

# Harper's Hitlist: Power, process and the assault on democracy

by Murray Dobbin

The following are excerpts from a report written by author and columnist Murray Dobbin detailing the harm Prime Minister Stephen Harper is doing to the political and social fabric of Canada. Visit [www.canadians.org/democracy](http://www.canadians.org/democracy) to read the full essay.

On January 23, 2010, thousands of Canadians in more than 60 towns and cities across the country demonstrated their anger over the shutting down of Canada's Parliament by Prime Minister Stephen Harper. At the same time, more than 220,000 Canadians also joined a Facebook protest group called Canadians Against the Prorogation of Parliament.

It was the second time the prime minister had summarily locked the doors to the people's house — the House of Commons. It was clear to most commentators, including columnists and editorial writers normally sympathetic to the Harper government, that the reasons for the shutdown were purely partisan: it ended the opposition's persistent and effective questioning about the government's complicity in the torture of Afghan "detainees" in the first years of the Afghan war. And prorogation would also allow Harper to appoint five new senators unopposed, and, more importantly, dissolve the current senate committees and form new ones with Conservative majorities.

This cynical move by Harper was preceded by two other less dramatic assaults on democracy: the government's refusal to obey a parliamentary resolution demanding documents related to the Afghan investigation, and the decision by the Conservative members of the parliamentary committee investigating the issue to boycott the hearings, thus bringing the process to a halt.

Pundits had widely predicted, even in the face of polls hinting at growing opposition, that Canadians didn't care about something as arcane as "prorogation." They were practical people, concerned about bread-and-butter issues — jobs, the cost of living, and their

mortgages. But something happened with this latest expression of disdain for democracy. It was the last straw. If it is true that Canadians are slow to anger then the outpouring of rage at Harper's move demonstrated that they finally had enough. It turns out that Canadians actually care a great deal about democracy and as arcane as the word is, they had no trouble figuring out that "prorogue" means to shut down, to suspend, and in this case it meant the government trying to escape the consequences of its actions.

The list of Stephen Harper's assaults on democracy is long and unprecedented, not only in Canada, but very likely in all of the English-speaking parliamentary democracies in the world. But how to explain such an attitude on the part of a politician who, after all, was elected democratically to run his country?

His contempt for what Canada had become led directly to his contempt for democracy (this is, after all, what produced the things he hates) and his willingness to subvert democracy any time it frustrates his long-term goal: to dismantle the Canada that three generations of Canadians have built. This is his ultimate goal — not to govern, not to be the leader of a political party, not even to be the prime minister.

These are simply the necessary steps on the way to achieving the power necessary to undo what past governments have accomplished. He is the only prime minister in Canadian history to openly detest his own country: its efforts at egalitarianism, its social programs, its wealth redistribution, its peacekeeping history internationally, and its attempts at promoting and preserving its unique culture.

EnviroNics, on behalf of the Council of Canadians, polled people about their feelings about proportional representation in February. Here are the results:

**61%**  
of Canadians support moving to a system of proportional representation in Parliament

**36%**  
said they were more supportive of proportional representation as a result of Prime Minister Harper's recent prorogations

(These results represent the findings of a telephone survey conducted among a national random sample of 1,001 adults comprising 501 males and 500 females 18 years of age and older, living in Canada. The margin of error for a sample of this size is +/- 3.10%, 19 times out of 20.)

This study is intended to examine the most serious violations of democracy committed by the prime minister and his government. Some are clearly more serious than others. But taken as a whole they add up to a dangerous undermining of our democratic traditions, institutions and precedents — and politics. These violations are not accidental, they are not incidental, and they are not oversights or simply the sign of an impatient government or "decisive" leadership. They are a fundamental part of Harper's iron-fisted determination to remake Canada, whether Canadians like it or not.

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Murray Dobbin is a former board member of the Council of Canadians, author and columnist. He is also the author of Word Warriors, an on-line activist tool hosted on the Council's website at [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org).