

Canada's NDP leader applauds Thatcher's legacy

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The revelation that the trade union-backed New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Thomas Mulcair is an avowed admirer of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher offers yet another demonstration of the openly right-wing character of Canada's official opposition party.

A video published online on Tuesday showed Mulcair speaking in 2001, when he was a member of the Quebec Liberals. In the brief clip, Mulcair declared that the Conservative Prime Minister had been a “wind of liberty and liberalism in the markets.” He added that Thatcher's period in office, which ran from 1979 to 1990, saw Britain emerge as one of the most productive countries in Europe.

“A government should never have the pretension of being able to replace the free market. It does not work. It didn't work in England. Up until the time of Margaret Thatcher, that is what they tried, the government had its nose in everything,” Mulcair asserted. “Interventionism is a failure. The best way for a government to create riches is to let the free market thrive and get off the backs of businessmen and women.”

His open praise for Thatcher provides a damning indictment of the trade unions and pseudo-left forces who claim that the NDP offers a progressive alternative for voters looking to get rid of the Conservatives. The reality is that, like the Tories and Liberals, the NDP is a pro-big business, right-wing party fully committed to the free market capitalist program for which Thatcher stood.

Mulcair's adulation was directed at one of the figures, alongside US President Ronald Reagan, indelibly associated with the brutal counter-offensive against the working class internationally begun in the late 1970s.

During her 11 years in office, Thatcher launched a vast privatization program, slashed local authority budgets, waged an imperialist war over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, attacked democratic rights and was a steadfast

supporter of Reagan's confrontational approach to the Soviet Union. She was also a close friend of the fascist Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet, and a supporter of South Africa's Apartheid regime.

Thatcher demonstrated her ruthless determination to eliminate any opposition to her reactionary agenda during the 1984-5 miners' strike. Her government viciously suppressed picketing workers, and the resulting destruction of thousands of jobs left communities across the country devastated. During the strike, some 20,000 miners were injured or hospitalized, 13,000 arrested, and two workers were killed on the picket lines.

Her confrontation with the miners was the most prominent example of a broader program of union busting which included the enforcement of some of the most restrictive anti-union laws in Europe. By the time she left office in 1990, vast areas of Britain had been transformed into de-industrialized wastelands.

Mulcair's embrace of Thatcher's record provides further confirmation of his right-wing political pedigree. His 2001 comments were directed against the separatist Parti Quebecois (PQ) government, which he attacked for being too interventionist and “playing in every sandbox.” He railed against Quebec for being the place in North America with the highest taxes and complained that this prevented workers from becoming consumers.

Two years later, he entered a Liberal government as environment minister in the cabinet of Jean Charest, which advocated a program of “reengineering” the state. This included increasing day care fees and easing the prohibition on contracting out work—moves which within months triggered widespread protests.

Mulcair also supported legislation opening the door to the privatization of healthcare, and provisions to cut wages for 500,000 public sector workers. He only left the Liberal government in 2006, after disagreeing with Charest's decision to develop protected land for property

construction.

In 2006-7, Mulcair held talks with the federal Conservatives about joining the government of Stephen Harper as an adviser. His high opinion of Thatcher makes clear that this overture was entirely in line with his free market ideological views. As Mulcair himself has previously acknowledged, his talks with senior Harper aids did not break down due to any disagreements over the Tories' program of spending cuts and slashing taxes, or its aggressive imperialist foreign policy, but rather differences over the Kyoto Accord.

Mulcair's flirtation with the Conservatives was considered to be a positive sign rather than a problem by the NDP. When further details on his talks with Conservative government officials were released earlier this year, NDP spokesman Karl Bélanger responded that the fact that all federal parties tried to recruit Mulcair proved he was a widely respected "public servant."

The New Democrats had long since abandoned their milquetoast reformist program when Mulcair joined in 2007, and became the party's only MP in Quebec. He was quickly promoted into the party's upper echelons and was being touted as a future leader of the NDP well before the sudden death of party leader Jack Layton in 2011.

While the NDP has yet to hold office at the federal level, it has demonstrated in several provincial governments since the 1990s its commitment to impose attacks on the working class and encourage investment through business tax cuts. In 2008, it concluded a deal on the federal level with the Liberals to topple the Harper government, containing a five-year \$50 billion corporate tax cut, a commitment to "fiscal responsibility," and a pledge to wage the Afghanistan war through 2011. This agreement failed to be realized only because of Harper's anti-democratic constitutional coup, when he persuaded the Governor General to prorogue parliament.

The NDP has moved further right under Mulcair's leadership. He has repeatedly revived the prospect of collaborating in a government, after the upcoming election, with the Liberals, which implemented the largest social spending cuts in Canadian history in the 1990s.

When the Conservatives outlawed a series of strikes by workers at Canada Post and CP Rail, the NDP worked with its allies in the trade union bureaucracy to force strikers back to work by arguing that the laws imposed by parliament could not be challenged.

The right-wing economic and social policies upheld by Thatcher have been embraced by formerly social

democratic parties around the globe. Britain's Labour Party adopted Thatcher's legacy when it came to power in 1997. Under Tony Blair, Labour made no move to undo any of the attacks on public services and welfare made by Thatcher, nor did it lift the reactionary anti-trade union laws she implemented.

Blair led Britain into a series of imperialist wars, including in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Labour's attitude to the rapidly expanding levels of social inequality was summed up by the infamous statement of senior figure Peter Mandelson that the party was "intensely relaxed" about individuals getting filthy rich.

In the current election campaign, Mulcair regularly attacks the Conservative government from the right. He has sought to secure the endorsement of big business by proclaiming the NDP's ability to more effectively produce balanced budgets through continued austerity, something the Harper government has failed to do since 2008, while maintaining a low tax regime for the wealthy and offering tax cuts for small and medium-sized businesses. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there is hardly a proposal being made by the party with which Thatcher could not have agreed.

It therefore comes as no surprise that the NDP praised Mulcair following the exposure of his adulation of Thatcher. Bélanger once again rushed to Mulcair's defense, stating that his remarks were "distorted" and taken out of context.

Mulcair seized the opportunity once again to present himself as a right-wing, bourgeois politician ready to do the bidding of big business. "There are certain things that work and others that don't, and it's not surprising that I'm in favour of the things that work," he proclaimed at a campaign stop in British Columbia on Wednesday. For Mulcair, "things that work" are code words for policies aimed at the continued enrichment of wealthier layers at the expense of working people.



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