

“Give me a call”: NDP MP offers to join Canada’s pro-austerity, pro-war Liberal government

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Newly elected New Democratic Party MP Heather McPherson has offered to take up a cabinet position in Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s Liberal government.

The offer, presented as a means of helping Trudeau ensure “regional balance” in his government after the Liberals were largely wiped out in western Canada in last month’s federal election, underscores the social democrats’ support for a pro-war, pro-austerity agenda.

“I think it’s important that we look at how we can represent Alberta,” McPherson told state-run broadcaster CBC. “If the prime minister is interested in having somebody from Alberta that is a New Democrat, then he’s always able to give me a call.”

McPherson was the only non-Conservative MP to be elected from the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The election results, including the Tories’ consolidation of their dominance in the Prairie provinces and the interior of British Columbia and the electoral resurgence of the pro-Quebec independence Bloc Quebecois, reflects mounting regional divisions within Canada’s ruling elite.

McPherson’s comments cannot simply be dismissed as those of a rookie MP. Throughout the campaign for the October 21st federal election, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh stressed his determination to work with the Liberals, so as to block a Conservative government headed by Andrew Scheer. Singh repeatedly promoted the possibility that the NDP could serve as the junior partner in a Liberal-led coalition government. Shortly before voting day he announced what he called the NDP’s “key priorities” for postelection negotiations with the Canadian ruling elite’s traditional party of national government. For the most part, these vaguely worded priorities overlapped with Liberal Party policy proposals, and all, Singh stressed, were “negotiable.”

When the election produced a Liberal minority with the

NDP holding sufficient seats to provide Trudeau with a parliamentary majority, Singh was ecstatic. Asked by journalists at his first postelection press conference how the NDP would use the “balance of power,” Singh again stressed the NDP’s eagerness to work with the Trudeau government, adding that this collaboration could take multiple forms, including a formal coalition or a “confidence and supply agreement.” “Everything is on the table,” declared the NDP leader.

Singh has previous experience in propping up a Liberal government. In Ontario between 2012 and 2014, he and the rest of the NDP caucus in the Ontario legislature propped up Liberal minority governments led by Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, even as they slashed spending on education, healthcare, and social services, and criminalized teacher job action.

Trudeau, for his own political reasons, was quick to publicly reject Singh’s offer of a formal Liberal-NDP coalition. Above all, this was to reassure the most right-wing sections of the bourgeoisie who are opposed to the social democrats’ inclusion in government. However, Trudeau is also anxious to retain full freedom to rely on Conservatives and Bloc Quebecois MPs to push through especially contentious or unpopular legislation deemed vital to the interests of the ruling class, such as ratifying the new NAFTA agreement Ottawa has negotiated with the Trump administration.

Whatever Trudeau’s public statements, he and his Liberals know full well that politically his minority government will rest chiefly on their close “partnership” with the trade unions and support from the social-democratic NDP. This is being dressed up by the corporate media and by the parties involved as a “progressive” alliance aimed at stopping the Conservatives’ return to power.

Trudeau's first four years in power have given a foretaste of what such "progressive" politics will look like. Identity politics and hollow "progressive" rhetoric will be used as a smokescreen for the implementation of a right-wing, pro-big business and militarist agenda.

This is exemplified by the Liberals' plans to procure new fleets of battleships and warplanes and hike military spending by more than 70 percent by 2026: their integration of Canada ever more deeply into Washington's military-strategic offensives against Russia and China; and their collaboration with the Trump administration in its vicious crackdown on refugees.

The trade unions, which joined with the NDP, in welcoming the Liberals' re-election, have provided the Liberal government with unprecedentedly close collaboration. Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) president Hassan Yussuff was allotted a seat on Trudeau's NAFTA advisory council, while Unifor President Jerry Dias and United Steelworkers head Leo Gerard closely coordinated with Ottawa in their lobbying of US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and other top Trump administration officials. The NAFTA talks concluded with Canada's ruling elite agreeing to Trump's demands that the three-country agreement be refashioned to make it a more explicit trade war bloc aimed at advancing the interests of American and Canadian imperialism against China and other overseas competitors.

The incoming Trudeau minority government, set to be sworn in on November 20, will intensify this right-wing agenda. This has been underscored by Trudeau's recent full-throated defence of the NATO military alliance, and his attempts to placate hard-right forces in Alberta and the Prairie provinces, like Jason Kenney's United Conservatives, that are mounting ruthless attacks on the working class.

Responding to French President Emmanuel Macron's assertion that NATO is "brain dead," Trudeau declared last week, "NATO continues to hold an extremely important role not just in the North Atlantic but in the world as a group of countries who come together to share values [and] that share a commitment to shared security. And quite frankly the fact that Canada has been able to show significant leadership both in Baghdad leading the training mission in Iraq and on the eastern front of NATO in Latvia are examples where NATO still very much has an important role to play."

In other words, Trudeau's "progressive" Liberals see the continuation of NATO's reckless war drive against

Russia, and Washington's ruinous illegal wars in Syria and Iraq, as central foreign policy priorities.

Moreover, the Trudeau government is committed to "modernizing" the Canada-US North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) in accordance with Washington's "new era of great power competition." This will entail billions of dollars in as-of-yet unannounced military spending, and a renewed push on the part of Canada's ruling elite to overcome popular opposition to Ottawa joining Washington's ballistic missile defence shield. Its name notwithstanding, the US defence shield is aimed at making a nuclear war "winnable."

In an effort to reach out to Alberta's hard-right Kenney government and the oil industry barons for which it speaks, Trudeau renewed his government's pledge to ensure the rapid completion of the Trans Mountain oil pipeline at his first postelection press conference. Since then Trudeau and his ministers have repeatedly vowed to work with Kenney and Scott Moe, Saskatchewan's right-wing premier.

Immediately after the election, Kenney's UCP government announced sweeping social spending cuts and threatened 180,000 public sector workers with mass layoffs if they do not accept wage rollbacks of between 2.5 and 5 percent. Kenney is also pressing for radical changes to the federal government's equalization program, which provides additional transfers to poorer provinces. Kenney's campaign against equalization is aimed at slashing the taxation of Big Oil and Alberta's rich and super-rich and gutting what remains of national standards for health care and other pivotal public services.

Trudeau will rely on the political support of the unions and NDP to ram through his unpopular pro-corporate program in the face of widespread opposition. Last week, he extended an invitation to NDP leader Singh and the other opposition leaders to meet with him one-on-one to discuss ways to achieve "common ground." Predictably, Singh's NDP was the first party to confirm that its leader will attend such a meeting. It is scheduled to take place this week.



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