

Canada's pseudo left groups seek to revive right-wing NDP

Roger Jordan
1 August 2017

Canada's pseudo left groups are seeking to provide the pro-big business, pro-war New Democratic Party (NDP) with some desperately needed "left" cover.

With working-class anger mounting against austerity and ever widening social inequality, as shown in the recent 175,000-strong Quebec construction workers' strike, groups like Fightback, Socialist Action, and the International Socialists (IS) have seized on the NDP's ongoing leadership campaign to propagate the fatal illusion that this right-wing, capitalist party can be transformed into a fighting "working class" organization.

The pseudo left's primary goal in this is to prevent the emergence of an independent movement of the working class, by harnessing the growing anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and youth to the trade union apparatuses and the social-democratic NDP.

As proof that the NDP can be "returned" to its purported "left-wing" roots, Fightback, Socialist Action, and the IS all point to Bernie Sanders' phony "political revolution" and Jeremy Corbyn's winning of the British Labour leadership on a pledge to oppose austerity.

The pseudo left groups have been shamelessly appealing to the union bureaucracy and NDP parliamentarians to bring forth a "Canadian Corbyn"—Fightback speaks of "corbynizing" the NDP—arguing such a development would boost the NDP's electoral fortunes and galvanize opposition to austerity.

In reality Sanders and Corbyn, with the full-throated support of the international co-thinkers of Fightback, Socialist Action and IS, are working might and main to contain social opposition within traditional parties of the capitalist establishment and under conditions where the ruling elite is hurtling to the right—pursuing a more aggressive, militarist foreign policy, while seeking to destroy what remains of the social gains workers made through the mass struggles of the last century.

Sanders deployed socialist phrases during his presidential election campaign to divert workers and youth hostile to capitalism into the Democratic Party. He then promptly threw his support behind the preferred candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, Hillary Clinton, helping pave the way for the election of Trump. Corbyn has capitulated on every major policy issue to the Blairite right wing of Britain's Labour Party, including by allowing free votes on Britain's bombing of Syria and the renewal of its Trident nuclear weapons systems, and ordering Labour-controlled local authorities to impose Tory-dictated austerity.

Fightback shills for Nikki Ashton

Immediately after the NDP's first televised leadership debate last March, Fightback, the Canadian section of the misnamed International Marxist Tendency, identified Niki Ashton, a Manitoba MP who ran an unsuccessful 2012 leadership bid against Thomas Mulcair, as its prime candidate to be "Canada's Corbyn." Ashton, enthused Fightback leader Alex Grant, had "staked out a position as the most left-wing" of the contenders and "has gone out of her way to make a break with the past."

This is a pack of lies. Neither Ashton nor any of the other leadership hopefuls, all of whom held high profile positions in the NDP during Mulcair's tenure, are opposed to the right-wing, pro-corporate and pro-war policies advocated under his leadership. Mulcair's name has been conspicuously absent from almost all of the debates thus far. None of the contenders have made anything but the most banal and superficial criticisms of the Harper-lite campaign the party waged in 2015, which included pledges to balance the budget, keep taxes on the rich at their lowest level ever, and form a coalition with the Liberals in the event of a hung parliament.

Ashton is proposing a package of meager reforms, including raising corporate taxes to the level to which Paul Martin had slashed them, a \$15 an hour federal minimum wage and increased "public ownership." Of course, she does not address, let alone answer, why the NDP and its sister social-democratic parties around the world have been in the forefront for the past three decades of dismantling the public and social services that in any earlier period they held up as proof capitalism could be "humanized" through parliamentary reforms and collective bargaining.

Ashton upholds the alliance between the NDP and the trade union bureaucracy, which has systematically suppressed the class struggle, imposing since the 1980s round after round of concessions and job cuts, and which played a pivotal role in electing the pro-war, big business Liberals in 2015.

None of this troubles Fightback. It functions, as it has for decades, as a loyal NDP faction, providing advice and window-dressing for the social-democrats. Fightback, like Socialist Action, maintains the preposterous position that the NDP can serve as a vehicle in the fight for socialism.

In late June, Fightback published a laudatory interview with Ashton along with its formal endorsement of her campaign to succeed the one-time Quebec Liberal cabinet minister Mulcair as NDP leader. According to Fightback, "A victory for Ashton would represent a victory for the left in Canada and open up the possibility of the development of a movement analogous to those sparked by Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders."

The issue of the growing danger of war has been all but blacked out

of the NDP leadership race, a fact that is hardly surprising given the party's pro-war record. Ashton managed to issue a mealy-mouthed protest at one of the most recent debates in Sudbury, admonishing Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for his readiness to spend "more money" on the military. But there was not a peep of opposition from her or any of the other candidates to the declaration by Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland that "hard power," i.e. war, would be a key part of Canada's foreign policy.

