

Election 2006 blog written by Maude Barlow for Macleans online
(www.macleans.ca)

January 24, 2006

Governing The Unconverted

Across the country last night, Canadians who have been fighting for national social programs, day care, women's and worker's rights, equality for gays and lesbians, public education, medicare, aboriginal justice, environmental stewardship and Canadian sovereignty breathed a sigh of relief. The threat of a Harper majority, so close just a week ago, disappeared and the Conservatives barely made minority status.

It is true that Canadians wanted change. In their wisdom, however, their bedrock values would not let them elect a Conservative majority. Instead, they elected a Parliament with a renewed NDP, and many progressive Bloc candidates. As well, they refused to decimate the Liberals. In fact, votes for candidates supporting centre-left policies far outweighed votes for those who espouse the right-wing agenda of the Harper Conservatives. The intervention of many progressive civil society groups in the last weeks of the campaign helped to turn the tide when they exposed Stephen Harper's record and core beliefs and showed him to be the staunchest right-wing ideologue ever to seek the office of Prime Minister in this country.

Harper will not have an easy time of it now. His caucus includes former Mike Harris cabinet members Jim Flaherty and Tony Clement, architects of the infamously unpopular "Common Sense Revolution" who will want to replicate that draconian plan at the national level. It includes radical social conservatives such as Cheryl Gallant and evangelical conservatives such as David Sweet and Stockwell Day. Harper is in debt to social conservative and Christian groups who expect a free vote on abortion and same sex marriage. He is welcomed by the American right wing and the Bush Administration who anticipate a new and closer relationship and expect a reversal of Canada's position on Ballistic Missile Defence. He will face provinces who will not be happy to lose the billions promised for new day care spaces and a First Nations community unhappy with promises to break the accord on housing and education signed merely weeks ago. With a majority government, Harper could have ploughed ahead on some or all of these fronts. But where will he turn for support to implement an agenda Canadians don't really want?

We're likely to find ourselves back to the polls in the next 18 months. Much can happen in that time. We in the civil society movement will be watching closely at any attempts to dismantle vital social programs such as public health care; rip up environmental treaties such as the Kyoto accord; cut funding and support to the arts and the CBC; sell off Canada's fresh water; enter the weaponization of space by buying into Bush's Ballistic Missile Defence plan; and moves to become even closer to Bush's military and security agenda and his war on terror.

We will also be watching the Liberal party and its search for a new leader. After all, it is under the Liberals that Canada has agreed to continental harmonization and the creation of a "Fortress North America." Will the Liberals choose a right-winger such as John Manley or Frank McKenna, both supporters of deeper integration with the United States? Or will the Liberal party undertake the soul-searching it needs and help build a real opposition inside Parliament to the Harper agenda?

In the end, the weakness of the Conservative minority may help the NDP and other progressives in Parliament to wrest some short-term concessions from Stephen Harper. But given his own predilections and the expectations of him from so many right wing groups, it will require a much stronger voice from progressive Canadians outside Parliament as well as those inside to bring any sense of the real public interest to a Prime Minister and a party that have shown little evidence they deserve the trust of Canadians.

The moment is ripe for renewed cooperation of progressive forces inside and outside Parliament to protect decades of social progress. There is not a moment to lose.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 3:55:35 PM January 24, 2006

January 21, 2006

Harper and the US Extreme Right

Today in the Globe and Mail, a number of organizations, including my own, published an entire speech that Stephen Harper delivered in 1997 when he was head of the right-wing lobby group, the National Citizens Coalition. We want Canadians to see for themselves exactly what Harper thinks of this country. It is worth reading in full on the eve of an election that might bring him and his party to power.

