

## JOIN THE NDP ★ FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM!

✪ By Alex Grant

*The fall of the minority Liberal government presents Socialists with a choice. Do we sit out the coming federal election or do we actively participate in the debate? What strategies are necessary for increasing support for socialist ideas? And finally, what position should we take towards the federal New Democratic Party?*

Bourgeois Democracy in Canada is facing a crisis of confidence. The old-line parties are incapable of forming a stable majority government that can push through the dictates of Big Business. Amongst the working class, there is a growing cynicism for this form of democratic process. In any normal period, the Liberal corruption scandal would lead to their replacement by the Conservatives, the other main capitalist party. However, the majority opinion is, “a plague on both your houses,” as people do not see the Conservatives as any less corrupt. In a recent CBC poll, 56% of Canadians have little or no confidence in our political leaders, and 73% don't expect politicians to keep their promises when in power. In essence, the people are saying it is the system that is corrupt. Voter turnout at 60% is at an historic low, and it is even lower amongst youth and the working poor. This low turnout does not represent apathy, as workers and youth are more than willing to get active in extra-parliamentary politics when they see an opportunity to have a voice. The disengagement represents a lack of faith that mainstream politics can make any change in their lives, and is an international trend. When you see an isolated phenomenon you can look for an exceptional explanation. When you see the same result repeated in Britain, USA, Canada, and throughout the Western world, then you must look for commonalities. All

of these countries are promoting capitalist policies and nowhere have the workers been given any real choice.

There is a myth that only gradualist policies will garner support; that the way to win elections is to water down your politics so much that parties are indistinguishable save for a few key issues. The consequence of this policy is the aforementioned mass abstentionism. Those who continue in this vein are asking for the riots in the Paris suburbs to spread to Jane and Finch in Toronto, the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, or to St. Henri in Montreal. If the dispossessed are not given an outlet to voice their injustices they will find their own way to get their message heard. It is also wrong to think that chronic poverty is the result of government mismanagement – Canada almost certainly has one of the best governments moneyed interests can buy. The truth is there is no profit in maintaining the standard of living of the poor and the system of free-market capitalism gives workers and youth no options. Yet again we are faced with systemic problems for which capitalist society has no solutions. This problem has a name; it is called “The Profit Motive.”

In the next election, any party wishing to break the downward spiral of disengagement and poverty, and give working families a real choice, must break with the profit motive. It is not as if Canada is a poor country; year after year the economy grows. However, this growth is of no benefit to the poorer half of society. If wealth were evenly distributed, the average family would have a net worth of a third of a million dollars. Conversely, over the last 25 years, net worth has, in fact, decreased for most families. The debt burden has climbed to 121% of annual income and the number of young families

in poverty has jumped from 31% to 43%. These are precisely the people who do not vote in elections. How then, do we gain the support of the non-voting 40% of society? Is it by continuing with the same old policies? One psychological definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result and in the words of Sherlock Holmes, “Once you have rejected everything that is impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be true.” It has been shown that the profit motive has not worked for the working class majority. The only other option is socialist policies.

Unlike parts of Latin America, Canada is not in a revolutionary situation. Our task is to use the election to increase support for socialist policies. However, even on the electoral plane there are huge reserves of support for a radical policy. Earlier in 2005, a poll by the National Post revealed that the statement, “Canada's problems are such that what we need is more socialism, and more socialist policies,” had just as many supporters as detractors. Another poll in September 2005 showed that 49% of Canadians support nationalizing the oil industry (see “49% of Canadians Support Nationalizing Oil Industry” at [www.marxist.ca](http://www.marxist.ca)). Strike statistics are also at their highest point in recent history, with workers willing to fight to defend their living standards. These figures are important because they speak to the main problem facing the New Democratic Party under Jack Layton. In the last election the Liberals were able to present themselves as progressives (just like the NDP) and were able to steal away soft NDP voters who were scared of the Conservatives. At the time we wrote,

The Liberals clung on to power by demonizing the Conservatives for their

# NDP to Power on a Socialist Program

dramatic tax cuts, cuts to social programs, and support for the Iraq war. The Conservatives were of course guilty of these accusations, but the Liberals have done and will do little different. The Liberal tactics were not aimed so much at Conservative supporters but at the NDP. NDP voters were told, "Don't split the anti-Conservative vote. Voting for the NDP will let the Conservatives in and Liberal policies are not that different from the NDP's anyway." This tactic yielded significant results – the NDP went from polling 20% to a final result of 16% of the popular vote. Frequently these tactics served to actually elect the Conservatives as NDPers split their vote to the third place Liberal (voters were fooled by the press into thinking the NDP had no chance). In many seats the NDP only lost by 1 or 2 percent. If the NDP's vote was not eroded by vote splitting, (equal to about 4%), they could have doubled their seats and would be in a far better position for the next election. The question arises, how does the NDP combat the vote splitting tactic?

Jack Layton, the NDP leader, ran a fair campaign and was forceful in putting forward his reformist program. The main problem with this program is that it never explained the source of the problems workers face (Capitalism), or the solution (Socialism). When you compare the NDP and Liberal programs you see that the Liberals propose money for healthcare and the NDP proposes *more* money for healthcare. The Liberals propose childcare spaces and the NDP proposes *more* spaces. The Liberals propose phased-in money for cities and the NDP proposes money for cities *now*. Combine this with the inability of the NDP leadership to rule out a coalition with any of the capitalist parties and you can see how the Liberals' claim to have the same values as the NDP can be convincing. An average worker might think, "I like the NDP's reforms, but the Liberals are offering the same sort of thing and the NDP are going to work with them in a minority anyway, so I'd better be safe and vote Liberal to keep the Conservatives out (see "NDP disappoints due to failure to use 'S' word" at [www.marxist.ca](http://www.marxist.ca)).

The NDP is in danger of falling into the same trap if it stays with the same reformist (i.e. capitalist, subservient to the profit

motive) platform and does not rule out entering a Liberal government. This also raises another question. If the NDP has not offered an anti-capitalist alternative, why on earth would socialists support the party?

Some on the left point to the NDP's lack of policies that go beyond the bounds of capitalism and say that the NDP is no different from the Liberals or Conservatives. Sometimes these ultra-left groups run candidates and get a miserable showing, but usually they just complain from the sidelines, bemoaning how the mass of working people do not listen to them. It would indeed be depressing to hold this world view, as it takes us back to the pre-history of the working class movement, over 150 years ago, before there were working class parties or mass working class organizations. Other left groups vote for the NDP, but leave it at that. In our view, such passive endorsement is not good enough and is tantamount to relegating the fight for socialist policies to the dim and distant future. The NDP is Canada's mass labour party with an organic connection to the trade union movement. All shades of opinion, and all tendencies present in the working class movement, are also present in the NDP. In fact, the leaders of the unions are frequently the same people who lead the NDP. The debate over what platform the party should adopt is the main forum for debating the politics of the labour movement. Those who do not like the result and decide to boycott the process are merely silencing themselves. Those who honestly believe that the profit motive holds no future for society must fight for an alternative at every venue possible. Socialists must join the NDP to put pressure for socialist policies where it really matters. The pro-capitalist elements in the NDP are not in absolute control, especially amongst the youth who are more open to breaking with the old failed methods. We can win support for the only policies that can make a difference for working class people. Also, in times of political turmoil workers turn to their traditional mass parties; it is important that there are socialists present in the NDP to show the newly active members that there is another way of doing things.

Production for profit is the mantra of capitalist society; socialists counter-act this by calling for production for need. Every day, food is deliberately destroyed to

maintain grain prices. And every day, millions suffer due to the inability to buy food. People go homeless while housing sits empty. Healthcare costs rocket while drug manufacturers make millions. But how are we to force these private interests to produce for need? The truth is that no law, or tax, or regulation can force private corporations to act in the interests of the environment and society. Increasingly, the call is coming that the key industries, the commanding heights of the economy, should be taken into public ownership and run in the interests of all. In Venezuela, workers have occupied plants and successfully demanded their nationalization. Now this is sparking a movement across the country that is providing health, education, and more and more services to the Venezuelan people. If they can do it in Venezuela, then why not here? GM recently closed its Oshawa plant, making thousands of workers unemployed. This plant has been ranked as one of the most productive in the world. If that happened in Venezuela, you can bet they would nationalize the plant in a heartbeat and turn it over to the workers to run. Why should workers and our communities suffer because of the dictates of the profit motive? Over the last 12 years, 140,000 manufacturing jobs have been destroyed. If the capitalist economy cannot provide a decent standard of living for working families then we must get rid of it. This is the key issue in today's society; it is also potentially the key issue to show how the capitalist Liberal and Conservative parties are fundamentally the same.

In the next period, there is a growing possibility for a new politics to emerge. The degree to which the NDP manages to put forward a new vision, separate from the old policies, will determine how successful it will be in this election and in the coming years. If, however, we hear the same old story, we can be assured of the same old result and an even lower turnout from disenfranchised voters. We call on all socialists to join the NDP and fight for socialist policies. ★

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