

“Party of One, Stephen Harper and Canada’s Radical Makeover”

Review of Michael Harris' Book

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Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [History](#)

This work, Party of One, should be the political work of the year, and perhaps should stand as the best for this century. It is one of the most powerful books I have read and it should be read by everyone. Anyone entertaining the idea of argument with Harris’ solid base of research (through documents and personal interviews) will need to stifle all independent thought and critical analysis abilities. Such however are the very abilities of the Conservative caucus in face of their dear one and only leader, Stephen Harper.

The first two chapters, “Sign of the Times” and “The Genesis of Steve”, provide a concise outline of Harper’s political routes (For more depth on this see also: Harperland – The Politics of Control. Lawrence Martin. Penguin, Toronto, 2011. – itself nominated as Finalist for Best Political Book of the Last 25 Years).

There are two main takeaways from these chapters. The first is the obvious, his absolute desire to control all aspects about himself and his goals, to demand full obedience from all his minions and appointees. The second aspect concerns his relationship with the Republican party and Republican elements of the U.S. political and business landscape. These ties were used to help boost Harper into power and to help maintain his control over the centre of power in Ottawa. It is perhaps treasonous in the dictionary sense of “breach of faith, disloyalty” or “to make war in order to change a policy rule” but unfortunately it does not fit within Canada’s criminal code definition of treason being generally harm against the Queen.

The most powerful personage presented here is the Republican Arthur Finkelstein, the “most sought after neoconservative political strategist in the world.” He has worked to unseat opponents with the “strategic use of attack ads” in which “issues don’t matter...perception is reality” and “fear is a political super weapon.” These attributes are supported by the perception that people today are “not wired in, but wired out...knowing more and more about less and less.” Harper has adopted these methods and the truth of the latter statement is unfortunately true for the rather general apathy and ignorance of Canadians.

Finkelstein helped elect Netanyahu and Lieberman in Israel, has worked with the big names of the Moral Majority in the U.S., alongside Dick Cheney, the Koch brothers, and Mitt Romney among others. The work of the neocons is supported by the National Citizens Coalition, a group that Harper has historically strong ties with, a group that is “anti public health insurance, anti-union, anti Wheat Board, and pro-corporate governance and control.”

In sum, Harper is a dictatorial ruler of Canada operating a Republican neocon style of

government.

This “incremental” coup d’etat is described over the events of the subsequent chapters. Harris discusses the robo-call scandal, the in-out money laundering affair, the Unfair Election Act, Kevin Page and the F-335 debacle, the elimination of scientific discussion and dissent within the federal bureaucracy. He continues with “Farewell Diplomacy” a critique of the change from friendly global citizen to one in which the economy rules all, creating a “nasty new world of Canadian foreign policy,” another area in which “Evidence never had much weight with the Prime Minister.” The chapter “Bad Boys” discusses four personnel assignments that created problems: Nathan Jacobson, Dr. Arthur Porter, Chuck Strahl, and Bruce Carson. All demonstrated that “Harper talks tough on crime everywhere but in his own office.”

The chapter “Forked Tongue” spoke about the racist colonial mindset that still pervades government, and this one in particular, concerning First Nations. While “The Harper government has bent over backwards to accommodate Big Oil” the First Nations have always known that “standing between a white man and his money has always been a dangerous place to be.” Being “stewards” of the land is “integral to their identity” and many court decisions, mostly generated in B.C. (as land title is unextinguished and exists in most of the province without any treaties signed) have placed road-blocks in the way of Big Oil and Harper’s dictatorial commands.

The Tribal Council (Carrier Sekani) reminded everyone, “The original practice of colonization was to isolate us on reserves in order for the Crown to extract resources. The new version of colonization is to change laws without consulting us in order to extract our resources.”

The next four chapters concern the Senate-Duffy-Wallen-Brazeau-Wright affair. The chapter “Wrecking Ball” provides a revealing back story on Nigel Wright who does not come out to be nearly as “ethical” as some say he is. His financial and corporate connections lead to great concerns about highly probable conflicts of interest as he moved “from the largest private corporation in Canada to the most influential position in the country next to the prime minister.”

Preston Manning was interviewed for the book, and I almost began to like the guy as much as I disagree with his right wing policies. He seems to sincerely believe in the openness, accountability, and transparency that Stephen talks about but blocks as much as possible, saying “Stephen doesn’t think words mean much,” and “I think Canada’s influence internationally has been diminished with Stephen’s approach.”

One of the final chapters, “On the Brink”, discusses the manipulations and muzzling that Harper applied to several well respected senior bureaucrats in Ottawa, Sheila Fraser, Peter Milliken, and Robert Marleau. They provide some very powerful comments on their views of the government.

Sheila Fraser:

...the authoritarian reflex of the Harper government was as unmistakable as the deliberate suppression of public information. “Parliament has become so undermined it is almost unable to do the what people expect of it.”

Peter Milliken:

Parliament can hardly be weakened any more than it already is. Harper can't go much farther without making the institution dysfunctional. He is trying to control every aspect of House business. In fact, it will have to be returned to its former state by someone if we are to have a democracy.

Robert Marleau:

Canadians are sleepwalking through dramatic, social, economic, and political changes surreptitiously being implemented by a government abusing omnibus bills and stifling public and parliamentary debate....Having attained absolute power, he has absolutely abused that power to the maximum.

The second to last chapter is very interesting, coming as this reading occurs after the military hype following the murder of two Canadian servicemen in Canada. Harper has done his utmost to play up the military aspect, appearing to support and glorify Canada's new combatative role around the world. In "Delay, Deny, and Die" Harris examines the manner in which the federal government, after looking for all the glory, essentially casts aside the veterans to fend for themselves. I do not support Canada's military roles, but I do support the idea that if someone volunteers to fight for Canada, misguided as that is, they deserve to receive the pensions they are due and lifetime support if disabled physically and/or through PTSD.

It comes down to the Harper neoConservatives and their intense mismanagement of budgetary matters. More soldiers have died from suicide recently than died in the years that other lives were wasted in Afghanistan (now 70 per cent controlled by the Taliban). Canada led the attack on Libya, with a subsequent military celebration in the now derided Senate, while Libya is wracked with violence between various militant groups. Canada spends more money on celebrating different wars than they do on assisting the veterans who have fought in them. "The party that had courted, lionized, and used the military now turned its back on them when priorities changed."

The last chapter highlights a Canadian icon, a war veteran from the Second World War who fought through some of the bloodiest campaigns in Italy. Farley Mowat, a prolific Canadian writer, generally known through his works on Canadian history and for his writings and advocacy for environmental protections, said,

"Stalin had small balls compared to this guy. Harper is probably the most dangerous human being ever elevated to power in Canada. How the population has acquiesced in following this son of a bitch, and to let him take over their lives, I'll never know. You have to create warrior nations, they are not born. They have to be made. It is the preliminary step of a tyrant. And this son of a bitch incited Canada into becoming a warrior nation."

It is unfortunate that the majority of Canadians are apathetic, they want democracy but not necessarily if they have to get out and think and act within it. As Arthur Finkelstein indicated, the Canadian public, through this apathy and ignorance are readily manipulated, "perception is reality...issues don't matter," and "fear is a political super weapon." It works

in Canada. And Stephen Harper is taking advantage of it to create a right wing neocon dictatorial militarized state with “one point” control – himself.

Party of One is a necessary read for all interested in political affairs in Canada and its relationship with the world around it. It is powerfully written and gives much information and supporting detail to support the idea that Canada has already suffered a radical makeover under his regime.

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