More disturbing than the views he expresses in this speech, however, is the organization to whom he delivered it and the fact that he would ever have allowed himself to be affiliated with it in any way. It is called the Council for National Policy and is a powerful and secretive collection of far-right American Christian and social conservatives who formed the backbone of the Bush victory. The CNP was founded in 1981 by Tim LeHaye, author of the best-selling "Left Behind" books that describe the "Rapture" (the literal end of time when true believers will be taken up to heaven and the rest of the world will perish in horrible ways), Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation, a far-right pro-family/anti-gay/anti abortion lobby that claims on its web-site America is becoming a third world country because of its "long slide into the cultural and moral decay of political correctness," and businessmen Joseph Coors and Herbert and Nelson Bunker Hunt, rabid anti-communists who were affiliated with the John Birch Society.

The Council for National Policy initiated the Moral Majority Coalition and recruited Jerry Falwell to run it and later welcomed James Dobson, head of the far-right evangelical movement, Focus on the Family. Dobson has said that homosexuality will destroy the earth and is the prime architect of the ban on gay marriage in eleven states. The New York Times says the CNP is made up of the most powerful conservatives in the United States who "meet behind closed doors at undisclosed locations to strategize about how to turn the country to the right." Recently, the group has hosted powerful right-wing foreign policy hawks such as Vice President Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and UN ambassador John Bolton, a hard-right ideologue who displays a mock grenade on his desk with the label "To John Bolton, World's Greatest Reaganite."

What was Stephen Harper doing by his association with these people? What does it say about his long-term agenda for this country? One thing is certain: the US right can hardly wait for a Harper win. Paul Weyrich of the Free Congress Foundation has e-mailed all his far-right friends in the US cautioning them to hold off any public gloating over a possible Harper win until after the vote Monday, "at which point hopefully there will be reason to celebrate." You can bet American social conservatives can hardly wait to see their White House counterpart ensconced at Sussex Drive. Patrick Basham of the right-wing American think-tank, the Cato Institute, says that a Harper win will "put a smile" on George Bush's face. Basham calls Harper the most "pro-American leader in the Western world...pro-free trade, pro-Iraq war, anti-Kyoto, and socially

conservative...Mr Bush's new best friend internationally and the poster boy for his ideal foreign leader."

Canadians don't like George Bush and the far-right coalition that brought him to power. Why are we poised to make his Canadian counterpart our next Prime Minister?

Posted by Maude Barlow at 7:17:23 PM January 21, 2006

January 20, 2006

Harper Threatens Fundamental Rights

It is not surprising that women's groups are alarmed over the possibility of a Stephen Harper government and were the first civil society groups to create the "Think Twice" Coalition. Many women are very worried that a Conservative government would roll back years of hard-won rights over their bodies.

Although Harper has said his party would not initiate new legislation curtailing reproductive freedom, many Conservative candidates are strongly opposed to abortion and are promising their constituents a free vote in the House after the election. Even as the Harper war room was trying to damp down public comments by Conservative candidates on the issue, party president Don Plett was issuing e-mails assuring party members that the issue would be resurrected if the party forms the government. Indeed, many Conservative candidates have given a written pledge to the Campaign Life Coalition - an ardent anti-abortion group - that they will re-open the debate with the intent to fully ban abortion. This can hardly be surprising given the deep influence of the evangelical Christian right in the Conservative Party of Stephen Harper.

Equally concerned are gays and lesbians who fear a re-opening of the divisive and painful debate around same-sex marriage if the Conservatives take power. In fact, more than 100 leading legal experts have issued a warning that re-visiting this issue in a free vote, as has been promised by Stephen Harper, would be "legally reckless, untenable, unconstitutional and irresponsible." Polls show that Canadians are supportive of same-sex marriage and full rights for gays and lesbians. But the views of the majority to protect the rights of a minority will be ignored by the ideologues who will sit in Parliament if we send a Conservative government to Ottawa.

Think twice Canada.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 10:32:04 AM January 20, 2006

January 18, 2006

Harper and American style health care

Canadians cherish medicare. Yes, people are weary of wait times and willing in some cases to pay for timely care. But polls show that given the choice between a corporate-driven for-profit system and their publicly funded system, the great majority choose the latter.

