

With union support, Trudeau's big business Liberals vie for re-election in fall vote

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The campaign for Canada's October 21 national election officially began yesterday, after the governor-general dissolved the Liberal-majority parliament elected in 2015.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau kicked off the Liberal re-election campaign with a speech in which he cast the election as a stark choice between his Liberals and their "progressive" agenda and the right-wing Conservatives of Andrew Scheer.

Using the Conservatives as a right-wing foil is a longstanding Liberal ruse. Time and again, the Liberals—the ruling class' preferred party of government for most of the past century—have railed against Conservative (and in the 1990s and early 2000s, Reform/Canadian Alliance) policies, only to subsequently implement them.

Like the previous and rightly reviled Stephen Harper-led Conservative government, Justin Trudeau's Liberals have pursued Canadian big business' agenda of austerity, attacks on democratic rights, rearmament and war. Only they have done so behind a smokescreen of vapid "progressive" rhetoric—insincere expressions of concern about the growth of social inequality and identity politics- based racial, ethnic and gender appeals—and through a corporatist partnership with the trade unions, whose leaders boast of unprecedented access to Trudeau and his cabinet.

Trudeau does not celebrate Canada, as Harper did, as a "warrior nation." But under his government, Canada is playing an ever more important role in Washington's military-strategic offensives against Russia and China, and in the oil-rich Middle East, any of which could ignite a catastrophic global conflict. Trudeau and Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland are also providing American imperialism's regime-change operation in Venezuela with much-needed political cover and support.

And like the other imperialist powers, Liberal-led Canada is rearming. Trudeau has committed tens of billions to purchase new battleships, warplanes, drones and other armaments, and ordered the military budget be hiked by more than 70 percent, to over \$32 billion per year by 2026.

The corporate media and union bureaucrats have made much of the fact that the Trudeau government, in accordance with advice from the IMF, eased the austerity throttle and ran modest budget deficits in a largely unsuccessful attempt to kick-start the economy after years of anemic growth. But this has not meant any respite for working people from the never-ending assault on public services and workers' social rights. The Trudeau Liberals have slashed tens of billions from health care. Meanwhile, their closest

provincial allies until their twin election defeats in 2018, Ontario Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne and Quebec Liberal Premier Philippe Couillard, implemented draconian social spending cuts.

Under Trudeau, as under Harper, workers' right to strike is under systematic attack and the repressive powers of the state have been strengthened. Last November, the Liberals, aping Harper's actions in 2011, criminalized rotating walkouts by 50,000 postal workers. Just before parliament rose in June, the Liberals rammed through their purported reform of Harper's 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act, legislation that even the pro-Conservative *Globe and Mail* termed a "police-state" measure. Not only does the Liberals' Bill C-59 enshrine the key anti-democratic provisions of Harper's law. It gives the national-security apparatus further powers.

Unions stump for Trudeau

Because of their right-wing record, the Liberals are relying, even more than in 2015, on the trade unions to burnish their phony progressive colors and muster votes in the name of an "Anybody but Conservative" campaign.

The Canadian Labour Congress, Unifor and other major unions have made clear that they are more than ready to play such a role. Through groups like Engage Canada, they are spending millions on promoting the lie that the big business Liberals are a "progressive" alternative to the Conservatives.

Canada's largest industrial union, Unifor, gave both Trudeau and Freeland center stage at its triennial convention held in Quebec City late last month. In July, Trudeau was guest of honor at the Canadian Teachers Federation convention, and the prime minister joined Hamilton's Labour Day parade at the invitation of the Labourers International Union.

However, the most critical service the unions are providing the Trudeau government is what they have provided the Canadian bourgeoisie for the past four decades. They are systematically suppressing the class struggle.

There is palpable mass opposition to the Ford Conservative government in Ontario, which, since coming to power in June 2018, has slashed social spending, frozen the minimum wage, gutted work standards and the Ontario Student Assistance Program, and vowed, if needed, to use strikebreaking legislation to

impose a real-wage cut on public school teachers, and dramatic class-size increases.

