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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Keith Jones
16.12.2019

NDP props up Trudeau, joins Conservatives in demanding tougher anti-China stance

The true character of the New Democratic Party’s “opposition” to the Liberals and the Conservatives—the Canadian ruling class’ traditional parties of national government—was laid bare in two House of Commons’ votes held Tuesday.

In one, the first “confidence” motion since the Liberals lost their parliamentary majority in the Oct. 21 federal election, Canada’s social democrats voted with the government—effectively voting to keep Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his Liberals in office.

In the other, the New Democrats backed a Conservative motion aimed at pressuring the Trudeau government to adopt an even harsher anti-China stance, in line with Washington’s demands.

In extending support to the government on Tuesday’s “supply motion”—that is a bill authorizing ongoing state expenditure—the NDP was joined by the rightwing nationalists of the Bloc Quebecois, a Green MP, and independent MP and former Liberal Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould. Voting against the government were the Conservatives and the other Green MP present for the vote.

Under Canada’s Westminster parliamentary tradition, all “money bills” are by definition “confidence” votes, and as such a test of whether the government continues to command the support of the majority of elected MPs.

The NDP’s vote to prop up the Trudeau Liberal government is, to say the least, unsurprising. The NDP and the trade unions have long justified close collaboration with the federal Liberals and the Ontario Liberal Party in the name of defeating or preventing

Conservative governments. This has gone hand-in-hand with their systematic suppression of the class struggle and connivance in the imposition of austerity, and in wage, job and pension cuts.

During its first four-year term, the Trudeau Liberal government pursued imperialist aggression on the world stage, while deepening the assault on workers' social and democratic rights. It integrated Canada ever more deeply into Washington's intrigues and military-strategic offensives around the world, including against nuclear-armed Russia and China, and rolled out plans to spend tens of billions on new fleets of warships and fighter jets. It cut tens of billions from health care; repeatedly bludgeoned workers back to work with the threat or imposition of strike-breaking legislation; enshrined and further expanded the police-state powers given the national-security apparatus under the Harper Conservative government's Bill C-51; and colluded in Trump's anti-immigrant witch hunt.

Yet during the fall election campaign the NDP and their union allies shamelessly promoted Trudeau and his Liberals as a "progressive alternative" to Andrew Scheer and the Conservatives.

Both before and after the elections, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh proclaimed the social democrats ready and eager to serve as the junior partner in a Liberal-led coalition government.

Although the NDP lost almost half its seats and saw its share of the popular vote shrivel to just 16 percent, the unions and social democrats welcomed the election of a minority Liberal government on Oct. 21, claiming that it opened the door to "progressive" reforms.

In fact, the Liberal government has lurched still further right.

Working with its Canadian Labour Congress "partners," the Liberals used threats of a back-to-work law to prevail on the Teamsters to short-circuit a strike by 3,000 CN rail workers against onerous and hazardous working conditions.

During the election campaign, Trudeau, with the unions' support, appealed for votes in Ontario by claiming to be an implacable opponent of Conservative cuts. But within weeks of the election he held a kiss-and-make-up session with Ontario Premier Doug Ford.

Trudeau flew to the Dec. 5 opening of parliament, from the NATO summit in London where he had repeated his full-throated support for the US-led war alliance, boasted to Trump about his government's plans to hike military spending by more than 70 percent to

\$32.7 billion per year by 2026, and announced increased Canadian deployments to NATO's "Four 30s" war readiness force.

Having danced and pumped his fist in the air on the night of the Liberals' re-election and proclaimed everything was "on the table" when it came to Liberal-NDP collaboration at his first post-election press conference, Jagmeet Singh felt compelled to say the NDP's votes couldn't be got for "nothing" in the run-up to the Liberals' Throne Speech. Subsequently, in his initial response to the speech, he termed it "not good enough," adding, "if they want our support they've got to work for it."

Predictably, this all proved to be empty bluster. Just five days later Singh and his New Democrats dutifully voted to keep Trudeau and his Liberals in power.

Canada's role in US imperialism's military-strategic offensive against China

No less revealing was the NDP's vote in favour of the Conservative motion on Canada-China relations, and the social democrats' subsequent hailing of its adoption as an example of how all the parties can work together in the current minority parliament.

Proposed by Conservative foreign affairs critic Erin O'Toole, the Conservative motion called for the creation of a special parliamentary committee "to examine and review all aspects of the Canada-China relationship including, but not limited to consular, economic, legal, security and diplomatic relations." This committee, the motion stipulated, would be empowered to order the prime minister, the foreign affairs and public safety ministers, and Canada's ambassador to China to appear before it to answer questions "as the committee sees fit."

