

Canada: How the NDP facilitates imperialist war

By Graham Beverly
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The trade union-based New Democratic Party has played a pivotal role in rallying popular support for Canada's participation in the NATO war against Libya—a war whose transparent purpose has been to effect the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and replace it with one even more subservient to North American and European imperialism.

Weeks before Prime Minister Stephen Harper publicly declared his support for the western powers intervening militarily in Libya, the NDP was urging Canada's government to champion the imposition of a no-fly zone over the North African country. Blunt statements from the then US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, and other US political and military leaders that such action would entail all-out war did not give Canada's social-democrats pause.

At the war's outset they joined the other opposition parties in unanimously backing the government's decision to send the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) into action alongside US, French and British forces. Parroting the likes of Harper, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, British Prime Minister David Cameron and US President Barack Obama, the NDP claimed the aerial bombardment of Libya and policing of a naval blockade was a "humanitarian" intervention aimed at saving civilian lives, not a war for regime change.

And Canada's social democrats have continued to promote this lie for the past five months, even as Canada and the NATO powers have provided the "rebels" fighting under the banner of the Transitional National Council with the political, logistical and military means to extend their control over virtually the entire country.

In June, the NDP, in one of its first acts upon becoming the Official Opposition, voted in favor of a government motion extending and expanding Canada's leading role in the NATO war on Libya. In an act of duplicity that raised eyebrows even among the press corps, the NDP justified this vote by claiming that it had secured "concessions" from the Harper government that reaffirmed that the CAF was deployed in a "humanitarian" mission, not a war for regime change.

These included a pledge that there would be no Canadian troops "on the ground"—a pledge that both sides agreed, either explicitly or tacitly, would not extend to the members of Joint Task Force 2, the Canadian special forces troops who it has been all but openly admitted are among the NATO troops in Libya that have been providing targeting information and other intelligence to guide the aerial bombing runs.

The NDP also successfully pressed for the government to provide diplomatic recognition for the Transitional Libyan Council, the coalition of Islamacists, defectors from the Gaddafi regime and longtime CIA assets being promoted by the NATO powers as Libya's government in waiting. Thus, while feigning opposition to a war aimed at replacing the Gaddafi regime, the NDP was in fact urging the Harper government to provide greater backing for the imperialist-sponsored opposition that NATO has coordinated its military campaign with and promoted as Libya's alternative government.

Yesterday, under conditions where the Gaddafi regime was

disintegrating, NATO having literally blasted the rebels' way into Tripoli, NDP Foreign Affairs critic Paul Dewar continued to peddle the lie that the NATO hadn't waged war with the aim of toppling the Gaddafi regime. "Canada," said Dewar, "must now transition from protection of civilians to stabilization so that Libya may find peace within its borders."

These remarks strongly suggest the NDP is now ready to support the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces troops to Libya to help "police" the peace. In any event, Dewar made clear that the NDP will continue to work to maintain and expand the fraud of "humanitarian" intervention. He declared that the NDP supports the prosecution of Gaddafi and his sons by the International Criminal Court for war crimes.

As a review of the NDP's record over the past dozen years exemplifies, the NDP's role in supporting the NATO war against Libya conforms with a long pattern of facilitating Canadian overseas military interventions and Canadian imperialism's ever more rapacious role on the world stage.

At the most critical junctures the NDP have helped rally support for and politically legitimize the use of the CAF to bolster the predatory interests of the Canadian bourgeoisie. On several occasions, as we shall also demonstrate, the NDP having supported the CAF's deployment in imperialist wars, subsequently responded to the growth of popular antiwar sentiment by calling for an end to Canadian participation. In so doing, their purpose has been to corral this opposition behind a section of the political establishment and thereby neuter it.