Fightback, for its part, did not ask Ashton, during their lengthy interview, a single question about the resurgence of great-power conflict and war and Canada's leading role in the US-led military-strategic offensives in the Middle East and against Russia and China.

Socialist Action's promotion of ex-OFL President Sid Ryan

Socialist Action, whose members lead the NDP's anemic "Socialist Caucus," have taken a slightly different tack. Initially they helped spearhead a high-profile campaign to convince Sid Ryan, the former head of the Ontario Federation of Labour, to contest the NDP leadership.

Ryan is a seasoned union bureaucrat, who for decades spouted "left" demagoguery while isolating and suppressing worker struggles, but Socialist Action dolled him up as a workers' leader.

As OFL president, Ryan played a pivotal role in the "Anybody but Hudak" campaign, in which the unions and pseudo left united, in the name of stopping the Tories, to secure the reelection of Kathleen Wynne's budget-cutting and wage-slashing Liberals in the 2014 Ontario election. This initiative pioneered the strategy the unions employed in 2015, when they championed the Trudeau Liberals as a "progressive" alternative to Harper's Conservative government.

Having had its hopes dashed by Ryan's refusal to enter the race, Socialist Action has now turned its attentions to pressuring the remaining candidates to the "left."

IS exploits its formal organizational independence from the NDP to subordinate left-moving workers and youth to its rotten politics all the more firmly. It advances the spurious argument that the NDP, and even Trudeau's big business Liberals, will respond to pressure from "the streets" by shifting to the left. In this way, IS desperately seeks to cover up its endorsement of the right-wing, anti-worker agenda advanced by the unions and NDP with radical-sounding rhetoric.

This was exemplified in an interview published on its web site in May with Ashton, which assumed the form of a cozy chat among friends. The IS breathlessly reported on Ashton's meet-and-greet event in Toronto, where she was "introduced by outspoken socialist and veteran NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo." DiNovo is a long-time NDP legislator who finally found the "courage" to criticize Mulcair after he led the party to an electoral debacle.

IS offered Ashton a platform to promote a Canadian nationalist strategy to uphold the interests of the country's corporate elite in the face of growing competition and protectionism. Referring to Trump, Ashton remarked, "This is not a leader who reflects many of the values that we believe in as Canadians, and certainly not a leader that has the best interests of Canadians at all in mind. I'm very concerned by the way Justin Trudeau for example has cheerlead Trump's bombing in Syria, has not stood up with backbone to Trump's threats on softwood lumber or the dairy industry."

IS' embrace of Canadian nationalism and loyalty to the NDP were demonstrated by its decision to invite Avi Lewis to lead a session on the "Leap Manifesto" at its misnamed "One Solution: Revolution" event in April. Lewis, the son of former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis, presented his climate change manifesto in the lead-up to the 2015 federal election with the explicit aim of having it endorsed by the NDP and other sections of the ruling elite, including the Trudeau Liberals.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time, the Leap Manifesto is "a pro-capitalist document which blends environmentalist policy with a heavy dose of economic nationalism" (See: "Canada's pseudo-left pledges loyalty to pro-war, pro-austerity NDP").

The pseudo left's support for such a right-wing, nationalist program dovetails with the agenda of the trade union bureaucracy to which they and the NDP are wedded. Unions like Unifor have hailed the prospect of renegotiating NAFTA as an opportunity to advance "Canadian interests," i.e. boost the profits of Canada's corporate elite and press for the reorganization of the North American auto industry at the expense of Mexican workers. At the same time, they exploit the threat of the outsourcing of jobs to low-wage locations to ram through concessions contracts in the face of hostility from their members.

The NDP was always a right-wing social-democratic party, an instrument for politically controlling and suppressing the working class. Like social-democratic parties around the globe, in response to the collapse of the post-Second World War boom and globalization, it renounced long ago any association even with social reform, advancing pro-war and big business policies virtually indistinguishable from those of the Liberals and Conservatives.

Attempts by the pseudo left to revive the tattered credentials of this party among workers are not the result of a mistaken policy. Rather they reflect the social interests of the privileged sections of the middle class which make up the constituency of groups like IS, Socialist Action and Fightback. These layers have grievances with the "top 1 percent," but are utterly hostile to the independent political mobilization of the working class, because it would threaten their own privileges.

In 2015, these groups all hailed the election of Syriza (Greece's "Coalition of the Radical Left), claiming that its promises to oppose austerity were genuine, although it was a capitalist party, and, as such, utterly opposed to mobilizing the European working class against the austerity demands of the bankers and their EU. When Syriza foully betrayed the hopes of the workers who had propelled it to power, Fightback and company blithely moved on to promoting Corbyn and Sanders. Their specific function is to use socialist rhetoric, to derail the growing leftward movement of the working class and harness it to the pro-capitalist unions and NDP.



To contact the WWSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact