Conservatives win British Columbia election as voters abandon NDP in droves

Penny Smith
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The Conservative Party prevailed in British Columbia's October 24 snap election, which New Democratic Party (NDP) Premier David Eby called some two years ahead of schedule. Premier-designate Lorne Doerkson will lead the province's first Conservative government in nearly a century after attracting strong support from big business and key figures within the province's former main right-wing party, the BC Liberals.

The new government will accelerate the austerity policies and enrichment of big business that have continued under successive BC Liberal and NDP governments. The Conservatives aim to intensify the outgoing Eby government's close partnership with the federal Liberal government to make Canada's West Coast province a centre for the exploitation of critical minerals to fuel Canadian imperialism's war machine.

The election results are a damning indictment of the reactionary record of the nine year-old, trade union-supported BC NDP government and a product of growing alienation from, and anger with, the entire political establishment. Voter turnout was the lowest in nearly a century—just 48.06 percent; the first time participation has fallen below 50 percent in at least a decade and the lowest recorded level going back to 1928. More than half of eligible voters decided that none of the official parties deserved their vote.

Of this abysmal turnout, the Conservatives received 48 percent voter-support, representing just 23 percent of eligible voters. The roughly 860,000 votes the Conservatives polled is some 48,000 fewer than in 2024, when they narrowly lost out to the NDP.

The Conservative "majority" rests in large part on the working class' disillusionment with the NDP, which lost over 270,000 votes compared with two years ago, about a third of its overall support. The party received just 37.4 per cent of the popular vote, which translates into the support of only 18 percent of eligible voters.

Of the parties with representation in the BC legislature, only the Greens, won more votes than in 2024. They polled some 23,000 more votes for a total of almost 197,000 (an 11 percent vote-share), after a campaign in which they sought to capitalize on left-wing opposition to the NDP by demagogically denouncing their cuts to public services and ever-escalating social-equality.

Of the nineteen seats the NDP lost, 16 were in the Greater Vancouver area, where workers are hard hit by the housing crisis and food inflation. More than a third of the workforce earns less than the regional living wage. The single biggest wipeout occurred in Surrey, a predominantly working-class suburb of Vancouver and an industrial hub. The NDP lost its 4 seats, with all 10 going to the Conservatives.

In the rural interior and north, where workers in forestry, mining, and resource industries devastated by decades of austerity have long since abandoned the social-democratic NDP as "their" party, the NDP retained just 3 out of 25 seats, 2 fewer than in 2024. The NDP's remaining seats, 27 out of 93 in the expanded legislature, are mainly concentrated in the affluent urban centres of Vancouver proper and Vancouver Island. On the night of the election, outgoing Premier David Eby resigned as party leader.

For the past nine years, the NDP, first under John Horgan and then Eby, has worked closely with successive federal Liberal governments as they moved sharply rightward. The BC NDP's federal colleagues propped up Liberal minority governments led by Justin Trudeau and Mark Carney between 2019 and 2025 as they hiked military spending, aggressively waged the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine, criminalized strikes by port, rail and dock workers, and imposed austerity to make Canada more "competitive" for international finance capital. In BC, the NDP government worked hand in hand with the trade unions to impose right-wing policies: the dismantling of pandemic protections, the starvation of healthcare funding and social services, and the enrichment of the corporate elite. The BC government was among the closest allies of the Trudeau and Carney Liberals throughout.

Eby's snap election call in September and "Build BC Strong" campaign—echoing Carney's pro-corporate "Canada strong" rhetoric and built around the need for a provincial "firebreak" against Trump's tariffs—was rightly seen by many as a transparent cover for corporate enrichment and austerity. While a significant section of former NDP voters stayed home, the corporate elite rallied behind the Conservatives because it considers them better able to enforce the all-out assault on workers' living standards, and democratic and social rights demanded by Canadian capital.

The BC Liberal Party, which imposed devastating public spending cuts and tax giveaways to big business for 16 years until 2017, left office widely despised. In 2024, under the new BC United brand, it engineered a reverse takeover of the largely defunct and far-right led Conservatives, who had not won a seat in parliament for decades. BC United suspended its election campaign to endorse them and allowed a massive migration of former MLAs and veteran staff into the Conservative fold. Premier-designate Lorne Doerkson himself was an early and prominent

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figure in that migration.

The reconstituted Conservatives went through turmoil in the months immediately preceding Eby's election snap election call, as BC's corporate elite struggled to put the party's far-right faction on a tighter leash and impose an "electable" leader. But once the election was called and the "moderate" Doerkson was drafted as party leader, big business swung decisively behind the Conservatives. In the final weeks of the campaign, Doerkson held multiple exclusive $1,500-a-head fundraisers at luxury downtown Vancouver hotels, packed with corporate executives, real estate tycoons, and business lobbyists. The Business Council of British Columbia congratulated the Conservatives on their "strong mandate to deliver change" and offered to be a "constructive partner" in restoring "provincial competitiveness."

