

# The Danger of a Reform-Conservative Majority Government in Canada.

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“We respectfully point out that the opposition parties, who together constitute a majority in the House, have been in close consultation.” Letter sent to the Governor-General and signed by Stephen Harper on September 9, 2004

“If Canadians do not vote for a majority [reform-conservative coalition] government, Michael Ignatieff will form a coalition [government] with the Bloc and the NDP.” Stephen Harper on Sunday, March 27, 2011

“There have always been two Harpers. ...The real Harper always comes out when he thinks he can't be heard.” Michael Ignatieff, liberal Leader

“As long as they work, parties will use [political attack ads], the only difference today being that the Harper party deploys more of them than any party in Canadian history.” [Jeffrey Simpson](#), Globe & Mail national affairs columnist, March 11, 2011

“You know, there's two schools in economics on this. One is that there are some good taxes and the other is that no taxes are good taxes. I'm in the latter category. I don't believe that any taxes are good taxes.” Stephen Harper, Canadian Prime Minister (July 10, 2009)

“I think all Canadians have to recognize that we have the smallest man on the world stage that it's possible to imagine, and that's Stephen Harper.” Bob Rae, Liberal foreign affairs critic (July 10, 2009)

## I- A Majority Harper Government?

There will a general election in Canada [on Monday, May 2, 2011. After a little more than five years (since February 2006) of a disastrous Harper-Reform-Conservative coalition minority government that was finally defeated on a motion of contempt of Parliament, the overriding central issue during this election is whether Canadians really want to elect a Harper-Reform-Conservative majority government.

Because of a weak and divided opposition and an obsolete electoral system, that may be the outcome of the coming election if Canadians do not wake up and consider the danger that would represent five years of a Harper-Reform-Conservative coalition majority government.

This blog will analyze the damage done by Harper's Reform-Conservative coalition and will

conclude on practical means for avoiding a repetition of previous elections when the democratic wish of the majority of Canadians was denied by abstentionism and by vote splitting among candidates, thus contributing *de facto* to electing Reform-Conservative candidates with a minority of votes.

## **II- Harper's Cynicism and his Politics of Fear**

Politics is a fertile land for hypocrites, where politicians may say one thing and do the contrary. This is especially true when a politician says something while in the opposition but sings another tune when he is in power.

On that score, Canadians have witnessed a lot of political hypocrisy recently. And Canadian politician Stephen Harper, head of a Reform-Conservative minority government in Canada for the last five years and an Evangelical Christian of the fundamentalist variety, has certainly shown a strong penchant for cynicism and hypocrisy.

For instance, when in the opposition, he was in favor of an open and accountable government; once in power, however, he ran one of the most secretive governments in Canadian history. Case in point, the Harper minority government has even gone as far as refusing to divulge to Parliament the cost of Canada's involvements in Afghanistan, pretending that it is a "state secret"!

On the whole, Harper and his reform-conservative coalition have been running a minority government in Canada with slightly more than one third of public support, but they did it as *if* they had a majority government and as *if* they had a democratic mandate to do so.

*[Harper's Reform-Conservative coalition obtained 37.6% of the votes in the 2008 election and led a minority government with 143 seats out of 308. The other political parties represent 62.35% of Canadians and hold 163 seats.]* —If there has ever been a denial of democracy, that's it.

In reality, close to two-thirds of Canadians disapproved of Harper's far-right extremist policies. But because of the splitting of votes among five different political parties, Harper and his rightist coalition have been able to form a minority government and govern nearly at will, essentially by pitting one opposition party against another. Harper's party has benefited greatly politically from the fact that his opposition is divided and from the fact that the current liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, [ seems unable to articulate a coherent political message and, according to polls, is dead in the water. His opponents seem to have succeeded in framing him as an inexperienced, aloof and disconnected leader.

## **III- The Bogus Issue of Majority Rule through a Coalition**

Stephen Harper, who is himself head of a Western-based Reform-Conservative coalition, has attacked his adversaries and accused them of hoping to form a coalition government along the lines of those presently in power in Great Britain and Germany, and in a host of other democratic countries (France, Australia, India, Israel, Italy, etc).

