

Read this before you vote...

Harper's Canada

John E. Trent

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Milan Kundera, Czechoslovak anti-communist novelist, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 1978)

“La MÉMOIRE reste un guide. Et l'OUBLI ... un danger. » (Gilles Vigneault)

Mr. Harper demanded transparency – so here it is!

This booklet is dedicated to Colette, of course, and to our friend John Hayes, and to the noble journalists of Canadian newspapers, without whom it would not have been possible.

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Writers are not there to reinforce the status quo. They're not there to make people feel comfortable. They're there to provoke and question and shake people out of their certainties and habits of mind. Hilary Mantel
(Jamie Portman, 'Thatcher story provokes uproar', *Ottawa Citizen*, 7-09-2014)

1. Introduction: the Nature of the Harper Conservatives

As one studies Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative government, the authors, journalists and scholars who have written about him rapidly focus a search light on a number of repetitive characteristics. Above all he is an ideologue. He has a narrow view of the world based on his personal economic and social conservative ideas which he has spent a decade trying to impose on Canada. In fact, he is more retrograde than he is Conservative.

Of course, he hasn't gotten where he is through stupidity. He is smart. Harper knows how to put two and two together. He moves stealthily by little increments. He is diligent, working hard into the night. But, all in all, his characteristics are, the very opposite of the open, progressive, accommodating, civil and tolerant, the traits by which Canadians had come to identify themselves during the past half century.

As early as 2003, speaking at Civitas, a private Conservative club in Toronto, Stephen Harper laid out his plans for transforming Canada as an economic and social conservative. While admitting that Prime Minister Thatcher of Great Britain and President Ronald Regan of the United States had already realized much of the conservative agenda he said, in government "we do need deeper and broader tax cuts, further reductions in debt, further deregulation and privatization." The real challenge was in confronting "the social agenda of the modern left." "Real gains" he stressed "are inevitably

incremental". It is clear that Prime Minister Harper has been driven by a preconceived ideological agenda to turn back the clock, to overturn the progressive state and replace it with small, mean, regressive government. Personally, he is vengeful, single-minded, solitary, ruthless, over-bearing and distrustful of friends and colleagues. Stephen Harper and his colleagues have never been able to understand the complex roots of Canada and the foundations of its culture which is a search for equilibrium and mutual accommodation in a country of diverse forces that need to be balanced.

Prime Minister Harper has forgotten federal-provincial relations. He has hardly ever held a federal-provincial conference. National policies of all sorts have taken a beating. We can say the same for Quebec which the Federal government has generally ignored and replaced by an Anglo-Canadian agenda of a robust military and ties to the British monarchy and British military history. Early on, the Harper Conservatives had wooed Quebecers but turned their back on them once they won a majority government without substantial Quebec support in 2011. That year, they stripped equalization components out of programs of which Quebec is the largest beneficiary, put the 'royal' back in the navy and the air force, cut funding to Radio Canada, scrapped the long gun registry and refused to let Quebec have its lists, toughened criminal sentencing when Quebec favored rehabilitation, and pulled back on environmental issues Quebecers favor. Thanks to the Harperites, we are back to two solitudes.

In fact, there are three. As soon as they came into power, the Harper Conservatives turned their back on the native peoples by renegeing on the \$5 billion Kelowna Accord painstakingly negotiated between Ottawa, the provinces and the Aboriginals over the previous two years. They have never been able develop a working relationships with the native peoples.

The narrow ideology of the Harper Conservatives has been devoted to installing a more individualist, market-oriented, small-

government Canada. Mr. Harper's deep convictions have driven a law and order agenda, cutting sales and corporate taxes, and imposing spending cuts and job cuts on the public service. Their entire time in power has been used to transfer advantages to the private sector and denuding the federal government of its resources. The goal has been to give corporations a free hand and to cut their taxes. Unions have been attacked.

Instead of a balanced government, it has become more and more centralized in the single hands of the prime minister and his unelected servants in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Harper has been an autocratic centralizer of power, tightly controlling information, ministers and public servants. Many institutions such as the House of Commons, the Senate, the Cabinet, Elections Canada, have been terribly diminished. A culture of secrecy has been installed, the media brought to heel, and CBC minimalized. Harper has systematically attacked not only opposition parties but public servants and non-governmental organizations. The tradition of big-tent accommodation, fairness, mutual respect and tolerance are nowhere to be found in the Harper regime which has been dominated by divisive, negative politics.

The regime's ideology is manifested in many of the Harper Conservative policies. A harsh regime of 'law and order' ignores the roots of crime in its drive for more prisons and more people in them for longer terms -- at a great cost to the society. Environmentalism, green policies and combatting climate change have been hobbled by policies which serve only to advance resource extracting industries. Every effort has been made to restrict scientific information, the census and communications so that Canada is no longer a land of progressive, evidence based governance. Billions of dollars have been cut from government social programs while agencies and departments have been emasculated. Programs and agencies such as the Status of Women and Court Challenges programs, Canada Mortgage and Housing, the Law Commission, the Long-arms Registry, the

Long-form Census, Experimental Lakes Area program, the Arctic Institute, and the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (amongst dozens of others) have been eliminated or seriously curtailed.

