Mounting pressure within Canada's Liberals for Trudeau to quit as PM, party leader

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2 July 2024

Pressure is mounting within the Liberal Party and the Liberal parliamentary caucus for Justin Trudeau to resign the prime ministership following the loss of what had been considered one of the party's safest seats to the official opposition Conservatives.

The Liberal debacle in the June 24 Toronto-St. Paul's by-election confirmed what polls have been indicating for well over a year: support for the Trudeau-led minority Liberal government has hemorrhaged. It has done so because Trudeau presides over a right-wing government committed to waging war around the world and class war against the working class at home, a strategy fully endorsed by his trade union and New Democratic Party (NDP) allies.

The Liberals had held Toronto-St. Paul's through ten federal elections dating back to 1993. This included the 2011 election, when the party scored its worst-ever result nationally, winning just 34 seats and a 19 percent share of the popular vote.

Yet last week the Conservatives were able to overcome a more than 20 percentage-point gap from their second-place finish in 2021 and capture one of the 25 seats in Metro Toronto for the first time since 2011.

Trudeau has been prime minister since Nov. 2015. For the past five years, he has headed a minority government dependent on the trade union-sponsored NDP for its parliamentary majority. With the unions' blessing and encouragement, the NDP entered into a formal governmental alliance with the Trudeau Liberals in late March 2022, one month after the United States, Canada and the other NATO powers goaded Russian President Vladimir Putin into invading Ukraine. To ensure "political stability," to use the words of party leader Jagmeet Singh, the NDP has officially pledged to keep the Liberal government in office through June 2025.

Nonetheless, a *fin de regime* stench now hangs over Trudeau and his government.

In recent months, Trudeau has had to regularly rebuff media calls for him to resign. In the wake of the Liberals' rout in the Toronto-St. Paul's by-election, the growing apprehension within Liberal ranks over Trudeau and the government's unpopularity and the evident swelling of big business support for a Conservative government under the far-right populist Pierre Poilievre has broken to the surface.

Several former ministers—including Catherine McKenna, Trudeau's high profile Environment and Climate Change Minister throughout his first term, and John Manley, a Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister under Jean Chrétien and later the head of the Business Council of Canada—have publicly called on Trudeau to quit. A group of nine dissident MPs has reportedly signed a letter now being circulated to all Liberal MPs demanding an emergency in-person meeting of the party's parliamentary caucus to discuss the Toronto-St. Paul's by-election defeat. Of the nine, only the letter's author, Calgary MP George Chalal, has yet publicly identified himself. But another MP, New Brunswick's Wayne Long, has made public his own email letter to caucus in which he asserts, "For the future of our party and for the good of our country, we need new leadership and a new direction." On Friday, *Toronto Star* national columnist Althia Raj cited an unnamed Ontario Liberal MP as saying, "A majority, if not the vast majority, of caucus want to see the prime minister step down."

Meanwhile, senior ministers, beginning with Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, have felt compelled to make statements reiterating their support for Trudeau remaining as prime minister and leading the Liberals into the next election.

Why Liberal support is hemorrhaging

Two interrelated processes account for the collapse in the Liberals' popular support.

Masses of working people rightly view the Trudeau government as indifferent and hostile to their interests. For close to a decade, Trudeau has prattled on about how his government "supports the middle class and people working hard to join it," while pursuing policies aimed at enriching the capitalist elite and strengthening Canadian imperialism's global position through aggression and war and intensified worker-exploitation.

Behind the backs of the population, the Liberal government has ensured Canada is one of the protagonists in an imperialist drive to repartition the world—to seize resources, pools of labor to exploit and strategic territories—that is rapidly evolving into a third world war. Ottawa has played a major role in instigating and prosecuting NATO's war on Russia, is supporting Washington's all-sided economic and military-strategic offensive against China, is complicit in Israel's genocidal war on the Palestinians, and is working with the US to subjugate Iran and its Mideast allies.

While starving health care and other public services of vitally needed resources, the government has committed hundreds of billions of dollars to preparing for what it terms "global strategic conflict" through the procurement of new fleets of warships and F-35 fighter jets and other advanced weapons systems.

Committed to the primacy of profit over human life, the Trudeau government has presided over the Canadian ruling class' ruinous response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in successive waves of mass infection and death. While the government, working with the Bank of Canada, provided more than $650 billion to prop up corporate balance sheets and the financial markets, that is the wealth of the ruling class, working people were placed on ration-style COVID relief and forced back to work in unsafe workplaces to resume churning out profits.

Since declaring the pandemic over, the government has pivoted to slashing social spending and "fighting inflation" on the backs of the working class through high interest rates and by spearheading corporate Canada's drive to impose real-wage cuts. With the assistance of the union

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bureaucracy, it has imposed below-inflation wage settlements on federal workers and repeatedly intervened to illegalize worker job action, as with the West Coast dockers, CN and CPKC railway workers, and, most recently, West Jet mechanics.