But the unions are determined to thwart any working-class challenge to the Ford government, as exemplified by the clock on the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) website that counts down the days, minutes and hours to the next provincial election in 2022 and the opportunity to elect a “progressive government”—i.e., a right-wing Liberal or NDP regime. As of August 31, 250,000 Ontario teachers and support staff workers are without contracts. But the teachers’ unions, backed by the OFL and Unifor, are doing everything to divide them and block job action, opening the door for Ford to seize the initiative and carry through with his threat to criminalize the teachers’ struggle.

Scheer, who previously described himself as “Harper with a smile,” and his Conservatives are seeking to rally ruling class support by pledging to move politics sharply further right. This includes eliminating the budget deficit within four years, working even more closely with Washington on the world stage, downgrading Canada’s relations with China and immediately banning Huawei from Canada’s 5G network.

At the same time, the Tories are seeking to make an appeal to working people, whose living standards have stagnated, with the demagogic claim that through a raft of tax cuts they can help them “get ahead.”

Conservatives exploit SNC-Lavalin scandal

Scheer also intends to cynically exploit the SNC-Lavalin scandal, in which Trudeau and his advisers were exposed as having gone to extraordinary lengths to rewrite and manipulate the law to stop the Quebec-based transnational from being prosecuted on corruption charges. Scheer featured in the SNC-Lavalin affair and claims the government’s action potentially amounts to obstruction of justice in yesterday’s Conservative campaign launch. Ammunition for his attack lines was provided by the *Globe and Mail*, which headlined its Wednesday paper with claims that an RCMP investigation is being stymied by cabinet confidentiality rules.

That the *Globe* chooses to give such prominence to this story, which is based on innuendo and unnamed sources, on the day the election was to be called, underscores that important sections of Canada’s elite are seriously weighing a turn to an even more aggressive right-wing government.

The social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) has been in perpetual crisis since the 2015 election, when it lost more than half its seats and was once again reduced to third-party status. Having risen unexpectedly to Official Opposition in 2011, the NDP sought to convince the ruling class it could be trusted with the reins of power by running a Harper-lite campaign, in which it promised balanced budgets and increased military spending, under former Quebec Liberal cabinet minister Thomas Mulcair.

Over the past four years, the social democrats, now led by Jagmeet Singh, have been at pains to differentiate themselves from

the actions of Trudeau and his government, and weighed down by the turn of their traditional union allies to even closer cooperation with the Liberals.

In a desperate bid to avoid a further election debacle—polls currently show the NDP with between 12 and 15 percent support—the social democrats have lifted some of the rhetoric and policies of Bernie Sanders and other “progressive” US Democrats, that is from capitalist politicians on the make who are trying to tart up one of the twin parties of US imperialism. The political rejuvenation of the NDP is equally bankrupt and similarly directed at preventing burgeoning social opposition and anti-capitalist sentiment from finding positive political expression in the development of an independent political movement of the working class against austerity, social inequality, and war.

The fondest hope of the NDP is that the elections will result in a hung parliament in which they hold the balance of power, thereby enabling them to trade support for influence in a minority Liberal government.

Three other parties held seats in the outgoing parliament and could factor in shaping the government in the event of a minority parliament.

The Greens, led by Elizabeth May, are a right-wing capitalist party that has long worked as a semi-official Liberal ally. In recent months they nonetheless have seen a spike in support due to mounting popular disaffection with the Liberals and NDP, and because they are perceived as being the party most committed to urgent action on the climate change crisis.

The Bloc Quebecois (BQ), the sister party of the Parti Quebecois in the federal parliament, lost no time yesterday in signaling its intention to wage a virulent chauvinist campaign. At its campaign kick-off, the BQ trumpeted its support for Bill 21, a recently adopted Quebec law that forbids teachers and other designated state employees from wearing religious symbols, such as the hijab, and bans Muslim women who wear the niqab or burka from accessing public services.

In a development symptomatic of the extreme rightward shift of bourgeois politics as a whole, Maxime Bernier, the second-place finisher in the 2017 Conservative leadership race, is standing for re-election as the leader of his newly-founded People’s Party of Canada (PPC). Echoing the rhetoric of Trump, the AfD and other neo-fascist European parties, the PPC denounces “mass immigration” and “multiculturalism,” charging that both are a threat to “western civilization.”



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