Canada: NDP pledges not to raise taxes on rich

Dylan Lubao
21 September 2013

The federal New Democratic Party (NDP) used its three-day parliamentary caucus strategy session, held in Saskatoon last week, to underline its commitment to a right-wing, pro-big business agenda.

Party leader Thomas Mulcair paid lip service to worsening levels of social inequality, but emphasized that an NDP government would pursue policies little different from those of the current Conservative government. The NDP, boasted Mulcair, is a party of "fiscal responsibility" that opposes any increase in the personal income taxes of even the richest 1 percent of Canadians and is committed first and foremost to providing "good, solid public administration."

Last week's caucus meeting was timed to precede the start of the fall parliamentary session. The Conservative majority government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has since prorogued, or suspended, parliament until mid-October. Harper has utilized this antidemocratic manoeuvre twice before—the first time in a flagrantly anticonstitutional manner to prevent a parliamentary vote that would have resulted in the defeat of the then-minority Conservative government; the second time to block investigation of the Canadian military's role in the torture of Afghan detainees. This time, Harper and his Conservatives are trying to ride out a Senate expenses scandal.

During his speech at the conclusion of the caucus meeting, Mulcair, a former Quebec Liberal cabinet minister, took aim at the Conservatives and the Liberals, both of whom now lead the NDP in the polls. In the 2011 federal elections, Canada's social democrats, under the leadership of the now deceased Jack Layton, were catapulted, for the first time ever, into the position of Canada's Official Opposition. But their support, as measured by the opinion polls, has steadily declined over the past year, because workers and young people rightly see little to distinguish them from the Canadian elite's other parties of capitalist austerity and imperialist war.

Since becoming the Official Opposition, the NDP have emphasized their "readiness to govern" by promising to continue the Conservatives' right-wing program of handouts to the rich and austerity for the working class. Mulcair has categorically opposed raising taxes on the wealthiest sections of society to provide better public services and alleviate mounting poverty, hunger and homelessness. "Several provinces are already at the 50 percent [taxation] rate," said Mulcair in a recent interview. "Beyond that, you're not talking taxation, you're talking confiscation. And that is never going to be part of my policies."

Mulcair has also signalled to Bay Street that he will continue to maintain Canada's corporate tax rates, currently the lowest among the G7 countries, far below both traditional levels and the US rate of 39.5 percent. Over the past two decades, federal and provincial government have lavished huge tax cuts on big business and the wealthy, contributing thereby to an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the working class to the top 10 percent of the population. While Muclair has suggested that he might raise the federal corporate tax rate back to 21 percent—that is, to the rate in place when the Conservatives came to power in 2006—his secretary insisted in a recent e-mail exchange with a *National Post* reporter that these are not "declarative" statements and that there is "a lot of room" to maintain the combined federal and provincial Canadian tax rate below the US rate.

The NDP's right-wing orientation is further demonstrated by their positions on other key questions of economic and foreign policy. The NDP and their allies in the trade unions have launched a chauvinistic campaign against the influx of Chinese economic investment and scapegoated immigrant workers for the employment crisis. The NDP has also voiced support for Canada's

© World Socialist Web Site

participation in negotiations to create a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a US-led free trade bloc of Pacific nations directed at isolating and pressuring China, and for the Conservatives' attempt to negotiate a Canada-EU free trade agreement.

The NDP's positions on the TPP and EU free trade agreements align the party with the most powerful sections of Canadian capital. Formerly, the NDP had opposed such agreements from the nationalist standpoint of smaller sections of Canadian business and the trade union bureaucracy.

The NDP is promising a few modest changes in socioeconomic policy—all of them contingent on balancing the budget: scrapping the Conservatives' plan to raise the retirement age from 65 to 67, increased support to impoverished aboriginal communities and retirees, and a universal early child care program

On matters posing a grave danger to the working class—the state spying on Canadians' telecommunications and the threat of a US military strike on Syria—Canada's social democrats have indicated their consent with the government through their silence. They have refused to challenge the Conservatives on the domestic spying operations of the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSEC). Apart from a terse six-sentence statement published in mid-August, the issue is entirely absent from the party website. By contrast, Mulcair and other NDP spokespeople have devoted numerous speeches and articles to hounding the Conservatives on the comparatively mundane Senate spending scandal.

In response to the Obama administration's criminal drive to war against Syria, the NDP has merely called for a debate in the House of Commons before the government commits to Canadian military participation—something Harper has previously promised to do. In 2011, the social democrats gave their unanimous support to Canada's participation in the NATO war for regime change in Libya, a war that claimed the lives of tens of thousands of innocent civilians. The NDP also supported the Conservative government's decision earlier this year to provide military aid to the French-led occupation of Mali.

Mulcair has been quick to claim the NDP's kinship with other "progressive" governments across the globe, including the Democratic Party administration of Barack Obama. In July, he traveled to France to meet with top officials of the ruling Socialist Party (PS), another right-wing party of austerity and war. Mulcair gushed that "this type of contact is extremely important to us," adding that France's SP government is a "model" for a future NDP administration.

Provincial NDP governments across the country have imposed massive public and social spending cuts, slashed public sector workers' wages and championed right-wing positions on everything from welfare reform to anti-labour laws. In Ontario, the NDP is currently propping up a minority Liberal government that has slashed billions in public spending and attacked workers' rights, including passing Bill 115, which criminalized a strike of tens of thousands of public school teachers.

The NDP position during last year's Quebec student strike was particularly odious. It refused to provide even nominal support for the strike and when the Liberal government passed its draconian Bill 78, setting a precedent for future state repression, the NDP refused to speak out against the legislation, saying that it was a "provincial matter."

The NDP's refusal to defend Quebecers' right to protest and demonstrate—Bill 78 placed sweeping restrictions on the right to demonstrate over any issue anywhere in Quebec—contrasts with their vehement denunciations of the Parti Quebecois government's chauvinistic and antidemocratic "Charter of Quebec Values." Here again the NDP's stance aligns with that of the most powerful sections of the Canadian ruling class. Canadian big business fully supported the Charest government's attempt to stamp out the student strike, and it opposes, for its own reasons and from the standpoint of promoting Canadian nationalism and democratic illusions in the Canadian state, the PQ's chauvinist Charter.

The author also recommends:

NDP "prepares for government" by emphasizing its kinship with Obama
[17 April 2013]

NDP convenes in Montreal: a party of capitalist austerity and imperialist war
[12 April 2013]

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site