Powerful sections of the ruling class are nonetheless eager to see the back of Trudeau. Through the corporate media, they have fanned opposition to his government by trumpeting various inflated or contrived controversies, most significantly the claim that for political gain it ignored the warnings of the intelligence agencies about supposed Chinese interference in Canadian "democracy."

These elements are clamouring for an even more aggressively bellicose and anti-working class government. They claim that the Trudeau government's "wild spending" and failure to match its NATO partners in immediately boosting military spending to 2 percent of GDP, or some $50 billion per year, is undermining Canadian capitalism's "global competitiveness" and placing its role at the imperialist high-table where the spoils are divided in jeopardy. They also complain that the union-NDP-Liberal alliance is proving too costly a mechanism for suppressing the class struggle and fear that it will be unable to contain mounting worker militancy.

This erosion of ruling class support is the second factor in the Liberals' impending electoral collapse.

Significantly, the calls from within Liberal ranks for Trudeau to resign are almost invariably associated with demands the government move still further right, and pay greater heed to the party's avowedly pro-big business, "blue Liberal" faction.

Trudeau, for his part, is plotting to do just that. According to the *Toronto Star*, he has had several discussions with former Bank of Canada and Bank of England Governor Mark Carney about his joining the government as finance minister to lead a major government "reset." The government is also said to be preparing a further massive increase in military spending. This could be announced as soon as next week's NATO summit, which is to focus on the imperialist powers' plans to massively escalate the war on Russia until "victory."

Whatever Trudeau's personal fate, it is clear that the ruling class is in the process of reconfiguring official politics for an intensification of class war and Canadian imperialism assuming a still larger role in the developing imperialist world war. These are in fact two sides of the same coin. Imperialist "great power" conflict can only be prosecuted at the expense of the social and democratic rights of the working class, by slashing social spending and illegalizing strikes so as to fund and ensure the smooth functioning of the war machine. This goes hand in hand with the suppression—as has already been seen in the attacks on anti-Israeli genocide protesters—of popular opposition to war.

The suppression of the class struggle and the growth of the far right

In Canada, as around the world, the deepening capitalist crisis is fueling massive working class resistance. Since 2022, there has been a wave of strikes involving workers in virtually every sector of the economy, private and public sector alike. On numerous occasions workers have angrily repudiated union backed tentative agreements.

However, these struggles have been systematically isolated by the trade unions and run into the ground. In November 2022, when the Ontario education support workers' defiance of a provincial anti-strike law threatened to precipitate a general strike against the Ontario Tory government, the unions rushed to shut down their strike and subsequently imposed a sell-out contract. Amid mass protests countrywide, the unions have not lifted a finger to mobilize the working class against the Gaza genocide, which is being backed to the hilt by the Trudeau government that they and their NDP allies are propping up in parliament.

It is the suppression of the class struggle by the unions and the social-democrats of the NDP—aided and abetted at every turn by the pseudo-left organizations of the upper middle-class—that has opened the door for the Conservatives to make a demagogic social appeal. Like their US Republican allies, Canada's Tories are increasingly morphing into a far-right party, with party leader Poilievre proclaiming his enthusiasm for the fascist-instigated "Freedom" Convoy and courting the supporters of Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada.

With the unions and NDP strangling strikes and propping up a pro-war government that is presiding over the impoverishment of working people and the crumbling of public services, Conservative leader Poilievre has cynically cast himself as the true opponent of "Justinflation" and advocate of "working Joes."

And he has done so to some effect. The opinion polls indicate that were an election held today, the Conservatives would sweep to power, reducing the Liberals to a rump but also capturing bedrock working-class NDP ridings. The extent of the Liberal collapse in Toronto-St. Paul's has served to obscure the NDP's own disastrous result. NDP representatives have tried to dismiss the shrivelling of the NDP's vote from 17 to 11 percent by highlighting the fact that the NDP has never represented this riding in the House of Commons. But this will hardly wash, since the NDP holds the very same Toronto-St. Paul's seat in the Ontario legislature.

A like process is being seen around the world. Despite the manifest failure of capitalism and the discrediting of the traditional institutions and mechanisms of bourgeois rule, the working class is politically paralyzed by the organizations that pose as "left" and claim to speak in its name. It is this that is enabling the Poilievres, Trumps and LePens, backed by powerful sections of the ruling class and the military-security apparatus, to take the political initiative.

The working class, the creator of all of society's wealth, has immense social power. But if that power is to be mobilized, its manifold struggles must be united in an industrial and political working-class counter-offensive against war and austerity and for social equality. This requires the building of new organizations of class struggle. Rank-and-file committees must be organized in every workplace in opposition to the nationalist and corporatist trade unions and armed with a program based on the needs of working people not what the employers and capitalist governments say they can afford.

What is above all required is the building of a mass revolutionary party of the working class that will infuse the growing opposition of working people with a socialist internationalist perspective. Based on the lessons of the great struggles of the working class and Marxist movement worldwide over the course of more than a century-and-a-half, it will develop a thoroughly worked out strategy for the systemic mobilization of the working class in the fight for workers' power. That party is the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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