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# THE NDP-LIBERAL DEAL IS A GIFT TO THE HARD RIGHT

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The recent pact between Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) and Liberal Party, whereby the NDP has [pledged to prop up the Liberals in office for three years](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/liberal-ndp-accord-confidence-supply-agreement-1.6397985) (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/liberal-ndp-accord-confidence-supply-agreement-1.6397985>), is a disaster for "official politics" in this country: the political possibilities that are treated as legitimate by the mainstream media and the major political parties, and so by most people most of the time. Left critics [like Nora Loreto](https://readpassage.com/rest-in-peace-ndp-1961-2022/) (<https://readpassage.com/rest-in-peace-ndp-1961-2022/>) are correct that the NDP has tied its hands with this deal; once signed, the party brass will be determined to stick with it. [Such critics](https://breachmedia.ca/the-ndp-is-run-by-a-consultant-class-g geared-toward-capitulation/) (<https://breachmedia.ca/the-ndp-is-run-by-a-consultant-class-g geared-toward-capitulation/>) are also on point when they argue that the agreement's proposed reforms are small; that accepting means-testing for dental care, as the deal does, is a blow to the cause of universal social programs; and that it's wrong for the NDP to effectively commit to vote for higher military spending and other regressive measures in future budgets. Yet worst of all, perhaps, is how the pact will further winnow the Anglo-Canadian parliamentary field into two blocs: the "liberal establishment" defined by the Liberals, with the NDP as their junior partner and the Greens on the fringe, and the "conservative opposition" made up of the Conservatives and the People's Party.

The very existence of the NDP, anchored in the desire of most of the union officialdom for a "political arm" to complement the "economic arm" of unions' collective bargaining efforts, has long meant there's been some space in official politics for ideas to the left of the Liberals'. This has been true *in spite of* the pro-capitalist politics of the NDP leadership. The party's brass has never imagined social change beyond an expanded welfare state and some publicly owned enterprises in a society that remains capitalist; today it [accepts neoliberal capitalism](http://newsocialist.org/reflections-on-the-ndp-at-50/) (<http://newsocialist.org/reflections-on-the-ndp-at-50/>) as the unchallengeable framework within which to seek minor reforms. But NDP supporters have often argued that their party is needed because the Liberals are, like the Tories, a party of Bay Street. Some make the case that workers need a party of our own, independent of the parties of employers, much as workers need unions because our interests are different from those of bosses. This was the point of [the famous "Mouseland" allegory](https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-story-of-mouseland-a-political-allegory) (<https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/the-story-of-mouseland-a-political-allegory>) shared by Tommy Douglas, the NDP's first leader, a tale of a town of mice who kept electing cats to govern them.

From a socialist perspective that sees the struggles of working-class people, manifested through social movements, as the key to changing society, that social democratic vision is lacking in lots of ways – above all, in how it treats elections and the "proper channels" of capitalist democracy as primary means of working for change, and tacitly or explicitly endorses capitalism as the way

to organize society. Nevertheless, the existence of the NDP as a self-described alternative to the parties of business has preserved a faint element of class antagonism – us vs. them – within official politics. This has long been valuable for people whose politics are to the left of the NDP’s, whether we’ve realized it or not.

The more the NDP subordinates itself to the Liberals in office, as it does with the new so-called [confidence-and-supply agreement](https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2015226947988) (<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2015226947988>), the more it encourages millions of working-class people to think about politics in terms of that “liberal establishment” vs. “conservative opposition” binary – a far cry from “the two parties of Bay Street” vs. “the party of ordinary people.” Since both the Liberals and Conservatives are parties of the capitalist ruling class, what the NDP is doing will make it still more difficult for independent working-class political ideas in so-called Canada to have influence at the level of mass politics, where the radical left today has virtually no impact whatsoever. The NDP is unlikely to become an acceptable alternative governing party in the eyes of the ruling class, which currently has no need for another one. Chasing that dream at the price of political independence is a dead end for the NDP and a problem for radicals.

To see what’s wrong with defining the political terrain in terms of “liberal establishment” vs. “conservative opposition,” we have only to look south of the Canada-US border, where two right-wing parties brand themselves in those terms and have a death grip on official politics. Wherever liberals administer a system that makes the lives of many working-class people worse and there’s no visible opposition from the left, more of the people who are suffering end up accepting the poisonous ideas of the lib-bashing right, as a way of explaining their pain and lashing out against its perceived causes. By pledging to support the Trudeau government, the NDP isn’t helping just the Liberals. It’s possible that the deal’s biggest winners, in time, will be forces further to the right.



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