

SEP statement on Canadian election: To oppose war and austerity, workers need their own party

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The campaign for the October 19 federal election in Canada has underscored the urgency of the working class constituting itself as an independent political force in opposition to the entire existing political set-up and socio-economic order.

Capitalism is in the throes of a systemic crisis. The rival nationally-based capitalist ruling elites have responded to this crisis by intensifying their assault on workers' jobs, living standards and social rights and asserting their interests on the world stage through bullying and war.

The Canadian ruling class is no exception. Governments across the country, at every level and of every political stripe, are slashing and privatizing public services. More than 6 out of 10 jobless workers no longer have the right to unemployment insurance. Both public- and private-sector employers are cutting pensions.

When workers resist, they are met with anti-strike laws. Just in the past four years, the federal Conservative and Ontario and Quebec Liberal governments have criminalized strikes by Quebec construction workers, Ontario teachers, Canada Post workers, Air Canada employees and CP Rail workers.

Behind the backs of the Canadian people, Ottawa, under Liberal and Conservative governments alike, has deeply integrated the Canadian Armed Forces into Washington's war plans. Canada is playing a major role in Washington's strategic offensives against China and Russia and its drive to secure hegemony over the oil-rich Middle East. Through the "Five Eyes" signals-intelligence consortium, Canada also plays a major role in America's global spying network, which is itself integrated into both the Pentagon war machine and the CIA's illegal drone strike program.

If humanity is not to be engulfed by reaction and war, the working class must impose its own solution to the capitalist crisis. But as the elections have so graphically demonstrated, the working class is politically disenfranchised.

The organizations that ostensibly represent working people, the trade unions and the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP), are defenders of the capitalist order. They suppress working class discontent and enforce the diktats of big business.

The "progressive" government fraud

The NDP has mounted a "Harper lite" election campaign, pledging

continued austerity for working people, more money for the police and military, further tax cuts for most businesses, and no increases in the taxes of the top 1 percent. Under conditions where the Canadian economy has been battered by falling oil and commodity prices, the NDP has pledged to deliver budget surpluses while leaving intact the reactionary fiscal framework established through Liberal and Conservative corporate, capital gains and income tax cuts over the past quarter century. These tax cuts have had the dual aim of redistributing wealth to the owners of capital and the most privileged sections of the middle class, and depriving the state of the means to fund public and social services.

The unions have fully supported the NDP's efforts to win big business' backing by pledging that its domination and privileges will be "off limits" under an NDP government. At the same time, the unions are spearheading an "Anybody but Harper" campaign that is aimed at replacing the Conservatives and Prime Minister Stephen Harper with a "progressive" government in which Justin Trudeau and his Liberals would have a pivotal and, most likely, principal role.

Large sections of the ruling class have a similar perspective. Under conditions where there is visceral working class opposition to the decade-old Conservative government, they favor replacing it with one led by the Liberals, big business' preferred party of national government during most of the last century.

Ruling class spokesmen and media outlets, including *La Presse*, the mouthpiece for the billionaire Desmarais family, and Conrad Black, the former press baron and patron of Canada's neo-conservative movement, calculate that a Liberal government, using the cover of "progressive" rhetoric, would be better able to pursue austerity at home and the aggressive assertion of Canadian imperialism's interests abroad.

After all, Harper has only continued down the path the Liberals blazed when they last held national office. The Chretien-Martin Liberal government implemented the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history; slashed taxes on big business and the rich, winning effusive praise from the neo-Conservative *National Post*; and gave Canada a leading role in NATO's war on Yugoslavia and the neo-colonial invasion and occupation of Afghanistan.

The unions and the NDP have long been pursuing a closer working relationship with the Liberals. This is a political expression of the same corporatist, pro-capitalist outlook that has led them to systematically suppress the class struggle and impose round after round of job cuts, wage rollbacks and other concessions.

In Ontario, the unions are staunch supporters of Kathleen Wynne,

Justin Trudeau's closest provincial ally, and her "progressive" Liberal government. Wynne has implemented sweeping social spending cuts, illegalized strikes, and pressed forward with Canada's biggest privatization program in decades.