We'll get ready for American-style health care if Stephen Harper and his Conservatives win the election because that is exactly what we are going to get.

Stephen Harper's roots are with the National Citizens Coalition, a far-right lobby that was founded to fight public health care. The NCC has been consistent in its opposition to medicare. Harper himself is on record calling for private health services. He told the NCC's newsletter, The Bulldog, "Its past time to scrap the Canada Health Act." As recently as October 28, 2002, he told the House of Commons that privatized health care is a "natural development." Harper also of course, supports decentralized government and would give the green light to premiers such as Alberta's Ralph Klein to advance a for-profit system.

This would spell the Americanization of Canada's health care system. There is currently in NAFTA an exemption for health care which has allowed Canada to keep the big US for-profit health corporations out. But is only effective as long as our health care is delivered by governments on a not-for-profit basis; the more private services we allow, the more rights American corporations have under NAFTA to enter Canada. And under the "National Treatment" provision of NAFTA, they would have the same rights to government subsidies as Canadian not-for-profit services.

A vote for Stephen Harper is a vote for American style health care in Canada.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 5:05:09 PM January 18, 2006

January 17, 2006

Canada Set to Join the Weaponization of Space

Canadians don't want nuclear weapons in space. They don't like George Bush's aggressive foreign policy and military build-up. They strongly backed the decision not to join the United States in Iraq and to say no to George Bush's ballistic missile defence plan. Well too bad -- all that is history if Stephen Harper forms the government on January 23.

In their platform, the Harper Conservatives have made it clear they will re-open the decision on ballistic missile defence. Harper says if the Americans come back with a proposal, he will send the decision to a free vote in the House of Commons. With a strong enough majority, his party could commit Canada to joining George Bush in his insane mission to weaponize space.

Under this President, the United States is massively and aggressively re-arming. Military spending has almost doubled since Bush took power in 2000 and this year, his government will spend US \$500 billion on the military. This figure does not include the war in Iraq or its "black budget" for space wars. Under George Bush, the US has entered a dangerous new level of proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is now poised to launch nuclear weapons in under two hours anywhere on the planet.

Not satisfied with earth-bound weapons, the Pentagon is preparing for weapons -- including nuclear weapons -- in space. General Lance Lord, Chief of the Air Force Space Command, says that space superiority is America's destiny -- the "American way of fighting." Understandably, China and Russia have said that if the US goes into space, they will have to go too, setting the stage for a dangerous new cold war.

A Stephen Harper government would put Canada square in the middle of this mess, a place most Canadians don't want to be.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 9:51:11 AM January 17, 2006

January 16, 2006

Stephen Harper Will Kill Kyoto

One of the many losses for Canadians and the planet if Stephen Harper wins the January 23 election is the environment. Against all odds, including the Bush administration's plan to kill the process, the 150 countries that came together in Montreal in early December put aside profound differences, and with the exception of the United States, agreed to formal talks on mandatory reductions of greenhouse gases beyond the current 2012 end date of the Kyoto Accord. This was an historic breakthrough. Environment Canada and Canadian NGOs played a huge role in this process and Canada is still chairing the UN climate change committee for almost another year.

But Stephen Harper has announced he will not participate in this historic agreement and will instead put some money into "new technologies," whatever that means. He wrongly stated that neither China nor India have ratified Kyoto - both have - and said there has been no federal/provincial consultation - wrong again. Most important, he is deeply wrong in refusing to accept the overwhelming scientific evidence equating our overuse of fossil fuels with the deadly increase in greenhouse gases that threaten every living thing, including ourselves, on the planet.

Elizabeth May of the Sierra Club of Canada says simply that his views on the Kyoto Accord place Stephen Harper more in the Bush camp than in the traditional leadership role of Canada. "Its a source of huge concern not only for Canada but for the planet," she adds sadly.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 11:14:51 AM January 16, 2006

January 15, 2006

A National Day Care Dream Dies

Well the Conservative platform is out and proves that Stephen Harper was right when he said people's deep values don't change.