The bombing of Yugoslavia

A demonstrative example of this two-faced approach was the NDP's attitude to the 1999 NATO bombing campaign in what was then known as Yugoslavia. Citing examples of ethnic-cleansing and massacres of civilians as a pretext, the US-led alliance, with a substantial contribution from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), conducted an air war in support of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and the dismemberment of what remained of the Balkan federation. From the outset of the war, the NDP gave its full support to Canada's participation. Svend Robinson, the NDP Foreign Affairs critic and leader of the party's left wing, justified his party's complicity in this imperialist war with the language of "humanitarian intervention".

"The possible NATO air strikes against the Serbian government are unprecedented," Robinson acknowledged on March 24, 1999. "It will be the first time since the alliance was founded 50 years ago next month that NATO has prepared to go into action collectively against a sovereign state. Certainly we in the New Democratic Party have not reached the decision to support this military action without much anguish and much soul searching. Our party has a long and honourable tradition of opposing NATO's military structure and doctrine, of calling for Canadian withdrawal from NATO and of strengthening the United Nations and regional security mechanisms."

Despite this "long and honourable" tradition of rhetorically calling for Canada to withdraw from the US-led military alliance, Robinson

concluded, after much “soul searching and anguish”, that NATO’s proposed campaign of aerial bombardment deserved his party’s full support, saying: “We in the New Democratic Party accept that the use of military force as a last resort is sometimes necessary in grave humanitarian crises when all efforts at diplomatic settlement have failed, and we believe this meets that test.”

After the first month of hostilities brought forth mounting opposition to the bloody NATO bombing campaign within the Canadian populace, the NDP began to call for a “pause” in the aerial bombardment, but only upon the condition that the Serbian government halt all ethnic cleansing and return to negotiations with the US-led alliance. After two months of bombing and as NATO troops massed on the borders of Yugoslavia, the NDP abruptly changed positions, calling for an immediate cessation of the air war. Svend Robinson now described the bombing campaign as a “complete disaster.” The hypocrisy of the NDP’s “opposition” to the bombing campaign was underscored when, just days later, NATO itself called an end to the bombing of Yugoslavia in anticipation of the Milosevic government’s surrender.

In spite of this posture of “opposition,” neither Robinson nor the NDP leadership retracted their initial support for the NATO bombing campaign.

The invasion of Afghanistan and the “war on terror”

The NDP attempted a similar “anti-war” pose in the initial debate over Canada’s participation in the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan, voting against the first parliamentary motion authorizing the CAF contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom in October, 2001. However, less than a month afterwards, they unanimously swung behind the mission, asking only for assurances from the Liberal government that the deployment of Canadian troops would be “...carried out under the auspices of the United Nations...” and “...debated and ratified by a vote in the House of Commons.”

NDP Leader Alexa McDonough was at pains to emphasize her party’s support for Canada’s participation in the US-led drive for geo-political dominance in Central Asia, under the banner of the “war on terror.” She asserted that “The New Democratic Party is absolutely committed to rooting out terrorism... Canadians, especially military families, are seeking the assurance that this mandate is indeed humanitarian in nature, but they are also supportive of the efforts to put in place a transitional administration...”

The NDP’s support for the CAF deployment in Afghanistan demonstrated that, with their rhetorical exultation of Canada’s Cold War-era “peacekeeping” tradition, they could effectively support Canadian imperialism in its pursuit of a greater role within NATO military operations and, through that role, the assertion of the Canadian elite’s national interests abroad. As soon as the invasion of Afghanistan received the sanction of the United Nations, the NDP eagerly gave their full support to Canada’s participation, the largest CAF deployment since the Korean War.

Whilst the NDP joined hands with the other parties of Canada’s political establishment in supporting the NATO counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan, the outburst of imperialist aggression associated with the “war on terror” soon began to provoke widespread opposition within the Canadian working class. In the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq, hundreds of thousands engaged in anti-war protests against US imperialism and its junior partner in Canada; in March 2003 over 250 000 people gathered in Montreal to oppose the war, in what was possibly the largest political demonstration in Canadian history.

