

For Independent Working-Class Politics!

Canada's No Choice Election

The following statement, dated 11 May 1997, was distributed by the IBT in the run-up to the 2 June Canadian federal election. The social-democratic NDP, which had been reduced to only nine seats in the 1993 Liberal landslide, and had lost its official party status, ended up with a few more members of parliament. But most of these were from Nova Scotia, the small Maritime province that Alexa McDonough, the party's new leader, hails from. The NDP was shut out entirely in Ontario, the industrial heartland of Canada.

The old anarchist aphorism—that whoever you vote for, the government always gets in—is more apt than ever in the current campaign. This is the sole reason [Liberal prime minister] Jean Chrétien called the election: the timing seemed right for the government to get back in.

Since their election in 1993, the Liberals have ditched their old “Just Society” double-talk in favor of the single-minded pursuit of “deficit reduction.” Social inequality has accelerated—with bank profits and stock values setting new records, while working people and the poor have suffered a rapid decline in living standards. The number of people below the official poverty line has risen from 4.7 to 5.2 million during the Liberals’ tenure, as federal transfer payments to the provinces—the primary means of funding medicare, education and income-support programs—have been slashed from \$19.5 to \$12.5 billion per year. Billions more have been cut from the renamed “Employment Insurance” program.

The Liberals have been deliberately inflaming ethnic and national divisions. Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi reintroduced the infamous “head tax” on new arrivals. When Chrétien was Minister for Indian Affairs in 1969, his department produced a White Paper that called for the forcible assimilation of Indians and Inuit. Time has not mellowed this corporate lackey, and during his term as prime minister, the feds have been stonewalling aboriginal land claims and demands for self-government. Furthermore, the Liberals have insisted that the people of Quebec do not have the right to self-determination (i.e., the right to separate when and if they choose). Justice Minister Allan Rock is currently seeking a ruling from the federally-appointed Supreme Court on the “constitutionality” of separation. With this sinister maneuver, the Liberals are establishing a “legal” cover for forcibly retaining Quebec. All class-conscious workers in English Canada must unambiguously defend the inalienable right of the Québécois to determine their own future.

While Rock’s colleagues have been shredding what remains of the “social safety net,” he has been busy expanding the Big Brother custodial state with measures ranging from reactionary and intrusive gun control laws to the creation of DNA banks. The Liberals’ most bizarre assault on civil liberties came in a bill introduced last September which:

“would allow the crown to ask a judge to require anyone it believes will commit a serious personal injury crime to

be electronically monitored.

“The individual—who may never have committed a crime in his life—would then wear a tamper-proof electronic bracelet which authorities would monitor....”

—*Toronto Star*, 4 December 1996

NDP: Chrétien’s Would-Be Helpers

There is a discernible undercurrent of resentment and frustration within the population, which surfaced with the various one-day city shutdowns carried out by the unions in Ontario against the [right-wing Tory] Harris government. But so far Chrétien’s teflon coating has held, despite the Liberals’ austerity program. While the electorate is aware of the government’s blatant cynicism (exemplified by Chrétien’s lies about scrapping the GST [the hated Goods and Services Tax introduced by the previous Conservative government]), the Liberals have remained ahead in the polls. This is because all the big business parties are saying the same thing—that “deficit reduction” must be Job One. “Less carrot, more stick” is the capitalists’ new credo.

Unlike the other major parties, the New Democratic Party is not funded by business; it is the party of the trade-union bureaucracy. While claiming to oppose the “corporate agenda,” the NDP has also made deficit reduction a central focus of its campaign, and talks about balancing the budget in three years.

The NDP platform also proposes a few modest tax hikes for the rich. But once in power, the NDP has a record of turning on the very people who supported it. Bob Rae’s NDP government in Ontario, elected on promises of taxing the corporations, soon dropped them in favor of ripping up “legally-binding” collective agreements, and rolling back public-sector wages. Rae was trying to curry favor with Bay Street [Canada’s financial center]. In attempting to do so, he alienated much of the NDP’s base, and helped shift the whole political spectrum significantly to the right, thereby paving the way for Mike Harris and his “Common Sense Revolution.”

The NDP’s record in B.C. is no better. In an attempt to placate the right, Glen Clark’s government attacked the poorest and most defenseless members of society by imposing an unprecedented three-month residency requirement on welfare recipients. It has also been involved in running a murderous operation against native protesters at Gustafsen Lake. According to a report in the 5 May *Globe and Mail*, in the summer of 1995 400 combat-equipped Mounties, acting under the direction of B.C.’s NDP government, laid siege to an native encampment during which: “The RCMP commander [gave] orders to ‘kill this Clark [the natives’ lawyer] and smear (him) and everyone with him’....” The *Globe* also cited an incident of a police sniper “being told to kill an apparently unarmed Indian walking in an agreed-upon safe zone near the camp (the sniper missed.)” Presum-

ably the NDP was trying to prove to B.C. rednecks that it was not “soft” on native claims.

In Saskatchewan the province’s healthcare system, long touted by Canadian social democrats as the CCF/NDP’s greatest contribution to human civilization, is being gutted by Roy Romanow’s NDP government. Romanow and Clark are also in the forefront of Anglo-Canadian “national unity” Quebec-bashers.

In the current federal campaign, the NDP is explicitly repudiating, *in advance*, any claim to be a working-class alternative to the parties of big business. Conceding that her party cannot win enough seats to form the next government, NDP leader Alexa McDonough has instead set her sights on some kind of *coalition* with the Liberals:

“I’d co-operate with the devil himself, if it would help get us to where we need to go’ in terms of government policy, Ms. McDonough said yesterday.

“We all know this country has worked better...when there is a minority government,’ Ms. McDonough said later. ‘We will co-operate with whoever else is interested’....”

—*Globe and Mail*, 9 May

Every militant knows that union officials on the bosses’ payroll don’t fight for the employees’ interests. By offering itself as a (formal or informal) partner in a coalition with Bay Street’s preferred party, the NDP announces in advance that it *won’t* be fighting for the interests of the oppressed. This conclusion is underlined by the decision of the labor bureaucracy to cancel the Windsor “Days of Action,” scheduled for mid-June, in order not to embarrass the NDP during the election campaign.

International Socialists: NDP, Now & Forever

In English Canada, various “Marxists” who are well acquainted with the NDP’s dismal record, and who know that McDonough intends to prop up the Liberals, are nonetheless calling for a vote to them. The biggest group of such “revolutionary” NDP-loyalists is the International Socialists (IS). The IS argues that the NDP’s connection to the trade-union bureaucracy is reason enough to support it:

“It would be electrifying if the NDP would present itself as a party of principle that stood for the defense of working people and that would tolerate no chauvinism in its ranks.

“Tragically, there is no sign at the top of the party that such a transformation of the NDP is in the cards.

“On June 2, vote for the NDP because it is the only mass party based on the trade unions and not on big business.”

—*Socialist Worker*, 3 May

There is nothing “tragic” about the NDP’s repeated betrayals. They are the *inevitable* and *logical* result of the social democrats’ loyalty to the capitalist social order. Sometimes, when it wants to present a left face, the IS is willing to acknowledge as much. For example, in a 10 April article in

the University of Toronto *Varsity*, IS supporter Sean Purdy wrote:

“In office, NDP governments have cut spending on social programs, closed hospitals, hired ‘welfare cops’ to harass the poor, slashed government jobs, ripped up the collective agreements of public sector workers and reneged on the fight for same-sex benefits.”

Purdy even explains why the social democrats will always betray: “The NDP is not really interested in challenging the wealth and power of the banks and corporations. They only want to manage capitalism....”

Quite right. But why then do the “revolutionary socialists” of the IS advise workers to vote for the NDP? In the past they have claimed that it was necessary to put the NDP in office so that it would expose its real character. For example, prior to the 1988 election, IS leader Paul Kellogg called for building “a fighting socialist alternative to the NDP,” but argued that:

“An unavoidable step on the way to building that alternative will be to get the NDP into power, and expose it as the pro-capitalist party that it is.”

—*Socialist Worker*, September 1988

Since then, the NDP *did* get into power in Ontario, Saskatchewan and B.C., and workers have become well acquainted with its pro-capitalist nature. But Kellogg and the IS persist in calling for a vote to them.

Someone new to the left might be confused to see that *Socialist Worker’s* demand to “Kick out the Liberals” is accompanied by a call to vote for McDonough, who hopes to be in a position to prop them up. But those who are more familiar with the IS will recognize that its occasional criticisms of the NDP are only a “Marxist” gloss on a policy which, at its core, is simply lesser-evilism.

For a Class-Struggle Workers’ Party!

A vote for the NDP in this election is a vote to endorse the party’s chauvinism, its record of betrayals and its strategy of power-sharing with the Liberals. The only way forward for the working class in the face of vicious and continuing capitalist attacks is to recognize the irreconcilable differences that separate the exploiters from their victims, and to launch aggressive, no-holds-barred counterattacks. NDP class-collaborationism will literally be a dead end for the labor movement.

The alternative to the anti-social profit-driven capitalist system is socialism—a humane and rational social order in which economic priorities are determined by human need, not private profit. Fighting for socialism means struggling *within* the labor movement to break the grip of the existing bureaucrats (and their parliamentary counterparts) and forge a new political leadership, committed to the revolutionary struggle for workers’ power. ■