After nearly ten years in power, the media described many of the short-comings of the Harper Conservatives. Chantal Hébert in the May 8th *Toronto Star* summarized one week in the life of the Harper government that made the government look "ugly and inept": two of the PM's promotional videos showed the faces of our special forces in Iraq; RCMP documents at Mike Duffy's trial show that Harper's palace guard doctored an independent Senate audit; the Conservatives lost their court battle to keep Omar Khadr behind bars until their appeal is heard; their leading attack dog, Pierre Poilievre fabricates Liberal party tax policies; Jim Prentice, former right-hand man to Harper leads Alberta Conservatives to stunning defeat at the hands of the NDP; and monthly employment numbers show Canada lost four times more jobs than expected in the last month. For his part, Michael Den Tandt in the 4 March 2015 *Ottawa Citizen* demonstrates Conservative inactivity on important policy issues. Despite Supreme Court decisions, there will be no hearings or legislation on physician-assisted death prior to the election. No pipeline proposals have been accepted in the U.S. or Canada. The Canada-U.S. relationship is in a mess. There are no consultations with the provinces. Little progress is reported on defence procurement. The First Nations Education Act has gone into the ditch. Harper's Arctic policy remains plagued by delays. The government's relationship with veterans is broken. The Duffy trial on Senate expenses will aim flame-throwers at the Harper government. In the meantime, the *Globe and Mail* weighs in with an article describing the latest omnibus budget bill as the "Monster on Parliament Hill" which usurps Parliament's oversight role".

As it is in domestic politics, so it is in foreign policy. Canada has traditionally supported efforts for international peace, order and justice and multilateral institutions like the United Nations,

as the best context in which to balance American power and advance Canada's own interests. But this is no longer acceptable under the Harper Conservatives. Harper announced early on in his Civitas speech that foreign affairs would be fought on "Moral grounds" (John Ibbitson, *The Globe and Mail*, 28-04-12). Because of this orientation, Canada has become a harsh, abrasive and aggressive country. All sense of our competence as a prudent negotiator has been abandoned. We are now renowned internationally as an environmental dinosaur, the only country to have renounced its signature to the Kyoto Agreement and the African Dessertification Control Treaty. We actively thwart environmental negotiations. The Harper Conservative's one-sided support for Israel in the Middle East, the closure of our embassy in Iran and refusal of diplomatic attempts to seek reconciliation with them, our minimal help for the Darfur and Mali, our thoughtless insults to China and Russia, and our lack of respect for the United Nations have not gone unnoticed by our friends and allies. Our country has been diminished and Canadian pride trampled.

The similarities between Putin's Russia and Harper's Canada are rather amazing. It starts with secrecy and centralized control at the top. Power and wealth are entrusted to a close coterie of senior aides and cronies. Muzzling of the media is accompanied by reinforcing of alternate media. Opposition is systematically dismantled including the stifling of civil society and watch-dog agencies. Crowds in the streets are closely controlled. Offensive individuals are publicly pilloried and perhaps taken off the playing field all together. Investments are concentrated on short-term energy assets and resources, while technological innovation is neglected. The legislature and governing party are controlled by an inner circle of powerful advisors. The police and military are modernized and heavily subsidized. Fear is nurtured. National pride is stimulated through the distortion of historical events. Both leaders have undertaken aggressive, single-minded foreign policy adventures to enhance their domestic

standing. Democratic institutions are systematically undermined – including elections, courts, the public service and agencies.

As I meditated on this analogy, I wondered if it wasn't too strong or simplistic. What was my surprise to come across an article that suggests we are in fact observing a new category of regime in world politics. Putin and Harper are not alone. Adhan Knan, a writer from Istanbul and Islamabad, calls these new regimes "managed democracies". These "neo-authoritarian states" include Turkey, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Ukraine, Egypt, and Uzbekistan where there are "would-be dictators cloaked in democratic garb."

Such a description is hard for traditional Canadians to digest. One of the reasons for this booklet is to provide chapter and verse to show that the description may be harsh but it is hardly an exaggeration. Our job as Canadian citizens is to recognize the reality and to seek out a more progressive form of democracy.

Although Harper has been determined to eliminate everything that is liberal, it is not really a question of being liberal or conservative. In fact, many Canadians have a strong streak of conservatism what with our continuous search for peace and stability, good government, and a slow evolutionary approach to development. Rather it is a question of being reactionary or progressive. Harper is a reactionary who wants both to turn back the clock and serve a right wing ideology.

