

Canada's Liberals take office spouting empty "real change" rhetoric

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Canada's new Liberal government has officially taken office. Justin Trudeau was sworn in as the country's 23rd prime minister along with 30 other ministers at a ceremony yesterday morning that, in a break with tradition, was open to the public.

The government inauguration and cabinet choices were carefully scripted to give the appearance of a major change from the previous, hard right-Conservative government. Eighteen of the cabinet appointees are political neophytes, first elected to parliament only on October 19.

In addition to portraying the new government as embodying "generational change," Trudeau and his advisers made a pronounced appeal to identity politics. Speaking to the press shortly after the swearing-in ceremony, Trudeau touted his cabinet as the first to be "gender equal" and to otherwise "look" like contemporary Canada.

With this boast, the incoming prime minister probably said more than he intended, for it is indeed the case that the "real change" promised by Trudeau and his Liberals will prove to be entirely superficial—a matter of image and rhetoric rather than substance.

No less than Stephen Harper and his Conservatives, the Liberals will implement the agenda of big business and, under conditions of deepening capitalist crisis, come into sharp conflict with the working class.

In the days immediately preceding the Liberals' assumption of office, a major measure of Canada's manufacturing output, the RBC Canadian Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' index, fell to its lowest level since 2010, and the Bank of America-Merrill Lynch reported that capital is flowing out of Canada at the fastest rate in the developed world.

The Canadian economy has been battered by the collapse in oil and commodity prices. While resources companies have slashed jobs and investment, manufacturers have been unable to significantly boost US exports despite the sharp depreciation of the Canadian dollar.

Trudeau has pledged to revive the country's faltering economy in the interests of big business, while strengthening collaboration with the Canadian bourgeoisie's strategic allies, above all the US, on the global stage.

Toward this end, Trudeau has already hedged his campaign promise to end the Canadian Armed Forces' combat mission in

Iraq and Syria. After speaking with US President Barack Obama, Trudeau refused to set a date for the end of the combat mission, merely saying that his government will act "responsibly," and reiterating the Liberals' promise to expand the current Canadian military training mission in Iraq.

Last week, Trudeau held phone conversations with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the heads of government of key US allies in the Asia-Pacific and Middle East respectively. In his discussion with Abe, Trudeau gave his full support to the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) trade deal, the economic arm of the Obama administration's anti-China, military and geostrategic "Pivot to Asia." Trudeau reassured Netanyahu that under the Liberals Canada will remain a staunch ally of Israel, even if it doesn't repeat Harper's bombastic claim that Canada will go through "fire and water" to defend the Zionist state.

The media has been quick to shower praise on the incoming government, echoing the Liberals' claims to have put a radically different stamp on government through their commitment to "openness," purported rejection of "divisive" politics in favor of "sunny ways," and appointment to cabinet of record numbers of women, aboriginals and other visible minorities.

The claims of diversity and inclusiveness are meant to obscure the fact that the Liberal government is committed to austerity at home and the aggressive assertion of the interests of Canadian imperialism abroad.

The key economic portfolios have been given to trusted representatives of the ruling elite. Bill Morneau, the new finance minister, is a Bay Street insider whose stockholdings in the human resource and pension management company he used to head, Morneau Shepell, is estimated to be worth more than \$30 million. Prior to joining "Team Trudeau," Morneau was the chair of the C.D. Howe Institute, one of Canada's principal right-wing think tanks, and a donor to Harper's Conservatives.

Morneau will be assisted in curbing government spending by new Treasury Board President, Scott Brison. A former investment banker, Brison was first elected as a Progressive Conservative, but crossed over to the Liberals to serve as Public Works Minister under Paul Martin.

The International Trade Minister Chrystia Freeland is a

proponent of big business trade and investment deals like the TPP. A former Thomson-Reuters executive, she has close connections to senior figures in international finance, including former Clinton and Obama administration official Larry Summers.

