

Canada's NDP blusters about social inequality, while propping up Liberal government

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The New Democratic Party's April 9-11 federal convention was an abysmal spectacle. It combined complacency and self delusion with a fraudulent attempt to cast Canada's social democrats as fighters for working people.

The trade union-backed NDP has propped up the big business Trudeau Liberal government on every critical parliamentary vote since the October 2019 election, and has long painted the Liberals as fellow, if insufficiently consistent, "progressives." Yet at the convention, the NDP leadership, cheered on by a chorus of pseudo-left groups, postured as trenchant critics of Trudeau and his Liberals, accusing them of pandering to the corporate establishment and billionaires.

Fear that their proximity to the Liberals will prove electorally damaging was one factor motivating the NDP leadership's attempt to put some distance between itself and the government. Another, even greater concern, was the growth of anti-capitalist sentiment among workers and youth, fueled by ever-deepening social inequality and the Canadian capitalist elite's disastrous mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After years of scurrying ever further right, the social democrats sense the need to make a rhetorical shift. They are adopting policies championed by senator and failed US presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America and with the same aim—to trap leftward-moving workers and youth within capitalist establishment politics.

At the convention, federal party leader Jagmeet Singh huffed and puffed as if there was nothing more that he would like to do than blow down the Liberals' house. "One of the things we notice throughout this pandemic very clearly," he asserted in his keynote address "is that the Liberals have shown again and again, how they're in it for the ultra-rich, and they're not in it for you or your family."

"I've heard it said," he continued, "that in this pandemic we're all in the same boat. I disagree. We're not actually in the same boat. We're certainly in the same storm. But some of us are in leaky lifeboats, while others are in luxury yachts. In this storm, the Liberals continue to side with those in luxury yachts."

No one at the convention was impolite enough to point out that the chief reason why the Liberals have been able to "side with those in luxury yachts" is because Singh's NDP has kept them in office—indeed, he has vowed the NDP will continue to do so until

the pandemic is over; and because the NDP's trade union allies have systematically suppressed the class struggle.

However, it would be unfair to single out Singh, whose leadership was confirmed by a resounding vote of 87 percent of delegates, for special criticism. The NDP and trade union apparatuses as a whole, including the Socialist Caucus and the rest of the NDP's anemic left-wing, are complicit in this political fraud.

There was much hullabaloo about radical-sounding resolutions submitted to the convention by constituency associations and the Young New Democrats that called for the "abolition of billionaires," a halt to defence-related exports to Israel and defunding the police. Yet not one of the close to five hundred membership resolutions so much as criticized the NDP for its support for a government that has strengthened the Canada-US military strategic partnership and is spearheading the ruling class' homicidal drive to keep the economy "open" amid the pandemic. Nor was there any opposition to the corporatist alliance between the trade unions, big business, and the Trudeau government, which has been taken to a qualitatively new level during the pandemic on the basis of a commitment to keep businesses open at all costs and restructure Canadian capitalism to boost its global "competitiveness," i.e., corporate profits. The attitude of even the most "left" sections of the party was summed up by the leader of Fightback, Alex Grant, when he penned an article that dismissed the NDP's support for the Liberals' September 2020 throne speech as irrelevant.

In that the throne speech, the Trudeau Liberals stipulated that in the event of a spike in COVID-19 infections, any future lockdowns should be "local" and "short-term," thereby paving the way for the pandemic's deadly second and third waves that have claimed the lives of close to 15,000 Canadians. The throne speech also laid out the Liberals' plans to promote green capitalism and support corporate Canada in advancing its global interests amid bitter inter-imperialist and great-power economic and geopolitical rivalries.

This program of mass infection and death based on the reopening of the economy and schools, stepped up exploitation for workers, and subsidies to the corporate elite and super-rich was worked out during months of backroom consultations between business lobbyists, the leaders of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Unifor, and other unions, and the government. At the beginning of

the pandemic, CLC President Hassan Yussuff appealed for a “collaborative front” with corporate Canada. This “collaborative front” has been realized through the unions’ efforts to corral workers into unsafe factories, warehouses, and schools, and their denunciations of job action to protect workers’ health and lives—as at Cargill’s High River, Alberta meatpacking plant—as “illegal.”

