

Toronto Star endorses NDP-led government in Ontario

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The *Toronto Star*, the voice of Canada's liberal establishment, is urging Ontario voters to elect a New Democratic Party (NDP)-led government when they go to the polls this Thursday.

In an editorial titled "Ontario voters should back NDP to stop Doug Ford," the *Star* advocates "strategic voting," saying voters should support the candidate from the governing Liberals or the social-democratic NDP with the best chance of defeating the Ford-led Conservative candidate in their specific electoral constituency. "Given the collapse in Liberal support," continues the *Star*, this means in "most parts of the province" that "progressive voters should back the NDP candidate to make sure Ford doesn't reach the premier's office."

The *Star's* endorsement underlines that an important faction of Canada's ruling elite now favors an NDP-led government in the country's most populous province.

Meanwhile, the pseudo-left is trying to manufacture enthusiasm for the NDP, claiming that it represents a "working class" alternative to the "bosses' parties" and constitutes a bulwark against the rise of rightwing populism in Canada.

In fact the NDP, like social-democratic parties around the world, long ago trashed its reformist program. For the past three decades, it has served as a vital instrument of the ruling class in imposing austerity and mobilizing support for Canada's participation in a series of US-led wars and military-strategic offensives.

The *Star* speaks for the pro-war, pro-austerity "liberal" faction of Canada's ruling elite. It is a pillar of the federal Liberal government of Justin Trudeau, just as it was of the Jean Chretien-Paul Martin Liberal governments that imposed the greatest social spending cuts in Canadian history, launched the rearmament of Canada's military, and dramatically expanded the reach and powers of the national-security agencies.

The *Star*, it should be added, continues to vehemently

defend the record of the 15-year-old Ontario Liberal government. Elected in 2003, with the explicit support of much of the trade union bureaucracy, the Liberals left in place the key changes implemented by the Reagan-Thatcher inspired Mike Harris Conservative government in the late 1990s. The Liberals then implemented their own wave of sweeping social spending cuts and tax breaks for big business in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis.

The *Star's* endorsement of the NDP is based on several interrelated calculations.

It fears that a government headed by Ford—a Trump-style millionaire who postures as a plain-speaking defender of the "little guy" while advocating further tax breaks for big business and the rich, and massive cuts to public services—will become a lightning rod for social opposition and under conditions where there is already a resurgence of the class struggle, in Canada and internationally.

The *Star* calculates that the NDP, building on the corporatist ties the Liberals cultivated with the trade union bureaucracy, will be able to provide a surer and safer means of increasing the "competitiveness," i.e. profitability, of Canadian big business, by pursuing austerity and capitalist restructuring in alliance with the unions.

In this, it is drawing on the experience of the Wynne government, which retained the backing of the trade union bureaucracy even as it imposed austerity and criminalized strikes, and of NDP provincial governments from Nova Scotia to British Columbia.

A final, albeit lesser consideration, for the *Star* is that an NDP government would be much more amenable to working with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his federal Liberal government than Ford and his Conservatives. After all, Canada's social democrats and their union allies have time and again boosted the Liberals

as a “progressive” alternative to the hard-right Conservatives and repeatedly allied with them in parliament and the provincial legislatures.

While endorsing an NDP government in Ontario, the *Star* made clear that it expects the NDP to quickly jettison many of its election platform proposals for modest social spending increases. If the NDP “do form government,” declares last Friday’s *Star* editorial, “it would be well-advised to reassure the business community that it understands they must remain competitive—and that includes the taxes that businesses must pay.”

The *Star* editorial board went on to criticize all three parties, the NDP, Liberals and Ford and his Conservatives, for proposing to run budget deficits, rather than “getting the province’s finances in order”—i.e. imposing even harsher austerity.

Earlier in the campaign, the *Star* joined Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne in denouncing provincial NDP leader Andrea Horwath for saying that she would not support strikebreaking legislation as it is contrary to NDP principles.

In fact, the NDP has repeatedly connived in the adoption of anti-worker legislation. This includes, to mention only the most notorious examples, the support the NDP governments in British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan gave to the three-year wage-cutting wage-controls program Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau imposed from 1975–1978 and the wage and job cuts the last Ontario NDP government imposed under its reactionary “social contract legislation.”

Moreover, Horwath’s reputed support for workers’ rights did not prevent her leading NDP legislators in propping up the minority Wynne Liberal government as it criminalized teachers’ job actions so as to enforce wage and benefit cuts.

The day after the *Star* endorsed the NDP, Wynne, in a move unprecedented for a sitting premier, conceded her Liberals will lose the June 7 election. “After Thursday, I will no longer be Ontario’s premier,” announced Wynne to a stunned Liberal election rally.

Wynne’s concession was a desperate attempt to salvage at least the eight Liberal seats needed to retain official party status in the Ontario legislature. She coupled it with a call for voters to ensure that enough Liberals are elected to deny either the NDP or Conservatives a majority, claiming both are “too extreme.”

Hoping the opposition to Ford and Liberal austerity can propel them to a majority, the NDP has aggressively attacked Wynne in the final days of the election

campaign.

Asked if the NDP would seek the Liberals’ support in the event of a minority or “hung” parliament, Horwath declared she would have nothing to do with them. “The Liberals,” she declared, “have supported privatization, they have sold off our public assets, they’ve cut our hospitals. Any party that does that is not a party I can work with.”

The reality, of course, is otherwise. The NDP and their union allies have worked closely with Wynne’s government and that of her predecessor Dalton McGuinty. In the name of “stopping” the Conservatives, not only did they work with Wynne, the social democrats helped keep the Liberals in office as they “cut our hospitals,” schools, and other vital public services.

And should the parliamentary arithmetic make it necessary, the NDP will seek the Liberals’ support in forming government after June 7.

Faced with growing pressure from the corporate media to demonstrate the NDP’s “readiness to govern,” Horwath has been stressing her good relations with big business and the “great deal of time” she has spent “over these last number of years meeting... with the chiefs of police [and] police associations.”

An NDP government, whether a majority government or formed through some form of combination with the Liberals, would be a big business government that would rapidly come into headlong conflict with the working class. The miserly social spending increases outlined in the NDP election platform will be quickly cast aside as Horwath comes under pressure from big business, including the NDP-friendly *Toronto Star*, and as the anemic and fragile “recovery” from the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression collapses under a mountain of debt and the whirlwinds of international trade war and intensifying geopolitical conflict.



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