It was in this context that the NDP again sought to present its threadbare “anti-war” credentials, heatedly criticizing the Bush administration for its drive to wage unilateral pre-emptive war against Iraq. This criticism, however, came not from a principled socialist position, but from the

standpoint of upholding an “independent” Canadian foreign policy, i.e., one that purportedly more fully corresponds with the interests of the Canadian ruling class, by promoting Canada’s posture as a middle-power and promoter of diplomacy and UN peacekeeping.

The NDP’s positioned dovetailed perfectly with that of the Chretien Liberal government, who viewed the turn to unilateralism on the part of the Bush administration as an undermining of the “multilateral” imperialist institutions, such as the UN and NATO, through which Canada has traditionally sought to pursue its international aims. Dwarfed by the economic and military might of America, Canada has traditionally looked to its fellow US allies, like Britain and France in NATO or Mexico in the North American Free Trade Agreement, as potential means of offsetting US dominance.

Consequently, when the Chretien government at the last possible moment declined to formally join the US-led “coalition of the willing,” it was no aberration that the NDP parliamentary caucus unanimously leapt to their feet in a standing ovation. Simultaneously, however, the NDP supported the deployment of CAF ships, aircraft, and 1,200 naval personnel in the Persian Gulf as part of Operation Enduring Freedom—forces which the Chretien government discreetly made available to support the US invasion of Iraq.

Canada’s NATO membership and the *coup d’état* in Haiti

2003 also saw the accession of Jack Layton to the leadership of the federal NDP, with the support of members of the party “left wing” like Svend Robinson and members of the party establishment, most prominently former federal party leader and “elder statesman” Ed Broadbent. While Layton promised a more “activist” NDP, he promptly moved the party still further to the right. In addition to pledging the party to “fiscal responsibility” and a pragmatic politics of “proposition not opposition,” he had the NDP’s “traditional” demand for Canada to leave NATO excised from the party’s programme.

Rather than advocating Canada leave the US-led military alliance, Layton said the NDP would henceforth work for NATO to be changed from within. “The Cold War,” said Layton, is over. The transformation of the old institutions of the Cold War is important and is happening. NATO is an organization essentially of the past. We are going to work for the restructuring of organizations for the future. People in NATO are already transforming it themselves.”

Layton’s references to the ongoing “transformation of NATO” were significant. Formed at the onset of the Cold War as a means for the US to militarily secure Western Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was up until the 1990s a military alliance with a regional focus—specifically to contain and pressure the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, the alliance gradually became the means through which US imperialism, in conjunction with its partners in Western Europe and Canada, began to aggressively intervene in the countries formerly within the Soviet sphere of influence: Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001.

Thus Layton jettisoned the NDP’s traditional call for Canada to leave NATO as the alliance abandoned its former regional role and was “transformed” into a platform for military intervention around the world. Layton pledged his party’s support for this “restructuring,” committing the NDP to the defense of Canadian imperialism’s interests within the alliance, as a means of demonstrating to the political establishment that under his leadership the NDP was readying itself to assume the “responsibilities” of a party of government.

The meaning of Layton’s actions were unmistakable: the NDP is ready to accommodate itself to Canada’s pursuit of its imperialist interests through NATO, in exchange for the possibility of entering into government and reprising their historical role as junior coalition partner with the Liberals. This attitude was concretely demonstrated in February

of 2004, when the NDP remained completely silent as the Canadian military joined with its NATO allies, US and France, to complete the right-wing military coup in Haiti that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Canada's Special Forces, Joint Task Force 2, established control of the Port-au-Prince airport where Aristide was forced onto a plane to the Central African Republic, after being kidnapped by US marines. The CAF deployed 500 troops to the Haitian capital to maintain security as US and Canadian diplomats helped install a new client regime in Haiti. Canadian police officers, drawn from the federal Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and other police forces, were later tasked with helping train a more professional, i.e., dependable, police force that could be used to quell social unrest and otherwise enforce the chasm that exist between Haiti's tiny elite and the mass of the population.

