

Former New Democrat Premier of British Columbia parachutes out of office and into top corporate job

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On April 2, just days after officially resigning his seat in the British Columbia legislature, former New Democratic Party (NDP) Premier John Horgan announced that he was joining the board of directors of Elk Valley Resources—a metallurgical coal company being spun off from mining giant Teck Resources.

The Vancouver-based Teck Resources is the largest Canadian-owned mining and smelting company with vast reserves of copper, zinc, coal and other metals, much of them in BC.

Reaction from the corporate media, as well as segments of the pseudo-left, was swift, focusing exclusively on the company's poor environmental record and its attempt to "greenwash" its operations through the Elk Valley spin-off. Lost in all the faux-outrage over ex-Premier Horgan's corporate appointment is the reality that the union-backed NDP is a right-wing capitalist party that colludes with and carries out the diktats of big business day in and day out, no less than its Liberal and Conservative rivals.

Horgan follows in a long line of top provincial politicians who have golden-parachuted their way into top corporate boards, lucrative think-tank positions, or prestigious posts elsewhere in the BC or federal government. Former Liberal Premier Gordon Campbell was appointed Canadian High Commissioner to Britain for 10 years, and then served on the Laurentian Bank of Canada's board of directors. His successor, Christy Clark, has served on a number of corporate boards since losing the 2017 election to Horgan and the NDP. Some of these companies include, law firm Bennett Jones LLP, AlaskaCan LNG (a natural gas development company) and telecommunications giant, Shaw communications.

The NDP's ties to corporate Canada are no less intimate. Perhaps the most shameless example of this in recent memory was in 2000, when Glen Clark, BC's NDP Premier from 1996 to 1999 and for the five years prior to that its finance minister, was hired by the notorious BC billionaire Jimmy Pattison to manage one of the branches of his Pattison Group. Clark ended up working for the Pattison Group for more than 20 years, rising to become both its COO and president. While he finally stepped down from those posts earlier this year, he still remains

on the boards of multiple Pattison Group subsidiaries.

Clark's role as the right-hand man for one of the richest capitalists in the province may have been one of the most brazen demonstrations by a BC NDP stalwart of the party's true class allegiance, but it is far from the only one. Former cabinet ministers such as Joy McPhail, Moe Sihota and Dan Miller all went on to either sit on boards or take positions within large corporations.

Other prominent BC NDP politicians, such as Clark's successor as premier, Ujjal Dosanjh, have continued their political careers after tacking sharply to the right. Dosanjh let his NDP membership lapse, ran for the federal Liberal party in three national elections, winning his riding twice, and served as Health Minister in Paul Martin's Liberal government.

Dosanjh's political trajectory tracks closely to that of former Ontario NDP premier Bob Rae, who implemented a ruthless onslaught on the working class when in power during the early 1990s. Later he declared himself a proud Blairite and in the mid-2000s fought with Michael Ignatieff, erstwhile "left intellectual" cum ideological proponent of George W. Bush's "war on terror," for the leadership of the federal Liberal Party.

Today as Canada's UN ambassador, Rae cuts a particularly pathetic figure. He voices moral outrage over the alleged human rights crimes of the Putin regime in the Ukraine war, the better to obscure how US imperialism with Ottawa's enthusiastic support prepared, instigated and is now recklessly escalating the war with Russia. In an April 7 tweet, Rae gloated over the terrorist bombing of Russian blogger Vladen Tatarsky in a crowded St. Petersburg café. The April 2 bomb blast that killed Tatarsky injured 40 more, including some children, according to Russian authorities.

Horgan is typical of the upper middle class and petty bourgeois elements—be they academics and other professionals, trade union bureaucrats, small business owners, or identity-politics warriors—that populate the NDP at all levels of its leadership, from riding association executives to its legislative caucus and, when in government, cabinet.

For three decades prior to being elected premier, Horgan was an NDP operative, first serving as a legislative assistant to a BC

NDP MP, then another, before working for the Harcourt, Clark and Miller BC NDP governments in various political and ministerial roles. He subsequently set up a consulting firm, which according to Wikipedia successfully lobbied Vancouver City Council to lift a moratorium on slot machines.

