

RED, WHITE AND YOU?

Paul Martin began his time as Prime Minister with a bang, at least from the point of view of George Bush's White House. His first actions in office have served to facilitate Canada's deeper integration with the United States.

In his first month as prime minister, Paul Martin appointed David Pratt, a vocal supporter of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, as defence minister, signalled his support for President Bush's ballistic missile defence program, and created a Canadian version of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan).

After Bush and Martin's meeting at the Summit of the Americas in Mexico, which was hailed as a thawing of relations between Canada and the United States, the two leaders will be meeting again soon, this time in the United States.

Are Paul Martin's right-wing and southward policy shifts really what Canadians want? Even for people who are cautious about the value of public opinion surveys, the *Maclean's* magazine year-end poll of Canadian attitudes is extremely revealing.

Asked about the most important issue facing Canada, what Paul Martin's first and second priorities should be, and if Canada was right to not participate in the war against Iraq, the Canadian public's responses clearly show they are not buying the consensus that corporate Canada is trying to sell.

Canadians believe that reinvestment in Canada's social programs and public health care system are top priorities. Improving Canada-U.S. relations are not on the public's radar, at least when it comes to prioritizing the various issues the government must address. Corporate Canada is out of sync with the Canadian public. The Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCE) continually makes the point that



Campaigner Guy Caron at the Summit of the Americas meeting in Monterrey. *Photo: Steven Staples*

Canada must be an active partner in the Continental Defence Strategy and the Ballistic Missile Defence program. Not coincidentally, participation in these areas would give corporations who support the CCCE access to multi-million-dollar defence industry contracts. In addition, the C.D. Howe Institute has issued a series of reports called the "Border Papers," aimed at influencing public opinion in favour of closer Canada-U.S. relations.

The question is, Who will Paul Martin and his team listen to? Although he claimed during his leadership campaign he wanted to address the "democratic deficit," his actions have only increased this deficit.

In March, The Council of Canadians held a series of meetings and public events across Canada to strategize and plan ways to counteract the agenda being propagated by Thomas d'Aquino of the CCCE and

the C.D. Howe Institute. These meetings generated a lot of public interest and the discussions will be key in the formation of an emerging "sovereign Canada" movement.

These meetings also led to a plan for "A Citizen's Inquiry into the Future of Canadian Sovereignty," which will take place in fall 2004. This inquiry is planned to be a broad consultation of Canadians in all provinces and territories, which will allow people to share their concerns and vision for the future of Canada with local and national commissioners.

Canadians deserve more than right-wing think tanks and lobby groups voicing the wishes of corporate executives.

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