Trade union-backed NDP pledges to sustain Trudeau government in power until June 2025

Keith Jones
23 March 2022

The trade union-sponsored New Democratic Party (NDP) has entered into a formal governmental alliance with Canada's Justin Trudeau-led, minority Liberal government. Under an agreement negotiated in secret and announced Tuesday morning, the NDP has pledged to sustain Trudeau and his Liberals in office through June 2025, by voting with the government on all budgets, spending bills and confidence motions.

The Liberal-NDP "Supply and Confidence Agreement" is underpinned by a series of mechanisms through which the two parties can determine their priorities and reconcile differences. These include regular meetings between, respectively, Trudeau and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, the two parties' house leaders and their party whips, and a monthly meeting of an "oversight committee" comprised of a small number of top party leaders and senior staff.

As part of a joint commitment to "no surprises," the Liberals will forewarn the NDP of any issues they want to make matters of confidence so as to rapidly implement them. The NDP, in turn, has pledged to privately inform their Liberal partners in advance of how they would vote were the Liberals to so proceed and thereby risk defeat in parliament.

The new governmental partnership between the Liberals, the Canadian ruling class' traditional preferred party of national government, and the social-democratic NDP falls just short of a coalition government with NDP cabinet ministers.

Under conditions where the COVID-19 pandemic has enormously exacerbated an already systemic crisis of world capitalism; the US, Canada and their NATO allies have goaded Russia into a war that is rapidly becoming a global conflict; and there is a growing upsurge in class struggle around the world, the NDP and their trade union allies have for all intents and purposes joined the Trudeau government.

In announcing their government alliance at separate press conferences Tuesday, both Trudeau and Singh stressed the need for "political stability," under conditions of a pandemic and war. Trudeau said the agreement "means" that during "this uncertain time the government can function with predictability and stability, present and implement budgets and get things done for Canadians." Both leaders, but especially Singh, also touted the agreement's promise of a series of modest social spending initiatives, beginning with the staggered introduction of a dental care program for low-income Canadians later this year. Most of these initiatives are vaguely worded and lifted from the 2021 Liberal election platform.

The real aim of the Liberal-NDP agreement is to shore up Canada's national government so that it can withstand mounting working class opposition as it lurches sharply further to the right.

Like its counterparts in Europe and the United States, Canada's capitalist ruling elite is using NATO's proxy war with Russia to implement longstanding plans to more aggressively pursue its imperialist interests on the global stage, dramatically increase military spending and poison the political environment with nationalism and anti-Russia and anti-China chauvinism.

The Trudeau government has rushed lethal weapons to Ukraine, expanded Canada's military deployments to the NATO states bordering Russia, and placed more than 3,000 additional troops on standby for deployment to Europe. In close partnership with Britain's neo-Thatcherite Conservative government, it has spearheaded the push within NATO for an economic blitzkrieg against Russia, including sanctions, the seizure of Russian central bank assets, the cutoff of all oil imports and the imposition of 35 percent tariffs on Russian imports.

The Liberal government has also reaffirmed the commitment it made in an agreement with Washington, signed last August, to "modernize" NORAD, the Canada-US aerospace and maritime defence command, for strategic conflict with Russia and China.

Reckless imperialist aggression abroad has been and will be accompanied by intensified class war at home. Even as 6,300 more Canadians were killed in January and February of this year by the Omicron-driven fifth wave of the pandemic, the Liberal government was bowing to the demands of the far-right "Freedom Convoy" by greenlighting the dismantling of virtually all anti-COVID mitigation measures and declaring the end to all pandemic relief programs for workers.

Already NATO's war with Russia is exacerbating the global price surges and shortages created by capitalist governments' ruinous "profit before lives" pandemic policy and their pumping of trillions of dollars into the financial markets to bailout big business, the rich and super-rich.

As the war continues to interact with the economic crisis, the ruling class will act ever more ruthlessly to place the full burden of both on the working class.

