

Pabloite Socialist Action nominates Canadian nationalist journalist Yves Engler to lead the New Democratic Party

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Radical journalist and anti-war activist Yves Engler is seeking the leadership of Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) based on the claim that this moribund, right-wing social-democratic party can be transformed into an instrument to fight the billionaires, oppose imperialism and its wars, and build "eco-socialism."

Earlier this month, Engler submitted his nomination papers, along with the first installment in a \$100,000 candidate's fee, to a three-member party vetting committee. It will determine whether his name can go forward in the race to succeed Jagmeet Singh as federal NDP leader, which is to be decided in a membership vote next March.

Prior to his July announcement that he intended to stand for the leadership as the "NDP Socialist Caucus" candidate, Engler was not active in NDP politics. He readily admits that it was the Socialist Caucus that first proposed and then persuaded him to run for the NDP leadership.

Socialist Caucus's self-avowed mission is to return the NDP to its supposed "socialist roots." Its activity revolves around federal and Ontario NDP conferences, where it presents alternate, more radically worded resolutions that seldom make it to a vote. Socialist Caucus' goal is to push the NDP to the "left." In reality, it works to trap leftward-moving youth and workers in the dead-end of opportunist maneuvers within the orbit of Canada's social democrats and their trade union sponsors.

Since its founding in 1998, the Socialist Caucus has been politically led by Socialist Action, an anti-Trotskyist Pabloite organization. Repudiating the basic tenets of orthodox Trotskyism, Pabloism emerged as a liquidationist tendency within the Fourth International in the early 1950s under the leadership of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The Pabloites rejected the revolutionary role of the working class in the fight for socialism, claiming that elements within the Stalinist bureaucracy, bourgeois nationalists, and social democratic and trade union functionaries would be compelled by mass pressure in a "revolutionary" direction. Acting on this perspective, the Pabloites demanded the liquidation of the Fourth International's national sections into the "mass movement" irrespective of its leadership and program.

Underscoring the intimate ties between Socialist Action and the NDP Socialist Caucus, the long-time Pabloite Barry Weisleder is both Socialist Action's Federal Secretary and Socialist Caucus's Chairperson. He is also the co-chair of Engler's campaign for the NDP leadership.

In a statement that sums up its perspective, Socialist Action, speaking through its Socialist Caucus front group, declared, "Engler embodies a robust, left-wing commitment to democratic socialism... The Socialist Caucus endorses Engler because he embodies its enduring project: pushing the NDP away from corporate rule and towards its socialist roots."

This brief statement perpetrates multiple frauds. Firstly, Canada's NDP

never had "socialist roots." Its founding in 1961 was a bureaucratic maneuver, undertaken by the Canadian Labour Congress and the CCF—which Liberal Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent had aptly dismissed as "Liberals in a hurry"—with the aim of providing the union bureaucracy and "left" sections of the petty bourgeoisie with a better means of politically controlling the working class and advancing their own interests.

Second, the perspective of pushing the NDP "away from corporate rule" or to the "left" is a hopeless endeavour. Like parties founded in the tradition of Second International social-democracy around the world, Canada's NDP long ago ditched even the most tenuous association with national-reformist politics and has emerged over the past four decades as an unalloyed defender of capital against the working class.

Finally, claiming that "democratic socialism" is a "left-wing" project is belied by its proponents in North America and Europe. The US "democratic socialist" Bernie Sanders now champions Trump's vicious crackdown on immigrants, while Jeremy Corbyn in Britain has kept the working class tied to the bankrupt national-reformist perspective of Labourism in the face of the biggest onslaught on its living standards since World War II. Germany's Left Party, one of whose predecessor organizations bore the name "Party of Democratic Socialism" and oversaw the restoration of capitalism in East Germany, has enforced austerity whenever it has entered government and backs German imperialism's mad rearmament drive.

Yves Engler: a "left" nationalist defender of Canadian capitalism

Engler, to give him his due, is the author of more than a dozen books and numerous articles that expose elements of Canada's predatory foreign policy. He has come under vicious attack from the corporate media and Canadian state for his vocal opposition to Israel's genocidal assault on the Gaza Palestinians and Canada's leading role in the NATO-instigated war against Russia. As a matter of principle, the *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally defends Engler from these right-wing attacks, and reiterates its call for the dropping of the trumped-up charges he is to face in a Quebec court on November 28.