Stephen Harper has long opposed national social programs that benefit women and poorer Canadians. In a 1994 speech to the National Citizens Coalition, a right wing lobby that he would go on to lead several years later, Harper said the Reform Party's great achievement was killing universality in programs such as family allowance and unemployment insurance. Universal social programs were "virtually dead as a concept" he crowed.

Now Stephen Harper is poised to kill the national day care plan recently negotiated between the federal government and the provinces. He would cancel the \$4.8 billion earmarked for desperately needed child care spaces in exchange for giving families with small children a paltry \$1,200 a year. This money is nowhere near enough to pay for decent child care anywhere in the country and will not even replace the cuts to current government subsidies sure to follow a Conservative victory.

This may not sound important to Mr. Harper and his gang. An MP's salary will pay for private care. But the situation is desperate for many families, especially female-headed households. Campaign 2000, the national coalition working to eradicate child poverty, reports that, in the last decade, one third of Canadian children have lived in poverty for a year. Lack of child care sets up a vicious cycle for parents who cannot go out to work and leave a child unattended at home. And to add insult to injury, says Ken Battle of the Caledon Institute, even this small cheque to

Canadian families will benefit those earning more money and who therefore don't need it, while being clawed back from lower income families.

Canada is one of the last modern, developed democracies not to have national child care plan. If Stephen Harper becomes Prime Minister, the dream will be put off for a decade.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 12:48:56 PM January 15, 2006

January 13, 2006

Think Twice Before You Vote

Today, a broad new coalition of social justice organizations launched a strong warning to Canadians: a Stephen Harper government would roll back decades of social progress in Canada.

Called the "Think Twice Coalition," representatives from childcare, Aboriginal, women's rights, health care, human rights, gay and lesbian rights, environmental protection, arts, and advocacy groups and trade unions came together to express their deep concern that a Harper government would:

- Privatize social programs and health care;
- Kill the recently-negotiated federal-provincial national day care program;
- Abandon the recently-negotiated agreement with the First Nations to alleviate their housing and health care crisis;
- Renege on Kyoto commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2012;
- Junk pay equity plans and a new national strategy for people with disabilities;
- Reduce support for the arts and public broadcasting;
- Reopen divisive issues such as same-sex marriage and women's rights to reproductive choice;
- Reopen the Charter to insert private property rights, which have been used in the U.S. to slash environmental safeguards;
- Cut taxes to big corporations; and
- Ramp up military integration with the Pentagon.

The groups from all across the country are non-partisan. But they have studied the Conservative platform and researched past policy statements of Stephen Harper and are so alarmed at what they have seen that they have taken the unusual step of issuing this collective warning. This is a crucial time for Canada. The country I have fought for, alongside the women and men who form the various organizations represented in this coalition, is at risk! On election day, Canadians should rally to stop Stephen Harper from establishing his Bush-style conservative agenda in Canada.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 12:42:05 PM January 13, 2006

January 12, 2006

American-style Evangelicalism in Canada

One issue everyone is avoiding in this election is the rise of American-style evangelical fundamentalism in Canada. The same coalition of far-right Christians and social conservatives that brought George Bush to power in the United States is moving into Canada and finding a home in Stephen Harper's Conservative Party.

I want to be clear that I deeply believe in freedom of religion and am not questioning anyone's private religious beliefs. But powerful far-right religious groups in the US, such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family (whose leader James Dobson has backed politicians who called for the execution of abortion providers), have entered the political arena to impose their

deeply conservative and narrowly moralistic views on the larger society. They want every breathing "liberal" removed from every level of office, from local school boards to the Supreme Court, and they are well on their way to success. In Canada, Focus on the Family is pouring money into its Canadian operation and is joined by a raft of new evangelical groups with a political mission such as Campaign Life Coalition, the Defend Marriage Coalition, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Institute for Canadian Values, whose founders liken it to the Fraser Institute with a religious tinge.