Freeland has also been an outspoken supporter of the ultra-right Ukrainian regime, and will undoubtedly play an important role in promoting the Liberal government's hostile stance toward Russia. During the election campaign, Trudeau repeatedly vied with Harper as to which party leader could make the most belligerent denunciation of Russia, a country that the Canadian elite views as both a major competitor for Arctic resources and among the principal obstacles to North American global dominance.

As Foreign Minister, Trudeau appointed an experienced representative of the ruling elite in former Liberal leader Stephane Dion. Dion made his name as the author of the Clarity Act, the anti-democratic legislation that threatens a seceding Quebec with partition.

Dion's reputation as an environmentalist will provide an ostensibly progressive political cover for realizing an important Liberal objective—developing a common climate-change and energy policy with the Obama administration and Mexico that will allow the NAFTA countries to profit and geo-politically exploit the continent's abundant carbon-based energy resources while becoming world leaders in "green technology."

In an appointment clearly aimed at finding favor with the military top brass, Trudeau has named Harjit Singh Sajjan, a former Lieutenant-Colonel and highly-decorated Afghan war veteran, as defence minister. Sajjan will be tasked with realizing the Liberals' pledge to hike military spending and successfully procure new warplanes and battleships so as to give the military "more bite and less tail."

Trudeau has appointed Ralph Goodale, his most experienced MP, as Public Safety Minister. A prominent member of the Chretien-Martin Liberal governments whose rightwing policies blazed the way for Harper, Goodale will be responsible for giving a "democratic" face-lift to the Conservatives' police state law, Bill C-51.

The Liberals voted for Bill C-51, which gives the national-security apparatus vast new and arbitrary powers, but with the aim of staunching a public outcry have promised to amend it. In reality these amendments are likely to be largely restricted to providing for greater "oversight" by a small number of MPs sworn to secrecy and themselves vetted by the security apparatus.

The appointment of a former BC regional chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Jody Wilson-Raybould, as Justice Minister is a transparent attempt to dampen popular anger over the deplorable treatment of Canada's indigenous people, particularly by the criminal justice system. However, the appointment of a native woman as justice minister and attorney-general will no more put an end to the endemic poverty, state

indifference and police violence that mar the lives of native people, than have the appointment of African-American police chiefs and the election of African-American mayors, Congressmen and a president put an end to police killings of unarmed youth in the US.

A former British Columbia crown prosecutor and proponent of making native "self-government" a pillar of the Canadian capitalist state, Wilson-Raybould is a member of the tiny native elite whom the Liberals and much of the ruling class argue should be cultivated as a social buffer to control an increasingly restless native population and divide them from the rest of the working class.

Long the Canadian ruling class's preferred party of government, the Liberals laid the groundwork for Harper and his Conservatives when they last held office. The Chretien-Martin Liberal government implemented the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history, including vast reductions in transfers to the provinces for healthcare and education, and massive cuts to unemployment insurance.

The savings from this assault on public and social services were ploughed into tens of billions of dollars' worth of capital gains, income and corporate tax cuts for the wealthy elite. The previous Liberal government also revived Canadian militarism by deploying the armed forces to wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, and in the wake of 9/11 passed anti-terror legislation that attacks fundamental democratic rights, while sanctioning systematic spying on Canadians' electronic communications.

The Liberals' ability to posture as agents of "change" and "progressives" is entirely bound up with the criminal role played by the trade unions and the social-democratic NDP over an extended period. For years, they suppressed the class struggle while promoting the lie that the big business Liberals represented a "progressive" alternative to Harper. In 2008 the NDP formed an abortive governmental coalition with the Liberals. With the approach of the 2015 elections, the NDP repeatedly announced its readiness to partner with the Liberals, while the unions mounted an "Anybody but Harper" strategic voting drive. Then in a bid to convince the ruling class that the NDP should be trusted with the reins of power, Canada's social democrats mounted a "Harper lite" election campaign, in which they attacked the Liberals from the right for proposing a small increase in the taxes of the 1 percent and for advocating deficit-spending to "kickstart" the economy.



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