

# MINORITY REPORT

## 2004 ELECTION ANALYSIS

**As we move into the fall parliamentary agenda, Canadians face the first minority government in many years. While the situation is not ideal, it is not without opportunities for our work in the months and years ahead.**

The Council was very active in the election. We distributed more than 100,000 voter's guides, as well as thousands of our "poll posters" showing that most Canadians share our values of peacekeeping, social security and sovereignty. Dozens of our local chapters held all-candidates' meetings and members across the country raised our concerns with the candidates at their doorstep and in town hall meetings.

As a non-partisan organization, our focus was on the platforms of the parties and enabling Canadians to make their own choice on how to vote. We did not endorse a party, but rather were vocal about the policies that we saw as most damaging to Canadians. Just as we were critical of the Progressive Conservatives' push for free trade in the 1988 election – without endorsing the Liberals that eventually signed on to NAFTA in 1994 – so too we were active in 2004 to stop any party that would bring us deep integration, private health care and the FTAA.

We got a fair amount of media reminding Canadians that Paul Martin was principally responsible for the crisis in health care in the first place, and kept up the pressure on him on the issues of for-profit health delivery, Canada-U.S. relations and missile defence.

But near the end of the campaign, when it became clear that Stephen Harper's Conservatives might win, we launched a "Stop Harper" campaign in coalition with several other groups and placed ads in key newspapers across the country. I had op-eds on Harper and his record with the National Citizens' Coalition placed in the *Toronto Star* and on-line in the *Globe and Mail*. I also co-founded a web site for

women to sign on to an anti-Harper petition, which was still receiving thousands of new signatures on election day.

Stopping the Conservatives from gaining power was therefore a win in and of itself. In fact, it must be noted that the new Conservative Party received only 30% of the popular vote – 7% fewer votes than the two old parties combined received in 2000. Canadians took a closer look at the values of Stephen Harper and said "no thanks."

We were disappointed that the best likely outcome – a Liberal/NDP minority government – fell short when several key NDP ridings were narrowly defeated during that long night. However, it must be said and understood that the majority of Canadians voted for three parties – the NDP, the Liberals and the Bloc – who ran on pro-

gressive, traditional Canadian values. So deeply engrained in the Canadian psyche is our notion of justice and peacekeeping that even the Conservatives tried to re-brand themselves as moderates, although in the end that proved impossible for the party's dinosaurs.

It seems to me that our role has become clearly defined, given this situation. First, we must hold Paul Martin to his campaign promises and work with friends in the NDP, Bloc and even the Liberal Party to see that the party does not revert to its bad old ways. We will remind them that they campaigned for "Main Street," not "Bay Street."

There are some disturbing signs on this front. It seems that some in the Liberal Party consider signing on to missile defence



On June 25, Maude Barlow, Elizabeth May and other Canadian women took their "Stop Harper" petition to Parliament Hill.

Photo: Bill Moore-Kilgannon

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# 83%

**83% of Canadians believe** that the Canadian government should put a moratorium on any further releases of genetically engineered crops until more health and environmental safety issues have been addressed.\*

*\*Ipsos-Reid poll conducted for The Council of Canadians, March 30-April 1, 2004. The poll was based on a sampling of 1000 Canadians and is considered accurate to within +/- 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.*

## ATTENTION ALL CANDIDATES

If you won't stand up for **SAFE FOOD**, you can't count on my vote.

**In this federal election, I'll be voting for the Canada I want!**

[www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org)

Artwork: Flavio Rojas

One of the Council's "poll posters."

as a done deal. As well, the Liberal Party seems prepared to move ahead with the bank mergers, even though the NDP and the Bloc would oppose this. Are the Liberals planning to use the NDP and Bloc when they want to move progressive legislation like day care and pharmacare, and the Conservatives on regressive legislation such as deep integration and other pro-business initiatives? If so, civil society groups must be vocal and strong in defending social programs and Canadian sovereignty. In particular, the Council will be concentrating on fighting for-profit health care and deep integration issues.

Second, this is an ideal time to work toward proportional representation. Never has an election so clearly demonstrated the need for a more progressive voting system. The NDP almost doubled its popular vote to just over 15 per cent but added only five seats in the House. Yet the Conservatives, with just less than double that popular vote, took 99 seats. This is simply wrong. The views of all Canadians must be fairly represented in our Parliament and the time for change is coming.

Finally, we must work to renew our networking efforts with like-minded social, human rights, environmental, women's,

labour and cultural groups. The "Our Canada" project, which came together to influence the election outcome, must meet again and move forward together on our common goals. We need a strong, united, civil society movement to fight for the Canada we want.

It has been years since this kind of opportunity presented itself to Canadian civil society; it is urgent that we meet the challenge.

**Maude Barlow is the National Chairperson of The Council of Canadians.**