

Canada's New Democrats pledge to keep propping up Trudeau's big business minority Liberal government

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New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh has vowed to prop up Canada's Justin Trudeau-led minority Liberal government until the pandemic is over.

The announcement constitutes a guarantee from Canada's social democrats to the ruling class that the Trudeau government will have a free hand to pursue its class war agenda. That agenda currently focuses on keeping the economy open and profits accumulating amid the COVID-19 pandemic; equipping the military with new fleets of warships and warplanes; and forging an unprecedentedly close partnership with the Biden administration to confront the common rivals of US and Canadian imperialism, above all China and Russia.

Addressing a press conference on February 24, Singh stated, "We do not think it's the right thing to do to go to an election while we should be fighting the pandemic. We are not going to trigger an election. So that means any confidence vote, we will vote to keep the government going."

The claim that the Trudeau Liberals are engaged in "fighting the pandemic" is an obscene lie. In truth, the NDP has spent the past year propping up Trudeau's big business government while it has prioritized corporate profits and backstopping the fortunes of the capitalist elite over workers' lives and livelihoods.

Singh's support for the Trudeau government was so fulsome that he didn't even bother to cover it up with bogus claims to be advancing "progressive" change and helping improve working people's lives.

On the contrary, Singh made his blank-cheque pledge of support to the government on the very same day that the Liberals united with the hard-right Conservatives and Quebec chauvinist Bloc Quebecois to reject an NDP-authored bill calling for the establishment of a universal pharmacare program, by a vote of 295 to 32 in the House of Commons.

On every critical parliamentary vote and political issue since the October 2019 election, the NDP has sided with the Trudeau government. In February 2020, when the nationwide railway blockades in support of the Wet'suwet'en First Nations anti-pipeline protest provoked a political crisis for the ruling class, with right-wing forces demanding the deployment of the military to crush the protests, Singh held a closed-door meeting with the Prime Minister to strategize on ways to solve the "national crisis." This offered Trudeau the opportunity to pose as a "progressive"

seeking a "peaceful solution" to the protests, while behind the scenes preparing the violent police deployment that ultimately dismantled the blockades.

With the onset of the pandemic and the eruption of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the end of the Second World War, the NDP moved to strengthen its alliance with the Liberal government. NDP MPs joined with the Liberals and Tories to support the massive bailout programs that handed virtually unlimited resources to the banks and big business, while placing workers rendered jobless by pandemic lockdowns on makeshift rations of \$2,000 per month.

This vast transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top was also facilitated by the trade unions, which participated in a series of closed-door talks with the government and corporate elite to negotiate the bailout of the super-rich and put together a reckless back-to-work campaign that has helped push Canada's COVID-19 death toll above 22,000.

John Horgan's provincial NDP government in BC has proven to be one of Trudeau's closest provincial allies. It, not coincidentally, has also been among the most determined to keep major corporations operating throughout the pandemic, and to keep the public in the dark about COVID-19 outbreaks in schools.

In late May, Singh declared with much fanfare that in exchange for a pledge by Trudeau to create a temporary sick pay program that would help "millions," the NDP would back Trudeau's anti-democratic manoeuvre to suspend normal parliamentary business for over three months. The much-vaunted sick pay benefit proved to be little more than a charade. It is so limited and so cumbersome to obtain that it has proven of no use to most workers who have fallen sick or been exposed to COVID-19.

Then in the fall, whilst Trudeau gave his blessing to the avowedly right-wing governments of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta to reopen schools and scrap virtually all pandemic restrictions, the NDP provided the minority Liberals with the crucial votes they need to pass the government's throne speech. Delivered as the beginnings of the pandemic's deadly second wave were already visible, the throne speech proclaimed that in the event of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases any lockdown measures should be "short-term" and implemented at the "local level." The pursuit of this strategy by all provincial governments led inevitably to a second wave that was far larger and more lethal than the first,

killing more than 10,000 people in the five months between September and January.

