

# Canada's pseudo-left Fightback pledges loyalty to pro-war, pro-austerity NDP

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The self-proclaimed “Marxists” of Fightback, the Canadian section of the misnamed International Marxist Tendency (IMT), have hailed the New Democratic Party’s (NDP) dumping of party leader Thomas Mulcair as a “rank-and-file revolt,” one that purportedly opens the way for this ossified, right-wing social-democratic party to turn left and become an instrument of working class struggle.

“The mood at the convention,” enthused Fightback, “was the most left-wing it has been in decades.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. The decision to remove Mulcair took place in the context of bitter disputes among competing party factions over which right-wing course to pursue in the wake of the party’s disastrous third-place finish in last fall’s federal election.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in its initial article on Mulcair’s removal, “The broad support within the NDP for Mulcair’s ouster reflects the awareness that he is too compromised in the eyes of the population to provide the pro-austerity, pro-war NDP with a ‘progressive’ veneer.”

Many of those who turned on Mulcair at the party’s Edmonton convention “were embittered former MPs and NDP staffers, whose plans for careers in parliament and government were dashed by the party’s abysmal election performance.” They would have been more than willing to loyally serve under Mulcair had the NDP won enough seats to realize its longstanding ambition of forming a coalition government with the big business Liberals or even to have significant parliamentary influence by propping up a Liberal minority government.

Fightback, together with their pseudo-left counterparts like the Pabloite Socialist Action and the International Socialists, the Canadian allies of the American ISO, have long insisted that the NDP is a mass, working-class party—fundamentally different from the bourgeoisie’s traditional parties of federal government, the Liberals and Conservatives, but which has been held prisoner by a right-wing cabal around Mulcair. Fightback and Socialist Action go so far as to explicitly declare that through a reinvigorated NDP workers can fight for socialism.

In an unmistakable attack on the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*, Fightback proclaimed the outcome of the NDP’s Edmonton convention proof of the viability of this reactionary perspective: “For years, the constant refrain from small left groups and sectarians has been that ‘the bureaucracy is too strong,’ or ‘The NDP will never change,’ or even ‘The NDP is bourgeois,’ etc. This convention is a clear refutation of this idea...This has confirmed the perspective of the Marxists as we explained that the NDP, in spite of the presence of Mulcair as leader, still has deep roots in the working class and therefore the pressure of the masses can reflect itself there.”

Such outrageous claims about a party and international political tendency that is an inveterate defender of the capitalist order illustrate the deep-rooted hostility of groups like Fightback to socialism and the working class.

## **Social-democracy: an inveterate defender of bourgeois rule**

Social democracy has served as a counter-revolutionary prop of

bourgeois rule for over a century, since the leaders of the Second International rallied to the support of their respective national capitalist governments at the outbreak of World War I. Whenever parties, like the Labour Party in Britain or Germany’s SPD, took power, they did everything possible to suppress the class struggle and uphold the interests of the capitalist class at home and abroad.

The NDP, which was founded by the union bureaucracy and the social-democratic CCF in 1961, was from the outset a right-wing, nationalist formation, even by the reactionary standards of international social democracy. It was never associated with any mass upsurge of the working class, but was rather born of the alliance between Canada’s social democrats and the union bureaucracy that was cemented in the late 1940s and early 1950s on the basis of the purging of socialists and left-wing militants from the labour movement. The NDP provincial governments that came to power in the midst of a militant wave of worker struggles in the early 1970s quickly came into open conflict with the working class, breaking strikes and policing the federal Liberal government’s wage-cutting wage-control program.

The NDP, like social democratic parties around the world, has emerged over the past three decades as an explicitly right-wing, pro-big business party which is indistinguishable from its Liberal and Conservative rivals. With the full backing of the trade union bureaucracy, the NDP has backed the revival of Canadian militarism, imposed savage attacks on public spending and worker rights when it has held power at the provincial level, and repeatedly offered to collaborate at the federal level with the Liberals.

Fightback’s designation of the NDP—a party comprised of trade union bureaucrats, upper middle-class professionals, identity politics activists and small business people—as a “workers’ party” is based on its explicit identification of the working class with the trade union bureaucracy. Fightback, and the pseudo-left as a whole, studiously avoid making any mention of the unions’ transformation into appendages of corporate management and the capitalist state with interests irreconcilably hostile to the broad mass of workers.

For all their rhetoric about the NDP turning “left” after Mulcair’s removal, they take for granted that the unions will remain a central pillar of the NDP—the same organizations which have collaborated in the imposition of wave after wave of job cuts, concessions and attacks on workers’ rights

Fightback has pointed to the Leap Manifesto, which the NDP voted to debate over the coming two years, as a sign of a shift “left” within the NDP. The document had become a “rallying point for the anti-establishment mood in the party,” asserted Fightback.

This is a pack of lies. The Leap Manifesto, which has been championed by Naomi Klein and her husband, Avi Lewis, the son of former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis, is a pro-capitalist document which blends environmentalist policy with a heavy dose of economic nationalism.

In a revealing comment in the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece of Canada’s financial elite, Avi Lewis revealingly described

the Leap Manifesto as a “Marshall Plan for employment.” This reference to the policies U.S. imperialism pursued to help rescue global capitalism in the immediate aftermath of World War II and launch the Cold War was no passing remark, but an apt characterization of the document’s purpose. Its call for investment in clean energy, “innovative” ownership structures, opposition to trade deals which endanger “local economies,” increased state regulation and higher taxes represents the program of a section of the ruling elite, albeit a minority at present, to establish a basis for the “greening” and growth of Canadian capitalism at the expense of the working class. Lewis and co. have made this clear by repeatedly emphasizing that the document is aimed at all the Canadian elite’s parties and praising the Trudeau government for adopting some of its proposals.