The NDP convention underscored the party’s support for this right-wing corporatist agenda when, at the leadership’s urging, it voted by the more than two-thirds majority necessary to increase union representation at future NDP conventions. This change was also bound up with the NDP’s fear that it is losing out to the big business Liberals in securing the union bureaucracy’s political and financial support.

As the NDP repudiated its traditional national-reformist program in the 1990s and the first years of this century, it reduced the unions’ role in the party’s councils so as to demonstrate to the ruling elite that it was abandoning even the most tenuous claims to be a labour or working class party. The fact that the social democrats now feel the need to reverse course to avoid being sidelined by the Liberals—the Canadian ruling class’ traditional preferred party of national government—illustrates just how fully the trade unions have been integrated into the political and corporate establishment.

The convention also glossed over the NDP’s staunch pro-imperialist stance, including its endorsement of the Trudeau government’s plans to procure new fleets of warplanes and warships, and its support for Canada’s participation in a series of ruinous US-led wars over the past three decades.

Last November, the NDP responded to the victory of Democrat Joseph Biden in the US presidential election by introducing a motion in parliament, which won unanimous support, that called on the government to deepen Canada’s long-standing military-strategic partnership with US imperialism and accord Biden the privilege of addressing a joint session of the House of Commons and Senate.

The Biden administration’s foreign policy, which is fully endorsed by the Canadian ruling elite, is based on a provocative escalation of its diplomatic, military, and economic offensive against China and Russia. This has vastly accelerated the danger of a catastrophic war, as the military build-up in the Black Sea region and the mounting tensions with Beijing over Taiwan in recent weeks testify. In a document agreed at a Canada-US bilateral summit in February, Trudeau made clear that Canadian imperialism will line up with the United States in such a conflict by committing, among other things, to the modernization of NORAD and to supporting Washington’s anti-China trade-war policy.

The NDP has also signalled that it supports the US military-strategic offensive against China, including a catastrophic military conflict, by repeatedly lining up with the hard-right Conservatives to attack the Liberal government from the right for allegedly being too soft towards Beijing. In the latest example of this, NDP MPs last week gave unanimous support to a Tory motion declaring Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen to be an “ideal candidate” for the Halifax International Security Forum’s John McCain Leadership Award in Public Service and calling on the government

to continue funding the forum, which was established under the Harper government to facilitate closer collaboration between US and Canadian political and military leaders.

The NDP’s pathetic attempt to posture as a “left” alternative was given a considerable boost by the overwhelmingly favourable coverage the convention received from the corporate-controlled media. The CBC, *Hill Times*, and even the neoconservative *National Post* published lengthy articles presenting in detail various “radical” resolutions, none of which got onto the convention floor, including a proposal to eliminate billionaires through a 100 percent tax on wealth above a \$999 million threshold and the abolition of the armed forces.

The extensive media attention given to these ostensibly “left” resolutions is explained by the fact that the ruling elite knows full well that the NDP would never vote for, let alone implement them, and that the NDP’s credentials as a “socialist” party must be bolstered so it can prevent radicalized workers and young people from finding their way to a genuine socialist organization. This latter task is performed above all by the pseudo-left groups, including the Socialist Caucus, Fightback, and International Socialists, that operate in and around the NDP, which they absurdly present as a “mass, working class” party.

In the end, NDP delegates supported various non-binding resolutions, including a \$20 minimum wage, a 1 percent tax on wealth over \$20 million, and an end to private long-term care. Members of the party’s “left” celebrated the passage of a resolution calling for a Canadian embargo on trade with illegal Israeli settlements on the West Bank, and the ending of military and defence-related exports to Israel. The worthlessness of these measures is shown by the fact that of the 29 resolutions adopted at the NDP’s previous convention, 14 were arbitrarily excluded from the party’s policy book. Even resolutions that make it into the policy book after careful vetting by the leadership do not automatically feature in election campaigns. Moreover, once in power, the NDP, as demonstrated by decades of bitter experience, genuflects before big business and abandons even timid reform proposals to impose the agenda of the ruling class.



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