In addition to providing a waft of progressive rhetoric to obscure the ruling elite's intention of letting the virus run rampant so as not to endanger corporate profits, the throne speech outlined a series of right-wing measures aimed at improving the global "competitiveness" of Canadian capitalism. In voting to support the speech, the NDP endorsed the slashing of the corporate tax rate for "clean energy" companies, the creation of an investment fund to attract financial support for zero-emissions products, and making Canada the "most competitive"—i.e., profitable—"jurisdiction in the world for clean technology."

In the preceding months, these issues had been the subject of extensive behind the scenes discussions between top business executives and the NDP's trade union allies. Building on what Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Hassan Yussuff dubbed a "collaborative front" with corporate Canada to get workers back on the job as quickly as possible, union leaders, employer representatives and government ministers plotted how to intensify the assault on wages and working conditions to ensure the profitability of Canadian capitalism. In early May 2020, Yussuff and Chamber of Commerce President Perrin Beatty issued a joint public call for the formation of a "national economic task force" to discuss how to restructure Canadian capitalism to improve its global competitiveness so as to prepare for increased corporate competition and trade conflicts in a post-COVID-19 world.

During the 2020 auto contract talks, Unifor President Jerry Dias used headline promises of new jobs through a government-supported transition to manufacturing electric vehicles to ram through new agreements that further enshrine multi-tier, low-wage employment and gut work rules. The trade unions' role as corporatist partners of big business was shown even more nakedly in January, when Unifor reopened the contract at GM's CAMI plant behind the backs of the workers to impose significant further concessions to secure a government-assisted investment in electric vehicle production.

The drive to make Canada a world leader in clean technology is inseparable from the ruling elite's push to deepen its military-strategic partnership with US imperialism. With the Democrat Joe Biden in the White House, corporate Canada sees an opportunity to consolidate supply chains for critical raw materials and hi-tech industries on the basis of a "North America First" strategy, and ensure the continent's twin imperialist powers dominate the global clean tech sector. That this is intimately tied to a resurgence of militarism and war was underscored by the recently agreed upon Roadmap for a Renewed Canada-US Partnership. It affirmed Washington and Ottawa's determination to modernize the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) to combat great power rivals, strengthen NATO, and dramatically boost defence spending. The document specifically took Canada to task for not meeting the NATO target of spending 2 percent of GDP on defence, which would require an annual spending increase of 30 percent.

Not only has the NDP not criticized the Roadmap. It played an important role in facilitating its adoption. In November, it

introduced a parliamentary motion praising Biden's electoral victory that received unanimous backing from all parties. The motion called for Biden to be given the honour of addressing a joint sitting of the House of Commons and Senate at the earliest opportunity, and urged the Trudeau government to deepen the decades-long Canada-US strategic partnership.

Significantly, one issue where the NDP has taken issue with the Liberal government is China. Responding to a virulent anti-China campaign mounted by the corporate media and openly encouraged by Washington, Canada's social-democrats have repeatedly sided with the Conservative official opposition in demanding the Trudeau government adopt an even harder line towards China. This included Singh and his New Democrats voting last November for the creation of a committee to scrutinize Canada's anti-China policy, and supporting a Conservative-authored parliamentary motion last month that provocatively declared China's persecution of the Uyghur minority to be "genocide."

For several years, the NDP has also been denouncing the government from the right for its alleged failure to spend enough on the military. During the 2019 federal election, the NDP complained that more money was needed for warships, fighter jets and other equipment. Even though the Liberals unveiled a more than 70 percent hike in military spending in 2017, the NDP platform condemned "decades of Liberal and Conservative cuts and mismanagement" for leaving the military with "outdated equipment, inadequate support, and an unclear strategic mandate."

By rushing to extend unconditional support to the Liberal government at the very moment when it has concluded a "whole-of-government" agreement with the Biden administration to pursue trade war and accelerate military conflict, the NDP and Singh are sending a clear signal to their masters in Canada's corporate boardrooms that they can be relied upon to manage the affairs of Canadian imperialism. Under conditions of unprecedented social inequality, the ruling elite's ruinous handling of the pandemic, and mounting working class anger, the social democrats and their trade union allies are well aware that they may be called upon to assume even more direct responsibility for administering the capitalist state and suppressing social opposition.



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