From the outset, the NDP refused to condemn the coup in Haiti, offering this act of imperialist banditry tacit support. On March 10, 2004, Svend Robinson merely called for an investigation into "Aristide's departure." It wasn't until the end of May 2004 that now-Foreign Affairs critic Alexa McDonough issued an official press release on the Haitian coup. Even then she could only muster the weakest and most meaningless of platitudes. "While the NDP is not calling for a full withdrawal of Canadian police officers and aid to Haiti, we are deeply concerned and highly critical about Canada's role in Aristide's removal," she wrote. "We consider it ill advised to abandon Haiti altogether. Canada has tremendous potential to play a constructive and responsible role in restoring peace and supporting the evolution of genuine democracy in Haiti."

McDonough's statement is a clear expression of how Canada's social democrats apologize for and facilitate the crimes of Canadian imperialism. Months after the CAF joined with US and French forces to complete a coup against an elected government mounted by a fascist force comprised of ex-Tontons Macoutes and Haitian military officers, the NDP voices tepid criticisms. But all the while it continues to support Canada's continuing leading role in Haiti and to assiduously promote the lie that Canadian imperialism and its military can promote "peace" and "democracy" and be a "force for good" in the world.

The NDP and Canada's assumption of a frontline role in the Afghan War

What Jack Layton's "remake" of the NDP, including its new policy of working to "transform" NATO from within, entailed was further demonstrated in the spring of 2005, when the Liberal government of Paul Martin announced a major escalation of Canada's role in the Afghan war. The Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) deployment was to be expanded and transformed, with Canada's military, assuming under NATO command, a leading role in counter-insurgency.

With the NDP's full support, Canada had participated in the initial invasion of Afghanistan and following the collapse of the Taliban regime had deployed troops to Kabul where they served to help stabilize the US-installed puppet regime of Hamid Karzai. But now the Liberal government signed on to provide a 2,000 strong CAF force charged with suppressing the Taliban in the southern province of Kandahar, the historic center of the Taliban and the stronghold of the insurgency.

Canada's assumption of a frontline role in the Afghan war was an attempt by the Martin Liberal government to mend faces with the Bush administration which had been angered by Ottawa's failure to join the 2003 invasion of Iraq and to sign on for its provocative "missile-defence shield" project. The Canadian deployment to Kandahar freed up US troops for redeployment to Iraq, where the US-British occupation was facing a mounting popular challenge. But the Kandahar deployment was not only aimed at placating Washington. It was also a response to pressure from the Canadian ruling elite and the top brass of the Canadian military

for Canada to assume greater "international responsibilities" so as to promote "Canadian interests" in an increasingly unstable world.

Fearing a hostile reaction to Canada's participation in a US-led colonial war, the Martin Liberal government—in sharp contrast with the Harper Conservative government that was to succeed it—played down the significance of the Kandahar deployment. The NDP followed suit, with a near-total silence on the Afghan deployment in the spring and summer of 2005. That this was a silence that bespoke support and consent is underscored by the fact that as Canada's Kandahar deployment was being decided and implemented, the NDP was providing the minority Liberal government with a vital parliamentary lifeline in a string of non-confidence votes.

Only in November 2005, six months after the deployment had been announced and at time when the NDP was preparing to withdraw its parliamentary support for the Martin Liberal government, did it make any criticism of the Kandahar mission. These criticisms did not call into question the deployment, let alone Canada's role in propping up the Karzai regime. They were entirely from the standpoint that if Canada's militarily became too integrated with the US occupation forces and too closely identified with bloody colonial-style repression it could undermine Canada's room for maneuver on the world stage and undermine domestic support for an "activist" Canadian foreign policy.

In raising the NDP's tepid criticisms, NDP MP Bill Blaikie was eager to establish, first and foremost, his support for the Canadian military in general and its mission in Afghanistan in particular. "I first want to second the words of admiration that the Minister of National Defence [Liberal Bill Graham] expressed for the work that Canadian troops do in Afghanistan and have done in many other difficult situations, such as in the former Yugoslavia and many other missions that they have been sent on.