In Quebec, the unions have for decades trumpeted the Parti Quebecois (PQ) and the PQ-led Quebec independence movement as "progressive," no matter that the PQ has spearheaded the dismantling of public services and the assault on workers' rights. In so doing, the unions have helped strengthen extreme right-wing forces, as exemplified by the role the Bloc Quebecois (BQ), the PQ's sister party, played in the federal election campaign. The BQ was the Conservatives' stalking horse in the whipping up of Islamophobia over the trumped-up niqab issue, and it took an even more hawkish line on Canada's role in Washington's new Mideast war than did Harper.

A union-backed "progressive" government, whatever its exact composition—whether formed exclusively by the Liberals or NDP, or involving a formal coalition or informal alliance between them—would be an instrument of big business for attacking the working class.

Cross-party unity in support of Canadian imperialism

Nothing more graphically demonstrates the essential class unity of all the parties—the Conservatives, Liberals, NDP, Greens and BQ—than their response to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's mid-campaign revelation that the head of the Canadian Armed Forces and the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff held formal talks in 2013 on the creation of a permanent joint foreign intervention force to be deployed in "hotspots" around the world. According to the documents obtained by the CBC, they even considered fully integrating the Canadian and US militaries.

This revelation—made all the more startling by the Harper government's claim that it knew nothing about the "Canada-US Integrated Forces Program"—elicited only deafening silence from Canada's political parties.

They wanted no discussion of the extent to which Canada is already deeply integrated into US imperialism's war plans, for two reasons. First, they know that within the Canadian population, especially the working class, there is no support for Canada waging war. Second, they recognize that the Canadian ruling class is united in seeking to strengthen its decades-long military-strategic partnership with Washington.

Under conditions of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression, and the rise of new economic powers such as China, the Canadian bourgeoisie calculates that it can best assert its own predatory global economic and strategic interests by doubling down on its strategic alliance with US imperialism.

Canadian democracy in shambles

So blatant is the assault on democratic rights, discussion of it could not be entirely excluded from the election campaign. However, the NDP and Liberals treated Bill C-51, the police state law passed by the

last parliament, as little more than a wedge issue. The NDP attacked the Liberals for having voted for it; the Liberals noted that the NDP had equivocated on its opposition to the bill, and, revealingly, denounced the NDP's limited criticisms of a law that massively increases the powers of the national security apparatus as "fear-mongering."

The official debate largely attributed the attack on democratic rights to Harper and his government, if not the prime minister's prickly personality. The Harper government has in fact taken numerous steps to criminalize dissent and run roughshod over constitutional norms, including its shutting down of parliament to avert defeat in 2008.

But it was the Liberals who began the broad expansion of the national security apparatus, including the authorization of systematic spying on Canadians' electronic communications.

Canadian democracy is in shambles, with democratic and workers' rights under systematic attack. The ruling elite's turn toward authoritarian forms of rule is rooted in the vast polarization of society that has taken place over the past three decades. A tiny minority has appropriated the lion's share of the gains from increased productivity, while the vast majority faces economic insecurity and stagnant or falling incomes.

Unable to find a popular base of support for its reactionary policies, the capitalist class and its political agents are increasingly resorting to authoritarian measures and, in anticipation of mass working class opposition, erecting the scaffolding of a police state.

There is mounting working class resistance to the big business assault on public services, jobs and workers' rights. But it must break free of the political straitjacket maintained by the pro-capitalist trade unions and NDP. Workers need to build new organizations of struggle, above all a political party guided by an international socialist perspective, to unite Canadian workers in a common struggle against war and austerity with workers in the US and around the world and to prosecute the struggle for a workers' government.

Such a government would radically reorganize social-economic life by placing basic industry and the banks under public ownership and workers' control, so that social need, not the enrichment of a tiny clique of capitalists, would be its animating principle.

All those who see the need for such a struggle should make the decision to join and build the Socialist Equality Party of Canada.



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