

NDP advocates spending tens of billions on Canada's military

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Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) is seeking to hoodwink voters with promises of modest social spending increases, while preparing, should the parliamentary arithmetic allow, to prop up a big business minority Liberal government.

Speaking to reporters Sunday, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh said his party is "ready to do whatever it takes" to oppose the Conservatives taking office after the Oct. 21 national election, including striking a parliamentary alliance with Justin Trudeau and his Liberals or even joining them in a coalition government. These are the very same Liberals that Singh derides in his election speeches for serving the same corporate interests as the Conservatives and for helping "rig" the economy against ordinary people.

The reality is the NDP is utterly subservient to big business and a loyal defender of Canadian imperialism. In federal politics, it has traditionally been consigned to the role of a safety-valve, working to channel social opposition into safe parliamentary channels. But in the six provinces where it has formed government, it faithfully enforced the dictates of big business, including imposing austerity and criminalizing strikes.

The rightwing character of the NDP is exemplified by the sections of its federal election platform, "A New Deal for People," that outline its proposals for the military and foreign policy.

While chock full of pseudo-progressive rhetoric about "human rights," making Canada a "force for peace," and promoting "gender equality," the platform champions a pro-war, militarist agenda. It advocates spending tens of billions of dollars on equipping Canada's military with new battleships, fighter jets and other high-tech weaponry, paving the way to turn workers and young people into cannon fodder for Canadian imperialism in foreign wars and future great-power conflicts.

No less significantly, the NDP platform voices not a word of criticism of Canada's ever-increasing integration, under the 2006-15 Harper Conservatives and now the Trudeau Liberal government, in US military-strategic offensives around the world. This includes Canada's participation in the war build-up against China and the strategic encirclement of Russia.

Tellingly, while the NDP platform is silent on these and other

Canadian foreign deployments, it justifies support for squandering tens of billions on new weapons of war by invoking Ottawa's "international commitments" along with "national defense."

Under the heading "Defence at home and abroad," the NDP platform declares, "Unfortunately, after decades of Liberal and Conservative cuts and mismanagement, our military has been left with outdated equipment, inadequate support, and an unclear strategic mandate. We need to do better for Canadians in uniform and for the defence of our country. A New Democrat government will make sure that the troops have the equipment, training, and support they need to do the difficult and dangerous work we ask them to undertake."

Reading these lines, one could be forgiven for thinking that Canada's military is barely surviving on a shoestring budget. Yet recent years have witnessed unprecedented levels of military spending. In 2011, spending increases by Stephen Harper's Tories brought the defence budget to its highest level in real terms since the end of World War II. Then, after taking power in 2015 with promises of "sunny ways" and more "peacekeeping," Trudeau's Liberal government initiated a defence policy review that culminated in a 2017 plan to hike defence spending by over 70 percent by 2026.

Nonetheless, powerful sections of the Canadian bourgeoisie see this as a mere down payment. Fearful of the rapid escalation of the global capitalist crises, the growing conflicts among the major powers, and, above all, the erosion in the economic and geo-strategic position of American imperialism, upon which it has relied to advance its own predatory interests for over three-quarters of a century, Canada's capitalist elite want a combat-ready war machine.

The NDP is part of this ruling class consensus. If its gains a role in determining government policy because neither the Liberals nor Conservatives win a parliamentary majority on October 21, it will loyally enforce the diversion of tens of billions of dollars from meeting vital social needs to providing the Canadian Armed Forces with more powerful weaponry.

After decrying the absence of a "strategic mandate" for the armed forces, the party's platform declares, "We will keep shipbuilding procurement on time and on budget." "Fighter jet procurement," it adds, "will be based on a free and fair

competition to make sure we get the best fighters to meet Canada's needs."

In other words, the New Democrats are full-throated supporters of the Trudeau government's plans to purchase a fleet of 15 new warships and more than 80 hi-tech fighter jets. The latter purchase is inextricably linked to Washington and Ottawa's plans to "modernize" NORAD—the joint Canada-US North American air defence command.

The NDP is also pushing for more effective use of Canada's large defence industry to arm Canada's military to the teeth. At the press conference launching the party's election campaign, Singh complained that General Dynamics workers in London, Ontario, are producing light armoured vehicles (LAVs) for the despotic Saudi regime as part of a \$15 billion deal negotiated by the Harper and Trudeau governments. The Saudis have used the LAVs to bloodily suppress opposition at home and wage war in Yemen. Singh vowed to cancel the deal, stressing that the General Dynamics workers should instead be employed building LAVs for the Canadian military and other "democratic" powers, i.e. the United States and other NATO countries. Just before the election campaign launch, the Trudeau government did in fact place an order for an additional 360 LAVs for the Canadian Armed Forces at a cost of \$2 billion.

The NDP's militarist agenda is also backed by its trade union allies, who, it should be noted, would be eager supporters of a governmental alliance between the social democrats and Trudeau's Liberals. When US President Trump imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum imports, the United Steelworkers (USW), which is closely aligned with the NDP, supported Trudeau's successful push to have the duties lifted. USW officials, in a line of argument subsequently adopted up by Ottawa, lobbied Trump to rescind the tariffs by highlighting the importance of Canadian-made steel and aluminum for building US tanks, warplanes, and other weaponry.

Well aware that the ruling elite's reactionary agenda of militarism and war enjoys no popular support, the NDP seeks to sell it with "progressive" rhetoric. Canada should be a "force for peace" in the world, it declares, committed to "peacekeeping" and strengthening "multilateral institutions" and defending "human rights."

This is the language that has been repeatedly employed by imperialist war-mongers for the past two decades to justify one war of aggression after another. From the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999, to the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the bombardment of Libya in 2011, and the ongoing US-incited war in Syria: all of these conflicts were dressed up by their proponents as crusades by benevolent governments concerned only with "human rights" and their "responsibility to protect" the civilian populations that they then massacred.

The NDP endorsed all of the aforementioned US-led wars, and Canada's participation in them. In its abortive coalition agreement with the Liberals in 2008, it vowed to continue—as

Harper subsequently did—waging war in Afghanistan through 2011. Then, in 2011, the NDP voted to send Canadian warplanes to support the NATO "regime-change" war in Libya, a decision which according to CAF personnel led to Canada's military serving as "al-Qaida's air force."

The NDP's championing of militarism and war is replicated by social democratic parties around the world. In Britain, Tony Blair's Labour Party government joined the US-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, playing in the latter case a leading role in promoting the fraudulent narrative of "weapons of mass destruction" used to justify Iraq's invasion. In Germany, a Social Democratic Party-led government organized the first foreign deployment of its military since World War II, when Gerhard Schröder's SPD-Green coalition joined NATO's bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999. And in France, François Hollande's Socialist Party waged war in Syria and expanded French troop deployments to its former African colonies.

Like its sister social democratic parties, the NDP is a pro-war, pro-imperialist party. Young people and workers seeking an alternative to the ruling elite's endless wars and the growing threat of a catastrophic global conflict will not find it in the New Democrats. Rather, they must join the fight to build a socialist anti-war movement that combines opposition to imperialist aggression and war with the fight to mobilize the international working class against austerity, social inequality and the capitalist system as a whole.

The author also recommends:

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