

# Canada's Liberal government clears decks for pandemic election

Keith Jones  
10 August 2021

According to numerous media reports, Canada's Justin Trudeau-led minority Liberal government is only days away from dissolving parliament and calling a federal election.

With the country on the cusp of what Canada's Public Health Officer Theresa Tam and numerous other officials are warning is a "Delta-driven fourth wave" of the COVID-19 pandemic, such an election would be unprecedented. Liberal legislation (Bill C-18) designed to facilitate a pandemic election by expanding voting from one to three days and making it easier to obtain and cast mail-in ballots failed to pass before parliament rose in June for its summer break.

Yet none of this appears to be giving the government pause. Trudeau and his ministers have been demonstrably clearing the decks for an election call with a series of appointments and spending announcements. Liberal candidates have reportedly been instructed to cancel vacations and procure offices for the next two months.

Particularly cynical was Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's July 30 announcement that emergency "pandemic recovery" benefits will be extended one month to Oct. 23. This means the benefits—which have served as a vital lifeline for the millions who have been adversely impacted by the pandemic and its economic fallout—will not expire, potentially damaging Liberal election prospects, in the midst of a campaign for a late September or early October vote. Under Canadian law, election campaigns must be between 36 and 50 days in length.

The opposition parties are criticizing the government for prioritizing its efforts to secure a parliamentary majority over containing the pandemic. Most opinion polls currently show the Liberals, who barely won 33 percent of the vote in the Oct. 2019 election, with a lead of 6 percentage points or more over the Conservatives, the Canadian ruling class's other traditional party of government.

"My biggest concern right now is the potential fourth wave of COVID-19," Conservative leader Erin O'Toole told reporters Monday at an election campaign-style event in Belleville, Ontario. "We shouldn't be rushing to an election. Mr. Trudeau always seems to put his own self-interest ahead of the interest of Canadians."

The fourth wave is a real and present danger. But such comments from O'Toole are utterly hypocritical and self-

serving. The Conservative leader has not breathed a word of criticism of Alberta's United Conservative Party (UCP) government, which has gone further than perhaps any government in a wealthy capitalist country in dismantling all measures to combat COVID-19. As of next Monday, all contact-tracing will be abandoned by Alberta. COVID tests will only be administered to the gravely ill, and even those stricken with the virus will not be required to self-isolate.

Much the same could be said of the other opposition parties and leaders. At a party rally Sunday, Bloc Québécois (BQ) leader Yves-François Blanchet accused Trudeau of putting his "personal ambitions" ahead of the fight against the Delta variant. The BQ, it need be noted, has never once deigned to criticize Quebec's right-wing "Quebec First" CAQ government, whose calamitous mishandling of the pandemic has resulted in Quebec recording more than 40 percent of Canada's 26,600 COVID fatalities. The CAQ is now insisting that all the province's public schools, colleges (CEGEPs), and universities fully reopen at the end of this month with few, if any, protective measures.

The truth is, throughout the pandemic, Canada's entire political establishment and all levels of government have systematically placed safeguarding the fortunes and profits of the capitalist elite before protecting the health, lives and livelihoods of working people. This class-war alliance extends from the federal Liberal government and the hard-right premiers of Ontario, Quebec and Alberta, through the ostensibly "left-wing" New Democratic Party (NDP) and the trade unions. In the spring of 2020, they all assented to Ottawa funneling hundreds of billions to prop up big business and the financial markets; then quickly pivoted to a homicidal campaign to force non-essential workers back on the job amid the pandemic. It was the back-to-work/back-to-school campaign—explicitly endorsed and promoted by the Trudeau Liberals in their September 2020 throne speech—that plunged the country into devastating second and third waves of COVID-19 infections and deaths in fall/winter 2020-21 and last spring.

