

Fraud vs reality—Canada’s New Democrats and the 2021 federal election

Roger Jordan
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Canada’s social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) is waging an election campaign that must go down as one of the most fraudulent and dishonest in the party’s six-decade history. After two years of loyally propping up Justin Trudeau’s big business minority Liberal government, the NDP and its leader Jagmeet Singh are attempting to market themselves as implacable opponents of the super-rich who have “fought” throughout the pandemic to secure social support for working people.

The New Democrats have published daily news releases over the past two weeks denouncing Trudeau as a shill for “the rich,” “corporations,” and “wealthy.” Singh has traversed the country proclaiming his determination to make the “super-rich pay their fair share,” and attacking the Liberals for allowing the wealthy to ride out the pandemic in “luxury yachts” while leaving everyone else in “leaky lifeboats.” Through this less-than-convincing “left” feint the NDP seeks to act as a safety valve for mounting popular opposition to the financial and political elite, which has found expression in recent months in a series of militant strikes and job actions by workers seeking to claw back wage and benefit concessions given up over the past four decades. These militant struggles have also been fuelled by anger over the ruling elite’s ruinous “profits before lives” policy in response to COVID-19. The NDP has fully supported this homicidal policy, both by its backing of the Trudeau Liberal government, which has spearheaded the back-to-work/back-to-school drive nationally, and by directly implementing it in British Columbia, the one province where it forms the government.

In one of the NDP’s media releases, it identified “14 times Justin Trudeau gave the ultra-rich a free ride.” These included his refusal to “crack down against fee hikes from Canada’s big five banks in the middle of the pandemic, as their profits soared,” his government’s creation of the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), which “funnelled millions” to big business, and the Liberals’ enabling of Canada’s billionaires to “increase their wealth by \$78 billion during the pandemic.”

To call this presentation of the past two years self-serving barely begins to describe the monumental fraud Singh and his NDP handlers are seeking to perpetrate on Canadian workers. The truth of the matter is that every pro-corporate policy they attack Trudeau and the Liberals for was made possible thanks to Singh and the New Democrats’ steadfast parliamentary support. This began on election night in 2019, when Singh appeared jubilant upon learning that the NDP would hold the balance of power in a minority parliament, even though the social democrats’ representation had fallen by almost half compared to their disastrous 2015 result under the former Quebec Liberal cabinet minister and Thatcher enthusiast Thomas Mulcair. It continued

throughout the pandemic’s multiple waves of infection and mass death, and led to Singh publicly pledging this February to continue propping up the Trudeau Liberal government until the pandemic was over. And it culminated in late July, when Singh appealed to the unelected Governor General, the Queen’s representative, to use her arbitrary and sweeping “reserve” powers to block the calling of a federal election because parliament was “working well.”

Indeed, it was working “well” for the financial oligarchy that dominates all aspects of social, economic and political life, and this was in no small part due to the NDP’s efforts. The NDP voted unanimously with the Liberals and Conservatives to approve hundreds of billions of dollars in pandemic bailout measures that overwhelmingly benefited the super-rich. The CEWS, which even the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece for the Bay Street financial elite, attacked as too generous “corporate welfare,” was championed by the NDP as a “job saving” measure. Singh and the NDP even boasted that it was they who convinced the Liberals to increase the percentage of an employee’s wages companies could receive a government subsidy for from the initially proposed 10 percent to 75 percent. In reality, in pressing for the expansion of the CEWS, which has provided tens of billions of dollars to big business with virtually no strings attached, the NDP was echoing and joining forces with a *Who’s Who* of corporate lobby groups, from the Chamber of Commerce and Business Council of Canada to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

The soaring profits for the banks Singh suddenly finds so objectionable were secured above all thanks to the funnelling of over \$650 billion into the financial markets and corporate coffers by the government and Bank of Canada following the March 2020 stock market collapse. This vast largesse, which dwarfs the comparatively small sum doled out to workers and their families in the form of the poverty-level Canada Emergency Response Benefit, was also instrumental in helping Canada’s billionaires profit off of mass infection and death. Another key factor in the swelling of their stock portfolios and investments was the enforcement of the reckless back-to-work/back-to-school policy by the entire political establishment, including the NDP and its trade union backers.

The NDP’s parliamentary support to the Liberals has allowed the Trudeau government to press ahead with its plans to increase military spending by over 70 percent over a decade, to almost \$33 billion per year by 2026, and purchase new fleets of warships and fighter planes. This has been combined with the further integration of Canada’s armed forces into US imperialist-led operations around the world, including against strategic rivals like China and Russia. Significantly, among the few occasions the NDP has joined forces with the

Conservatives in attacking the Trudeau government is over the question of China. In actions that underscore that Singh and the NDP are fully on board with the Canada-US military-strategic partnership that is the cornerstone of Canadian imperialist policy, they have repeatedly echoed complaints levelled by the Conservatives and US Congressional leaders that the Liberal government is too conciliatory to Beijing.

