

Trudeau appoints Canadian Labour Congress President Yussuff to Senate sinecure upon his retirement

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Four days after Hassan Yussuff ended a seven-year stint as president of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the country's largest trade union federation, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his appointment to the Senate. Canada's unelected upper house of parliament is notorious as a reward and political rest home for has-beens, cronies and bagmen of Canada's two traditional parties of government, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Yussuff's new sinecure will provide him an annual salary of \$150,000-plus till he is 75 and a lavish expense account. His appointment epitomizes the ease with which top trade union bureaucrats find their home in the right-wing political establishment and corporate boardrooms.

In the most immediate sense, Trudeau is rewarding Yussuff for his services in suppressing the class struggle and supporting the multibillion-dollar bailout of the banks and big business during the coronavirus pandemic. In March 2020, as the pandemic erupted and financial markets quaked, Yussuff declared that Canada required a "collaborative front" between the trade unions and employers. This front would soon be giving its blessing to a \$650 billion state bailout of the markets and big business, so as to prop up the rich and super-rich. It then transitioned to forcing millions of people back into unsafe workplaces as the virus ran rampant.

In May 2020, Yussuff co-authored an article with Chamber of Commerce head Perrin Beatty in which the pair called for the aforementioned "collaborative front" to be made permanent in the form of a "national economic task force." This was necessary, they argued, to ensure that Canada could compete with its rivals on the world stage, and to "stop stakeholders going off in different directions," i.e., to prevent the working class from asserting its independent interests, including prioritizing workers' health and lives over capitalist profit. Whilst Yussuff articulated this corporatist policy most openly, it has been pursued by every trade union, from Unifor and the teachers' unions to the Quebec Federation of Labour and *Confédération des syndicats nationaux* (CNTU).

Yussuff's nearly two-decade career in the CLC leadership—prior to being elected president he served as its secretary-treasurer—embodies what the anti-worker syndicates that go by the name "unions" have become over the past four decades: nationalist and pro-corporate entities, dedicated to upholding the interests of Canadian big business.

Pseudo-left defenders of the unions like Fightback and the International Socialists now try to depict Yussuff as a "bad apple." They conveniently forget that it was the decision of the ex-Stalinist Hassan Husseini—the candidate for CLC president that they backed—to withdraw and throw his support behind Yussuff that ensured his narrow election as CLC president in 2014. Last year, they went into a fit of apoplexy when Yussuff and the CLC released a statement supporting Bill Morneau, Trudeau's former finance minister and corporate pension CEO, in his bid to head the

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. However, Fightback and the other pseudo-left groups remained conspicuously silent, as they do to this day, on the unions' role in supporting, indeed lobbying for, the bailout of corporate Canada and their enforcement of the ruling class' homicidal back-to-work/back-to-school policy.

The truth of the matter is that Yussuff is a typical representative of the upper echelons of the union bureaucracy. Elected as secretary treasurer of the CLC in 2002, he served for 12 years as the right-hand man to CLC President Ken Georgetti, who came to be so hated that he is the only incumbent CLC president to ever lose a bid for re-election. Yussuff defeated his former boss and close ally amid mounting worker anger over the unions' refusal to wage any serious opposition to the hard-right policies of the federal Harper Conservative government.

Georgetti's period in office was characterized by the trade unions' acquiescence to the decimation of industrial and manufacturing jobs; the New Democratic Party's propping up of the big business and scandal-ridden Paul Martin Liberal government; and the failed CLC-backed attempt to forge a Liberal-led Liberal-NDP coalition government during the 2008 economic crisis. The coalition agreement, which was torpedoed when the ruling elite swung behind Harper's proroguing of parliament to cling to power in a constitutional coup, included commitments to enforce \$50 billion in corporate tax cuts and wage war in Afghanistan through 2011.

When the New Democrats emerged as the official opposition in 2011, Georgetti and the CLC backed the ascension of former Quebec Liberal minister and avowed Margaret Thatcher admirer, Thomas Mulcair, to the leadership of Canada's social democrats. The union body also backed the Ontario NDP's support for the austerity Liberal governments of Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne, which gutted spending on health care, education, and social services. Throughout this entire period, Yussuff was re-elected to his well-paid position at one CLC congress after another, on the same slate as Georgetti.

In spite of his fraudulent attempt to posture in 2014 as the candidate of "change," with his slogan "More democracy, grassroots renewal," Yussuff, during his tenure as CLC president, oversaw a further turn to the right on the part of the union bureaucracy. With the election of the big business Liberals under Trudeau in 2015, the unions further expanded their corporatist relations with government and big business.

The CLC and all its affiliates, including the purportedly "left"-led Canadian Union of Postal Workers, played a key role in Trudeau's 2015 election by spearheading an "Anybody but Conservative" campaign that portrayed the Liberals as a "progressive" alternative to the Tories. Just a week after being elected prime minister, Trudeau held an unprecedented closed-door meeting with more than one hundred top leaders of the CLC and its affiliates, in which they all pledged to work closely and loyally

with the incoming government. After the election of US President Donald Trump, the unions joined in the fascist-minded president's promotion of economic protectionism and nationalism, the only difference being their slogan of "North America First" instead of "America First."