The NDP and its leader Jagmeet Singh have been especially vocal in urging Trudeau and his Liberals not to call a snap election. Singh, reported the *Toronto Star* on Monday, has sent

a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau in which he urged him to recall parliament and promised the NDP would work “constructively” with the government. Through this letter, Singh has in effect reiterated the public pledge he made last February that the NDP would ensure the minority Liberal government’s parliamentary survival until the pandemic is over.

Singh has been true to his word. With the full-throated support of the trade unions, the NDP has kept in office a right-wing government that, in addition to fronting the ruling class’ criminal response to the pandemic, is integrating Canada ever more fully into Washington’s military-strategic offensives against China and Russia; spending hundreds of billions on re-arming the Canadian Armed Forces; further expanding the reach and powers of the intelligence agencies; and continuing to criminalize, as most recently with the Port of Montreal dockers, working class struggles.

For fear the New Democrats will lose the modicum of parliamentary leverage they exert in the current parliament, Singh has also publicly appealed to the Governor General to refuse Trudeau’s request for an early election. On July 27, the day after Mary Simon was sworn in as the Queen’s representative, the federal NDP leader penned an open letter to her in which he appealed to the unelected Governor General to make use of her extraordinary powers to flout the wishes of the sitting government.

In his letter to Simon, Singh made brief reference to the pandemic. His main argument, however, was that an election is unnecessary, because the current parliament is working. Thanks to the NDP’s support, the Liberals have “won every confidence vote they have put to the House,” wrote Singh, “including on the speech from the throne and on the budget.”

The right-wing character of the NDP’s appeal to the Governor General is underscored by Singh’s plea that an election isn’t needed because the social-democrats have helped ensured the ruling class has a stable big-business government. But even if the Governor General were to refuse to heed a request for the dissolution of the current nearly two-year-old parliament in the name of the pandemic emergency, it would be manifestly reactionary. It would further bolster the arbitrary powers of the Governor General, an anti-democratic institution that serves as a safety mechanism for the ruling class.

In a July 29 editorial, the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of Canada’s financial elite, opposed Singh’s call for the Governor General to refuse Trudeau an election request, no doubt out of concern such action would trigger a political-constitutional crisis. However, it effectively agreed with the NDP leader that an election is “unnecessary.” “There is no pressing reason of national interest or public policy that demands an election,” declared the *Globe*. “Elections,” it goes on to lament, “are when politicians make easy promises to voters, not hard demands of them.”

The *Globe* editorial is an admission that, notwithstanding the

rhetoric, all the parties are pursuing the same right-wing agenda. This is especially true of their response to the pandemic, where the union-backed Liberal and NDP “progressives” and O’Toole’s Conservatives and their hard-right allies in Ontario and Alberta have joined forces to funnel endless amounts of cash into the coffers of big business, and relentlessly press forward with the “reopening” of the economy.

That said, there are mounting concerns within the ruling class—over the precarious state of the world economy, intensifying global trade and geo-political conflict, the unravelling of the US-led world order, and increasing demands from Washington that Ottawa must do more to sustain the military-security partnership through which Canadian imperialism has asserted its predatory interests on the global arena for the past three-quarters of a century.

As the *Globe*’s reference to making “hard demands” of the population indicates, as far as the ruling class is concerned, the homicidal pandemic “back to work” campaign is meant to be the opening salvo in a drive to bolster the “competitive” and strategic position of Canadian imperialism through an intensified assault on the working class at home and aggression and war overseas.

This agenda is and will encounter mounting opposition from a working class whose alienation from, and anger with, the establishment has been aggravated by the mass death and huge increase in social inequality caused by its criminal mishandling of the pandemic. As in the US, Latin America and around the world, recent months have seen a wave of militant worker struggles, including strikes by Vale, Cominco, and ArcelorMittal mine and smelter workers, Quebec food processing workers and Quebec public sector workers.

The critical task is to develop an independent political movement of the working class by uniting its myriad struggles and infusing them with a socialist-internationalist perspective. This requires a political war against the corporatist trade unions and NDP, whose alliance with the Trudeau government epitomizes their role as agents and lackeys of Canada’s capitalist ruling elite.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**