On occasion the NDP will tout itself as a “workers’ party” and party leaders like Horgan will point to their working class backgrounds and/or hard-scrabble beginnings. But since its founding in 1961, the NDP has functioned as an integral part of the political establishment, dedicated to keeping the working class trapped within the confines of state-regulated collective bargaining, and parliamentary and protest politics.

Over the past four decades, the NDP, like the British Labour Party, German SPD and social-democratic parties around the world, has repudiated even the modest national-reform program with which it was historically associated, and demonstrated time and again when in office that it is a tool of corporate Canada for imposing austerity on the working class. Its close ties to the trade union bureaucracy, incessantly cited by the pseudo-left as “proof” of its link to the “working class,” in fact underscore its integration into the capitalist state and the ruling elite. This finds its clearest expression in the governmental alliance forged by the NDP and trade unions with the minority Trudeau Liberal government as it spends tens of billions on waging war in Ukraine and rearming the military, and enforces “post-pandemic” austerity and inflation-driven real wage cuts.

The close integration of the union bureaucracy and NDP leaderships is also on full display in BC. Jinny Sims, a current NDP legislator and former minister, is an ex-British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) president. Both Stephanie Smith, leader of the BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) and Barb Nederpel of the Hospital Employees Union (HEU) sit on the party’s 41-member provincial executive. This exclusive body endorsed the arbitrary shutting down of the leadership race to succeed Horgan, when it became apparent that his anointed successor, the current premier David Eby, might lose to an environmentalist deemed too left wing by the party establishment.

The trade union bureaucracy has been a pillar of government policy in BC and nationally during the pandemic, including by spearheading the deadly profits-before-lives back-to-work drive. They have enforced the capitalist narrative that the working class has to pay the costs for inflation by forcing massive wage cuts upon their membership through sell out contracts. The latest example of this was the rotten sellout imposed by the Public Service Alliance of Canada on 155,000 federal government workers, who are being ordered to accept massive real-terms pay cuts after waging a courageous strike for almost two weeks.

One of the most instructive aspects of Horgan’s Elk Valley appointment has been the criticism generated in the capitalist media and subsequent muted political reaction. All of the major news outlets provincially covered the story prominently, from

the CBC to Global News and the *Vancouver Sun*. To the extent that there was criticism of Horgan’s actions, it was that he was now working for a so-called “dirty” energy company. This was reinforced by the political reaction of the pseudo-left, such as Naomi Klein, author of the *Shock Doctrine*, the *Tyee*, the *Narwhal* and the provincial Green Party.

All criticism of Horgan’s appointment came from the standpoint that he would be henceforth working for a polluter and not that he had moved seamlessly from the premiership to working directly for one of BC and Canada’s largest corporations—illustrating thereby the true class character and loyalties of the BC NDP government. The implication here is worth drawing out: the revolving door between top politicians and corporate boardrooms is perfectly acceptable, but those passing through it should be somewhat more careful in choosing a company with the requisite “green” credentials.

Horgan for his part was utterly shameless in asserting his right to cash in on his political connections. “I don’t have a lot of time any more, none in fact,” Horgan declared, “for public comment on my world view, or what I am doing with my time.”

During his five-and-a-half years as premier, Horgan led a right-wing government that continued the austerity policies of its Liberal predecessors and was endorsed for re-election by none other than the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional voice of the Bay Street banks. The pandemic policies of Horgan and the supposedly “left” BC NDP were virtually identical to all other provinces, including the hard-right governments led by Jason Kenney and the UCP in Alberta and Francois Legault’s CAQ in Quebec.

Horgan has stood, literally in some cases, shoulder to shoulder with the union and NDP-supported Trudeau Liberal government. This was true not only at the height of the pandemic, but also on other critical issues, such as Canadian rearmament and support for Canadian imperialism’s major role in the US-NATO war on Russia.

All of this demonstrates the urgent and vital need for the establishment of the political independence of the working class. Absent the building of a new mass socialist party of the working class, working people will continue to be subjugated to wage cuts, unsafe workplaces, and the corresponding costs to their physical health, and have the social programs that they rely on attacked and cut in the name of imperialist wars that threaten them with nuclear annihilation.



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