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According to the CBC reporter who on Monday night broke the story of the impending Liberal-NDP alliance, the agreement came together in discussions over the preceding 10 days among a very narrow circle of Liberal and NDP leaders and was above all driven by the concerns about the impact of the war over Ukraine.

The specific task of the NDP and their union allies will be to suppress worker struggles, while providing the Liberals with "left" cover as the government pursues imperialist aggression and pivots to renewed austerity and "growing the economy"—a euphemism for a raft of pro-business policies from deregulation to privatization.

It is no accident that the Liberal-NDP governmental alliance was announced the very same day that the Teamsters' union shut down the struggle of 3,000 Canadian Pacific railway workers and agreed that a government-appointed, pro-big business arbitrator will dictate their terms of employment.

Unsurprisingly, the trade unions hailed the Liberal-NDP alliance. A statement from the country's largest labour federation, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) began by saying "Canada's unions celebrate today's historic agreement." It went on to cite CLC President Bea Bruske as saying the CLC and its affiliates "look forward to working with the Government and New Democrats" in implementing a "progressive policy agenda." In congratulating the two parties on their anti-working class alliance, Unifor, the country's largest industrial union, noted that it has long been urging them to form such a partnership.

Over the past four decades, the unions have systematically suppressed the class struggle, enabling the ruling class to impose round after round of austerity and capitalist restructuring, while integrating themselves ever more fully into management and the state. But this corporatist partnership has reached a qualitatively new level over the past two years. The unions and NDP supported the placing of unlimited funds at the disposal of big business and the financial aristocracy at the beginning of the pandemic; policed the ruling class' drive to keep non-essential businesses and schools open amid successive waves of mass COVID-19 infections and deaths; then last month backed the Trudeau government's use of emergency powers to put an end to the far-right Freedom Convoy. Now as the capitalist crisis reaches a new stage with the eruption of war in Europe— a war in which Canadian imperialism is a major belligerent—the unions and NDP are strengthening their partnership with the Liberal government and the ruling class.

The NDP, while professing to be "pro-peace," has given its full-throated support to the NATO proxy war against Russia. At yesterday's press conference, NDP leader Singh was repeatedly pressed to commit the NDP to support a hike in Canadian military spending from the current 1.4 percent of GDP to at least 2 percent ($35 billion) in the coming federal budget.

This is in line with the clamour from the corporate media and various think-tanks for a massive, permanent hike in military spending, and Defence Minister Anita Anand's recent announcement that she has provided the cabinet with multiple "aggressive" options for raising military spending to 2 percent of GDP or higher.

Singh dodged the questions about NATO's minimum 2 percent defence spending target. Yet he reiterated the NDP's longstanding support for increased military spending, including on the purchase of new fleets of warships and fighter jets. He made clear that the NDP will vote for the coming budget, irrespective of how much military spending is hiked, as long as the Liberals move forward with providing some of the "help for Canadians" outlined in the Liberal-NDP agreement.

Trudeau, who left Tuesday for the war summit of NATO leaders to be held Thursday in Brussels, bluntly told a press conference that his government will not be deterred by any qualms the NDP caucus may have about implementing the demands of big business. "Where there is not agreement," he declared, "we will continue to do the things that the Liberal Party was elected to do and will look for support from other parties as necessary as we move forward."

Anxious to counter the insinuations of some reporters that the NDP is little more than a Liberal lapdog, Singh repeated ad nauseam that his party will "never stop fighting for Canadians." He emphasized, in particular, that the NDP would not support ending labour disputes with back-to-work legislation, even if the Liberals chose to make it a confidence vote. This is bombast of the worst kind. Everyone knows that if the Liberals had failed to prevail on their allies in the Teamsters union to impose binding arbitration on the CP Rail workers and been forced to use a back-to-work law against them, the Conservatives would have immediately provided the government with the requisite parliamentary support.

Yesterday's announcement of a union-backed Liberal-NDP governmental alliance must serve as a salutary lesson. It highlights that the working class' struggle against war, the pandemic, capitalist austerity and the ever-widening assault on democratic rights can only develop in direct struggle against, and through a political and organizational break with, the corporatist unions and their NDP allies.

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