Besides the fact that there is nothing wrong or illegitimate with a coalition of elected political parties in a representative parliamentary democracy—quite the contrary—the outrage comes from the fact that Harper has ruled the country for five years with the support of a minority of voters and that he himself contemplated forming a coalition with

other parties when he was in the opposition in 2004, after having merged his own Alliance party (formally the Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance) with the Progressive Conservative Party in 2003. *(See the above quote.)*

But today, Harper's strategy is tainted with hypocrisy and exploits the politics of fear.

As Harper tries to present it, a government formed by excluding the party winning the largest number of seats, without gaining a majority, is anti democratic. —This is a complete fallacy. In saying so, he is trying to create confusion in the minds of voters and scare them into supporting his own coalition party, while demonizing the other political parties in the most undemocratic way, and all the while ignoring fundamental issues and problems.—This is shameful.

I happen to believe that the liberals and their current leader, Michael Ignatieff, a Harvard professor for thirty years, should logically imitate the Reform-Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties that merged and united the Canadian right. (Note that S. Harper dropped the word "progressive" from the new Conservative party!) At the very least, they should aim at not splitting the center-left vote between the Liberals, the New Democrats and the Green Party.

Structurally, the Liberal Party and the NDP (New Democratic Party) should probably also formally merge in order to present a more credible progressive alternative to Harper's rightist coalition. But Ignatieff's political inexperience recently showed when he fell head first into Harper's astute trap by ruling out in advance any coalition with other duly elected parties, even if only circumstantial. —Let's call it what it is: Ideological purity but political stupidity.

Ignatieff is not in power and could likely never be, unless he can stop Harper from bullying him, defaming him and framing the issues. For instance, he should have told Stephen Harper that it is not up to him to decide who among the elected parties is to form the Canadian government, but to the Canadian electorate. Unfortunately instead, he caved in to Harper.

He should also have taken the initiative in proposing to hold a referendum about adopting a system of proportional representation for Canada, in order to avoid the scandalously undemocratic outcome when a party with 30 percent of popular support ends up as the governing party for 100 percent of the population. That's the dictatorship of the minority; that's not a true democracy.

But let's move on and let's cast our sight on what the Canadian government under Stephen Harper has done.

#### **IV- A Denial of Democracy**

Domestically, the Harper reform-conservative coalition minority government has eroded democracy in numerous ways: It has been formally accused and has been found in contempt of Parliament. This is the first time in Canadian history that a minority government has been found in contempt of Parliament.

Moreover, this was not the first time that Harper has shown his disdain for democracy. In 2008, Harper went so far as having the Canadian Parliament prorogued in order to avoid a

vote of non-confidence that would have paved the way for the Liberal party and the NDP to form a new government with the support of a majority of the House of Commons. Such a unilateral prorogation of Parliament had never been done during peace time (it was done only once before, in 1917, during World War I) and represents a very unhealthy precedent.

Domestically also, while pretending to be against crime, the Harper coalition minority government has done its utmost to make the ownership of dangerous firearms as widespread as possible, even in large urban areas. The Harper coalition is against gun control of any sort, just like their far-right counterparts to the South. This may bring comfort to some of its rural supporters, but it is a tragedy for people living in large urban areas whose life is threatened daily by the easy availability of guns.

## **V- Harper has Turned Canada into a Client State of the USA**

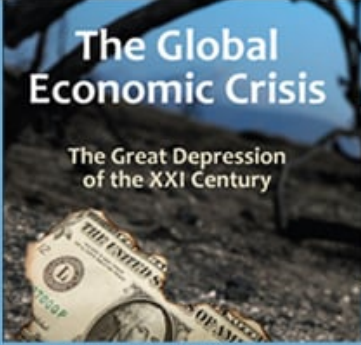
On the international scene, nobody can deny that Harper, an avid admirer of American politician George W. Bush and a far out conservative, has done more than any other Canadian politician to destroy Canada's independent and peace-maker image around the world, while presenting Canada as a full-fledged **American colony**. Harper has also adopted a rigid support of the state of Israel, no matter the political cost to Canada, placing his own extremist religious ideology ahead of Canada's interests and the wishes of a majority of Canadians.