But Engler is not and has never been a socialist. Nor has he ever been associated with the struggles of the working class. He is a "left" Canadian nationalist, who argues that Canadian imperialism should distance itself from the US empire and war machine, by adopting an "independent foreign policy." Canada could then play a pacific and progressive role in world affairs, or so he contends. Engler is a proponent of multi-

polarity—the claim that other great powers, including China and Russia’s capitalist restorationist regimes—can constitute a progressive antipode to crisis-ridden US imperialism, and, through organizations like BRICS and a reformed UN, bring about a stable capitalist order in which the interests of the rival capitalist powers are accommodated.

He is hostile to basing the struggle against war on the revolutionary mobilization of the international working class, which requires freeing it from the grip of the trade unions, social democracy and all the political representatives of the rival capitalist states.

Engler was one of the initiators and remains “Interim Director” of the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute. The CFPI’s maiden initiative was to circulate a petition appealing to the Trudeau government to convene a foreign policy review—a demand made separately by the *National Post* and other right-wing forces—based on the claim that Ottawa could be pressured to pursue a more altruistic foreign policy. To this day, the Institute website proudly lists as the first signatory of this petition none other than Stephen Lewis, the former Ontario NDP leader who became Tory Prime Minister Brian Mulroney’s UN ambassador. Lewis is celebrated by the Canadian bourgeoisie for his role in assisting in “a peaceful transition” of power in South Africa—that is in the dismantling of the apartheid regime while preserving imperialist domination and savage capitalist exploitation.

Engler has frankly admitted that the aim of his campaign is to pressure the NDP establishment. “From the standpoint of the left,” he declared, “the NDP leadership race is principally an opportunity to push the so called ‘Overton window,’ in the direction of social and economic justice. To expand the parameters of what is politically acceptable in mainstream politics.”

The 28-page program Engler has issued as the supposed basis of his bid for the NDP leadership—“Capitalism Can’t Be Fixed—Onward to a Socialist Future!”—is a mishmash and a fraud. It has the handprints of both Weisleder and the various identity-politics groups with which Socialist Action works all over it. It combines bombastic declamations about the need for “socialism,” with support for the trade union bureaucracy and the most vague and mundane calls for increased government spending.

The program says nothing about the drive of the fascist US oligarch Donald Trump to establish a presidential dictatorship south of the border; its implications for the class struggle in Canada; or the parallel turn of the Canadian ruling class to authoritarian methods of rule—from the effective abolition of the right to strike and the “normalization” of the use of the “notwithstanding clause” to the cultivation of the far right.

The lone reference to Trump comes on page 26 and reads as follows: “No new trade accords with the untrustworthy Trump regime.”

Similarly, while there are several pages of demands under the heading “Peace, Solidarity and Anti-imperialism,” these constitute little more than moral handwringing and reformist pipedreams. The Gaza genocide, the US-NATO instigated war on Russia and the Canadian ruling class’ rearmament drive are all decried. But they are treated as discrete events; not elements in a developing global war, rooted, as were the two imperialist world wars of the last century, in a systemic crisis of capitalism that can only be stopped through working-class led world socialist revolution.

In keeping with his Canadian nationalist perspective and orientation toward the trade union bureaucracy, Engler has embraced the Canadian ruling class’ bogus “Team Canada” propaganda, which asserts that all Canadians are united in the trade war launched by Trump. While he cloaks it in demagogic calls for Canada to “pause joint military deployments,” Engler joins the CLC’s Bea Bruske and Unifor’s Lana Payne in criticizing Prime Minister Carney from the nationalist right for taking his “elbows down” and not pursuing more aggressively the Canadian ruling class’ trade war with the US, which is waged at the expense of workers on both sides of the border. Promoting the ruling class’ depiction of

imperialist Canada as an innocent victim, rather than a predator in the imperialist struggle to redive the world of which the Trump- initiated trade war is part, Engler bombastically declares: “The NDP needs a former hockey playing leader that’s actually willing to skate into the corners and take the puck away from the goons of the US empire.”

It goes without saying that Engler’s promotion of such a filthy “Canada First” nationalist agenda makes him a bitter opponent of the struggle to unite Canadian, American, and Mexican workers against all the attacks on their social and democratic rights and the root cause of trade war and militarism: capitalism.

