

Naomi Klein promotes pro-war, pro-austerity NDP as antidote to populist far-right

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The well-known author and “social justice” activist Naomi Klein is pleading for working people and the “left” to rally behind the NDP—Canada’s pro-war, pro-austerity social-democratic party—in the June 7 Ontario election. The NDP, Klein claims, is a bulwark against the populist hard-right, represented in Ontario by Progressive Conservative leader Doug Ford, and would provide Ontarians with a “different kind of government,” one committed to “tangibly” improving working people’s lives.

In an article titled “We can stop Trump from coming to Canada,” Klein and her co-author, University of Toronto Professor Rinaldo Walcott, argue that whilst the billionaire demagogue Trump was able to capitalize on anger with the establishment in the 2016 elections because Hillary Clinton personified the big business status quo, his Canadian acolyte Ford confronts a formidable obstacle in trying to exploit anger over rampant social inequality. Unlike south of the border, they contend, “we have a viable third party on the ballot.”

“The NDP,” write Klein and Walcott, “has been out of power for longer than either the Tories or the Liberals and can therefore make a more credible claim to represent ‘change’.” Moreover, the social democrats, they enthuse, offer “genuine hope.” An Andrea Horwath-led NDP government would be committed to a “bold ... plan to begin interrupting the inequalities that have taken deep root ... under Liberal-Tory rule,” and would be amenable to pressure from “engaged and organized social movements.”

“Now is the time,” conclude Klein and Walcott, “for everyone who is committed to social justice to throw down to help elect the NDP—and that includes people like us who have never been NDP members and usually stay away from parliamentary politics.”

This is all hogwash. For a start, who does Klein think she is kidding when she portrays the NDP as an anti-establishment party capable of bringing about “change” and a “different kind of government”?

Like social-democratic parties around the world, including the German SPD, the British and Australian Labour parties, and the French and Spanish Socialist parties, the NDP long ago shredded its timid reformist program and for decades has been complicit in the assault on the social and public services that it once held up as proof capitalism could be “humanized.”

If in the US and Europe, far-right forces from Trump to the AfD in Germany, the Front National in France and the Lega in Italy have been able to gain traction appealing to popular anger over social inequality and economic insecurity, it is because the official “left”—which in most countries is led by social-democracy and their trade unions allies—has enforced capitalist austerity, promoted militarism, and scapegoated immigrants.

The rise of the far right demonstrates the urgency of the working

class tearing itself free from the putrefying corpse of social-democracy and opposing war and the ruling-class assault on social and democratic rights by fighting for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of society.

These lessons are as vital for workers and young people in Canada as in the US or Europe, whatever the outcome on June 7.

The NDP is no less a pliant tool of big business than its sister social-democratic parties. Whenever it has held provincial office, it has come into headlong conflict with the working class, with the 1990-95 Ontario NDP government and its wage- and job-cutting “social contract” only the most notorious example.

The NDP has supported Canada’s participation in one US-led war after another, including in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Libya, and backs Canada’s ever-widening role in Washington’s military-strategic offensives against China and Russia and in the Middle East.

With the encouragement of the unions, Canada’s social democrats have drawn ever-closer to the Liberals, long big business’ preferred party of government. Their response to the 2008 global financial crisis was to sign up to serve as junior partners in a Liberal-led national coalition government committed to implementing a \$50 billion corporate tax cut and waging war in Afghanistan till 2011. For two-and-a-half years, ending in June 2014, Horwath and her NDP propped up Ontario Liberal governments under Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne that slashed social spending and illegalized teacher job-action so as to impose wage and benefit cuts, while further reducing corporate taxes.

Klein glosses over all this. She attributes the NDP’s march to the right to a misguided “attempt to appear more electable,” and, in a brazen attempt to put lipstick on a pig, claims the Ontario NDP is championing an election platform that represents a dramatic “shift” left. In reality, all that Horwath is proposing, after nearly three decades of unrelenting austerity, are modest social spending increases, and to return the corporate tax rate to where it was when Wynne became premier.

Klein’s “bold” platform is a sham which, even were it to be implemented, would do nothing substantive to reverse the social crisis that is devastating working people’s lives and livelihoods and which the Trumps and Fords, with the support of powerful sections of the ruling class, are seeking to exploit to push politics still further right.

That Klein and Walcott’s brief for the NDP was published by the *Toronto Star*, the mouthpiece of Canada’s Liberal establishment, is no accident. While continuing to vehemently defend the record of the Wynne and McGuinty Liberal governments, the *Star* editorial board has signaled that it is ready to support an NDP government. This is because the “liberal” faction of the Canadian bourgeoisie calculates an

NDP-led government in Ontario would be better able to suppress the class struggle, due to its symbiotic ties with the trade union bureaucracy, and constitute a more dependable ally of the federal Liberal government than a hard-right, Ford Conservative government.