The consequences are all there to be observed: On October 12, 2010, for the first time ever, all Canadians were deeply humiliated when Canada lost a vote to become a member of the United Nations **Security Council**. Many countries, it seems, did not want the United States—which already has one of the five current vetoes at the Security Council—to have two automatic votes in this body. Canada has lost its international identity.

## **VI- Harper has Introduced Negative Campaigning and Attack Ads into Canadian Politics**

Politically, Harper and his far-right coalition have sent Canadian politics into the gutter, by relying massively on negative campaigning rather than on raising issues and on persuading voters of the merits of their proposals, and by importing into Canada the despicable American practice of negative attack ads and of "*ad hominem*" attacks designed to assassinate the character of their political opponents. In a fascist and demagogic McCarthy-style way, Harper has stooped so low as to question Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff's patriotism.

Attack ads are certainly one of the main reasons why voter turnout in Canada on election day has gone from 61% in 2000, which was a record low, to an even lower 59% in 2008, reflecting the disgust and apathy of an increasing number of Canadians toward elections and politicians.



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VII- Harper has Accelerated the Sell-Out of Canadian Companies and Placed Canada’s sovereignty at risk

Regarding the economy, it is recognized that Canada has greatly benefited from the current commodity price boom because of its oil and natural resources. As a consequence, and because of the U.S. Fed’s policy of devaluing the U.S. dollar as well as other factors, the Canadian dollar [is presently at a 30-year high. This is good news for Canadian importers and consumers, but a mixed blessing for exporters.

While Canada is faring better economically than the United States, in great part because the structure and regulation of the Canadian banking system did not permit the type of speculative excesses that the U.S. allowed, the economic recession has been milder in Canada than in the United States. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate in the largest manufacturing province, Ontario, is still at 8.0%, which is above the national average of 7.8%. But since mid-2009, employment has been increasing in Canada, a factor that plays in favor of Harper’s Conservatives through no merit of their own.

Nevertheless, Canadians have to be worried for some questionable economic policies that the Harper’s minority government has pursued and which have the potential to create problems down the road.

–A glaring example is the cavalier attitude adopted by the Harper minority government toward the foreign control of Canadian natural resources companies to foreign interests.

Already two-thirds of the Canadian mining industry is under foreign control. Under Harper’s Reform-Conservative coalition minority government, this trend has continued and has even accelerated. His minority government has adopted a policy of rubber-stamping the foreign takeover of some of the most basic Canadian resource industries.

As a consequence, here is a very partial list of large Canadian companies that Canadians cannot invest in because their control has moved abroad: Alcan, Stelco, Dofasco, Inco, Falconbridge, Nortel, Hudson’s Bay Company, Molson... even the Montreal Canadiens. Renters in their own home, that’s what Canadians are becoming under the misguided policies of Harper & Co who do not have the A-B-C of an industrial strategy for Canada.

And when the Harper government intervened, such as in the case of the impending foreign takeover of Saskatchewan-based Potash Corp., [<http://www.economist.com/node/17421347>] it was not as a matter of conviction and policy, but only because the Premier of Saskatchewan Brad Wall threatened Harper, a Saskatchewan MP, with the political fight of his life if he did not block the foreign takeover.



[But](#) make no mistake about it; the Harper Reform-Conservative party has on its agenda to allow the sale of Canadian cultural industries, including Canadian communications and media companies, to foreign interests. This could include public and private cultural and communications industries such as the CBC, the National Arts Center, Bell Canada, etc., even though such a policy is overwhelmingly opposed by the Canadian people who believe cultural industries and communications industries are too important to Canada's national security and cultural sovereignty to be under foreign control.

Case in point: All Conservative MPs voted against a motion in the House of Commons on May 30, 2006, calling for the retention of current restrictions on foreign ownership in the cultural sector. Imagine what they would do if they were in charge of a majority government! They are firm believers in the god-market and for them, the cultural identity of a nation simply does not matter.

-Another example is the Harper government's fiscal policy that has been anything but conservative and prudent. Indeed, after eleven years of previous liberal balanced budgets, the Harper minority Conservative government has been the biggest deficit spender in Canadian history. Since taking office in 2006, it has piled up yearly deficits equal to \$122.3 billion in five years, with the result that this has inflated the size of the federal government debt by some 26 percent.

