

NDP blocks anti-genocide activist Yves Engler's leadership bid over his opposition to Canadian imperialist aggression

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The decision of the New Democratic Party's unelected, three-person Leadership Vote Committee (LVC) to bar left-wing author and anti-war activist Yves Engler from standing in the race for the federal party's next leader is a politically calculated act of censorship. One that is aimed at excluding any opposition, however limited, to Canadian imperialism from the spectrum of official NDP politics and bourgeois politics more generally.

A proponent of left Canadian nationalism, Engler announced via social media on the evening of December 9 that he had been declared ineligible to stand for NDP leader. Canadian Press subsequently reported that the party's vetting committee had nixed Engler's candidacy due to purportedly "credible evidence of harassment, intimidation and physical confrontation" of NDP members, staff and volunteers, and his alleged spreading of pro-Russian "disinformation" on the war in Ukraine and issuing of comments "consistent with antisemitic attitudes." NDP president Lucy Watson issued the usual boilerplate about upholding "integrity, honesty and respect for human rights," while the party refused to publish either the names of the committee members or the letters and material on which they claimed to have relied.

Engler, who had raised the prohibitive \$100,000 entry fee and secured well over the required 500 party member signatures for nomination, was informed of the LVC's decision weeks after first being notified that his candidacy was under review. He submitted a detailed 14-page legal appeal from his lawyer, Dimitri Lascaris, rejecting the committee's "Kafkaesque" procedures and demanding basic disclosures. The anonymous committee brushed this aside and an equally anonymous "independent" review body ratified the ban.

In a public letter to the NDP Federal Council, appealing for the body to overturn the ban, Engler denounced the decision as the result of a "kangaroo court" and declared that his campaign "has no intention of accepting the decision" and "will fight this decision by every means at our disposal." He warned that "this leadership contest will now be met with a full-blown campaign of protest" and insisted that any leader "elected through this rigged process will have no legitimacy."

The Socialist Equality Party (Canada) and the *World Socialist Web Site* unequivocally oppose the NDP's reactionary decision to bar Engler from the leadership race. We reject the slanders deployed against him as part of the broader campaign by the Canadian state, political establishment and media to criminalize anti-war and pro-Palestinian opposition as antisemitic. We defend his democratic right, and the right of all NDP members, to debate foreign policy issues, and Canada's role in the Gaza genocide and the NATO-instigated war with Russia in particular, without threats of bureaucratic reprisals.

But we issue this defence from a fundamentally different political standpoint than Engler and his sponsors in the NDP's Socialist Caucus,

which is a front for the Pabloite Socialist Action. We are not campaigning for Engler to become leader of the NDP, nor for the "renewal" of this bankrupt social-democratic party. The exclusion of Engler only confirms what the WSWWS has long explained: that the NDP is a trap for the working class, a party of Canadian imperialism and the union bureaucracy, organically hostile to any genuine struggle against war, austerity and the capitalist system.

Engler is being targeted because his past record as an anti-war campaigner and critic of Canada's role in Haiti, the NATO war on Russia (including Ottawa's decades long alliance with the Ukrainian far-right) and the genocidal onslaught in Gaza cuts across the NDP leadership's slavish alignment with the foreign-policy objectives of Canadian imperialism.

The ruling class fully supports the Liberal government under Prime Minister Mark Carney as it massively hikes military spending so that Canadian imperialism can assert its aggressive interests in a rapidly escalating third world war for the redivision of the world's resources. This agenda necessarily entails a savage onslaught on what remains of public services, worker rights, and social supports, because the ruling class needs every penny for war and its own enrichment. Under these conditions, the social democrats in the NDP leadership and their sponsors in the trade union bureaucracies are terrified that giving a platform to any anti-war candidate, however confused and misguided his program, would legitimize social opposition and help fuel a social explosion in the working class that they would struggle to control.

An anti-democratic ruling founded on smears and lies

The charge sheet assembled by the LVC—"harassment," "Russian propaganda," "Rwandan genocide denial," "antisemitism"—is a toxic amalgam of smears and distortions. They reproduce lies and distortions that originate almost entirely from right-wing and pro-Israel circles and that these forces have long promoted precisely because of Engler's exposure of Canada's crimes abroad.

Lascaris's appeal letter makes clear the fundamentally anti-democratic character of the NDP's decision to bar Engler. On the charge of harassment, the committee admitted it relied on "many letters" from unnamed complainants, some not even NDP members, whose identities and specific accusations are being withheld in their entirety under the pretext of "privacy" and "safety." It refused to disclose the names of the committee members themselves, making it impossible to test for bias or basic qualifications. It cited a fake Bluesky impersonation account as

“evidence” that Engler supposedly contemplated running for the Greens. And it simply ignores the extensive record Engler has of explicitly condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as “illegal” and “brutal,” even as he correctly exposes NATO’s decades-long eastward expansion and the 2014 Western-backed coup in Kiev as the root causes of the conflict.