Two final thoughts are in order before drawing this introduction to a close. The motive for producing this booklet is that it is all too easy for people to forget what has gone on in politics for the past ten years. Many may be tempted to forgive and forget. At the same time, the governing party is in a position to make vast electoral promises, and can use it's, and the government's, financial resources and communications professionals to inundate the public with its own campaign propaganda. That is why it is wise for Canadians to be aware of the long list of harms done to Canada by the Harper Conservatives. More important, when you are

reading about the current situation, please keep asking yourself how we could improve what is going on at present in the Canadian government. This is the most important aspect of the booklet. We must ask ourselves how to improve Canada – what policies, institutions and procedures – will help us improve our governance and our democracy? This is the subject to which we will return in the conclusion.

Second, this booklet is not meant to present a “balanced” picture of the past 10 years. It is a critical analysis of the Harper regime. To borrow a term from the Conservatives, the booklet is about ‘principles’ and not ‘going along to get along’. It would be hypocritical to try to be even-handed when what voters need most is an unvarnished portrait of the house that Harper has built as opposed to what Margaret Atwood called, “the kind of country we want to live in”. The Conservatives have abused tax payer money to put forth their side of the story in thousands of television ads. If you want to know about Conservative policies just watch the TV ads tonight. You do not have to accept this booklet as the only truth. But, in light of the Conservative’s abuse of knowledge and information it is important that this book be based on fact. It is a book of research. Everything is backed up by references. To save space and small print, these references are presented on my webpage at johntrent.ca

The reader should recognize that this booklet does not just come out of my head. As a politist (political scientist) I have tried to provide an empirical analysis of facts and opinions about the Harper Government using mainly the Canadian news media, particularly the daily new papers during the past six years. This being said, the facts and opinions are indeed selective. My choices are based on 30 years of effort to interpret the Canadian identity and what has and should make Canada function best. The reader is free to agree – or not.

By 2015, the Harper Conservatives (the name they call themselves) will have been governing Canada for almost 10 years. When Canadians

go to the polls in the federal election, they should be aware of the immense harm Harper has done to the traditional Canada that the world had come to know and respect.

We will now go on to look at the Harper Conservative record in greater detail. In addition to the usual narrative form, each chapter will include some unique way of looking at the Harper record. To reinforce the Introduction’s depiction of Harper’s Canada, here are a series of media quotes.

Reflections on the dark side of the Harper Conservatives:

- “Here is a comment Harper himself made in 2009. When it comes down to it he told the *Globe and Mail*, “I don’t believe any taxes are good taxes,” which is just a short way of saying he believes that literally everything the state does is bad.” (Andrew Potter, *Macleans Magazine*, 26-07-2010).
- ““As an architect of Mr. Harper’s party, Tom Flanagan was complicit in the cultivation of a climate of ruthlessness that put the PM into power and has kept him there. The iron law of this political culture is that you do whatever it takes to win. People and principles are expendable. Dissent is not tolerated. Policies are props that are fashioned to appeal to voters. Everything is evaluated through the prism of whether it will help or hurt the leader.” (Margaret Wente. ‘The Conscience of a Conservative’, *The Globe and Mail*, 26-04-2114).
- “If today both Harper and the party he leads are actively disliked by more than seven voters in 10, it may be because they have gone out of their way to alienate them in every conceivable way – not by their policies, or even their record, but simply by their style of governing, as over-bearing as it is

under-handed, and that on a good day... When they are not refusing to disclose what they are doing, they are giving out false information; when they allow dissenting opinions to be voiced, they smear them as unpatriotic or worse; when they open their own mouths to speak, it is to read the same talking points over and over, however these may conflict with the facts, common courtesy, or their own most solemn promises... Secretive, controlling, manipulative, crude, autocratic, vicious, unprincipled, untrustworthy, paranoid ... even by the standards of Canadian politics, it is quite the performance.” (Andrew Coyne, ‘Nasty Party reputation well deserved’, *The Ottawa Citizen*, 11-05-2013).

- “Rather than elevating political life, the Conservatives have diminished it. They disdain the rules of Parliament. They muzzle backbenchers. They avoid the media. Critics pointedly call the government nasty and high-handed. It practices the politics of slash and burn. At this, Harper’s Conservatives are masters. » (Andrew Cohen, *Ottawa Citizen*, 14-05-2013).
- “The propaganda machine has become mammoth and unrelenting. The parliamentary newspaper, the *Hill Times*, recently found there are now no fewer than 1,500 communications staffers on the governing payroll...virtually every government communication is filtered through central command.” (Lawrence Martin, *Globe and Mail*, 29-11-2011).
- “A government’s tone and style gradually shape an electorate’s view. Do people feel comfortable?... And this government’s tone and style are beginning to wear on more and more Canadians. The ferocious partisanship, the excessive secrecy, the negative television ads, the lying directed at

opponents, the overwhelming sense that enemies abound (including most of the media, of course), the most manic preoccupation with spin and image, and now little scandals from the Senate have created the impression... of a government that has ideology and agenda but not much heart, empathy, feeling or understanding for anyone who doesn’t share that ideology and agenda.” (Jeffrey Simpson, *Globe and Mail*, 5-07-2013).

