

In the Wake of the Elections: Canada Turns Hard Right

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Region: [Canada](#)

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On May 02, 2011, Canadian electors voted in a majority government for the former minority government of Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party. The Conservatives won 157 out of 308 possible seats, although statistically, because of Canada's "first past the post" system of electing representatives, they did not receive a majority of the "popular" vote. With a voter turnout of 60- per cent, and the popular vote of 40 per cent for the Conservatives, only 24 per cent of Canadians elected the new government.

The main issue turned out to be "stability" - not economic stability, not world stability, not peaceful stability, but stability in that Canadians did not want to have another election for as long as the mandate lasted, which in Canada is four years. Canadians as such are all for democracy if they do not have to bother with it.

The opposition for the first time ever is the New Democratic Party, a left wing party that made huge gains in the province of Quebec and smaller gains in other areas. And for the first time ever, the Green party leader, Elizabeth May, was elected in her riding, a singular counterpoint to what will become the Conservative government's ignoring issues concerning the environment.

Policies

There are significant differences in domestic policy that do not have an impact on the rest of the world. The main thrust is similar to the U.S. policies of less government, more privatization of health care and education (mainly under provincial control, but funded in part by the federal government.)

Canada's foreign policy will be affected, as the Conservatives will now turn hard to the right and follow if not increase the rhetoric and actions used by the U.S. in its foreign policy. Canada has generally followed the U.S. lead with some minor diversionary arguments to help Canadians feel that they are an independent country. However, most of Canada's economy is tied to the U.S. economy, and most of its foreign policy reflects that of the U.S.

Environment

Canada advertises itself as a green country, the great outdoors to come and explore, with vast regions of wilderness and adventure. On environmental issues the government is

distinctly on the side of the large corporations, meaning there may be some lip service paid to the environment, but the real thrust will be towards resource extraction for other countries and corporations profit and benefit. The Harper Conservatives have argued that they are “aligning” our policies with those of the U.S., essentially meaning that any current environmental laws will tend to be ignored, removed, or watered down.

The Alberta tar sands are the biggest most obvious issue. Requiring huge amounts of water and other energy (natural gas) in order to extract the oil residues, the tar sands have become the oil corporations best ‘safe’ reserves. After the lengthy sand scrubbing process, much of the tar sands by-products are then transported to the U.S. after being reconstituted into a form of crude. Under the NAFTA agreement (free trade between Mexico, the U.S. and Canada) the U.S. government has first rights to the oil before Canada gets any remaining share under circumstances of oil shortages. Mexico at least was smart enough to protect its oil resources.

Foreign policy militarization

Foreign policy for Canada, as witnessed by the tar sands and NAFTA, is very much in line with U.S. foreign policy. In the first part of the Twentieth Century, Canada followed Great Britain’s global imperial lead, following on their imperial history of creating Canada to protect its own interests at the expense of the French, the nascent U.S. empire, and of course the indigenous population of Canada. As the U.S. became Canada’s lead trading partner and the global imperial leader, Canada followed, often projecting an image of the peaceable kingdom, but more frequently acting in full support of U.S. initiatives. (see Yves Engler, *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy*, Fernwood/RED Publishing, 2009)

Currently Canada’s military supports U.S. actions in the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan, Haiti, more recently in Libya, and in Palestine/Israel. The Harper government is intent on purchasing sixty five of the Lockheed Martin F-35 joint strike fighter plane. Canada has no need of this plane unless it intends to support U.S. actions overseas, as there is nobody in the world capable of attacking Canada in a manner requiring Canada’s use of the F-35. Its main beneficiary, apart from the support given to U.S. foreign policy actions, is to the corporate businesses that make the fighter. Many Canadian companies are complicit with U.S. companies in the manufacture of armaments and technological items used for warfare. These companies will benefit financially from the government largesse in purchasing these weapons.

The price is huge, especially when considered against the squabbling about the mere hundreds of millions of dollars accounted for health care and education. The original sticker price of \$75 million per plane is indicated to really be much greater, as “Kevin Page, the parliamentary budget officer...estimated in March that the sticker price for the radar-evading plane would be more like \$148 million apiece.” To maintain the planes, a “new Pentagon report suggests Canada could pay up to \$24 billion over 30 years to maintain 65 planes.” (CBC.ca, April 26, 2011). The total cost - and these costs as witnessed by U.S. experience always tend to increase even more significantly than projected - of \$33 billion is a wonder when the government is calling for fiscal restraint.

What it really amounts to is the slow militarization of the Canadian economy in line with the U.S. economy, as that is where the major manufacturing profits are made in this era of

market financialization. It also suits Harper's agenda of creating "courageous warriors" for projecting Canada's power on the international scene.

Palestine/Israel

That power is fully aligned with U.S. power and initiatives. Canada has always supported Israel in its fight against the Palestinians, even more so at times than the U.S. government. Canada was the first, before the U.S., to denounce the democratic election of Hamas in Palestinian elections in 2006. Canadian ignorance refuses to recognize that by drawing the extremists into power, there is a necessity to moderate and accommodate policies in order to both retain power and to provide services for the citizens. This has been well evidenced by situations in Ireland, and South Africa as the best examples, but also is show with the rise of Hezbollah in Lebanon, who have never attacked another country.

The Canadian government creates the same fear of terrorism as the U.S. The Palestinians are considered intruders into their own land, while the Israeli's are granted their supposed god-given right to inhabit the land regardless of who resided there most recently and over a long historical period. Canada supports the Israeli line of "we are the victims" while the Palestinians are the 'perpetrators' of all the violence.

The world can expect, now that the government has a majority, more policies that support both U.S. and Israeli initiatives around the world, economically and militarily - recognizing that the two are well entwined. They may not be broadcast as such, but worded in more carefully phrased rhetoric or rhetoric disguised in a similar manner as the U.S. freedom and democracy agendas are phrased in the U.S.

Concluding Remarks

Generally, the trend for Canadian foreign policy will be a strengthening of its supposedly independent hard line approach to 'terror' in support of U.S. policies. Canada is not strictly a sycophantic follower of the U.S. as it inherited a great deal of its underlying ethos from the British imperial system. Canadians pretend to be much more worldly and compassionate, but with the Conservatives receiving only 24 per cent of the actual voting populations support, what is really reflected is a comfortable complacency with the status quo combined with an underlying wilful ignorance of some of the main global problems of today.

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