The anti-Trotskyist roots of the Pabloite Socialist Action

The Socialist Action/Caucus intervention in the NDP leadership is aimed at channeling workers and youth being radicalized by the capitalist crisis into the political dead-end that is the NDP. In this, it is reprising the role played by dozens of Pabloite organizations the world over in recent decades. Under conditions in which profound changes in the structure of world capitalism beginning with the globalization of production in the 1980s have cut the ground from under the feet of all national-reformist programs and parties, Pabloism has made it its business to breathe life into the reformist nostrums of social democracy, whether in the form of Canada’s NDP, Britain’s Labour Party, or France’s Socialist Party.

The NDP is deeply discredited after years of propping up Liberal governments. In this year’s federal election, it was reduced to 7 seats and saw its share of the vote slashed by almost two-thirds to just 6.3 percent.

Now with Carney and the Canadian ruling class hurtling to the right, there are efforts on the part of the union bureaucracy and pseudo-left to rebrand the NDP. Engler is only the most-radical sounding of several candidates seeking to revive the party’s fortunes on the basis of pledges to tackle social inequality and fight austerity.

The fact that Canada’s Pabloites are so prominent in this endeavour flows from the entire history of this anti-Trotskyist tendency, which emerged in the aftermath of World War II as an expression of the accommodation of the “left” petty bourgeoisie to the temporary restabilization of capitalism.

Socialist Action traces its roots to the League for Socialist Action (LSA). At its foundation in 1961, the LSA was already colluding with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the US to orchestrate an unprincipled reunification with the Pabloite International Secretariat. The Canadian Trotskyists had belatedly supported the formation of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953 to defend the continuity of orthodox Trotskyism against Pabloism. However, together with the SWP south of the border, they adapted to the post-war boom, and soon swung around to a policy of “regroupment” and re-unification with the Pabloites. Both organizations embraced the Pabloites’ hostility to the construction of a revolutionary party to lead the working class in struggle, insisting instead that other social forces could overthrow capitalism with a “blunted instrument.”

It was on this basis that the LSA and SWP asserted that Fidel Castro was an “unconscious Marxist” whose bourgeois nationalist guerrilla movement in Cuba had established a “workers’ state” that blazed the way forward for “socialist revolution” in the Americas.

In a similar opportunist adaptation, the LSA proclaimed the founding of the NDP “the most important event in the history of the tumultuous struggle of the Canadian people for political and social justice.” The LSA was forced to acknowledge that the NDP’s founders were building a “liberal-labour coalition”—as explicitly formulated in their call for “progressives” of all parties to unite. But in a classic Pabloite formulation,

the LSA asserted that this was irrelevant because objective conditions would bring the NDP into conflict with capitalism and make it an instrument of class struggle for workers.

In 1963, the LSA and SWP formally broke with the ICFI and joined the Pabloite International. Underscoring the irreversible character of its break from Trotskyism, the LSA soon after began touting both Quebec and Canadian nationalism as incipient “anti-imperialism.” They thus helped legitimize political conceptions that have proven pivotal to maintaining the bourgeoisie’s political-ideological hold over the working class.

The Pabloites’ promotion of Castroite/Guevara-ist guerrillaism had even more fateful consequences, contributing to the political disorientation of a generation of Latin American workers and youth. The diversion of radicalized youth and young workers away from the working class and the struggle for its political independence into suicidal guerrilla struggles claimed thousands of lives, reinforced the paralyzing grip of the union bureaucracy and Stalinists over the workers’ movement, and paved the way to fascist-military dictatorships.

During the intervening six decades, the Pabloites have lurched in line with social democracy and Stalinism sharply to the right. Socialist Action has continued to promote the NDP as the only “mass, working-class party” in North America, as it has backed the participation of Canadian imperialism in a series of US-led wars of aggression over the past quarter century. Since 2019, the NDP has propped up minority Liberal governments as they enforced a murderous profits-before-lives pandemic policy, massively increased military spending, backed the Gaza genocide and played a leading role in the US-NATO war on Russia.

Socialist Action justifies the designation of the NDP as a working-class party by citing its organizational links to the trade unions; yet whenever it is compelled to criticize the NDP, it covers up the role that the unions play in shaping its right-wing policies. While the CLC and Unifor boasted about their role in negotiating the NDP-Liberal confidence-and-supply agreement, Socialist Action, along with the rest of the pseudo-left, was at pains not to mention it.

The truth is the trade unions today are in no meaningful sense of the term workers’ organizations. In Canada, as around the world, they responded to the development of globalized production by integrating themselves ever more completely into management and the state, and have become the chief enforcers of job cuts, wage restraint, and capitalist restructuring at workers’ expense.

