

Canada's NDP ends governmental pact with Trudeau in hopes of averting electoral debacle

Keith Jones
5 September 2024

New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh announced by way of a less than minute-long video Wednesday that Canada's social democrats were ending or, to use Singh's inflated rhetoric, "ripping up" their "confidence and supply agreement" with Canada's Justin Trudeau-led Liberal government.

For the past two-and-a-half years, the NDP, with the full-throated support of the trade union bureaucracy, has provided the minority Liberal government with its parliamentary majority, as part of a parliamentary and governmental alliance that stopped just short of a formal coalition.

The NDP struck this alliance in the immediate aftermath of the outbreak of the NATO-instigated Ukraine war, so as to provide the Canadian ruling class, as Singh himself explained, "political stability." Until this week, the union-sponsored NDP loyally upheld its end of the bargain, voting with the government on all confidence motions and money bills, even as Trudeau and his Liberals lurched ever further right.

During the 29 months the Liberal-NDP "confidence and supply agreement" remained in force, the Trudeau government joined with Washington in relentlessly escalating the war with Russia, integrated Canada still more fully into the US all-sided economic and military-strategic offensive against China, gave full-throated support to the Israeli genocide in Gaza, and committed hundreds of billions of additional dollars to providing Canada's military more lethal weaponry. On the home front, the Trudeau government has worked with the Bank of Canada to impose inflation-driven real wage cuts on working people, pivoted to "post-pandemic" austerity, and repeatedly robbed workers of their rights to strike and bargain collectively.

From a strictly legal-constitutional standpoint, the fate of the nine-year-old Trudeau government now hangs in the balance.

However, the NDP's repudiation of its governmental alliance with Trudeau ten months before its June 2025 expiry date is far less than meets the eye. And not just because Singh has made clear that the NDP is not committed to bringing down the Liberal government now or even before its mandate officially expires in fall 2025.

The NDP's ending of its formal governmental pact with the Liberals is a desperate attempt to put some distance between itself and a hated government in the run-up to the next election.

Since last fall, opinion polls have consistently shown the official opposition Conservatives with a 15 to 20 percentage point lead over the Liberals and poised to win a thumping parliamentary majority. In all likelihood, this would include capturing a sizeable crop of working-class ridings from the NDP, whose popular support has stagnated.

Even more fundamentally, the NDP's new oppositional posture is aimed at repositioning the social democrats and their trade union allies

so they can more effectively perform their essential function for the ruling class—suppressing the class struggle and acting as political safety valves—under conditions of intensifying global capitalist crisis and mounting social opposition.

In Canada, as around the world, there is a growing working-class radicalization. Since 2021, there has been a wave of strike struggles, impacting all parts of the country and virtually every sector of the economy. Over the past eleven months, hundreds of thousands have taken to the streets to protest the imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza.

But the mounting opposition has been contained and suppressed by the unions, who have isolated and divided workers struggles, and bowed before government strike-breaking, while working with the NDP to prop up the Trudeau government.

This has opened the door for the Conservatives under their far-right leader and strident "Freedom Convoy" supporter Pierre Poilievre to make a demagogic social appeal, denouncing "Just-inflation," the lack of affordable housing, collapsing public services, and a Canada that is "broken."

While the NDP is now eager to put some distance between itself and the Trudeau government, it remains no less committed to smothering the class struggle on behalf of the corporate elite. Moreover, its abandonment of the "confidence and supply agreement" in no way represents a repudiation of the Liberal-union-NDP alliance, which for decades has served the ruling class as a pivotal mechanism for politically controlling the working class and advancing its agenda under the guise of "progressive" government.

And if this is true of the social democrats, it is at least as true of the corporatist trade unions.

That the NDP's political repositioning is nothing more than a repackaging of its efforts to politically suppress the working class was well-illustrated by the press conference Singh gave Thursday to discuss the reasons for and consequences of Wednesday's announcement.

Over the course of an hour, the NDP leader recycled the same vapid populist talking points as he tried to simultaneously criticize Trudeau, staunchly defend the NDP's governmental alliance with the Liberals, cast the NDP as the real alternative to Poilievre and his Conservatives, and leave open the door for collaboration with the Liberals both in the coming weeks and after the next election.

Singh made next to no concrete criticisms of the government's actions and said even less about what the NDP would do differently.

While the press conference ran on for an hour, there was no mention of foreign policy issues—let alone even a hint of criticism of the Liberal government's integration of Canada, behind the backs of the population, into the US-led global war. Similarly, Singh failed to

mention or criticize the massive sums the government has diverted from meeting social needs to equipping the Canadian military to wage war, as spelled out in the recent defence policy update, across the globe, from the Arctic to the South China Sea, and in space and cyberspace.

Singh's favourite line, taken from Wednesday's video, and repeated a dozen or more times, was that Trudeau and his Liberals "are too weak, too selfish and too beholden to corporate interests to fight for people."