To put this slogan into practice, Yussuff and Unifor President Jerry Dias effectively served as Trudeau government advisers during the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. They and the CLC subsequently hailed its outcome: a protectionist trade pact aimed at laying the basis for North America's twin imperialist powers to wage trade war and prepare for potential military conflict with global rivals like China, the European Union and Russia.

Yussuff termed the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which includes a clause barring free trade agreements with "non-market economies," a euphemism for China, as "historic." The CLC has also continued to describe Trudeau as "worker-friendly," even as the Liberal government has embarked on a vast rearmament program that will see military spending rise by over 70 percent by 2026 as compared to 2017 levels. At the same time, Trudeau has repeatedly adopted or threatened to adopt laws criminalizing workers' struggles, including the 2018 postal workers' and 2021 Port of Montreal strikes.

The cooperation between the CLC, government and big business was taken to the next level with the outbreak of the pandemic. Yussuff's "collaborative front" took the form of a series of backroom meetings with government ministers and business lobby groups aimed, first, at designing various emergency programs—massive bailouts for big business and makeshift relief for working people—and then at "reopening" the economy—that is, forcing workers back on the job amid the pandemic. One of the key slush funds for the corporate elite was the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, which is set to cost the government well over \$100 billion. Sold by Yussuff and his fellow union bureaucrats as a "job saving" measure, it has been used by some of Canada's largest corporations to boost shareholder payouts, executive salaries and share buybacks.

To enforce the back-to-work campaign, the unions deliberately demobilized all worker opposition and refused to fight for any pandemic-related demands in contract disputes. As soon as the pandemic erupted, the teacher unions in Ontario wound up the fight against Ontario Premier Doug Ford's cuts to education, which had precipitated a one-day province-wide strike in February 2020.

Harvey Bischof, the head of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, responded to the suggestion that teachers might strike to oppose what the union itself described as potentially life-threatening working conditions by declaring that the OSSTF would not sanction "illegal job action."

At the Cargill meat packing plant in High River, Alberta, the United Food and Commercial Workers sent 2,000 workers back to the unsafe factory after almost 1,000 COVID-19 infections and three deaths, insisting that any job action by workers to protect their health and lives would be "illegal" and would contravene the collective bargaining system the union is duty-bound to uphold.

Meanwhile, Unifor, the union where Yussuff embarked on his career as a trade union bureaucrat, helped the Detroit Three in the fall of 2020 to impose another round of concessions on autoworkers, including the entrenchment of the multi-tier low-wage system, while failing to negotiate a single pandemic-related safety measure.

In light of this record, Yussuff's ability to exchange the CLC president's suite for a plush leather-upholstered chair as a Liberal government appointee in the "Red Chamber" should come as no surprise. That being said, it does point to the extraordinary extent to which the union bureaucracy has been integrated into the structures of the capitalist state and major corporations.

This is a process driven by powerful objective forces: on the one hand a

growing working class rebellion, fueled by mounting social inequality and the endless assault on workers' rights; and, on the other, the turn of the ruling elite to right-wing, anti-democratic forms of rule as it prepares for economic and military conflicts with its rivals on the world stage, under conditions of an unprecedented global capitalist crisis.

Given the nationalist and pro-capitalist outlook that is the very essence of the unions, they must inevitably respond to the growth of the class struggle and the deepening crisis of the social order upon which their privileges depend by moving ever further to the right, becoming ever more hostile to the working class, and embracing ever more forthrightly the institutions of the capitalist state.

The integration of the union bureaucracy with the capitalist state is an international process. In the United States, President Biden is supporting union organization drives with the so-called Pro Act, which will simplify the process for union certification in economic sectors with no unions or a low rate of unionization. The aim of this unprecedented support from a US president for the union bureaucracy is to establish a "national labour front," led by the secretaries of defence, homeland security, and the Treasury, which will use the trade unions to dragoon workers behind American imperialism's economic, diplomatic, and military offensive against China.

Germany's largest union, IG Metall, is overseeing the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the auto and related industries, blackmailing and bullying workers to accept early retirement and other compensation programs, and drafting restructuring programs on behalf of corporate management. Underscoring that this process has been long in the making, Berthold Huber, the former head of IG Metall, celebrated his 60th birthday in 2010 in the office of Germany's right-wing Christian Democratic Chancellor Angela Merkel. (See: "German trade union boss to celebrate birthday in the Chancellery"). The Merkel government has imposed rigorous austerity throughout Europe and in Germany itself, and led a revival of German militarism that has been accompanied by the trivialization of Nazi war crimes by state-backed far-right academics.

The key lesson workers should draw from Yussuff's appointment to the Senate by Trudeau is that it confirms the anti-worker character of the appendages of the corporations and capitalist state that continue to call themselves unions.

It is high time for workers across all economic sectors to break politically and organizationally from these pro-employer, anti-working class organizations. The first step in this process must be the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, controlled by the workers themselves, to fight for a worker-led counteroffensive against capitalist austerity, and for decent-paying, secure jobs for all. A prerequisite for such a struggle is the arming of the working class with a socialist and internationalist program to unify working people in struggle around the world in opposition to the nationalism and corporatism promoted by the pro-capitalist unions in every country.



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