- “Cui bono the Romans asked? Who benefits? If applied to most of the major laws and policies of the Harper government over the past eight years, it would reveal that the beneficiaries have overwhelmingly been the top executives, investors, and shareholders of the largest corporations. They have benefited from the massive corporate tax cuts, the privatization of public services, the attacks on unions and union rights, the refusal to curb industrial pollution, the deregulations of controls on marketing, and the lax enforcement of regulations that remain.” Ed Finn, *CCPA Monitor*, Ottawa, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Feb., 2014)
- “Harper’s inconsistencies and course corrections... He accused critics of wanting to ‘cut and run’ in Afghanistan... but began withdrawing Canadian forces... He was never going to downplay China’s human rights abuses... until it became useful recently to ardently court China as a customer for tar sands... Other surprises: Mulrone-style Senate appointments... The use of G8 funding to help Tony Clement secure re-election... The inexcusable defence of an Employment Insurance agency that has done no work... Defunding ideologically suspect aid agencies... Expanding PMO staffing... The threat of lost jobs in the federal public service... Selling Canadian energy to the highest bidder,

shipping unrefined product and jobs to other places... Meddling in the market with favorable tax treatment for the oil industry, weakening environmental reviews, and trash-talking foreign environmentalists... Voter suppression via robo-calls... Shrill defence of the Northern Gateway pipeline... Frontal attacks on old age security..." (Susan Riley, 'Harper wins when voters snooze', *Ottawa Citizen*, 27-01-2012).

- "As of Feb. 1, 2012, the number of full-time employees in the Prime Minister's Office was 94, with 21 of them making \$100,000 or more ... The cost of Harper's office soared 30 per cent between 2007 and 2010, from around \$7.6 million to \$9.8 million... (Jason Fekete, *Ottawa Citizen*, 13-04-2012).
- "When 11 former presidents of the Canadian bar Association rebuke the government for attacking Canada's top jurist, it is fair to ask the question: How low can Prime Minister Harper's government go? ... Attacking the integrity of the Chief Justice is a very serious matter, an attack without precedent in Canadian history. It shows a Prime Minister furious at the Supreme Court, angry at obstacles put in the way of his exercise of power, willing to misrepresent facts and lash out at one of the country's most respected persons... What must especially gall Mr. Harper is that he appointed a majority of the Court's current judges." Jeffrey Simpson, 'Conservatives sink to a new low', *Globe and Mail*, 7-05-2014.
- "Mr. Harper putting Pierre Poilievre in as his Minister of Democratic Reform means we will soon have no democracy at all. Mr. Poilievre would no doubt feel comfortable defending 'democracy' on the streets of Kiev with the remnants of the skinheads there. Putting this fellow who has shown little understanding of democratic principles or practices in charge of 'reforming' those practices is,

in effect, Harper's way of retiring the whole concept of democracy from Canadian politics." (Fred Ryan, 'Kissing old Canada good-bye?' *West Quebec Post*, 18-04-2014).

- "He is an evangelical conservative, so dedicated to converting others to his world view that he has transformed – polarized, really – the political life of the country (Ibbitson 28-04-12)."
- "Two protests seemingly miles apart, were about the kind of country we want to live in. a) Save our prison farms – they mean local food chains, rehabilitation, mental health, socialization, minimum security; and b) What are prisons for – Keeping us safe? Rehabilitation? Or harsh punishment, pure and simple? The Canada we thought we knew: civic responsibility, lending a hand, second chances. This image got a boot in the face. The Prime Minister has shown a suspicious interest in the infliction of pain." Margaret Atwood, *Globe and Mail*, 6-07-2010.

2. The Dumbing-Down of Canadian Democracy:

"Democracy is not an easy system of governance. It is fragile and its essence cannot be guaranteed only because there is an assurance of periodic elections... This requires constant vigilance lest the people who come into power...then go astray. This vigilance can be exercised only if there is information available to the people. Thus transparency and availability of information is critical to hold the government accountable." Social Watch E-Newsletter, sw-news-bounces@listas.item.org.uy

There has been the willingness to attack the core elements of our democratic society, especially the two most fundamental: the courts

and the management of our electoral process.
Gar Pardy, Embassy Newspaper

“Canadian democracy rates a mediocre ‘C’ in new report”. Mark Kennedy, *Ottawa Citizen*, 25-03-2015.