However, desperate to eschew anything that remotely smacked of class struggle, Singh echoed Trudeau's rhetoric and that of the US Vice President and Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris, proclaiming himself a "fighter" for the "middle class."

Pressed by reporters to explain what precisely had caused the NDP to "rip" up its agreement with the Liberals, Singh said that in working with the government he had come to recognize Trudeau couldn't and wouldn't stand up to corporate interests. As if there could ever be any doubt that Trudeau, the head of the Liberal Party, long the Canadian ruling class' preferred party of national government, and the son of a long-tenured anti-working class prime minister could be anything but a ruthless representative of Canadian capital.

Last month Singh made a show of opposing the Trudeau government's use of the arbitrary powers of the unelected Canada Industrial Relations Board to short-circuit the struggle of 9,000 Canadian National and Canadian Pacific-Kansas City railway workers and order their contracts to be dictated by a pro-employer arbitrator. Yet the NDP leader never raised this until prodded by a reporter more than half an hour into the press conference.

In touting his claim that the NDP had wrung real gains "for people" from its governmental pact with the Liberals, Singh repeatedly pointed to the new federal dental care program. This program has been lionized by the *Globe and Mail*, the traditional mouthpiece of Bay Street, as providing a "possible blueprint for the reform of the broader health care system." This is because it is means-tested, includes co-payments for all but the least well-off, and is being run by a private insurance company, Sun Life.

Powerful sections of the ruling class are now eager to see the back of Trudeau, favouring a Poilievre-led government that will move even more aggressively to assert Canadian imperialist interests globally and against the working class at home. Thus it was no surprise that much of the corporate media, including the *Globe*, has welcomed the NDP's ending of its governmental pact with the Liberals, and that their reporters pressed Singh to clearly state that he would support a Conservative non-confidence motion.

But Singh refused to be pinned down or to say when and under what conditions his party would vote to bring down the Trudeau government. As for CLC President Bea Bruske, she issued a statement Wednesday shortly after Singh's video was released, in which she hailed the Liberal-NDP agreement for delivering "landmark gains" to working people, praised Trudeau and Singh "for their efforts," and opposed an "early election." "Canada's unions expect their elected representatives to continue to find opportunities to work together," she declared.

There is no question but that the NDP's withdrawal from its governmental alliance with the Liberals was closely coordinated with Bruske and the CLC leadership, which has previously boasted about its role in midwifing it. On Monday, Labour Day, the CLC initiated a new campaign, "Workers Together: For a better deal," which it termed "a worker-led initiative to tackle corporate greed, make life

more affordable, and hold anti-worker politicians accountable."

The campaign announcement made no mention of Trudeau or the Liberal government, but did roundly denounce the far-right Conservative leader.

At his press conference Thursday, Singh tried to promote the NDP as the true alternative to the Conservatives. Although before and after the last two federal elections Singh declared himself open to forming a coalition government with the Liberals to block the Conservatives from power, he declared that he was running for prime minister and that the coming election would come down to a choice between "Conservative cuts" and the NDP which will "fight to bring back hope ... hope (for a Canada) where the middle class will thrive again."

No doubt electoral calculations are also at play here. The NDP is attempting to get out in front in the coming electoral squabble with their erstwhile Liberal allies over who is best positioned to "stop" the Conservatives and "Conservative cuts." But the labour bureaucrats are above all motivated by their fear that the rise of the far-right is further fueling a working-class radicalization that threatens to escape their stultifying grip.

Political developments in Canada parallel those in the US, France, and the other European imperialist powers. For decades, the "left" and "liberal" establishment parties, with the support of the trade unions and the pseudo left, have enforced capitalist austerity, resulting in ever-widening social inequality and economic insecurity, and pursued a policy of aggression and war that has metastasized into a developing global war.

In so far as the working class is prevented by the bureaucratic organizations that falsely claim to speak in its name from advancing its own socialist alternative to the ruling class agenda of the evisceration of workers' democratic and social rights and war, the far-right is able to seize the political initiative.

Like the Trump-led Republicans, the Conservatives, the Canadian ruling class' traditional right-wing party of government, are morphing into a far-right party, as the ruling class, no matter the party in power, increasingly uses authoritarian methods of rule to enforce its interests. These include breaking strikes, invoking the constitution's "notwithstanding clause," and whipping up chauvinism and xenophobia.

A Poilievre-led Conservative government would undoubtedly be the most reactionary government in modern Canadian history. This threat cannot be met by voting and supporting the parliamentary maneuvers of right-wing parties entirely in the thrall of the Canadian imperialist ruling class like the NDP and Liberals, whose right-wing policies bear considerable responsibility for Poilievre's rise. The threat posed by the far right can only be averted through the intensification of the class struggle and the development of a political and industrial working-class offensive against war and austerity and for workers' power.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)