

MINORITY



Eduardo Sousa

On January 19, Council activists urged voters to “Think Twice,” in front of the CBC studios in Toronto, where Stephen Harper was scheduled to appear.

government that would destroy decades of social progress and dramatically hasten the creation of a “Fortress North America” and closer ties with the administration of George Bush.

I believe we were successful. Canadians wanted change and were understandably angry with the Liberals. But in their wisdom, their bedrock values would not let them elect a Conservative majority. Indeed, almost two-thirds of Canadians voted for other, more progressive parties. Harper was forced to silence the extreme right-wing elements in his party, and the Liberals campaigned sounding down-right – well, liberal! The new Parliament includes a renewed and invigorated NDP and many progressive Bloc candidates. The Liberal Party was sent away to do some serious soul-searching but was not decimated. Liberals now have

MAUDE BARLOW REFLECTS ON THE OUTCOME OF THE FEDERAL ELECTION AND THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE AHEAD

Once again, the Council of Canadians was deeply involved in the federal election, raising our key issues of deep integration, Canadian sovereignty and public health care with politicians and the media throughout the campaign.

As voting day approached, when it became evident that the Harper Conservatives might achieve a majority, we joined with a number of other groups representing women, daycare advocates, gays and lesbians, workers, environmentalists, students, First Nations people and public health care activists to form the Think Twice coalition. We held a press conference exposing Harper’s record and

urged voters to think twice when they entered the voter’s booth. We also set up an interactive Think Twice website and all of the groups sent out information on the Conservatives to their members and shared information and strategy.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

There was some concern expressed that perhaps our criticism of Stephen Harper might be taken as an instruction to vote for the Liberals. It is important to set the record straight. Being non-partisan, we could not and did not tell anyone how to vote or even advocate strategic voting. But we reminded Canadians of our shared values. We asked them to consider the ramifications to the country before letting their desire for change result in a



Dave Duprey

Susan Howatt, National Water Campaigner and Carleen Pickard, BC/Yukon Regional Organizer, posing in front of the Council’s election billboard in Vancouver in January.

REPORT

the opportunity to reflect on why so many Canadians were so angry with their party.

The progressive elements in all of the opposition parties now have an opportunity to work together to oppose the extreme platform that a majority Harper government would have introduced.

BEHOLDEN TO FUNDAMENTALISTS

It will not be an easy ride for Prime Minister Harper.

His caucus includes former Cabinet ministers from Mike Harris's Ontario government who want to reproduce the so-called "Common Sense Revolution" at the national level. The party elected many social conservatives and evangelical Christian fundamentalists and is deeply beholden to right-wing groups who expect a free vote on abortion and same-sex marriage.

Harper is the darling of the American right and the Bush administration, who anticipate a new and closer relationship with the United States and a reversal of Canada's position on Ballistic Missile Defence – something highly unpopular with the Canadian people. He will face provinces who will not be happy to lose the billions promised for new daycare spaces and a First Nations community unhappy with promises to break the accord on housing and education signed just weeks before the election. With a majority government, Harper could have ploughed ahead on some or all of these fronts. But where will he turn for sup-

port to implement an agenda Canadians don't really want?

DEVOLVING FEDERAL POWER

One thing is certain: Stephen Harper and his government will try to do all of the above as well as paving the way for the Americanization of our health care system by going through the back door of federal-provincial change. He intends to devolve federal powers to the provinces by replacing the Canada Health and Social Transfer cash with tax points to the provinces, a move that will leave the federal government without the ability to enforce the Canada Health Act or ever introduce new national programs. The new federal/provincial arrangement would severely curtail revenue generation by the federal government, thus destroying much of the national fabric of this country. Harper will also attempt to hasten the creation of a North American trade bloc and common market, started under the Martin government, that would further entrench the continental harmonization of Canadian laws, standards and policies.

Canada will likely be into another federal election within two years, perhaps earlier. A lot can happen in that time. Canadians need the progressive members of the three opposition parties to work together to stop the dismantling of the Kyoto Accord, the cancellation of the national daycare plan, a reopening of the same-sex marriage debate, a rejection of the First Nations Accord, assaults on the CBC and the arts, the



John Bonnar

sell-off of our freshwater supplies, inclusion in the Ballistic Missile Defence plan of George Bush, the Americanization of health care, and deeper integration into Bush's war on terror.

PROTECTING SOCIAL PROGRESS

However, given the expectations of Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party by powerful social conservatives and business groups in Canada and south of the border, it is going to take a coalition of progressive forces inside and outside Parliament to protect the public interest and stop an assault on the social fabric of the country.

The moment is ripe for renewed cooperation of progressive forces inside and outside Parliament to protect decades of social progress. A central defining call must be for proportional representation in order to ensure that, in the future, every vote truly counts and that a party's representation in the House of Commons corresponds to the number of votes it received.

The Council of Canadians is dedicated to continuing to build alliances with like-minded social, human rights, environmental, women's, labour and cultural groups to fight for the Canada we want. The Canadian people denied Stephen Harper the majority he sought – let's deny him the radical change he still intends to inflict on Canada.

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