This chapter will show how the Harper Conservatives have tended to erode Canada’s democratic spirit, beliefs and institutions. This statement is fact not rhetoric. A December 2014 survey for the Samara group reported in the *Citizen* of 25 March 2015 showed there is lower voter turnout in elections; low participation in political activities; a lack of diversity in the House of Commons; and a sentiment politicians don’t really care to hear from voters. Canada has one of the lowest voter turnouts of any comparative western democracy. The political process now repels more citizens than it attracts. In particular, the Harper Conservatives stand accused of concentrating power, attacking the democratic bases of all our institutions, and governing with a mixture of centralization, secrecy and authoritarianism.

Canada’s traditional democracy had a distinctive cultural element. The political scientist, Rand Dyck, notes that the objectives of the United States are “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” whereas those of Canada, set out in our Constitution, are “peace, order and good government”. Throughout our history Canadians have been drawn to a peaceful, lawful society in which the rules of our democratic institutions are maintained. Pollster Allan Gregg asked ordinary Canadians what they thought is distinctive about their country. They replied, “Non-violence, tolerance, humane treatment of the poor and disadvantaged and official bilingualism”.

One can conclude that Canadians prefer a power structure that is limited because it is decentralized, dispersed and divided. Unfortunately, the current reality in Canada under the Harper Conservatives does not conform to these preferences.

Here is a list of accusations made against the Harper Conservatives.

- . Demeaning the House of Commons
- . Packing the Senate and contributing to its loss of repute
- . Attempting to undermine the fairness of the electoral system
- . Concentrating power in the office of Prime Minister
- . Confronting the courts
- . Not accepting the impartiality of the public service
- . Weakening the independence of government agencies
- . Engaging in sleazy politics
- . Neglecting federal-provincial relations
- . According insufficient importance to Quebec and the Native Peoples

Demeaning the House of Commons

Prime Minister **Harper twice prorogued Parliament to save his political skin**. The temporary closing of Parliament to prepare for a new session is meant to happen only when the legislative agenda is largely completed. In 2008 Harper shut down Parliament to prevent a coalition of opposition parties from taking power. He claimed that a coalition of ‘losing parties’ that held a majority of seats in the House of Commons would not have the legitimacy to govern. This, quite simply, was a lie. Harper then prorogued Parliament a year later in 2009 to avoid losing a motion of non-confidence over the scandal of detainees in Afghanistan.

Tight discipline is used to control the Conservative Party Caucus and its MPs. Independent votes are not tolerated. Even the few minutes allowed to MPs for short speeches to serve their constituency is taken over by the Party to spout the party line of the day. Michael Chong’s private members bill to empower MP’s a little and restrict the powers of party leaders was passed by the House of Commons and then

stalled in the Senate by the Conservative majority. The government has amassed **unparalleled executive power** in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO – Officials hired by Harper to do his bidding).

The Conservative MPs were issued a secret handbook detailing how they could **disrupt the committee process, which is** vital to the effective working of this most fundamental of our democratic institutions.

The usefulness of the **Question Period is vitiating** by the government not answering questions – no information, no democracy. Instead, some putdown of the previous government's record is rolled out time and again.

In 2011, the Government decided to **eliminate the traditional debate in response to the Throne Speech** (the Government's plan for the session), leaving time only for passing its budget.

Exceptional methods are used to crush the opposition. There are attack ads against opposition leaders on TV – often using public funds. Because the Conservatives were bringing in more private money than all the opposition parties, the government **cut off the public funding of political parties** which had helped to balance the electoral process.

Harper had once argued that giant '**omnibus bills**', used to hide subsidiary legislation, were illegitimate, but he has twice used 900 page omnibus bills, one of them forcing through some 70 hidden laws. For instance, in the Conservative's latest omnibus bill in the spring of 2015, supposedly dealing with the budget, the government gave itself the power to override the labour law and impose a contentious new sick-leave and disability regime for public servants.

Omnibus bills are not the only form of legislation calculated to hide new laws from public view. The "cyberbullying bill", which was intended to make it a crime to post revealing images of someone online without their consent, also hid

under its skirts a number of unrelated measures including one that made it easier for the police and the government to obtain a customer's personal data from Internet and telephone providers without a warrant.

The Senate Scandal

For many years, Prime Minister Harper has let it be known he prefers a reformed Senate in which senators would be elected by the provinces for a set period of time. Having been told many times this would require a Constitutional amendment he eventually submitted his proposal to the Supreme Court for its opinion. The Court stipulated that the provinces would have to approve major changes to the Senate.

Harper recognized he would have to use the Senate as it is. So it was that Harper who wanted to stop nominations to the Upper Chamber **ended up naming the largest number of Senators in Canadian history (62)**. Amongst this number he personally nominated several party hacks well known to the public, Pamela Wallin and Mike Duffy to help promote the Conservative Party at the tax-payers' expense.

