

Canada's Liberals sweep to power on phony anti-austerity vow

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The Liberal Party, which has long been Canadian big business's preferred party of national government, will be returning to power for the first time in a decade after winning a sweeping victory in yesterday's federal election.

Little more than four years after suffering their worst ever electoral defeat, the Liberals polled about 40 percent of the popular vote, more than double their vote-share in 2011. This was enough to catapult them from a distant third-place to a parliamentary majority of a dozen or more seats in the 338-seat House of Commons.

Final seat and popular vote figures were not available at the time of writing. But under Justin Trudeau, the son of former Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the Liberals made major gains in virtually all parts of the country, including the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia.

Yesterday's vote was a massive repudiation of Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his decade-old Conservative government. The Conservatives lost more than 60 seats, with many cabinet ministers, including Finance Minister Joe Oliver, going down to personal defeat.

Harper announced he was stepping aside as Conservative leader even before giving his concession speech.

The Liberals were the entirely undeserved beneficiaries of mass opposition to the Conservative government, which imposed sweeping austerity measures, further integrated Canada into the military-strategic offensives of US imperialism, and attacked democratic and workers' rights.

The Liberals' ability to portray themselves as the agents of "real" and "progressive" change was entirely due to the right-wing politics of the trade unions and

the social-democratic New Democratic Party (NDP).

For years the unions and NDP have been working for the replacement of Harper by a "progressive" government in which the Liberals would play a leading role.

Since last fall, the unions have been spearheading an "Anybody but Harper" campaign, pouring millions of dollars into third-party anti-Conservative ad and protest campaigns.

Furthermore, the NDP, in the hope of convincing big business that it should be entrusted with the reins of power, mounted a "Harper lite" election campaign. This included pledging four years of balanced budgets, no increases in the taxes of the rich and super-rich, further corporate tax cuts, and increased military spending.

As the result of the combined efforts of the unions and NDP, the Liberals were able to pass themselves off as opponents of austerity. This from the party that when it last formed Canada's government implemented the largest social spending cuts in Canadian history and handed tens of billions in savings to big business and the financial elite through massive corporate, capital-gains and personal-income tax cuts.

The NDP fittingly suffered an electoral debacle. The official opposition in the last parliament, the NDP was the frontrunner when the election campaign began 11 weeks ago. But its pro-austerity stance, coupled with its promotion, along with the unions, of the Liberals as a fellow "progressive" party and prospective coalition partner, led large numbers of working people to rally round the Liberals.

The NDP's parliamentary representation was more than halved to about 40 seats. Its share of the popular vote shrunk by more than a third to less than 20 percent.

NDP losses were especially large in Quebec. There the NDP lost seats not only to the Liberals, but also to the Conservatives and the pro-Quebec independence Bloc Quebecois (BQ), whose sister party at the provincial level, the Parti Quebecois, has long enjoyed the support of the union bureaucracy. During the election campaign, the Conservatives and BQ effectively worked in tandem. They made joint reactionary and Islamophobic appeals, demanding that restrictions be imposed on the wearing of the niqab and championing Canada's role in the latest US war in the Middle East.

Trudeau and his Liberals will use their majority to enforce the dictates of the capitalist elite. Under conditions of a deepening economic crisis in Canada, driven by the sharp fall in oil and commodity prices and anemic growth internationally, as well as mounting tensions between the major powers, the Liberal government will be called upon to step up the assault on workers' rights at home and to more aggressively assert Canadian imperialism's predatory interests abroad. This will include adoption of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, a central component of the United States' drive to strategically isolate and militarily encircle China.

During the course of the campaign, it became clear that important sections of the ruling class were rallying round the Liberals. Endorsements for a Trudeau government came from *La Presse*, Canada's most important French-language daily, and even from Conrad Black, the founder of the neo-conservative *National Post* and a key backer of the 2004 fusing of Harper's Canadian Alliance with the remnants of the Progressive Conservative Party.

The ruling elites calculate that after nine years of Conservative rule, the installation of an ostensibly "progressive" government will better enable them to continue to ruthlessly enforce their interests while keeping a lid on mounting social anger.

Moreover, they know full well that the Liberals have a very long record of making "progressive appeals during election campaigns, only to impose the policy prescriptions of their avowedly more right-wing opponents when they take office. In 1993, the Liberals swept to power under Jean Chretien after nine years of Progressive Conservative rule. Chretien ran a "progressive" campaign, pledging to end the

Conservatives' "fixation" on the deficit so as to focus on "jobs, jobs, jobs" and to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). His government went on to spearhead the dismantling of public services and unemployment insurance, making savage cuts that are still held up by the IMF as an austerity model for governments around the world.

This time around, the Liberals are committed to upholding Bill C-51, the police state law the Conservatives adopted with Liberal support last spring. It gives the national security apparatus unlimited access to all government information on individual Canadians, enhances their powers of "preventive" detention, and empowers the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to break virtually any law when "disrupting" vaguely defined threats to national and economic security.

Trudeau has vowed to increase the number of Canadian Special Forces deployed to Iraq to train local proxy troops to combat ISIS within the framework of the US-led war coalition. He has also pledged to strengthen Ottawa's relationship with Washington and to hike military spending, so as to better equip the Canadian Armed Forces to intervene alongside the US military around the globe.

As for the Liberals' much vaunted promise to oppose austerity, their own financial plan calls for them to find \$6 billion per year in annual savings by their fourth year in government.



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