"It is precisely because Canadians do such good work and it is precisely because the Canadians do their work differently that it is so important that the government pay attention to anything that might threaten the differences that other people see between the way Canadians do things and the way other forces do things."

While affirming its support for the CAF mission in Afghanistan, the NDP sought to "raise questions" about some of the most egregious excesses of this imperialist adventure: the CAF's transfer of prisoners of war to the Afghan government, notorious for its barbaric treatment torture, and outright murder of detainees; the reliance of Canadian troops on anti-personnel landmines laid by other military forces; and the integration of the Canadian forces into the counter-insurgency strategy of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom campaign. In this, the NDP spoke for a section of the Canadian elite that worried about the consequences of so openly contradicting the claims that Canada upholds "international law" and that its armed forces, unlike those of the US, are primarily "peacekeepers." These hypocritical claims, which to this day are assiduously promoted by the NDP, had long been cultivated by Canada's ruling elite as part of the nationalist ideology used to harness the population behind it.

When, in early 2006, the first Harper minority government came to power, the Conservatives seized upon these feeble "questions" presented by the NDP to cast them, and by implication anyone who genuinely opposed the war in Afghanistan, as "disloyal," treasonous, and a supporter of Islamic fundamentalism—going so far as to refer to Jack Layton as "Taliban Jack". Predictably, this provocative stance elicited grovelling assurances on the part of the NDP that they indeed supported the Afghan war and the deployment to Kandahar; they requested only the chance for Parliament to vote on the mission.

Layton led the effort, promoting in an April 2006 parliamentary debate the canard that Canadian troops in Afghanistan and their US-NATO allies were fighting for democracy. "How," asked Layton, "can we ask our

soldiers to bring democracy to Afghanistan if democratic debate and decision making is denied in our own Parliament?"

He was later reinforced by NDP MP Dawn Black, who assured the Conservative government that: "The New Democratic Party supports the hard-working women and men of the Canadian Forces. However, we want to ensure that this is the right mission and that our soldiers are instructed to conduct themselves in strict accordance with Canadian and international law."

When faced with continued taunts from the Conservatives, demanding that the NDP state their position on the Afghan War unambiguously, NDP MP Peter Stoffer rose to put any lingering questions about his party's "anti-war" posture to rest: "I want to answer the question the Conservatives have been asking all day. The answer is yes, I support the mission and the troops in Afghanistan and so does my party, but I take great umbrage to the party over there that reflects in its connotations [*sic*] that the NDP does not support our troops because the NDP asks questions."

The NDP's on-again off-again call for the withdrawal of Canadian troops

Just months after this servile display of loyalty to Canadian imperialism, the NDP made an abrupt tactical manoeuvre to capitalise on growing anti-war sentiment among Canadian workers and youth. The offensives undertaken by the CAF in Kandahar province had led to a sharp increase in Canadian casualties and the commission by Canadian troops of atrocities against the civilian population, triggering antiwar protests and a sharp erosion of support for the CAF deployment as measured by the opinion polls.

At its national convention in August 2006, the NDP suddenly issued a call for the withdrawal of the CAF from Kandahar by February 2007, a withdrawal that was to be carried out in an "orderly" manner so as not to harm the prospects of the US-NATO occupation. Revealingly, Layton and company only made this toothless call for the withdrawal of Canadian troops after Canada's Green Party, which the NDP leadership then perceived as a major threat to their electoral ambitions, had issued a similar demand.

After issuing its call for Canadian troops "to come home," the NDP made no attempt to retract or explain its previous support of the war. Instead it couched its new demand as a way to free up Canada's military to intervene in other areas of the world. The CAF mission in Afghanistan, claimed Layton, was "not the right mission for Canada," was "not clearly defined," and lacked an "exit strategy".

At the same time, Layton held the door open for a repackaged, "non-combat" role for the Canadian military in Afghanistan, saying that "we must continue to work multilaterally to get tough on terrorism" and that "issues like combating global poverty, international development assistance, reforming international institutions, peace building and securing human rights are all part of the solution."

The NDP used their call for an orderly end to Canada's leading role in the Afghan War as a political ploy to attract the electoral support of youth and workers who genuinely opposed this outburst of Canadian imperialism. The NDP consistently sought to assure Canada's ruling elite that their "opposition" was only tactical: rather than directly participating in US-led wars of aggression, Canadian imperialism should retain its "peace keeper" image and restrict itself to UN-mandated interventions that did not so flagrantly evoke the widespread hostility to war within the Canadian population. In spite of these assurances, Canada's corporate controlled media and the Conservative minority government reacted furiously to any suggestion of "retreat" from Afghanistan.

In the face of this pro-war consensus in the political establishment, the NDP was at pains to demonstrate that its call for the CAF's withdrawal from Afghanistan was of a hollow and entirely toothless character. During

the October, 2008 election campaign, the NDP joined with the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois in burying the issue of the Afghan War. By its silence, it acquiesced before the Conservative-Liberal bipartisan agreement to keep Canadian troops in Kandahar through the summer of 2011 and chose to ignore the Harper government's often-voiced intention to commit CAF troops to "non-combat" roles in support of the Afghan pacification campaign after that date.

Only weeks after the 2008 election, Layton and his NDP jettisoned outright their reputed opposition to CAF participation in the Afghan counter-insurgency war. In a bid to unseat the minority Conservative government, the NDP entered into a formal coalition agreement with the big business Liberal Party, the initiators of the CAF role in Afghanistan and its escalation with the Kandahar deployment. As part of this coalition agreement, the NDP, with the enthusiastic backing of the Canadian Labour Congress bureaucracy, agreed to implement a right-wing programme, including a quick return to a balanced-budget and the implementation of a Liberal-Conservative plan to cut corporate taxes by \$50 billion over five years. In direct contradiction to the NDP's 2006 call for a Canadian withdrawal from Afghanistan, the coalition agreement further committed the prospective Liberal-NDP government to waging the war in Afghanistan until the completion of Canada's "combat mission" in 2011.

With its Dec. 2008 coalition agreement the NDP gave an object lesson as to its true nature: given the chance to enter into government, the social democrats eagerly abandoned their denunciations of corporate tax cuts and the Afghan war and were otherwise determined to convince Canada's capitalist elite that they could be depended on to uphold its interests domestically and abroad. Nonetheless, Canada's ruling elite spurned the Liberal-NDP coalition and firmly supported Prime Minister Harper as he shut down Parliament through a constitutional coup, depriving opposition MPs of their constitutional right to defeat the government. Recognizing the consensus in the ruling class, the Liberals quickly repudiated their support for the coalition, leaving the NDP to pathetically plead to the Liberals to reconsider.

Obama's "Good War" in Afghanistan and the NATO war on Libya

The NDP did not, however, return to their previous "anti-Afghan War" posture. With the election of Barack Obama, Jack Layton jumped at the chance to offer the NDP's services and support to the new president in developing strategy for the war in Afghanistan.

A key factor in Obama's electoral success had been his appeal to widespread anti-war sentiment in the American working class and among young people. Obama's critique of Bush, however, was that his Republican administration had focused on the "wrong war," diverting precious military resources from the war in Afghanistan to invade Iraq. To win the "good war" in Afghanistan, Obama maintained that the US had to undertake a comprehensive review of its war strategy, with the aim of concentrating and mobilizing greater firepower and pressuring Pakistan to crackdown on insurgents in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas bordering Afghanistan. The outcome of Obama's 60-day "strategic review" of the Afghan war was the decision to implement a "surge" of US troops in a blood-drenched escalation of the counter-insurgency war and to extend the war, now redubbed the AfPak war, into the northern regions of Pakistan through stepped up Predator drone missile strikes and by bullying Pakistan into unleashing its military against the Taliban and its allies.