However, as time went on they were both accused of fraudulently padding their travel and living expenses and sometimes double charging. The two senators were going to party meetings to promote the Conservatives at public expense – as they had been told they could. As this scandal became public, **Harper was caught up in trying to defend the two in question-period and then stonewalling most questions**. Eventually, it became known that the PM's Chief of Staff, Nigel Wright, offered Duffy \$90,000 to cover his expenses and quiet the scandal. It just made the Party look even more under-handed. As time went on, the Conservative Senators kicked Duffy and Wallin out of their caucus and suspended them from the Senate –without due process. Harper put all the blame on his loyal servant, Nigel Wright.

Gradually it became known **that the youths in the Prime Minister's Office were telling the**

venerable Senators what to do. Mike Duffy's lawyer accused the PMO of approving his housing allowance and choreographing how he would respond to criticism. The PMO even threatened to expel him from the Senate over the residency issue. "The threat seems obvious: you take the dive or the Subcommittee will throw you out". So Duffy is implying the long arm of the Prime Minister's Office can even control Senate committees! By 2015, the RCMP reported that the PMO had indeed tried to change the Senate's report on the subject.

The Prime Minister refused to take any blame for his choices. And then, worst of all, there were the weeks and **months of lies and half-truths, stonewalling and delays, under-handed deals and behind the scenes game-playing** – all this leading to the destruction of the reputation of one of Canada's two Chambers of Parliament.

The journalist, Andrew Coyne, writing in the Ottawa Citizen, came to the following conclusion about the sordid Senate scandal, "Well, that was edifying. The Conservative government and one of its Senators would appear to have spent the better part of the last year **discreetly blackmailing each other**. Now they are doing so openly."

Attacking the basis of Canadian democracy: the electoral system

One of the mainstays of Canadian democracy is the fine reputation of its electoral process. Central to this process is the independent, hands-off, non-partisan agency Elections Canada which oversees each election. The Chief Electoral officer is an appointee who answers to Parliament, not to the government.

In 2000, Stephen Harper referred to Elections Canada officials as "jackasses". Since he came into power the federal electoral system has been in turmoil and the Conservatives have treated with disdain the laws that keep our elections fair. In the 2006 election, Elections Canada said that some of the Conservatives' *local* advertising expenses were not eligible because they had come from the *national* campaign. When Harper

took the agency to court, it found that Elections Canada was right.

The 2011 election was bedevilled by vote suppression tactics and illicit 'robocalls' that misdirected electors. They were found to have been the work of someone with access to the Conservative party voter lists. The Court convicted a former Conservative Party staffer for the robocalls scandal in Guelph and sentenced him to jail, saying it was an "affront to the electoral process". The judge also said he believes the employee of the Conservative party did not act alone. Elections Canada pointed out it could never find the culprits until it had investigative powers to compel testimony and to oblige political parties to keep lists of phone calls.

2014 was revenge time for the Conservatives. The Government placed before Parliament a new, 252 page 'Fair Elections Act' that they tried to force through in several weeks. Among its many changes, the new Act would have:

- Stripped the Chief Electoral Officer of authority to appoint the Elections Commissioner (who has the main investigatory powers) and instead make him a subordinate of the Director of Public Prosecutions who reports to the Attorney General, a member of Cabinet.
- Stopped the Commissioner from informing Canadians that an investigation is under way.
- Stopped the Chief Electoral officer from communicating with Canadians.
- Taken away the ability of people without identification to use the vouching system to vote.
- Increased fundraising and spending limits while opening up new loopholes.
- Given incumbent politicians more power over poll-worker

appointments – the on-the-spot people who verify our votes.

Fortunately, immense rage across the country, stimulated by the Council of Canadians, forced the Harper Conservatives to amend the Bill and some of its most objectionable electoral changes were abandoned. But the new act *still* makes the Elections Commissioner an officer of the government – one of the very groups he is meant to investigate for electoral wrongdoing; does not require parties to keep phone lists; and there is still no ability to compel oral evidence from potential witnesses. Canada is saddled with a new law that, according to the *Globe and Mail*, frightfully complicates the vouching system (thereby disenfranchising many young and poor citizens); and forbids Elections Canada to educate the public

A further example of conservative electoral aggressiveness was the reaction of the former **Conservative MP Dean Del Mastro being found guilty that** he had spent more than the legal limit in the 2008 election, had failed to report a personal contribution to his campaign, and had submitted false documents. Exiting the court he cast doubt on its verdict, saying that he and the judge had a difference of opinion. He said he would appeal and continue to sit as an MP. Several days later he finally admitted he had to resign from Parliament. The *Globe and Mail* was happy: “PM’s former pit bull gets his comeuppance”, it headlined.

As the judge said, Del Mastro “frequently distorted the truth”. Many thought he did in Parliament too, acting as though Conservative politicians thought they were above both honesty and the law. Del Mastro had been personally selected by Prime Minister Harper as his Parliamentary Secretary and was renowned for cantankerous and misleading rants in Parliament. Like his predecessor Pierre Poilievre and his successor, Paul Calandra, he knew no limits in his partisan combativeness.