A close ally of the unions and NDP

As for Klein's claim to be an NDP "outsider," it is totally disingenuous. While she may not hold an NDP membership card, she operates as a member of the "first family" of Canadian social democracy. Her husband, Avi Lewis, himself increasingly active in the NDP, is the son of former Ontario NDP leader Stephen Lewis and grandson of former federal NDP leader and NDP/CCF secretary David Lewis.

Klein has a long record of working with the trade union bureaucracy and NDP and providing "anti-establishment" cover for their key initiatives aimed at subordinating the working class to capitalist politics.

Klein backed the abortive 2008 Liberal-NDP coalition agreement. She was also a vocal proponent of the 2015 "Anybody but Conservative" campaign that helped bring to power a Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government that uses "progressive" rhetoric and identity politics as a smokescreen for pursuing the ruling-class agenda of austerity and war. She gave a keynote address at the 2013 convention that rebranded the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) as Unifor, hailing the union that has imposed round after round of concessions and job cuts on auto workers and led the union bureaucracy in forging ever closer ties with the big business Liberals as an exciting new venture.

Klein and Walcott's efforts to invoke the 2016 US election are shot through with hypocrisy. Klein was an active participant, endorsing the campaign of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders for the Democratic Party nomination. After securing 13 million votes in the primaries on the basis of his phony claims to be a "socialist" and an advocate of a "political revolution," Sanders promptly and predictably threw his support behind Clinton, the preferred candidate of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, in the November election.

Klein's pose of radical opposition to the status quo is no less dishonest. Even after 15 years of Liberal-enforced austerity, strikebreaking laws, and privatizations she touts the Liberals as a "progressive" force. "The (Ontario) NDP, whether on its own or leading a coalition government, would open up the possibility of actually moving forward," declare Klein and Walcott.

Resuscitating illusions in the failed national-reformist perspective

No less preposterous is Klein's argument that the NDP will respond to pressure from working people by moving left. It mirrors the politics of pseudo-left groups like Fightback and the International Socialists, which, whether they operate within or outside the NDP, promote the spurious claim that pressure from "the streets" can push the social democrats to the "left" and transform them into an instrument for opposing austerity, even fighting for "socialism."

In fact, all such attempts to pressure social democracy to the "left"

have only served to politically disorient and derail the working class.

In Greece, mass opposition to European Union-dictated austerity led in January 2015 to the election of Syriza, a coalition of ex-Stalinists, pseudo-lefts and disgruntled social democrats. Terrified by the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment and determined to preserve the material interests of its upper-middle class constituency, the Syriza government rapidly reached an accommodation with the EU and agreed to impose an even more vicious austerity program than its conservative and social-democratic predecessors.

In Britain, Jeremy Corbyn secured the leadership of the Labour Party after a campaign in which he attracted mass support for his attacks on austerity, militarism, and social inequality. Yet ever since, in the name of preserving party unity, he has conceded on every issue to the Blairite right-wing of the party. Under Corbyn, Labour has backed war in Syria, implemented Tory austerity measures at the local level, and endorsed the renewal of Britain's Trident nuclear weapons system. John McDonnell, Corbyn's right-hand man and Labour's shadow chancellor, summed up Corbyn's role last October when he told supporters to cheers that their objective is to "save capitalism."

Klein is not unaware of these experiences. Her enthusiasm for Horwath's feint "left" and advocacy of an NDP or even NDP-Liberal government on the grounds it could be pressured into pursuing reform is likewise not the result of political naiveté. Ever since she won international acclaim for her 2000 book *No Logo*, which became something of a bible for the anti-globalization movement, Klein has been associated with a national-reformist brand of politics based on the trade union bureaucracy and right-wing social democratic parties.

In her second major work, *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), Klein argued that the collapse of the Keynesian programs of national reform implemented during the post-Second World War boom was not bound up with fundamental shifts in the structure of global capitalism, but was merely the result of a policy change, the embrace of "neoliberalism," which could be corrected.

This explanation intentionally ignores the objective changes brought about by the globalization of capitalist production, which pulled the rug from under all national-reformist agendas and the social democratic parties which rested upon them. Similarly, the trade unions, rooted within the nation-state and based on a program of pressuring governments and companies for concessions within the national framework, have been transformed over the past three decades into appendages of the corporate elite who extort concessions from workers in the name of securing investment.

Under conditions where there is a global resurgence of the class struggle, Klein is seeking to chain the working class to the unions and NDP and resuscitate illusions in the failed, pro-capitalist perspective of national reformism. She speaks on behalf of a section of the well-heeled middle class, which while dissatisfied with the distribution of wealth at the top of society and concerned by climate change, fears nothing more than the development of an independent political movement of the working class and a revolutionary challenge to crisis-ridden capitalism, even as it hurtles to war and vomits up social reaction.



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