One main reason for this fresh public borrowing was the need to finance a huge expansion in defense spending. Canadian military spending is now higher than it was during the Cold War or at any time since the end of the Second World War. The fact that Canada is spending more on military gear and less on diplomacy is a bad omen for the country's future and the future of the Planet.

The Harper minority Government's recently announced plan to purchase a fleet of new F35 fighter jets, a type that cannot be used for defense but rather for military missions abroad, is indicative of the type of role it wants Canada to play in the world. That expenditure alone will cost about \$29 billion, almost double what the government had initially accounted for, and is another sign that this trend to channel public spending toward the military will continue under a future Harper government, along with the possible neglect of such basic social needs as health and education.

### **VIII- Other Dubious Harper Policies**

Harper's conservatives can be justly criticized for a host of other dubious policies that would be too long to elaborate. Let us mention just a few:

-Harper's pettiness and irresponsibility were amply demonstrated when his government gutted the mandatory long census form for political and crassly partisan reasons, against the official protestations of Statistics Canada, most Canadian demographic and social researchers, and people from a wide range of sectors. Harper gave the impression that one does not need essential demographic information to govern.

-The Harper minority government has dragged its feet in the fight against global warming and against the degradation of the environment. In fact, it has positioned Canada as a fierce opponent of extending the greenhouse-gas reduction Kyoto treaty, thus undermining further Canada's reputation around the world. Canada ratified the Kyoto protocol in 2002, when Jean Chrétien's Liberals were in power. This is no longer the type of leadership that Harper

wants Canada to play around the world. It's no wonder that Canada was unsuccessful in getting enough support to win a seat at the United Nations Security Council. <http://one-blue-marble.com/canada-and-climate-change.html>

-Stephen Harper also has a very poor record on women's rights. In 2006, soon after taking office, Stephen Harper broke a promise he had made during the 2006 election campaign to "take concrete and immediate measures... to ensure that Canada fully upholds its commitments to women." Instead, Harper quickly removed 'the pursuit of equality' from the mandate of Status of Women Canada (SWC) and made it sure that SWC could no longer fund any organization that did research, advocacy or lobbying to promote women's equality. So much for protecting women's rights.

## **IX- A Far-Right Agenda**

Let me say that when politician Stephen Harper professes that no taxation is legitimate in a democracy (see his July 10, 2009 quote above), he reveals how much he is a tea-party extremist. Only libertarian extremists and full-fledged anarchists believe that all taxes are bad and that a civilized society can get along without them.

Stephen Harper has amply demonstrated that he is a dangerous far-right ideologue, probably the most right-wing prime minister that Canada has ever had. Luckily, so far his right wing coalition has never gotten a majority of seats; but if he were to gain a majority, his campaign to destroy Canada by implementing his extreme political agenda would take a new twist and Canadians may live to rue that day.

## **IX- A Practical Conclusion**

What does all this mean in practice?

It means that in a political system that does not have a proportional representation feature, such as the Canadian electoral system, a vote cast for a 3rd or 4th party candidate who has no chance of being elected is *de facto* a vote for the Harper-Reform-Conservative candidate. Such a vote indirectly can contribute a lot toward the election of a majority Harper-Reform-Conservative government.

In other words, when people abstain from voting or when they give their support to a candidate who has no hope of winning, they end up, whether they like it or not, contributing to electing the candidate, the party and the leader who may possibly be the most inimical to their interests and values.

The conclusion for this election seems clear: In many closely contested ridings, especially in British Columbia and in Ontario, the motto should be: "No Majority Victory for Harper and his Right-Wing Cohort".

Every Canadian voter opposed to a majority Harper government should seriously consider voting his overall interests and values, even if that means not voting for his preferred candidate, but rather voting for the candidate who has the best chances of defeating Harper's candidate.

If not, you may wake up on May 3rd with a Harper-Reform-Conservative majority government that will impose on you their rigid far-right political agenda, even with a

minority of votes. —Think about it.

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The book “The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles”, by Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay, prefaced by Dr. Paul Kurtz, is now available from Prometheus Books.

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