

Trudeau given hero's welcome by Unifor bureaucrats

Roger Jordan
27 August 2016

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was accorded a hero's welcome Wednesday when he addressed the national convention of Unifor, the country's largest private sector union. The well-heeled Unifor bureaucrats repeatedly rose to their feet, greeting Trudeau's hollow "progressive" rhetoric with rapturous applause.

Trudeau was introduced by Unifor President Gerry Dias, who is currently overseeing contract talks with the Detroit Three automakers in which the union is once again offering up cuts and concessions in exchange for worthless job guarantees.

Dias denounced the previous Conservative government of Stephen Harper, before heaping praise on Trudeau, including declaring that the Liberal leader's election last October had made him "proud" to be a Canadian again.

"When I first met with Justin Trudeau," said Dias, "he talked about the importance of working class people—he talked about the importance of the labour movement—a strong labour movement playing an incredible role if we wanted a strong economy."

Dias' promotion of Trudeau as committed to working people is a shameless fraud. The Liberals were long the Canadian big business' preferred party of national government. When last in power, they implemented the largest social spending cuts in the country's history and deployed the Canadian Armed Forces in US-led wars in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan.

In last fall's election, the ruling elite again turned to the Liberals, calculating that they would be better able to implement austerity at home and aggression and war abroad than the discredited, decade-old Harper government.

Under the new government there has been a shift in rhetoric, with Trudeau feigning concern for the "middle class and those struggling to join it" and casting Canada as a "peacekeeping" country, rather than *à la* Harper a nation of "warriors." But the Liberals have also worked systematically to cultivate the trade union bureaucracy and, particularly through identity politics, other privileged upper middle-class layers, so as to provide a broader social base

for the assault on the working class. Whereas Harper baited the "union bosses," Trudeau solicits their collaboration in boosting the "competitiveness," that is the profitability, of Canadian big business, and in suppressing any and all working class opposition.

Not surprisingly, the Unifor delegates' biggest cheer for Trudeau was when he promised to repeal the Harper government's Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, anti-democratic laws that negatively impact on the interests of the union officialdom by imposing onerous reporting requirements on union expenses and activities and making it more difficult to win union certification. The Liberals have already moved to restore the special tax concessions for union-controlled investment funds that the Harper government was to entirely phase out by next year.

In his speech Wednesday, Trudeau once again emphasized that he values the unions as partners and will be looking to them to stifle opposition when his government is forced to take unpopular decisions. "We might not always agree on everything," said the prime minister. "In fact, we won't always agree on everything. But our larger relationship is built on a bedrock of common goals"—that is ensuring the profitability and global position of Canadian capitalism.

Trudeau also had warm praise for Alberta's New Democratic Party (NDP) Premier, Rachel Notley, who addressed the Unifor convention later Wednesday.

The unions—particularly the Unifor's forerunner, the Canadian Auto Workers—were traditionally identified with the social-democratic NDP. But over the past two decades, the unions have increasingly openly allied with the Liberals.

The NDP, for its part, has similarly swung ever further to the right. In the last federal election campaign ran, it on a "Harper lite" platform of balanced budgets and increased military spending.

The embrace by Unifor and the entire trade union bureaucracy of Trudeau's big business, pro-war government makes clear the anti-working class character of these organizations. The trade unions have developed over the past three decades into arms of corporate management and the

state, enforcing the dictates of the corporate and financial elite against their own members and enriching themselves in the process.

In introducing Trudeau, Dias lauded the actions of his government, calling them “a pinnacle start for working people.” In fact, the new government has retained intact the reactionary fiscal framework created by the decades of cuts to social spending and tax cuts for big business and the rich implemented by successive Liberal and Conservative governments.

Trudeau’s first budget in March contained a plan to direct billions in public funds into investment in infrastructure projects with the aims of boosting corporate profits and growing the economy.

But the Liberals are presiding over an economy that is in deep crisis as the result of the collapse in oil and other commodity prices and the global capitalist downturn. The Liberals have pledged to impose at least \$6 billion in austerity measures per annum before the next election, and this figure will undoubtedly increase as the economy continues to underperform and the deficit grows.

In foreign policy, the Liberals have vastly expanded the militarist and war-mongering policies of Harper. They have increased Canadian deployments in the Mideast war, sent troops to Eastern Europe to confront Russia and prepare for war, and, under the guise of “peacekeeping” are proposing to send up to 1,000 troops and warplanes to Africa to uphold Canadian imperialist interests there. Moreover, the government is using a Defence Policy Review, the first in more than two decades, to lay the political groundwork for major hikes in military spending—hikes that will have to be clawed back from the working class through further social spending cuts.

The unions were central to bringing this right-wing government to power. After the Liberals fell from power in 2006, they systematically worked for their rehabilitation, promoting them as a “progressive” alternative to the Conservatives.

From September 2014, with Unifor very much in the lead, the unions spearheaded a pro-Liberal “Anybody but Harper campaign,” spending millions on promoting “strategic voting.” Meanwhile the NDP, with the unions’ encouragement, proclaimed its readiness either to form a coalition government with the Liberals or prop up a Liberal minority government.

Barely a week after Trudeau took office, over 100 top union bureaucrats gathered behind closed doors with the Prime Minister to confirm their readiness to cooperate with the government. At the time, Hassan Yussuff, president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), enthused over Trudeau’s visit, “Everybody who left the room was

delighted that he came, and there was a strong sense that he was sincere in the things that he was talking about.”

The unions relied on the complicity of their pseudo-left apologists, which, whether they openly backed “Anybody but Harper” or kept their distance for tactical reasons, maintained a studious silence on the unions’ support for the Liberals and the NDP’s plans to join or prop up a Liberal government. Among the most prominent promoters of “strategic voting,” was Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) President Mike Palecek, a former leader of Fightback, the Canadian section of the misnamed International Marxist Tendency. In recent weeks, Palecek has been arguing that postal workers should not strike against Canada Post’s sweeping concession demands so as not to disrupt the Liberal government’s review of the government-owned post office—a review predicated on it functioning as a profit-making business.

The “Anybody but Harper” campaign was the outcome of over a decade of collaboration between the unions and the Liberals in Ontario, Canada’s most populace province. Terrified by a popular upsurge against the Progressive Conservatives “Commonsense Revolution” in the late 1990s, which saw mass protests and strikes against Premier Mike Harris’s right-wing agenda, the unions turned to the Liberals and helped elect a government led by Dalton McGuinty in 2003.

Over the past thirteen years, the Liberals, with the unions’ complicity and support, have implemented a wide-ranging assault on the jobs and living standards of the working class. Among the most devastating measures were the imposition of a \$20 per hour wage and benefit cuts at the Detroit Three in conjunction with the Harper government in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the privatization of public services such as Hydro One, and sweeping cuts to social spending.

A number of Trudeau’s key staffers built their political careers in the Ontario Liberal government and are determined to make use of the unions’ services to wage similarly destructive attacks on workers across Canada.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact