

# Trudeau triggers Canadian election in midst of pandemic's fourth wave

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The Justin Trudeau-led minority Liberal government has triggered a federal election to be held—amid Canada's Delta variant-driven fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic—on Monday, September 20.

The Liberal government's election call is a gamble based on three cynical political calculations: first, that the Liberals, who have led Canada's government for the past six years, are up in the polls and thus appear well-positioned to regain the parliamentary majority they lost in the October 2019 election; second, that the Liberals' electoral prospects could easily sour in coming months, whether because of economic headwinds, global geopolitical shocks, public demands for an accounting for Canada's ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, or popular anger over the ever-widening social chasm that divides Canada's rich and super-rich from working people; and third, that the pandemic's fourth wave will not overwhelm the health care system and cause thousands more deaths ... at least prior to voting day.

Trudeau and his handlers carefully scripted Sunday's election call over many weeks. Nevertheless, they could not prevent an air of crisis from invading their election launch. Since the beginning of August, COVID-19 cases have spiked, as the inevitable result of governments across the country and at all levels abandoning virtually all anti-COVID-19 measures. In the two weeks ending Saturday, August 14, the average number of daily new infections more than doubled from 776 to 1,608, causing health experts, including the government's own chief medical officer, Theresa Tam, to warn that the fourth wave is now upon us.

At his election launch, Trudeau was peppered with reporters' questions as to why the government was triggering an election now. Would it not have been prudent to have first secured passage of Bill C-19, a government bill designed to facilitate mail-in voting and extend in-person voting over multiple days?

However, before Trudeau made any reference to the impending election, he was compelled to address events in Afghanistan, where in the preceding hours the Taliban had made a triumphant entry into Kabul. The ignominious collapse of Afghanistan's made-in-USA puppet government, after two decades during which Washington squandered \$2 trillion, the lives of thousands of US-NATO troops and countless Afghans, while trying to subjugate the Central Asian nation, is an historic debacle for US imperialism.

But it is also a debacle for Canada's capitalist ruling elite, which for the past three quarters of a century has depended on its close military-security partnership with Washington to assert its own imperialist interests on the world stage. With the aim of strengthening this reactionary alliance, Canadian imperialism made the neocolonial Afghan war its own, deploying 40,000 troops to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014 and lavishing billions of dollars in aid on the Kabul

regime.

Whilst the Canadian Armed Forces once boasted about the influence their embedded advisers exerted over the Afghan government, Trudeau was reduced on Sunday to announcing that Ottawa's embassy in Kabul has been closed and all Canadian diplomatic personnel are being evacuated from the country.

Nonetheless, the prime minister went out of his way to reaffirm his government's support for Canada's role in the Afghan war. He declared Canada remains "committed to Afghanistan," and vowed to work with NATO allies to ensure that the "sacrifice" of the more than 150 Canadian soldiers who died propping up the Karzai/Ghani government was not "in vain." Above all, he sought to recycle the deeply discredited lies about Canada and its military promoting "humanitarian" and "democratic" values that provide political cover for Canadian imperialist aggression around the world.

In his prepared text on the election, Trudeau acknowledged the threat of an economic slump and invoked the climate change crisis, which has impacted millions of Canadians this summer in the form of drought, an unprecedented heat dome, and massive wildfires in much of western Canada. Along with the pandemic, he sought to tie these to his central electoral sales pitch: the claim that the Liberal government "has had Canadians' backs."

In reality, the Trudeau Liberal government has ruthlessly enforced the agenda of the ruling class. It ignored and played down the threat of the pandemic during the first 2½ months of 2020, so as not to impinge on profit interests. Only on March 10, 2020, did it even write the provinces to ask about potential shortages of personal protective equipment, ventilators and other essential supplies. Subsequently, it funneled some \$650 billion into the financial markets and the coffers of big business to safeguard investors, then pivoted to pressing for "reopening" the economy, i.e., forcing workers back on the job in non-essential businesses amid the pandemic.

Similarly, behind phony progressive-sounding rhetoric, the Trudeau government has further integrated Canada into Washington's military-strategic offensives against Russia and China and is spending tens of billions to procure new fleets of warplanes and warships.

If Trudeau is anxious to secure a parliamentary majority, it is to further insulate his government from any popular pressure, the better to press forward with implementing the reactionary agenda of the ruling class, from deregulation and privatization to austerity measures aimed at making working people pay for the corporate bailouts.

The day before the election call, Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and US Defense Secretary Lloyd James Austin III issued a joint statement on "modernizing" NORAD, the North American Aerospace Defense Command. It is meant to pave the way for further militarization of the

Arctic, in the name of great-power “strategic competition” with Russia and China, and for Canada’s participation in the US ballistic missile shield, whose underlying purpose is to enable the US to wage a “winnable” nuclear war.

The opposition parties all made a show of deploring Trudeau’s “risky” decision to call an election amid an incipient fourth wave of the pandemic. Conservative leader Erin O’Toole said he hoped “it won’t cost Canadians dearly.”

This is rich. All the federal opposition parties are themselves complicit in the Canadian ruling elite’s prioritizing of corporate profits over human lives throughout the pandemic. This has resulted in more than 26,700 officially recorded pandemic deaths, but probably closer to 40,000, according to a recent Royal Society of Canada study. The opposition parties’ provincial allies, from British Columbia’s John Horgan-led New Democratic Party (NDP) government to the hard-right Conservative governments in Ontario and Alberta, have all pursued the back-to-work/back-to-school policy that led to Canada’s devastating second and third pandemic waves.

Moreover, now when ten million Canadians, including all children under 11 and under, have yet to get a single vaccine shot, they are all rushing to fully reopen schools for in-class instruction by early September.

Seeking to tap into justifiable popular concern that the election campaign will serve as a series of super-spreader events, O’Toole made a point of appearing only at virtual events on the campaign’s first day. But he also made a marked appeal to far-right, anti-vaccine, anti-mask forces in and around his Conservative Party. He said he would not require Conservative candidates to be vaccinated and made known his opposition to the government’s recent announcement that it will make it mandatory in the fall for all federal workers to be vaccinated.

In a transparent appeal for big-business support, O’Toole attacked the Trudeau government for having no plan to eliminate the deficit and promote economic growth. He also denounced Trudeau for being “offside on China for the past six years,” vowing that a Conservative government would immediately ban Huawei from Canada’s 5G network and otherwise align Ottawa even more fully behind Washington’s economic and military aggression against China.

At the express urging of its trade union affiliates, the purportedly “left” NDP has played the principal role in propping up the minority Liberal government over the past 22 months. Indeed, so anxious is the NDP for that collaboration to continue that party leader Jagmeet Singh wrote the unelected Governor General in late July to urge her to use her arbitrary powers to refuse Trudeau’s impending election request. But that did not stop Singh from decrying, at his party’s campaign launch, how the “ultra-rich” have benefited from Liberal policies and programs the NDP voted to enact.

With its promises of a wealth tax and pharmacare, the NDP is making a calibrated appeal to mounting social anger with the aim of securing more seats and influence. But its function first and foremost is to trap social opposition within the confines of establishment parliamentary politics.

Like the other party leaders, Singh deplored the collapse of the US-sponsored Afghan regime. A lengthy party policy statement published late last week, reiterated the NDP’s support for arming the Canadian Armed Forces with new, high-tech fighter jets and warships. “Decades of Liberal and Conservative cuts and mismanagement,” it complains, have left “our military ... with outdated equipment, inadequate support and an unclear strategic mandate.”

The Bloc Québécois (BQ), currently the third-largest party in parliament, launched its campaign Sunday on a strident chauvinist note. Party leader Yves-François Blanchet boasted that the BQ is the only party exclusively devoted to the “economic interests of Quebec,” that is, supporting Quebec’s capitalist elite and Quebec-based businesses. The BQ postures as a “progressive” party. But it is a close ally of the province’s Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government, which has adopted chauvinist legislation targeting immigrants and religious minorities, routinely threatens to criminalize worker job action, and denounces the “high wages” of manufacturing workers.

Annamie Paul, whose leadership of the Green Party has been challenged since one of the party’s three MPs defected to the Liberals in early June, stressed at her campaign launch that the “green economy” is where “the smart money” is going, and an “opportunity of a lifetime” for Canadian capitalism to become a “world leader.”

One faction of the trade union bureaucracy, led by Unifor, the country’s largest industrial union, and many of the teachers’ unions, is once again mounting an “Anybody but Conservative” campaign, urging in effect a vote for the Liberals in most constituencies. Another faction, including the top brass of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the United Steelworkers (USW), is somewhat more circumspect in its support for the Trudeau government. But both factions will urge the NDP to prop up a Trudeau Liberal government committed to boosting the global “competitive” and strategic position of Canadian capitalism in the event no party wins a majority on September 20.

As Sunday’s election launch underscored, Canadian imperialism is beset by crisis. Its greatest threat is a growing movement of opposition within the working class, which has already given rise to a wave of strikes against jobs cuts and deteriorating working conditions and protests over the ruinous mishandling of the pandemic. The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) will use the election campaign period to intensify its efforts to give this opposition conscious political articulation. This includes fighting to mobilize the working class to impose its own science-based policy to bring the pandemic under control by prioritizing lives over profits; opposing the anti-working-class union-NDP-Liberal alliance; and uniting the struggles of workers across Canada with their class brothers and sisters in the US and around the world.



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