

Canadian parliament reconvenes following formation of Liberal minority government

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Canada's House of Commons reconvened Thursday for the first time since the October 21 federal election, which resulted in a minority Liberal government.

Having lost over 30 seats from first term in office, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has made clear he will seek "common ground" with hard-right forces in the Conservative Party, while relying on his close partnership with the trade unions and support from the New Democrats (NDP) to give his minority government a "progressive" cover.

The Liberal government's Throne Speech, delivered by Governor General Julie Payette, was mainly devoted to cultivating the Liberals' fraudulent "progressive" image. Promises were made to tackle climate change, work towards "reconciliation" with the Native population, expand access to mental health services, introduce a federal prescription drug plan, and help the "middle class" with a modest tax cut and increase to the federal minimum wage.

The purpose of such progressive posturing was revealed this week by Trudeau's performance at NATO's 70th anniversary summit in London. Speaking alongside US President Donald Trump, Trudeau boasted that his government has already initiated a more than 70 percent hike in military spending by 2026, and plans to do more. Trudeau then announced Wednesday that Canada will assign an additional six fighter jets and a frigate to participate in NATO's High Readiness Force, which aims to facilitate the mobilization of 30 land battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat vessels within 30 days in the event of a war crisis with Russia. This brings Canada's total contribution to 12 fighter jets, an expeditionary air task force, a maritime patrol aircraft, three frigates, a submarine, a mechanized infantry battalion, a military hospital, and a platoon for biological, radiological, and nuclear contamination.

Announcing the new deployment, Trudeau praised the Canadian military's participation in a series of aggressive US-led interventions around the world. "Today, Canada is leading NATO missions in Latvia, Iraq, and NATO maritime forces in the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea,

and advancing the Women, Peace and Security agenda," he declared.

In a section of the Throne Speech largely ignored in the media coverage, entitled "Positioning Canada for success in an uncertain world," the Liberal government outlined its aggressive militarist foreign policy. Behind empty invocations of "democracy," "human rights," and "international law," the government pledged to strengthen Canada's commitment to NATO, and "stand up for the rules-based international order when that order is put in question, particularly when it comes to matters of trade or digital policy."

The "rules-based order" is the global hegemony of US imperialism, which has been maintained since World War II through the ruthless deployment of military force on every continent. The Liberals' readiness to stand up for this order "particularly when it comes to matters of trade and digital policy" is a clear swipe at China, making clear that the overwhelming majority of the Canadian bourgeoisie backs Washington's drive to economically isolate and prepare for military conflict with its strategic competitor.

The incoming government's right-wing agenda is not confined to questions of foreign policy. The pledge to seek "common ground" with other political parties and provincial governments is being used as a smokescreen to establish close cooperation with hard-right forces, including Jason Kenney's United Conservatives in Alberta, Doug Ford's Tories in Ontario, Francois Legault's Coalition Avenir Quebec, and Scott Moe in Saskatchewan. Since the federal election, Kenney's government has tabled a provincial budget containing public spending cuts of more than 10 percent in real terms and has demanded public sector workers accept wage cuts of between 2.5 and 5 percent. Ford has imposed a 1 percent annual cap on wage and benefit increases for 1 million public sector workers for the next three years, and is preparing to criminalize teachers' strikes.

Trudeau recently held a kiss-and-make-up meeting with Ford, with both politicians committing to work together. This followed an election campaign during which Trudeau

and the Liberals, with the support of the trade unions, postured as determined opponents of Ford and his austerity measures. This enabled the Liberals to win 79 of Ontario's 121 seats and defend their position as the largest parliamentary party.

Significantly, the minister being tasked with overseeing these inter-governmental relations is former Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland. The leading war-hawk in Trudeau's first term, Freeland made a name for herself as a vociferous critic of Russia and proponent of a deepening military-strategic partnership with the US. In her speech launching the Liberals' new defence policy in 2017, she asserted that "hard power," i.e. war, had been part of Canada's past and must be a part of its future. As part of her newly-expanded role as Deputy Prime Minister, Freeland will reach out to Kenney and Moe with the ostensible purpose of listening to western interests. In reality, this means serving the demands of big oil for pipelines to tidal water, the expansion of energy exploration, and deepening attacks on the working class to boost corporate profits.

Freeland will also continue to play a leading role in managing Canada-US relations.

Apart from Freeland, another important cabinet appointment was that of Bill Blair to the post of Minister of Public Safety. The former Toronto police chief is notorious for presiding over the brutal crackdown against anti-G-20 protests in 2010. During the Liberals' first term, he was responsible for overseeing border security, and thus played a leading role in integrating Canada into Trump's witch hunt of immigrants.

The initial actions of the new government underscore that Trudeau's second term will be characterized by a further turn to the right on foreign and domestic policy, and an intensified reliance on the unions and NDP to provide the Liberals' with "progressive" credentials.

Last month, the Canadian government played a significant supporting role in the US-backed right-wing coup that toppled Bolivian President Evo Morales. Canada financially backed the Organization of America States mission that declared October's presidential election to be null and void, clearing the way for the military to take power and brutally suppress popular opposition.

The Liberals also worked closely with the union bureaucracy behind the scenes to shut down a week-long strike by CN Rail workers on the company's terms. Transport Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau effectively issued an ultimatum, warning that the government would step in to end the strike with legislation. One day later, the Teamsters union called off the strike and refused to release any information on the deal it had agreed to.

The union bureaucracy played a central role in ensuring

Trudeau's re-election. In the summer, the annual conventions of the Canadian Teachers Federation and Unifor, two of the country's most influential unions, were all but transformed into Liberal party election campaign rallies. During the campaign, the unions continued to peddle their fraudulent claim that the Liberals represent a "progressive" alternative to Andrew Scheer and his Tories.

The NDP's role is particularly duplicitous. NDP leader Jagmeet Singh sought Wednesday to give the impression his party is striking a hard bargain, telling reporters that Trudeau would have to rely on support from the Tories or Bloc Quebecois if he doesn't push for "meaningful progress."

Yet Singh and the NDP spent the entire election campaign virtually begging the Liberals to form a coalition or some sort of parliamentary arrangement to establish a "progressive" government. When the Liberals were implicated in the Bolivian coup, Singh issued a mealy-mouthed statement that avoided directly criticizing the Trudeau government, merely noting that they should concentrate on pushing for "democracy" in the South American country. Singh also met with Trudeau in mid-November and remarked afterwards that he was confident the two parties could work together.

Tellingly, after criticizing Thursday's Throne Speech for not "going far enough," Singh still left the door wide open to the NDP's MPs voting for it.

The reality is that while Singh and the NDP may occasionally criticize the Liberals, Trudeau's government will rely on the social democrats to provide them with much-needed left cover. The NDP for its part will play its allotted role, burnishing the Liberals' claims to be "progressives," and providing them support when needed, including in crucial parliamentary votes. This will strengthen the Liberals' hand to press ahead with savage attacks on the working class across the country through their collaboration with the likes of Kenney and Ford; and as they divert tens of billions of dollars from meeting social needs to funding the new fleets of warplanes and battleships that the government needs to advance Canadian imperialist interests and ambitions on the world stage.



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