The most poisonous of the NDP’s accusations is the claim that Engler has made “comments consistent with antisemitic rhetoric.”

This is the standard slander now deployed across Canada and internationally to smear anti-genocide protesters and left-wing critics of Zionism and imperialist war. It has nothing to do with combating real antisemitism and everything to do with criminalizing opposition to Israel’s crimes in Gaza and the West Bank, and to the wider US–NATO campaign of aggression against Lebanon, Syria and Iran in which Israel functions as a forward operating base for imperialism.

In Engler’s case, the NDP leadership has simply laundered a long-running campaign by pro-Israel and “anti-antisemitism” advocacy outfits that have targeted him precisely because he has documented Canada’s complicity in Israeli-state apartheid and genocide. The Canadian Antisemitism Education Foundation publicly lobbied the party to bar his candidacy, denouncing him as “virulently antisemitic” and calling on the NDP to keep him off the ballot.

A hostile piece in TheJ.ca sneers at a letter signed by around 100 Jewish Canadians urging the NDP to allow Engler into the race. It brands the signatories “fringe anti-Zionist Jewish activists,” because they insist Engler’s criticism of Israel falls within legitimate political discourse and declare “we reject any effort to cite Judaism or the Jewish community as grounds for restricting NDP members’ right to make up their own minds.”

This campaign proceeds in flagrant disregard of the factual record. Engler and his campaign have repeatedly and explicitly condemned antisemitism alongside Islamophobia and all forms of racism and have opposed the growing attempt to equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism. “Racism has no place in our movement,” his campaign states, adding that “the continued conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism weakens the struggle against all forms of prejudice.”

As Lascaris notes in his letter, Engler has written extensively about historic antisemitism in Canada—from university quotas to racist immigration policies—while arguing that institutional antisemitism has largely been dismantled and that the concept is now routinely invoked by defenders of Israel’s crimes to shield it and them from political criticism.

Engler was arrested by Montreal police in February on manifestly trumped-up charges of harassment and obstruction of justice based on a complaint filed by a Zionist activist in Toronto over his political activity on X. While the initial charges were dropped, he now awaits a judge’s verdict on charges of harassing police, because he urged his supporters email the authorities to demand they drop the original charges against him.

The smear of “antisemitism” against Engler is not an isolated case, but part of a conscious strategy deployed by the ruling class and its political parties. In Ontario, NDP leader Marit Stiles expelled Hamilton MPP Sarah Jama from the caucus after she issued a statement condemning Israel’s assault on Gaza and calling for an end to the occupation; her removal was accompanied by a media frenzy painting her as antisemitic for demanding a ceasefire and expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Across Canada, pro-Palestinian encampments and demonstrations have been met with police violence, disciplinary measures and legislative “anti-hate” initiatives that, as civil liberties lawyers have warned, systematically stigmatize Palestine solidarity and treat criticism of Zionism as suspect hate speech.

Internationally, the same playbook has been used to destroy and discipline left-wing tendencies inside the official parties of the bourgeoisie. In Britain, the Labour right and the media forged a campaign

around antisemitism allegations to oust Jeremy Corbyn from leadership and purge his supporters; even the party’s own Forde Report acknowledged that antisemitism had been used as a “factional weapon” in the intra-party struggle.

In the United States, Congress and state legislatures have pressed to codify definitions of antisemitism that explicitly fold in core slogans and demands of the Palestine solidarity movement, such as the call for a single democratic state “from the river to the sea,” in an effort to criminalize boycotts and protests against Israel.

Taken together, these facts make clear that the NDP’s charge of antisemitism against Engler is not a good-faith concern for the safety of Jewish workers and youth, but an expression of a global campaign to equate opposition to genocide and imperialist war with hatred of Jews.

The party leadership has aligned itself with the Canadian state and its imperialist allies in seeking to silence and intimidate anyone who names Israel’s actions in Gaza as genocide and points to the role of Washington and Ottawa in arming and financing the slaughter. In doing so, the NDP not only slanders an anti-war activist; it trivializes real antisemitism and hands a powerful ideological weapon to the forces waging a murderous war against the Palestinian people and preparing even wider bloodshed in the Middle East.