O'Toole's motion passed by a majority of 171-148, with only the Liberals, who argued the existing foreign affairs committee could serve the same purpose, voting against.

In arguing for the establishment of the special committee, the former Canadian Armed Forces' officer framed it as a means of forcing the government to take a tougher stance against China—a stance in which the "national security interest" does not take a back seat to commercial ties.

The Conservatives, said O'Toole, decided to devote their first opposition motion in the new parliament to this issue, "because we have serious concerns with the Prime Minister's ability to govern in Canada's national interest on the world stage."

O'Toole's nearly twenty-minute speech stuck to the script that has been developed by Washington to justify its escalating campaign of diplomatic, economic and military

pressure against China. That script, which paints China as the greatest threat to the “liberal international world order” and to “democracy,” has been taken up with fervor by Canada’s media, with the traditional voice of Bay Street, the *Globe and Mail*, and the neo-conservative *National Post* leading the chorus.

O’Toole repeatedly pointed to Washington’s criticisms of Canadian actions relating to China that have raised US “national security concerns.” These complaints, he emphasized, have been levelled by leading Republicans and Democrats alike, as well as by the US National Security Agency (NSA)-led Five Eyes consortium.

O’Toole accused Trudeau of being “naïve” as to China’s intentions and denounced the government for failing to vigorously respond to China’s actions in the South China Sea, its assertion that it is a “near-Arctic state,” and Beijing’s “human rights” violations. He also chastised the government for not withdrawing from the Chinese state-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and not heeding Washington’s demand Ottawa exclude Huawei from the country’s 5G network.

In fact, behind the backs of the population, the Liberal government has integrated Canada in the US offensive against China. The Canadian military has declared the Malacca Strait of vital strategic important to Canada, and it routinely deploys ships to the Asian Pacific to assert the unbridled “right” of the US and its allies to maintain an armada off China’s coast.

With the seizure and detention of Huawei’s Chief Financial Officer, Meng Wanzhou, at Washington’s behest, Canada’s Liberal government has played a major role in the US attack on China’s most important high tech company, which is part of a much larger US drive to thwart China’s emergence as a global force in new technologies.

However, the Liberals have intimate ties to a section of Canada’s business elite that is clinging to the hope that if the US-China trade war subsides and the tensions over Meng’s arrest and Beijing’s reciprocal arrest of two Canadians can be defused, Canada will be able to significantly expand business ties with China.

Washington and increasingly Canada’s own national security establishment, the Conservatives and the media are pressuring the Liberals to demonstrate that there is no distance, however small, between US and Canadian policy over China.

With their proposal for a high-powered special committee on Canada-China relations—one, moreover, on which the opposition will have a voting majority—the Conservatives

were clearly seeking to establish a mechanism to push the government to take a still more hawkish anti-China stance.

As for the New Democrats, they were more than happy to assist the Conservatives in this intrigue, even while they conceded that the Conservatives were “playing politics” with the issue.

During the debate on the Conservative motion, NDP MPs joined in the denunciations of China in terms indistinguishable from those of the Liberal and Conservative MPs, or for that matter US Republican and Democratic Party leaders. China’s repressive capitalist regime was attacked, while any reference to the aggressive actions of Washington and its junior partner, Ottawa, and their common drive to thwart China’s rise were omitted.

“We have a very aggressive Chinese policy in many parts of the world,” declared NDP frontbencher Charlie Angus, “and we have not taken this issue seriously.” Through a special committee, he continued, “we can apprise and look at this issue and find solutions and look at the threats that are being posed.”

After the motion was adopted, NDP leader Singh exalted in the result as an example of how the minority parliament can and should work to reach “common ground.” According to NDP foreign affairs critic Jack Harris, “The motion would actually put into effect the kind of collaboration that Canadians wanted the government to be.”

Like the NDP’s vote to prop up the Liberal government, its lining up behind the Conservatives’ efforts to align Canada even more fully with Washington’s anti-China drive is not surprising.

While the NDP occasionally postures as anti-war, in reality it and all the other parliamentary parties stand on the “common ground” of Canadian imperialism and militarism.

This was highlighted during the recent election campaign in which the NDP uttered not a word of criticism of Canada’s role in NATO and NORAD and the US-led war drives against Russia and China, and endorsed the Trudeau government’s plans to dramatically hike military spending.

14 December 2019