

Canada's NDP rushes to Trudeau's rescue amid “national crisis” over pipeline protests

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New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jagmeet Singh strategized with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau behind closed doors Tuesday on how to realize big business' demand that a quick end be brought to the Native blockades of railway lines. Indigenous protesters have been disrupting rail traffic for the past two weeks to support the Wet'suwet'en First Nation's opposition to the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

Convened by Trudeau, the meeting was also attended by the Green Party's Elizabeth May and Yves-François Blanchet, the head of the Bloc Québécois.

Trudeau publicly justified the meeting as a response to an inflammatory speech from the head of the Official Opposition Conservatives. Andrew Scheer had denounced the indigenous protesters as “radical activists” and demanded the government “enforce the rule of law” forthwith—that is, deploy state violence to suppress the protests.

“Mr. Scheer disqualified himself from constructive discussions with his unacceptable speech earlier today,” declared Trudeau after the meeting. Singh concurred, and thanked Trudeau for seeking the NDP's input in resolving what the Liberal government, opposition parties and corporate media are all describing as a “national crisis.”

It would be a mistake to accept Trudeau's presentation of Tuesday's meeting as simply occasioned by Scheer's remarks. The Canadian bourgeoisie's traditional party of government, the Liberals have long fostered ties with the NDP and their trade union allies as a means of burnishing their “progressive” credentials, the better to implement the pro-austerity, pro-war agenda of the ruling class.

And the unions and NDP have reciprocated. Indeed, Singh's rallying to Trudeau's side Tuesday marks a further step in the consolidation of a trade union-NDP-Liberal alliance aimed at upholding the interests of Canadian imperialism at home and abroad as class tensions mount.

Despite the Liberals' public avowals of their commitment to a peaceful solution to the current stand-off, Trudeau is clearly preparing a violent crackdown on the indigenous rail blockades. This is underscored by his convening Monday of the secretive Incident Response Group, which only meets in a “national crisis,” and his repeated declarations that the “rule of law” must be enforced. This was the very same argument used by British Columbia NDP Premier John Horgan to justify his government's sanctioning of the police crackdown on the Wet'suwet'en pipeline protest camp on February 6–7, which triggered the ongoing solidarity blockades.

Singh participated in Tuesday's meeting with Trudeau knowing full well that a Plan B is in the works. Whilst the Liberals hope that they can prevail on the indigenous protesters to stand down by mobilizing their allies in the leadership of the Assembly of First Nations, should that fail they will turn to the RCMP or military to smash the blockades. In 2016 then Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr said in reference to anti-pipeline protests, “If people choose for their own reasons not to be peaceful, then the government of Canada, through its defence forces, through its police forces, will ensure that people will be kept safe.” (See: Canada's Resources Minister threatens to use army against pipeline protests)

Underscoring that the NDP's support for the Liberals goes well beyond the issue of ending the Native protests, Singh and his NDP colleagues also voted with the government Tuesday to fast-track Parliament's consideration of the US, Mexico, Canada Agreement (USMCA). Canada's ruling elite views the renegotiated NAFTA pact as critical, because it guarantees corporate Canada access to its most important market, the United States, and helps cement Ottawa's military-strategic partnership with Washington. USMCA aims to consolidate a US-dominated North American trade bloc, which will serve as a platform for American and Canadian

imperialism to aggressively assert their interests against their overseas rivals, above all China.

The NDP is itself fully committed to the Canada-US military-strategic partnership. Its platform for last fall's federal election explicitly endorsed the Liberal government's plans to spend tens of billions of dollars on new fleets of warships and war planes. And the NDP uttered not a word of criticism of the Trudeau government's integration of Canada into Washington's principal military-strategic offensives—against nuclear-armed Russia and China, and in the oil rich Middle East. (See: NDP advocates spending tens of billions on Canada's military)

Singh's key message during the election campaign was that Canada's social democrats would do whatever it takes to prevent Scheer and the Conservatives from coming to power. He repeatedly pleaded with Trudeau for formal cooperation between the two parties, whether in the form of a coalition government or an accord pledging support for a common agenda.

Although Trudeau spurned the NDP's pleas after the election, calculating the parliamentary arithmetic would allow the Liberals to partner with the Conservatives, NDP and BQ as needed, the NDP has continued to offer its services. In two of the first three confidence votes in the new Parliament, it voted to sustain the Liberal government in power.

Now, with the government in crisis and the ruling class divided over how best to end the native protests and push through pipelines and other resource extraction projects, the NDP is rushing to Trudeau's aid so as to demonstrate its loyalty and subservience to Canadian capitalism.

The NDP and unions have been working for over two decades to cultivate the Liberal-NDP-trade union alliance that is now coming to fruition. Under Jack Layton, the NDP, with the full-throated support of the unions, responded to the eruption in the fall of 2008 of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the 1930s by agreeing to serve as the Liberals' junior partners in a coalition government. The Liberal-NDP coalition agreement—which was never realized due to Stephen Harper's proroguing of Parliament in a constitutional coup—included plans to impose “fiscal austerity,” cut business taxes by \$50 billion, and wage war in Afghanistan through 2011.

The NDP, having been catapulted into official opposition status in 2011, sought to prove to the ruling class its readiness to enter government by working with the unions to suppress working class opposition to the

Harper Conservative government and its hard-right agenda. It refused to give any support to the 2012 Quebec student strike on the spurious grounds that it was a “provincial affair.” It also made no effort to mobilize popular opposition to Harper's repeated criminalization of strikes and gutting of social spending. At the same time, the NDP in Ontario assisted the minority Wynne Liberal government to pass austerity budgets containing sweeping cuts to health care, education, and social services.

The next stage in the NDP and unions' steady march to the right came in 2015. Led by Unifor and the Canadian Labour Congress, the unions mounted an “Anybody but Conservative” campaign that promoted Trudeau and his Liberals as a “progressive” alternative to Harper. Meanwhile, the NDP, determined to prove its reliability to the ruling elite, ran a “Harper-lite” campaign, promising balanced budgets and increased military spending.

The unions hailed Trudeau's victory and soon forged unprecedentedly close ties with the Liberal government—ties the prime minister has repeatedly referred to as a “special partnership.” Armed with this “progressive” cover, Trudeau proceeded to hike military spending by 70 percent, criminalize the postal workers' strike, attack refugees, and impose tens of billions in cuts to the grants Ottawa gives the provinces to fund health care.

It is no coincidence that the unions and NDP's years-long embrace of the big business Liberals is becoming even tighter under conditions of a dramatic escalation of the class struggle in Canada and internationally, and a deepening crisis of the Canadian bourgeoisie. Like social democratic parties the world over, the NDP is completely beholden to big business and is terrified at the growth of social opposition, above all from the working class.



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