Many Conservative candidates and staffers are deeply involved with these groups and I have documented these connections in my book, *Too Close for Comfort: Canada's Future within Fortress North America*. Some were endorsed by Tristan Emmanuel, former candidate for the far-right Christian Heritage Party in Ontario and the founder of a political training group for evangelical Christians. Emmanuel fought the same-sex legislation passionately, endorsed a US evangelical definition of Islam as "evil," and organised a 2003 "Canadians for Bush" rally in support of the US invasion of Iraq.

Charles McVety of the Defend Marriage Coalition says the goal is to achieve a "pro-marriage" Parliament in the near future. His movement is depending on the Harper Conservatives to deliver. When they vote on January 23, Canadians should ask themselves if they want a Bush-type religious revolution in this country.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 11:28:04 AM January 12, 2006

January 11, 2006

A National Water Crisis

It is pretty astounding that we are deep into yet another federal election with not one word about an issue that is likely to explode in the next few years - sovereignty over Canada's fresh water supplies.

The United States is thirsty. Americans now depend on groundwater for over half their water needs and huge areas of the Mid-and South-West are drying up, some say permanently. The US Geological Society says the Interior West is the driest in 500 years at a time when the population is exploding. And demands on the Great Lakes waters are going to expand exponentially with the recent signing by the Great Lakes governors of an agreement to allow, for the first time, communities and industry situated off the Great Lakes Basin to access these declining water supplies. Scientists, environmentalists and aware political observers realise that it is only a matter of time before Americans start eyeing Canada's water supplies and demanding the same continental sharing arrangement that now exists for energy.

The Canadian government is totally unprepared. It has no national water policy, no national inventory of its groundwater supplies, and no plan to stem the massive pollution now taking place. A recent internal memo from Environment Canada prepared for Environment Minister Stephane Dion, warned that a national water crisis is imminent but that no-one is in charge.

The only serious existing legislation affecting Canada's water is NAFTA, which defines fresh water as both a "good" and an "investment." Under NAFTA, if any province begins the commercial export of its waters, the Canadian government has no right to turn the tap off. Further, US corporations with investments in the water export business are protected by trade law.

Let's ask about protection of our fresh water supplies to those politicians at the door!

Posted by Maude Barlow at 9:38:36 AM January 11, 2006

January 9, 2006

Minority Governments: They Might Just Work

Minority governments are bad for the country. Right? Wrong!

Minority governments can work very well if the parties understand that their voters want them to talk to and work with one another for the greater good of the country. In a terrific new report, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) clearly demonstrates that the Liberal/NDP collaboration in the last Parliament not only worked well in practice at the political level, it was a big plus for the country. This collaboration, says the CCPA, forced the government to put people first and created a space to spend billions of dollars of the budget surplus on programs that reduced tuition fees for university students, built affordable housing, improved energy efficiency,

and protected workers. While gratuitous corporate tax breaks were held up, priority went to creating the first real national child care program. And the government signed a landmark agreement with the First Nations to close the gap between Aboriginal Peoples and other Canadians in areas such as education, health care, housing and economic opportunity. Perhaps most important, being in a minority situation convinced the Martin government to listen to the wishes of the Canadian people and their opposition (by a margin of two to one) to George Bush's Ballistic Missile Defence plan for the continent. To a collective sigh across the country, Canada declined to participate in this inexcusable next phase of the weaponization of space. Right until the election was called, the NDP and the Liberals were into a deep negotiation over how to stem the rising tide of private health care services across the country. This is a dialogue millions of Canadians would like to see continued. Let's vote to make it happen.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 1:17:37 PM January 9, 2006

January 5, 2006

Captain Canada?