The Leap Manifesto found significant support within the NDP not in spite of, but because of this. Indeed, the only outspoken opposition to the Leap Manifesto on the convention floor was from the right, from sections of the trade union bureaucracy and the party’s Alberta delegates, who were unwilling to accept the document’s criticisms of Big Oil—an opposition so limited it doesn’t even call for their nationalization—and rejection of new pipeline projects.

Even Fightback was compelled to admit that the Leap Manifesto contains not a word of criticism of the capitalist profit system. “It would be extremely unfortunate,” said Fightback, “if this is as left as the current mood in the party goes, as this is far too confused to inspire and mobilize masses as Bernie Sanders has clearly done with his ‘revolution against the billionaire class’.”

The combination of so many lies in one sentence is truly astounding. For one thing, the Leap Manifesto, as we have noted, does not represent a shift “left.” Nor is it a “confused” document, but an explicit defence of the capitalist order and the private ownership of the means of production.

#### **Fightback’s call for a “Canadian Sanders”**

More significant still is Fightback’s contention that Sanders, a bourgeois politician who is seeking the nomination of the Democratic Party, one of the twin parties of the US oligarchy, has “mobilized masses.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has repeatedly pointed out, there is nothing socialist whatsoever in Sanders’ program. He is proposing a watered-down version of the higher-taxes and social-welfare reforms that were the staple of Democratic Party programs from Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal of the 1930s through Lyndon Johnson’s 1960s “War on Poverty.”

On the fundamental issues of imperialism and war, Sanders is entirely within the mainstream of establishment US bourgeois politics. He is on record as supporting Obama’s foreign policy and has repeatedly pledged to support Hillary Clinton if she is the Democratic Party nominee.

Yes, workers and young people have gravitated toward Sanders’s campaign because, with his claims to be a “democratic socialist” and verbal tirades against the “billionaire class,” he has tapped into growing anti-capitalist sentiment. But Sanders’s aim is not to “mobilize the masses,” let alone lead a “political revolution,” but to politically suppress the growing social anger by diverting it back into the Democratic Party.

Sanders is the undeserving beneficiary of the initial stages of a political radicalization within the working class. This process has already begun with last year’s rebellion of autoworkers against the trade union bureaucracy’s attempts to force through sell-out contracts at the Big Three automakers, and the ongoing strike at telecommunications giant Verizon.

Fightback is determined to prevent such a rebellion developing in Canada. The privileged sections of the middle class for which it speaks are tied by a thousand threads to the trade union bureaucracy and the NDP and their social interests are bound up with the defence of capitalism and the Canadian state.

“Will there be a Canadian Sanders?” Fightback asks, looking ahead to

the upcoming NDP leadership race, before answering, “If there were a candidate who put themselves forward and was at least as left-wing as Bernie Sanders, the election would be theirs to lose.”

A “Canadian Sanders” could, Fightback asserts, “enthuse and mobilize workers and youth, win the leadership of the party, and build a mass movement against the Liberal government.”

This is pure fantasy. The NDP and the unions spent the past decade working to rehabilitate the Liberals’ “progressive” credentials, proclaiming them allies in the fight against the Harper Conservatives and repeatedly offering to join them in government.

Moreover, any “mass movement” mounted by the NDP would be aimed—like the Sanders campaign—at preventing the development of an independent political movement of the working class, at suppressing the class struggle and channeling growing social unrest into elections and other mechanisms of the capitalist establishment.

That Fightback hails this prospect provides a damning indictment of its right-wing, pro-capitalist—social-democratic—political line.

Having waxed eloquent on what a “Canadian Sanders” might achieve, Fightback grudgingly laments, “Unfortunately, no one of significance has so far come out with anything like this.”

Fightback could not be clearer. Its hope is that someone “of significance,” a prominent NDP MP or trade union bureaucrat, will step forward and spout the necessary amount of “left” rhetoric to enable it to jump on their bandwagon and assist the pro-war, pro-austerity social democrats in a desperately needed political makeover. One that would make the NDP more effective in defusing and diverting working class opposition, i.e., in defending the interests of the Canadian bourgeoisie.

“Above all,” declares Fightback, “a genuine socialist candidate must decry the injustice of capitalism, where the rich cheat the system and make the rest of us pay the bill.”

This is, to say the least, pretty thin gruel. As the history of NDP and social-democratic parties all over the world demonstrate, there are any number of bourgeois politicians able to “decry the injustice of capitalism,” but who when in power or faced with a genuine working class upsurge have proved to be the most determined defenders of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist state.

Fightback hailed the election of Syriza in January 2015, claiming that it was the legitimate expression of the anti-capitalist sentiments of the Greek working class, and it denounced those who warned that it was a bourgeois party hostile to any challenge to the Greek bourgeoisie and the EU. Six months later, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras betrayed the anti-austerity mandate he had received and agreed to implement social spending cuts and privatizations far more severe than those imposed by the previous rightwing governments.

The only way for the working class to fight for its independent interests is through the building of its own revolutionary party—the Socialist Equality Party—fighting on a socialist and internationalist program. A key element in this struggle is to expose all those elements, like Fightback, who use pseudo-Marxist rhetoric to uphold the political authority of the corporatist trade unions and the “left” parties of the bourgeoisie like the NDP.



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