount a counteroffensive. Rob Ford lashed out at the press, calling them a “bunch of maggots,” denied any video existed, and vowed to stand for re-election as mayor. Doug Ford denied the allegations in the *Globe* exposé, while adding that they pertain to things said to have happened a quarter-century or more ago.

Short of a criminal conviction, there is no quick

mechanism to remove an elected Toronto mayor. Ford's administration, however, is unraveling. Last Thursday, Ford dismissed his chief of staff, Mark Towhey, for "insubordination" and had him escorted from the building by security guards. Yesterday his press secretary and his assistant resigned.

A multi-millionaire who was born to privilege, Ford is an ignorant rightwing bully, whose claims to speak for the little man have always been a sham. He has served as a willing instrument for the Toronto elite, which itself comprises a good portion of the Canadian ruling class, in slashing public services and goring city workers.

That said, Ford's apparent political demise is not the product of an independent movement of the working class. Rather it is being orchestrated by an elite that has decided he has become a liability to the prosecution of their class war agenda.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* explained late last year when a court case mounted by the well-known "left" lawyer Clayton Ruby found Ford guilty of a minor abuse of his authority—a verdict reversed on appeal—and ordered him removed as mayor, Ford's ouster would merely provide the ruling elite with the opportunity to fashion a more effective big business administration.

Ford's political victories—his winning of the 2010 mayoral election, his imposition of sweeping budget cuts, and his goring of the city workers in the 2012 contract negotiations—were entirely bound up with and due to the rightwing politics of the official "left," the unions and the social-democratic NDP, and their liberal friends.

Ford's predecessor, the trade union and NDP-supported David Miller, lavished generous property tax breaks, grants, and subsidies to large developers. These policies robbed city coffers of millions and led to cuts in snow clearance, parks and recreation, and day care. In 2009, Miller forced city workers out on strike, but after he failed to extract concessions of the size and scale demanded by the financial elite, it turned on him and served notice it would oppose his re-election. Miller responded by quickly announcing that he would step down at the end of his term.

In the 2010 election, Ford was able to exploit widespread popular anger over declining living standards by promising to lower taxes, while

shamelessly lying that any cuts would only affect the "grave train" on which city employees reputedly gorged.

When Ford moved to impose sweeping budget cuts and gut city worker contracts, the unions and "left" mounted only token opposition. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) deliberately separated the city workers' struggle against the destruction of job security—a critical step toward the privatizing of public services—from the fight against the budget cuts. Then, with Ford threatening to hire strikebreakers to break a strike against the city's concession demands, CUPE went before city workers and told them they would be "isolated" if they resisted.

CUPE thus forced through concession-laden contracts, allowing Ford to impose a demonstrable defeat on city workers and setting a precedent for employers, public and private sector alike, across the county.

Having at every step facilitated Ford's "victories," the unions and NDP have invoked the rightwing threat represented by Ford and his provincial ally, Ontario Tory leader Tim Hudak, to justify their propping up a minority Ontario Liberal government that has implemented anti-worker measures far greater in scope and scale.

In the spring of 2012, the NDP facilitated the passage of an Ontario budget that cut \$14 billion from public spending over the next three years. And last week the NDP, to applause from the trade unions, reaffirmed its support for the Liberals. In the name of opposing the "right," the social democrats are continuing to sustain in office a Liberal government that last winter used anti-worker legislation to impose sweeping contract concession on teachers and that in their spring 2013 budget expanded their austerity agenda, promising to freeze public sector workers' pay and hold annual social spending increases to 1 percent through 2017.



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