In his thoughtful January 5 Globe and Mail column, Lawrence Martin wonders whether Conservative Leader Stephen Harper's new "Captain Canada" persona is real or a ruse. Martin cites recent Harper policy promises to assert control of fisheries outside Canadian territorial waters, protect Canadian sovereignty in the far North, and beef-up military measures to secure sovereignty on the West Coast. "Stand Up For Canada" says Harper's new logo and the Canadian flag is constantly behind him in television spots.

How real is this new persona? Well I for one don't buy it for a minute. I did a lot of research on Stephen Harper for my new book and was very disturbed by what I found. Harper has been a consistent and clear pro-American hawk. As recently as May, 2003, he called Canada's support of multiculturalism a "weak nation strategy," and called for Canada to replace the "soft power" of persuasive diplomacy and peacekeeping with "hard military power" in the service of continental security. He said that "the time had come" to recognize that the US has unprecedented global power to use its military might to "advance free democratic order."

He dismissed the Canadian decision not to participate in the war in Iraq as "abrasively neutral," and incorrectly stated that Canadians supported the American invasion. He supported George Bush's continental ballistic missile defence plan, promoted continental economic and security integration with the United States under its most right wing president in modern history, and proposed to negotiate international trade agreements with the very superpower whose corporations want to come to Canada and replace our public services with for-profit companies. Heaven knows, I have not been happy with the Liberal Party on its slow dance toward deep integration with the United States. But a Stephen Harper government would be disastrous for Canadian foreign policy and the bedrock values of mainstream Canada.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 3:09:22 PM January 5, 2006

January 5, 2006

Fortress North America

Missing in Action: any serious election debate about Canada/US relations at a time when huge commitments are being made to create a "Fortress North America."

Oh I know that there were the dust-ups before Christmas between Paul Martin and David Wilkins which showed how hostile this territory can be. But there has been almost no policy discussion about the fact that, less than a year ago, Paul Martin and George Bush signed a North American "Security and Prosperity Partnership" toward the creation of a common market and trade bloc, a common security perimeter, joint immigration and refugee policies, and a North American resource pact. The two governments also agreed to regulatory harmonization of all aspects of food and drug policy and Canada launched a process to emulate George Bush's disastrous program of environmental deregulation.

These issues matter to every Canadian, far more than offensive blogs, possible leaks, or even the sponsorship scandal. I know. I just finished a 25-city book tour on deep continental integration and I can tell you Canadians are hungry to talk about these issues. Will Canada be able to maintain its commitment to peacekeeping? Will private American health corporations move into Canada? Will we lose control of our water resources as we have of our energy supplies?

When the policy positions of the parties are released in the next week or so, Canadians have a right to some hard answers to these crucial questions.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 11:34:03 AM January 5, 2006

January 4, 2006

We're Off To The Races

So they are off and running, with the two front parties in a dead heat. My immediate first thought is really a gut fear: that anger with the Liberals will lead to the triumph of Bush conservatism in Canada and American style private health care. While the desire of Canadians for change is entirely understandable, it is imperative that we think this through carefully. At stake is the role of government itself. Polls consistently show that Canadians want activist (but responsible!) government. They will not get that with Stephen Harper whose record supports minimalist government and private social programs.

The real change we need is a reform of the democratic process itself, including participatory democracy, proportional representation and an end to both elite accommodation and the power of the corporate lobby to dictate policy. Under proportional representation the last Parliament would have had approximately 113 Liberals, 91 Conservatives, 48 New Democrats, 13 Greens, 38 from the Bloc, and 4 Independents.

We would never get this reform with a Stephen Harper government. Nor would we likely get it with a Liberal majority. This election we should be aiming for a Liberal minority with a strong showing by the progressive third parties and a demand for true democratic reform. Canadians value our public health care system, a peacekeeping role for our armed services, the CBC, and the sovereign right to determine our own policies.

All of these are at stake in this election. Let's get it right.

Posted by Maude Barlow at 1:14:16 PM January 4, 2006