

Canada's trade union bureaucracy flaunts its support for pro-war, pro-austerity Trudeau Liberal government at CLC convention

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Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) President Bea Bruske and her leadership team were re-elected unopposed at the CLC's recently concluded convention in Montreal, Quebec. The delegates' unanimous endorsement of Bruske's leadership and reward of a further three years at the CLC's helm testified eloquently to the bureaucracy's unity on its two main goals: suppressing the class struggle and providing unstinting backing to the pro-war, pro-austerity federal Liberal government as it spends tens of billions on rearmament and waging imperialist war abroad and attacks the democratic and social rights of the working class at home.

The Bruske-led slate of candidates, known as "Team Unite," proudly declared on the "achievements" section of their campaign website, "We helped broker the confidence and supply agreement between the Liberal government and the NDP [New Democratic Party], ensuring electoral peace until 2025."

This is confirmation—straight from the horse's mouth—of the correctness of the *World Socialist Web Site's* assessment that the union bureaucracy played a pivotal role in facilitating the March 2022 agreement under which the union-sponsored NDP has pledged to keep the Justin Trudeau-led minority Liberal government in office through June 2025. In announcing this parliamentary and governmental alliance, which stops just short of a formal coalition, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh said it was aimed at guaranteeing "political stability."

In keeping with this agreement, and with the full-throated support of the unions, the NDP has backed all of the provocative actions Ottawa has taken, first in instigating, and then in prosecuting the US-NATO war in Russia in Ukraine. To date, the union-NDP backed Liberal government has provided the far-right regime in Kiev with over \$8 billion in military and financial support since the war began in February 2022.

The unions and NDP are also fully on board with massive

hikes in Canadian military spending. This includes the purchase of 88 F-35 fighter jets and the spending of tens of billions to "modernize" the Canada-US joint North American Aerospace Defence (NORAD) to wage "great power" strategic conflict and a supposedly "winnable" nuclear-war with Russia and China.

With its "confidence and supply" agreement, the NDP also gave its stamp of approval to the dismantling of all remaining COVID protection measures as demanded by the far-right "Freedom" Convoy. It has also endorsed Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's program of "post-pandemic" austerity designed to make the working class pay for the hundreds of billions of dollars handed over to big business with no strings attached when COVID first emerged in 2020.

The timing of the agreement was of enormous political significance. It was finalized almost exactly one month after the imperialist powers succeeded in goading the reactionary Putin regime into invading Ukraine. It also followed just weeks after the occupation of downtown Ottawa and blocking of border crossings by the fascistic Freedom Convoy, which was instigated by, and enjoyed the backing of, powerful sections of the ruling elite.

The Trudeau government responded to the Freedom Convoy by invoking the draconian Emergencies Act, which arrogated sweeping repressive powers to the state, to disperse the occupiers. The NDP voted with the government in support of these authoritarian powers, which, now that the taboo on their use has been broken, can and will be deployed against working-class opposition to capitalist exploitation and war.

In the months leading up to the announcement of the deal between Trudeau and Singh, it was the unions who pushed the hardest for its conclusion. Immediately after the Liberals failed to secure a majority in the September 2021 federal election, Unifor, the country's largest industrial union and for decades the most vocal proponent of "strategic voting," publicly urged the formation of a governmental coalition

between the Liberals and NDP. While Unifor is not currently affiliated with the CLC, the CLC and its affiliates, as well as the Quebec-based CNTU and CSQ, joined it in welcoming the re-election of a supposedly “progressive” minority government and parliamentary majority.

Within a matter of weeks, the Montreal-based daily *La Presse* was reporting that the chiefs of staff of Trudeau and Singh were meeting secretly to discuss the parameters of a “confidence-and-supply” agreement.

While the NDP’s task is to ensure “political stability” inside the House of Commons, the unions’ end of the bargain is to block any working-class-led challenge to the ruling elite’s class war agenda outside of parliament.

Bruske’s term as the head of the CLC covers a period in which the union bureaucracy has sabotaged a series of major workers’ struggles that could have spearheaded the development of a mass movement against the financial elite’s policies of war abroad and attacks on workers’ social and democratic rights at home.

These include the May 2022 strike by over 40,000 construction workers in Ontario, the November 2022 defiance of anti-strike legislation by 55,000 Ontario education support workers, and the two-week strike by over 100,000 federal government employees in April this year.

Numerous smaller struggles, including many in which workers sought to resist the homicidal pandemic policy pursued by all levels of government, were shut down by the unions. In so doing, the union bureaucracy invariably lauded the sanctity of the “collective bargaining” system, that is the legal and organizational structures upon which the close ties between union bosses, government ministers, and corporate executives rest.

The union bureaucracy’s close partnership with the Liberal government has been decades in the making. One of Trudeau’s first major meetings upon assuming power in 2015 was a closed-door affair with over 100 top CLC union bureaucrats, who pledged to collaborate with the Liberals on a range of policy areas.

This cooperation found its clearest expression in the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), during which Unifor President Jerry Dias functioned as a semi-official government adviser. The renegotiated deal consolidated a US-dominated protectionist trade bloc in North America aimed at facilitating the projection of American and Canadian imperialism’s predatory interests around the globe.

The intimate ties between the Liberal government and the union bureaucracy were further underscored by Trudeau’s decision to appoint Bruske’s predecessor as CLC president, Hassan Yussuff, to the Senate, Canada’s upper chamber of parliament, upon his retirement.

The outbreak of the pandemic saw the unions take their partnership with the Trudeau government to a qualitatively new level. Then-CLC President Yussuff proclaimed the need for a “collaborative front” between the unions, government, and corporate elite. This corporatist alliance served as a key mechanism for forcing workers back into unsafe workplaces, where they were infected en masse by a potentially deadly and debilitating virus. This ruthless “profits before life” agenda has led to the deaths of over 50,000 Canadians.

The CLC’s unanimous endorsement of this reactionary record by re-electing Bruske unopposed must be taken as a serious warning by working people. As the union-backed Liberal government, supported in parliament by the NDP, intensifies its push to offload the cost of waging an imperialist war on Russia onto the backs of working people, the country’s top union bureaucrats are making clear that they will do everything in their power to help impose this class war agenda.

In this, they will receive the support of pseudo-left groups like Fightback and Socialist Action, which systematically cover up the unions’ role in forging and sustaining the NDP-Liberal parliamentary and governmental alliance. While they make the occasional criticism of Singh and the NDP for getting too close to the Trudeau government, these outfits deliberately cover up the instrumental role the unions play in sustaining it in office as part of their efforts to keep the working class under the bureaucracy’s stifling grip.

The urgent task facing workers is to break politically and organizationally out of the straitjacket imposed upon them by the union bureaucracy. This requires a political rebellion against the union/NDP/Liberal alliance, the building of new organizations of rank-and-file struggle independent of the bureaucratic union apparatuses, and workers making socialist-internationalism the axis of their struggles.



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