The real issue for the NDP leadership is not “harassment” or “hate,” but politics. In the past two years, hundreds of thousands of workers and youth in Canada have joined global protests against Israel’s genocide in Gaza and the complicity of Ottawa and its allies. They have clashed repeatedly with the pro-war policies of the minority Liberal governments of prime minister Justin Trudeau and Mark Carney. The NDP has propped up both of these governments for years as they hiked military spending, joined the US–NATO war drive against Russia and backed Israel’s onslaught, while criminalizing strikes at home. The party apparatus is determined to ensure that not even a limited, nationalist, left-reformist criticism of this agenda can gain a platform in its carefully stage-managed leadership contest.

The message to the ruling class could not be clearer: the NDP will ruthlessly police its own ranks to ensure that no one who challenges Canadian imperialist interests—on Ukraine, Gaza or any other front—can speak from within its leadership. That the party responds to a candidate associated with mass anti-genocide protests by branding him a threat to “safety” and “values” is a self-exposure of its role as a loyal instrument of the state.

The party behaved similarly in 2022, when it terminated the BC NDP leadership contest and proclaimed David Eby, the choice of the party establishment and current premier, elected by acclamation. The party apparatus shut down the leadership race because there had been a spike in membership applications, prompted by the limited criticisms that Eby’s sole opponent, the self-proclaimed “eco-socialist” Anjali Appadurai, had made of the provincial government’s pro-big business, austerity policies.

Engler, Socialist Action and the dead end of efforts to “revive” the NDP

At the same time, the Engler episode is an indictment of the NDP Socialist Caucus and its Pabloite political parent organization, Socialist Action, which drafted him as their candidate and have for decades peddled the fraud that the NDP can be taken “back to its socialist roots.”

In a detailed analysis published last month, the WSWS explained that Socialist Action’s promotion of Engler as a vehicle to transform the NDP into an “eco-socialist” party that fights the billionaires and imperialist war is a cynical operation aimed at keeping workers and youth politically

chained to a moribund, right-wing social-democratic apparatus. Canada's social-democratic party, as we have shown, long ago completed its evolution into an openly bourgeois party indistinguishable from the Liberals and Conservatives on all fundamental questions of imperialist war and capitalist class rule.

Engler himself accepts the political framework of this operation. He does not call for a break with the NDP, but for its "democratization," and is now threatening to wage a campaign of protest stunts to pressure the party's Federal Council to overturn the decision. His program, centred on nationalizing sections of industry, cancelling student debt and reorienting Canadian foreign policy along more "independent" lines, remains entirely within the confines of bourgeois nationalism and the capitalist profit system. Furthermore, Engler's turn toward protest theatrics is not a strategy to mobilize the working class, but an expression of the political dead end of petty-bourgeois radicalism and moralising that seeks to pressure the NDP establishment rather than break from it.

His anti-war stance, while genuine in its outrage over imperialist crimes, is framed entirely within the limits of a nationalist critique that accepts the capitalist state and repudiates the central role of the international working class in opposing war.

Engler's campaign is consciously aimed at preventing workers from drawing the central lesson of the past century of social-democratic betrayals: that the working class must establish its political independence from all capitalist parties and build its own revolutionary party on the basis of a socialist, internationalist program. By presenting the NDP as a potential vehicle for anti-imperialist and socialist politics, the Socialist Caucus and Engler are helping refurbish the party's tattered "left" credentials at the very moment when its popular support has fallen to a record low and its real function—as prop of the Liberal government, enforcer of austerity and war, and jailer of the class struggle—is being exposed before millions.

After the April 28 federal election, in which the NDP suffered its worst result in history and lost official party status, the NDP launched the protracted 2025–26 leadership race precisely to resuscitate itself as a "responsible," "left" safety-valve for Canadian capital, and thus a more effective instrument in assisting the ruling class in imposing its agenda of austerity, rearmament and war.

While begging Prime Minister Mark Carney's Liberals for funds and parliamentary recognition on the grounds that this will "make Parliament work better," the NDP is determined to exclude any candidate who might become a lightning rod for popular opposition to war and social reaction amid the largest wave of strikes in Canada in many decades.

The lesson of the Engler campaign is clear: the way forward for the growing layer of workers, youth and intellectuals outraged by the Gaza genocide, by the drive to world war and by the relentless assault on jobs and living standards, does not lie in appealing to Mark Carney's adjuncts in the NDP to rediscover their "values," still less in rallying behind a nationalist "left" faction within that party. It lies in building an independent political leadership in the working class based on a conscious break with all factions of the bourgeois political establishment and the fight for a socialist, internationalist program—above all through the building of the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International as the mass party of the Canadian and international working class.



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