Singh now claims to be “afraid of Trudeau,” according to a recent interview in *The Tyee*. He considers the prospect of another Liberal government to be “pretty bad” and a Conservative government under the former Harper minister Erin O’Toole to be “worse.” This was itself a climbdown from his statement during last week’s English-language leaders’ debate, in which he said that the Liberals and Conservatives were just as bad as each other. This was evidently too much for the NDP’s backers in the upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy. They have developed unprecedentedly close corporatist relations with the Trudeau government since it first came to power in 2015, and fully expect Singh and the NDP will resume propping up Trudeau and his Liberals in the event next Monday’s election produces another hung parliament.

The tripartite corporatist alliance between the Liberals, unions, and big business reached a new level during the pandemic. In March 2020 the then Canadian Labour Congress President Hassan Yussuff, who has since been compensated for services rendered to the ruling class with an appointment to the Senate, led the way with his call for a “collaborative front” between employers and workers. Yussuff worked closely with Trudeau and corporate lobbyists to enforce an unsafe return to work as the first wave of the pandemic still raged by demobilizing all worker opposition and protests to the reopening drive. Over recent months, unions like Unifor, the United Steelworkers, and the teachers’ unions in every province have proven instrumental in sabotaging the struggles of industrial workers and educators against new concession-filled contracts and the dangerous reopening of schools.

Under these conditions of mounting class struggle, and with decisive sections of the ruling class making clear that they want an intensification of the onslaught on jobs, wages, and social spending after September 20 to pay for the multi-billion-dollar bailout of the super-rich, Singh’s pitch is that he is best equipped to ensure the stability of Canadian capitalism. With his demagogic attacks on the “ultra-rich” and demands for the wealthy to “pay their fair share,” the NDP leader is seeking to appeal both to widespread popular anger at rising social inequality and the growth of low-wage poverty jobs, and the concern of a minority faction within the ruling elite that the continued unrestrained growth of vast wealth in the hands of a tiny few could provoke a social explosion.

This is the essential content of Singh’s demand that the elite “pay its fair share.” The party’s taxation and spending proposals amount to nothing more than a drop in the bucket. The NDP intends to raise just \$166 billion in extra revenue and spend an additional \$215 billion over five years, according to its election platform. This equates to about \$33 billion and \$43 billion per year respectively. This is a tiny fraction of the vast sums handed to the banks and big business virtually overnight during the pandemic’s early stages, and similarly small change when compared with Canada’s total federal budget, which in 2019, the last year prior to the pandemic, amounted to \$350 billion. Yet even Singh’s tepid proposals would never be implemented. The NDP has proven time and again at the provincial level that once in power, it will bow to the demands of big business

and enforce spending cuts and austerity.

Singh’s repeated references to the wealthy paying a “fair share” are an explicit recognition of the corporate elite’s right to acquire and hoard huge wealth, which is possible under capitalism only through the ruthless exploitation of the working class. He never talks of expropriating even a portion of the obscene wealth accumulated by the financial oligarchy during decades of privatizations, tax cuts, wage reductions, and the gutting of social programs—measures that were implemented just as brutally by NDP governments at the provincial level as by their Tory and Liberal counterparts. Nor is there even the most oblique reference to establishing social equality. The word socialism never passes Singh’s lips.

This extremely important omission thoroughly exposes the absurd character of the claims, repeated endlessly by the media and sections of the pseudo-left, that Singh has turned the NDP to the “left.” Singh’s brand of mild reformist politics and unswerving loyalty to the interests of big business and Canadian imperialism is, at least rhetorically, significantly to the right of the recent campaigns of Bernie Sanders and the Democratic Socialists of America. Sanders twice ran for US president in 2016 and 2020 with the explicit aim of trapping leftward-moving workers and youth within the confines of the Democratic Party, the oldest capitalist party in the world. On both occasions, Sanders demonstrated where his true loyalties lay by offering full-throated endorsements to pro-war, pro-austerity candidates backed by Wall Street, Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Joseph Biden in 2020. But compared to Singh’s timid and vague pledges to ensure a “fair deal” for all and tackle the “rigged economy,” Sanders campaign calls for a “political revolution” and claim to be a “democratic socialist” sound positively radical.

Singh is a fitting representative of Canada’s social democrats, which have emerged over the past three decades as open proponents of Canadian imperialist aggression abroad and savage austerity at home. Workers looking for a real alternative to ever increasing social inequality, imperialist aggression, environmental devastation and the accelerating attacks on working people’s democratic and social rights will not find it in the New Democratic Party. What they require is a mass working class party based on a socialist and internationalist program that fights for the revolutionary transformation of society, by placing the central levers of economic life under public ownership and the democratic control of the working class. That party is the Socialist Equality Party, the Canadian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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