

NDP leader Mulcair makes pitch to Canadian big business

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With opinion polls showing the trade union-backed New Democratic Party (NDP) in the lead just four months prior to Canada's October 19 federal election, party leader Thomas Mulcair has stepped up his efforts to convince big business that the NDP will faithfully serve its interests.

In speeches before the Economic Club in Toronto and the Montreal Board of Trade, Mulcair—himself a former Quebec Liberal cabinet minister—reassured corporate Canada that the NDP is a “moderate,” fiscally conservative, “middle class” party. He was at pains to dispel any notion an NDP government would pursue significant social reform or would challenge the right-wing fiscal framework established by successive Liberal and Conservative governments over the past three decades.

An NDP government, pledged Mulcair, would deliver balanced budgets and keep taxation rates on the incomes and capital gains of the rich and super-rich at their current record-low levels.

The NDP, he further vowed, would champion the interests of Canadian business internationally and ensure an investment-friendly climate at home.

The richest Canadians have for years gorged on tax cuts, even as public and social services have been ravaged by successive rounds of budget cuts and austerity drives. Yet Mulcair declared that everyone in Canada currently pays their “fair share” of taxes, with the exception of big business.

The NDP leader then hastened to reassure his business audiences that he is proposing only a modest scaling back of the corporate tax cuts implemented by the current Conservative government.

An NDP government, said Mulcair, would keep Canada's combined (federal-provincial) corporate tax rate lower than the combined US rate, so as to ensure that Canadian big business continues to enjoy a “tax advantage” over its US rivals.

Eager to demonstrate the NDP's pro-business credentials, Mulcair also promised to cut the tax rate on small business by 20 percent in a first federal NDP budget, and to boost

infrastructure spending so as to attract investment. “Canada,” said Mulcair, “must position itself as an innovative, energy efficient, high tech economy that is a magnet for both global and domestic investment.”

The NDP leader criticized the Conservatives for “just (sitting) there on the sidelines” rather than aggressively promoting Canadian business. “It's time,” he said, “that Canada's manufacturers had a partner here at home and a champion on the world stage to attract investment and help create export markets. I will be that champion.”

Although Mulcair avoided discussing foreign policy in either speech, the NDP has joined with the Liberals and Conservatives—the Canadian ruling elite's traditional parties of national government—in advocating a much more aggressive role for Canadian imperialism.

This has included strongly backing Canada's leading role in the US-led 2011 “regime change” war in Libya and NATO's aggressive anti-Russian provocations in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Mulcair and his NDP have also lined up with Washington in its increasingly aggressive moves against China. On a 2013 US tour, Mulcair sought to woo the US political and business establishment with attacks on Stephen Harper's Conservative government for being too welcoming of Chinese investment, especially in the energy sector.

By assisting Washington and Wall Street in shoring up US global dominance, Canada's capitalist elite seeks to lay claim to its share of the spoils—markets, natural resources, political influence and pools of cheap labor to exploit.

Mulcair spent much of both speeches promoting the NDP as the party best able to balance the state's books. He took a swipe at the Conservatives, not for their tens of billions in social spending cuts and aggressive concession demands from federal public sector workers, but for running up large budget deficits in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis. Referring to the government's balanced budget law, passed in parliament earlier this year, Mulcair said, “I don't believe budgets balance themselves, nor do I believe they become balanced just because you pass a law—zap you're

balanced.”

Mulcair continued, “I do believe that it is fundamentally important that the federal government live within its means...The federal Department of Finance’s own reports show that NDP governments are the best at balancing the books when in office.”

As proof of the NDP’s determination to limit spending to avoid running afoul of the financial markets, he cited several examples of NDP provincial governments that slashed social spending in the face of bitter opposition from working people. “I come from the school of ... Roy Romanow, who rescued Saskatchewan from bankruptcy with prudent fiscal management. Or Manitoba’s Gary Doer, who has the best track record of any Premier in the modern era for balanced budgets.”

Such comments merely confirm that the NDP, in common with social democratic parties around the world, long ago abandoned any commitment to modest social reforms and has transformed itself into a right-wing party of big business and the financial elite.

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In the early 1990s, Romanow cut spending on health care, social welfare and education to the bone, helping blaze the trail for the massive social spending cuts instituted by the Chretien-Martin federal Liberal government between 1995 and 1997, and by governments of every stripe at the provincial level. Doer, Manitoba’s premier from 1999 to 2009, slashed taxes for the well-to-do and big business, but kept budgets “balanced” by rationing health care and education and punishing the poor with cuts to social welfare programs.

A key mechanism through which the interests of big business will be enforced, should an NDP-led government come to power, will be the trade unions. In Montreal, Mulcair attacked the Harper Conservatives for removing the special tax status of the Quebec Federation of Labour’s (FTQ) Solidarity Fund and other union-managed investment funds. Valued at over \$10 billion, the Solidarity Fund is Quebec’s largest pool of venture capital and is intimately involved in developing profitable Quebec-based firms. It exemplifies the transformation of the unions into corporatist organizations that systematically suppress the class struggle and work hand-in-glove with big business to ensure investor profits.

In February, in a speech before the very same Montreal Board of Trade, Liberal leader Justin Trudeau similarly promised to restore the Solidarity Fund’s special-tax status. On both occasions the announcement was enthusiastically applauded by Quebec’s business elite.

Mulcair’s two speeches were also noteworthy for what

was not said. No mention was made of the drastic assault on democratic rights carried out by successive governments and which has been a major issue in recent months with the Conservatives ramming through passage of Bill C-51.

The NDP claims to oppose the new law, which hands vast new powers to the intelligence agencies, including the “right” to use illegal means to actively “disrupt” individuals and groups deemed to threaten national or economic security. But it did nothing to mobilize the widespread opposition among the Canadian population to Bill C-51, just as it earlier maintained a near total silence on the revelation that the Canadian state has been spying on the metadata of Canadians’ electronic communications for at least a decade.

The NDP only came out against Bill C-51 after it was opposed by the *Globe and Mail*, a development that reflected concerns within Canada’s ruling elite that so brazen a break with traditional bourgeois-democratic forms of rule could dangerously undermine the popular legitimacy of parliament and the state. Moreover, the NDP’s opposition centered on the lack of oversight of the national security apparatus by vetted ruling class representatives, not opposition to the expansion of the state’s coercive powers.

The NDP’s fundamental agreement with the ruling elite’s turn to toward authoritarian methods of rule was further exposed Wednesday when it emerged that Mulcair had approached former Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair to run for the party in the upcoming election. Blair, who subsequently decided to stand as a Liberal candidate, oversaw the brutal repression of the anti G-20 protests in the city in 2010. As police chief, he was also a vocal proponent of the notorious “carding” system in which cops randomly stop individuals—overwhelmingly visible minorities in poor working class neighbourhoods—and bully them into providing personal information.



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