The international pseudo-left milieu of which Socialist Action is a part is strenuously working to revive illusions in various strains of national reformist politics. These privileged layers of the middle class are concerned above all with the preservation of crisis-ridden capitalism, the source of their social position, which explains their determination to prevent workers from drawing revolutionary conclusions from the betrayals carried out by the trade union bureaucracies, social democracy and other parties of the “left.” Where pseudo-left forces have felt compelled to establish independent parties due to the overwhelming hostility towards the social democrats, like Jean-Luc Melenchon’s Unsubmissive France and now Corbyn with his Your Party project in Britain, these initiatives remain oriented to upholding the authority of the unions, keeping the working class within the confines of establishment politics and propping up social democracy and rehabilitating its reputation.

In the United States, the Democratic Socialists of America claims it is possible to capture the Democrats, one of the twin parties of American imperialism, and transform it into a vehicle for social change. The record of Sanders, who obtained the support of millions while posturing as a “democratic socialist” during two abortive presidential bids, only then to throw his lot behind the warmongers and vicious opponents of the working class Hilary Clinton and Joe Biden, provide eloquent testimony on the bankruptcy of this strategy. In Greece, Syriza, a party of the pseudo-

left, took power in 2015 and proceeded to enforce the most savage austerity program in the country’s history in cooperation with the European Union and IMF.

The experience with Corbyn in Britain provides a devastating refutation of the perspective Socialist Action is advancing with their campaign to make Engler NDP leader. Corbyn attracted upwards of half a million new members into the Labour Party in 2015 on the basis of his claims he would transform Labour, a pro-imperialist bourgeois party of more than a century’s standing, into a fighting organization against inequality and war, and for workers’ rights. During his four-year leadership, Corbyn retreated before the party’s Blairite right-wing on every single issue. He gave Labour MPs a free vote on Britain’s bombardment of Syria, declared his support for the retention of its trident nuclear weapons, and ordered Labour-controlled local councils to impose Tory austerity. When the party’s right launched a witch-hunt against Corbyn’s supporters, using concocted charges of “anti-Semitism,” Corbyn stood by as they were expelled. He ultimately handed the party over to Keir Starmer, who as Prime Minister has positioned Britain as a close ally of the would-be Führer Trump, and is cribbing policies from the fascistic Reform Party on immigration, and law and order.

Workers need new organizations of class struggle and a socialist program

The deepening social, economic and political crisis of world capitalism is setting the stage for the eruption of mass revolutionary struggles by the working class, around the world and in Canada. The financial oligarchy is pushing for the elimination of all that remains of the concessions made to the working class in the course of militant struggles following World War II, from public services to collective bargaining rights. AI and other technological developments are to be used under capitalism to slash jobs and intensify exploitation. Through these attacks, the ruling class in every country intends to make workers pay for the massive rearmament it needs to participate in the new redivision of the world through war.

Workers cannot fight this onslaught with calls for piecemeal reforms to be carried out by national-based organizations tied to the capitalist state that long ago abandoned any pretence of seeking even limited improvements for the working class. The social democratic parties, trade union bureaucracies, and their pseudo-left satellites are obstacles that the working class must overcome to mount a successful counteroffensive against the ruling class’ program of austerity, war, and dictatorship.

What they require are independent class struggle organizations controlled by workers themselves—rank-and-file committees capable of coordinating struggles internationally in correspondence with the global character of production and the class struggle. These committees must fight to mobilize the independent political and industrial power of the working class to take political power and prioritize social needs, not private profit.

The precondition for the construction of such a movement is the building of a revolutionary leadership in the working class—a party fighting for a socialist and internationalist program and rooted in the assimilation of the key strategic experiences of the Trotskyist movement’s century-long struggle. The International Committee of the Fourth International’s struggle against Pabloite opportunism is of decisive significance in this regard. At issue has been the defence and development of the most basic tenets of Trotskyism, the sole continuity of Marxism and Lenin’s Bolshevik Party: the revolutionary role of the working class, the need for a revolutionary party to secure workers’ political independence and hegemony, and a socialist and internationalist program and strategy.

Workers and young people who want to fight Canadian imperialism's rearmament and participation in a developing third world war, turn to dictatorship, and brutal attacks on worker rights must study and appropriate this history to guide their struggles and inoculate themselves against the fraudulent "left" politics offered up by the likes of Socialist Action and Yves Engler.



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