On the occasion of Obama's first trip to Canada, in February, 2009, Jack Layton issued an open letter to the new president that promoted Obama's "strategic review" and offered the NDP's and Canada's assistance in implementing it. "We [in the NDP], wrote Layton, "support your call for a full strategic review of the mission in Afghanistan and the adoption of a much more comprehensive approach that respects human

rights and places dialogue at the centre of a comprehensive peace process.... Canada can help you in charting a new path in Afghanistan, though not with [additional] combat troops” beyond 2011.

In the ensuing two-and-a-half years, the NDP has maintained and intensified its support for Canadian militarism and imperialism.

As previously noted, in March, the NDP parliamentary caucus unanimously joined with the Conservative government and the other opposition parties in endorsing Canada’s participation in the NATO war against Libya.

Just days later, the social democrats joined with the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois to bring down the Harper minority government, initiating an election campaign in which the NDP, by stressing its commitment to “fiscal responsibility” and moderation sought to convince the capitalist elite that it can be trusted with the reins of power. Like the Liberals and the Bloc, the NDP’s campaign kept a studious silence on the wars in Afghanistan and Libya, thereby underscoring the support for these wars across the official political spectrum.

When the Conservative foreign minister absented himself from an imperialist conclave on Libya, citing the convention that governments should refrain from controversial actions during election campaigns, NDP Foreign Affairs critic Paul Dewar criticized him, saying Canada must play a leading role in Libya.

In fact, with the NDP’s fulsome support, Canada was already playing a leading and utterly reactionary role in NATO’s war on the North African country. This included deploying a naval battleship, seven CF-18 fighters and 500 military personnel to the Libyan war-theatre and providing the general charged with leading the overall NATO mission.

The NDP’s electoral program pledged to maintain the current level of military spending—which, adjusted for inflation, is at its highest level since the end of the Second World War. In this, the NDP were completely indistinguishable from the big business Liberal Party. The only criticism these parties raised was around the Conservative government’s plan to purchase F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter jets from the US, criticising not the level of military spending but merely its allocation

With their accession to the Official Opposition, the NDP leadership has gone into overdrive in its campaign to convince the ruling class that it can supplant the Liberals as its reputedly “left” party of government.

The NDP’s June parliamentary vote to extend the CAF’s role in the war on Libya, the accompanying charade about pressing the government to reaffirm the mission’s “humanitarian” aims, and the attempt to expunge the word “socialism” from the party’s program were all carefully calculated moves to demonstrate the social-democrats’ political pliability and cynicism.

Should the Harper Conservatives founder in the face of the inevitable opposition of the working class to their brutal austerity measures and bellicose foreign policy, the social democrats stand ready to step into the breach and will put their utterly undeserved credentials as opponents of militarism and US aggression and proponents of social justice at the service of the bourgeoisie.

As this review of the NDP’s attitude toward Canadian imperialism’s military interventions over the past twelve years has shown, this party is completely beholden to the bourgeoisie. It has repeatedly acted as a support and facilitator of Canada’s participation in imperialist wars and regime change. Whenever a consensus has emerged within the Canadian ruling class to deploy the CAF overseas, the NDP has given its support, repeating and frequently amplifying the various “humanitarian” and “democratic” arguments used to bamboozle the population into supporting the bloody overthrow of regimes considered an obstacle to the interests of the western powers and the grabbing of resources and geo-strategic positions.

In the case of the US-NATO wars on Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, the NDP later responded to the growth of anti-war sentiment by claiming to

oppose Canada continuing to play a leading role in the wars’ prosecution. But this “opposition” was utterly disingenuous. Thus the NDP called for the withdrawal of all “combat troops” from Afghanistan in a manner that would not endanger the occupation, tied its call for the troops to come home to demands for Canada to otherwise help prop up the US-installed Karzai regime, and later signed on to participate in a coalition government committed to waging counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan for another two-and-a-half years.

To oppose the increasingly rapacious and bellicose Canadian bourgeoisie, the working class must build a genuine socialist-internationalist party in opposition to the social-democrats of the NDP and to all those who seek to dress this hand-maiden of Canadian imperialism in left and progressive colors.

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