

Canada: BC's new NDP premier pledges to work closely with Trudeau

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British Columbia Premier John Horgan, whose New Democrats (NDP) officially took power in a Green Party-backed minority government July 18, pledged to cooperate closely with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during their first meeting last week.

The friendly meeting underscores that BC's NDP government is fully on board with the Liberals' and corporate Canada's agenda of using "hard power" to assert Canadian imperialism's interests on the world stage and intensifying the assault on the working class at home.

At a joint press conference in Ottawa, Trudeau, whose government announced a 70 percent hike in military spending in June, declared that he and Horgan had a lot in common and were both "progressive politicians." The pair pledged to cooperate on dealing with the ongoing wildfires in BC and the opioid crisis, which is expected to claim 1,400 lives in BC just this year.

Horgan's NDP finished two seats behind the BC Liberals in May's provincial election, but with the support of the three Green MLAs was able to oust the 16-year-old BC Liberal regime.

Horgan's public embrace of Trudeau underscores that the new NDP government will make little more than cosmetic changes to the right-wing policies of its Liberal predecessor.

Speaking of Trudeau, who has expanded Canada's role in US military-strategic offensives around the world, slashed health care spending, kept corporate taxes at a record lows, and launched a privatization drive, Horgan said, "We often feel isolated on the other side of the Rocky Mountains, but we have an ally in the Prime Minister."

Horgan has signaled his commitment to assist Trudeau in defending the interests of Canadian big business in the upcoming North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) renegotiation, which is set to begin in Washington later this month. Following his Ottawa trip,

Horgan flew on to the American capital. There he held talks aimed at resolving the softwood lumber dispute, a long-running trade irritant between the US and Canada, which, as a result of the original 1988 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, is outside NAFTA's purview.

Horgan stressed the importance of resolving the lumber dispute prior to the opening of the NAFTA talks, saying Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland needs the freedom to champion "Canadian interests" on the wider issues related to NAFTA. Horgan also fully endorsed Trudeau's statement that any renegotiated NAFTA deal must include a "dispute resolution mechanism," a key demand of Canadian big business to defend their interests against American competitors.

The BC Liberal government oversaw a massive transfer of wealth to the richest sections of the province's population through tax handouts and savage social spending cuts. In a transparent appeal for big business support, Horgan promoted the NDP's "fiscal responsibility" during the election campaign by accepting as the basis of his party's platform the same reactionary, three-year fiscal framework on which Liberal Premier Christy Clark based her most recent budget.

Many of the NDP's headline promises, including the introduction of a \$15 an hour minimum wage and the building of 114,000 low-cost housing units, did not even survive the negotiations with the Greens, who repeatedly denounced the NDP for its "lavish" spending promises during the campaign.

Hoping to cover over the right-wing character of the incoming BC government, Horgan's swearing-in as premier July 18 was accompanied by a nauseating display of "progressive" rhetoric that appeared to have been lifted straight from the Trudeau Liberals' 2015 playbook. The BC NDP proudly unveiled a "gender-balanced" cabinet, and also made much of the naming of BC's first-ever indigenous minister—as if this will do anything substantive

for the province's impoverished First Nations population.

After just a few days in power, Horgan began to remove any obstacle to close cooperation with the Trudeau government by softening the NDP's stance on the expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline, to which Trudeau gave the go-ahead last fall. During the election campaign, Horgan sought to capitalize on widespread popular opposition to the project by vowing to use "every tool available" to block it. However, in his mandate letter to Environment Minister George Heyman, Horgan instructed him merely to use every tool to "defend BC's interests," not block the pipeline project.

Two days later, Attorney General David Eby acknowledged the hollow character of the NDP's purported opposition to the project, stating in a radio interview that the provincial government will not refuse permits for the construction of the pipeline for fear of lawsuits. Given the federal government's endorsement of the project, denial of the permits is the main, if not only, legal avenue through which the province can block it.

In neighbouring Alberta, the NDP government led by Rachel Notley, speaking on behalf of its paymasters in the province's big oil corporations, has vowed to work with Trudeau's Liberals to ram through the pipeline project so as to secure new markets for the province's tar-sands oil and boost the profits of the Canadian corporate elite.

Both Trudeau's Liberals and Horgan's NDP enjoy close ties to the trade union bureaucracy, which played a crucial role in promoting both parties. Unions like Unifor and the United Steelworkers invested millions of dollars in 2015 in an "Anybody but Conservative" ad campaign and continue to work closely with the Liberal government, with Unifor President Jerry Dias and Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff boasting about their access to government ministers. Yesterday, Foreign Minister Freeland appointed Yussuff to a 13-member NAFTA negotiation advisory council.

The BC Federation of Labour (BCFL), which isolated and shut down a series of militant strikes over the last 16 years that threatened to spark a broader working-class upsurge, deployed substantial resources to elect the NDP. After attending the swearing-in ceremony of Horgan and his cabinet, BCFL President Irene Lanzinger proclaimed the beginning of "a new era" in which BC's government "will act to deal with the real issues facing working people."

Canada's pseudo-left and trade union bureaucracy are lending their services to provide the Horgan government with some much-needed "left" credentials. The Hospital

Employees Union, which represents nurses and other health care workers and is due to start bargaining with the government for a new contract next year, praised Horgan's appointment of two health ministers, describing them as "BC's health dream team." The International Socialists, the Canadian co-thinkers of the US International Socialist Organization, participated unreservedly in the "celebrations" that it claimed took place with the NDP's coming to office, before going on to urge people to "organize in our workplaces, our schools and our communities" to "pressure" the NDP government.

To a considerable extent, the enthusiasm of these organizations is due to the fact that the NDP's coming to office now opens up opportunities for them to work with the state and big business, including by placing some of their leading figures in government. Judy Darcy, who received the newly created portfolio of minister for mental health and addiction, was a leader of the Maoist Workers Communist Party of Canada in the late 1970s before going on to become a president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

George Heyman led the BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) and later became executive director of the provincial branch of the Sierra Club. He has close ties to environmental activist groups. Horgan's cabinet also includes NDP stalwarts like Carol James and Adrian Dix, who served in the Glen Clark NDP government in the 1990s, which imposed a series of austerity budgets and wage freezes.

Horgan's closest adviser and chief of staff, Jeff Meggs, is a former local leader of the Communist Party of Canada. After quitting the Stalinists and serving as an aide in Glen Clark's government, he played a leading role in merging the CPC-influenced Coalition of Progressive Electors with right-wing political forces to form Vision Vancouver, the party led by Mayor Gregor Robertson that currently controls Vancouver City Council.



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