The day after the election Doerkson appointed Kim Henderson to chair his transition team. Henderson was deputy minister to the premier in Christy Clark's Liberal government, and was considered her chief policy adviser and strategist. The Conservatives' election campaign was managed by former BC Liberal Katy Merrifield, who served as executive director of the BC Liberals, before going on to work as communications director for former United Conservative Party (UCP) Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and current far-right federal Tory leader Pierre Poilievre. The *Globe and Mail* has reported that Merrifield consulted Clark, who remains highly active behind the scenes, before taking the post of BC Conservative campaign manager.

The Conservative platform combines fraudulent populism and far-right incitement with corporate handouts. Its tax-cut pitch—tripling the basic personal exemption to $32,000—is regressive, handing the largest benefit to the highest earners and nothing to BC's poorest citizens. Its pledge to "never raise taxes" guarantees deeper cuts to social services. These right-wing fiscal promises are paired with dog-whistle attacks on Indigenous and LGBTQ+ people, and a promise of a law-and-order crackdown to be enforced by the hiring of more police officers. Its "Energy Superpower Plan" promises to double natural gas production by 2032 and triple it by 2035, supplying "reliable Canadian energy to our allies."

The Conservatives' right-wing program builds on the NDP's reorganization of British Columbia's economy around Canadian imperialism's drive to expand Pacific trade routes. The NDP has boosted the exploitation of natural gas and critical minerals to fuel the waging of global war, including through an agreement signed with the Carney government in July that Eby touted. Liberal Prime Minister Mark Carney's Defence Industrial Strategy is a key element in his pledge to raise Canada's military spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035. Alongside it, Carney is rolling out a sweeping program of "nation-building projects"—fast-tracked energy, resource and transportation megaprojects—framed as a drive to make Canada an "energy superpower" and "the reliable supplier of critical minerals" to the world.

The provincial NDP's "Look West" strategy announced last November targets $200 billion in major project investment by 2035, with 18 fast-tracked projects worth $20 billion. In the BC Conservative Party, the federal Liberals have an even more right-wing partner to pursue the predatory aims of Canadian imperialism and impose its class-war agenda on workers across BC. The Conservatives have doubled down on the NDP framework, vowing to cut red tape "like its never been cut before," fast-track resource extraction, and aggressively curb social spending.

In one of his first statements as premier-designate, Doerkson vowed to "supercharge" BC's economy and launch an independent review of the province's finances on "Day 1." His first phone calls upon securing his majority were to Carney and far-right Alberta Premier Danielle Smith, with the explicit goal of fast-tracking the Pacific Link Pipeline—a million barrels of oil a day to the West Coast for export—as his "first order of business."

The BC Conservatives' vicious class-war agenda of austerity, tax breaks for the rich, and collaboration with the Carney government's massive rearmament program will rapidly come into collision with the growing opposition and militancy of the working class. On election-day, October 24, 1,200 workers at the Highland Valley Copper mine in the BC interior launched strike action to press for higher wages, and an end to staffing shortages and chronic safety issues. The open pit copper mine, Canada's largest, was recently green-lit by the former NDP government for a multi-billion-dollar expansion. The company is on pace to make over $2 billion in gross profit this year, yet it is demanding a 25 percent cut to its future worker pension contributions and refusing to address dangerous conditions it has known about for years. The United Steelworkers (USW) offers no strategy to the workers beyond returning to the bargaining table.

The mass abstention in the provincial election shows the working class increasingly rejects all the establishment political parties—all of which are committed to austerity, the enrichment of the financial oligarchy, and world war. This opposition requires a socialist political perspective and organization. The strikers at Highland Valley Copper and other sections of the working class who enter into struggle in the coming months, including against the social spending cuts imposed by Ottawa and the BC Conservative government, must build rank-and-file committees independent of the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracies, who have worked systematically to subordinate workers to the NDP and federal Liberals for decades, creating the disillusionment that paved the way for the right-wing Conservatives to come to power. These committees will fight to place control of strikes and other struggles into the hands of workers on the shop floor and broaden them into a mass industrial and political counteroffensive of the working class for good-paying, secure jobs, well-funded public services, the expropriation of the ill-gotten wealth of the oligarchy and big business, and an end to rearmament and war.

Only the unity of workers across Canada, North America, and the globe—fighting for a socialist and internationalist strategy that mobilizes workers to take political power—offers a way forward.

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