The Liberal candidate whom Del Mastro had unfairly defeated in Peterborough, Betsy McGregor, had this to say: “Voters, donors,

campaign workers and fellow candidates were all denied a fair election. With his resignation, Peterborough is left with no voice in Parliament. Election fraud is not a victimless crime. It damages democracy and hurts us all.”

Confrontation with the courts

Prime Minister Harper thinks he is so powerful that for the first time in Canadian history he **crossed over jurisdictional lines and attacked the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court**, Beverly MacLauglin. The PM accused her of interference. It turns out that of the government’s list of six nominees for a Quebec vacancy on the Supreme Court, four who were ineligible, so the Chief Justice had every reason to call. As the *Globe and Mail* wrote in an editorial, it gave the impression the PM was simply spoiling for a fight with the High Court. The newspaper said it was **one of Mr. Harper’s most imprudent acts**.

Later, when the Court tossed out the old rules on prostitution, citing them as a violation of prostitutes’ constitutional right not to be beaten or murdered, the Harper government brought in new legislation which in effect flung the ruling back in the judges’ faces. The confrontations is a collision of beliefs about how Canada should work. The Conservatives have a long history of distrusting the Constitution and a will to pick ‘populist’ fights. The Department of Justice under Peter Mackay launched a legal cold war by forging ahead with legislation which he knew would not likely be upheld by the courts

The battle over the courts carries over to the mode of nomination for Supreme Court Justices. After years of debate, the Liberals introduced reforms in 2004 that included publishing criteria for the jobs, a protocol for the selection process, and an advisory committee to vet the long list of applicants. Harper added the condition that nominees had to appear before a nationally-televised ad hoc, all-party committee of MPs and legal experts. But, when the *Globe and Mail* revealed his secret manipulations to get Judge Nadon appointed, he became so enraged he cancelled the entire public and parliamentary

participation in the nomination process which now hangs in limbo.

Trying to make the public service a part of the Conservative Party

Traditionally, Canadians have been able to count on public servants being neutral. Not many years ago it was considered one of the finest government bureaucracies in the world. A variety of ways have been used by the Conservatives to **limit the voice of the public service (including foreign affairs) by making it more submissive and partisan.**

Ralph Heinzman, a University of Ottawa research professor, prepared a report in 2014 on Canada's public service for the think tank, Canada 2020. He came to the conclusion that the public service has been 'neglected', 'devalued', and has seen its 'neutrality abused' by the Conservative government. "A big problem is that the Conservatives don't value the public service as a national institution for Canada's democracy and see it as an extension of the government to be used as desired." Heintzman referred to a "creeping politicization in the public service".

Sleaze Politics

The Conservatives resort to dirty tricks. The Conservatives try to sully the reputation of opposition leaders by **resorting to attack ads that journalists have called a dirt machine, sleaze, deceitful, and low-grade political standards.** A teacher from Winnipeg wondered how the Conservatives could use 'bullying ads' while at the same time encouraging anti-bullying campaigns in schools.

The Harper Government has **been playing the card of "ethnic politics" to the hilt.** Its Israeli policy follows every wish of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and anyone in Canada who does not is branded anti-Jewish. To play to the Toronto Tamil community he refused to attend the Commonwealth

Conference in Sri Lanka where the Sinhalese govern. Other leaders went. Many Asian business people who support the Conservatives' small-government policies are given rapid entry to Canada. During the Ukrainian uprising Harper tried to win favour with the Canadian Ukrainian community by being pictured as a leader on the issue although he was generally at cross-purposes with other Western leaders. Now the Conservative wish to build a Holocaust monument and a memorial to the victims of communism in order to attract Jewish votes and those of Poles and Ukrainians and others. They are pushing ahead despite an Ekos poll in May 2015 showing 77 per cent of Canadians are opposed to the communism memorial.

Giving insufficient importance to Quebec and Native Peoples

The Federal government has generally ignored and replaced Quebec by an Anglo-Canadian agenda of a robust military and ties to the British monarchy and British military history. Early on, the Harper Conservatives had wooed Quebecers but turned their back on them once they won a majority government without substantial Quebec support in 2011. That year, they stripped equalization components out of programs of which Quebec is the largest beneficiary, put the 'royal' back in the navy and the air force, cut funding to Radio Canada, scrapped the long gun registry and refused to let Quebec have its gun lists, toughened criminal sentencing when Quebec favored rehabilitation, and pulled back on environmental issues Quebecers favour.

Thanks to the Harperites, we are back to the two solitudes. In fact, there are three. As soon as they came into power, the Harper Conservatives turned their back on the native peoples by renegeing on the \$5 billion Kelowna Accord painstakingly negotiated between Ottawa, the provinces and the Aboriginals over the previous two years. They have never been able develop a working relationships with the native peoples. This was not helped by the Prime Minister's statement that the murder of some 1,300

aboriginal women and girls in the past ten years was not a 'sociological problem, only a series of crimes'.

A properly-functioning democracy respects the wishes of its minorities.

Summary

Democracy is like a diamond: tough and durable at the core, but whose facets can be manipulated. Citizens would be unwise to sit back and let manipulators have their way..

As it has been said by Andrew Coyne, "Time was when we had to wait weeks, even months for each new abuse of power by the Harper government. Now they arrive by the day, sometimes two or three at a time." He concluded, "Several themes run throughout these: contempt for civil liberties, for due process, for established convention, for consultation, for openness, replaced throughout by a culture of secrecy, control, expedience and partisan advantage" (Andrew Coyne, *Ottawa Citizen*, 7-06-2014).

Mr. Harper's biographer, William Johnson, said flatly that "**the government has subverted Canadian democracy**". The journalist, Jeffrey Simpson, is more scathing: "The Harper government is more bullying, scornful of dissent, intent on controlling every utterance, contemptuous of the media, and determined to carry on political war at all times and by all means" (*Globe and Mail* 16-12-2011).

Put simply, the last ten Conservative years have been a complete abuse of Canadian democracy. If Canada is going to return to democracy it means more than a change of reigning party. We have to change our institutions and constitution to ensure that no prime minister and Prime Minister's Office ever again has the absolute power and the ability to abuse our democracy that we have witnessed in this chapter.

Chapter 3: Stifling Science and Information, Muzzling Critics

"Facts will not alter the government's contempt for science: The latest research on safe injection sites is unlikely to spur any change in Canadian drug policy. The Conservative government's disregard for evidence on harm-reduction practices is part of a persistent trajectory of governing through indifference to scientific evidence." Lisa Wright, *Ottawa Citizen*, 11- 08-2014

For the greatest part of history, the bulwark of not-knowing has been superstition, dogma, and orthodoxy". Allan Gregg, *CCPA Monitor*, Nov. 2012

Silencing the scientific lambs

Access to information is a basic foundation of democracy. Government scientists are not only a core part of the public service's professionalism and specialized competence but also a fundamental source of public information. But in 2007, the Conservatives ruled that any media interview with Environment Canada scientists must be "co-ordinated" by communications staff. Recently it was reported that Canadian scientists going to international conferences were accompanied by a government 'minder'. Other scientific departments and agencies in the government soon followed suit. The Soviet Secret Police (KGB) used the same tactic to keep Russian scientists and academics under control. By the summer of 2014 Canada's Information Commissioner was investigating seven government departments in response to complaints they were 'muzzling scientists'.

This was the last of a long series of complaints. A submission from the University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre and Democracy Watch alleged the federal government is preventing media and the Canadian public from speaking to government scientists for news stories. There have also been complaints from the Canadian Science Writers' Association and the World Federation of Science Journalists. In 2012, hundreds of scientists marched on Parliament Hill to mark the 'death of evidence'. In 2013, the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada published its survey, "*The Big*

Chill: Silencing Public Interest Science” and in 2014 they followed up with *Vanishing Science: The Disappearance of Canadian Public Interest Science*”. Both reports demonstrated the extent of the barriers to scientific communication and collaboration imposed on government scientists by the Harper Conservatives.

Here is an example of what this can mean. The Canadian Press asked for an interview with a scientist, Max Bothwell, of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans who had just published an article in an important scientific review. He is a specialist on invasive seaweed. It must be a very secretive and dangerous field of research, because it took 110 pages of e-mails with 16 different officials and still the interview was never obtained. As Allan Gregg put it, “It seems as though our government’s use of evidence and facts as the basis of policy is declining, and in their place dogma, whim and political expediency are on the rise.”

The Conservatives did not restrict themselves to hampering communication, they actually stymied scientific progress. The Harper team had learned to treat specialized wisdom (from government scientists and researchers, economists, lawyers, academics, foreign policy experts etc.) with disdain. Among the scientific, research and policy endeavours shut down by the Harper Government were the following:

- Eliminating the position of National Science Advisor in 2007 and closing the Council of Science and Technology Advisors.
- Shutting down the Experimental Lakes Area, world renowned for its forefront research on fresh water (partially taken over by Ontario).
- Eliminating the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, set up by Prime Minister Mulroney to bring together expertise from the scientific, corporate and governmental sectors.
- Cutting \$137 million from the budgets of the three federal, research granting

Councils in 2009 and leaving out completely ‘Genome Canada’.

- Canceling, in 2010, the ‘long-form’ census -- the comparative, long-term basis of much statistical data on Canada that is the country’s ‘navigational system’ used for the diagnosis and verification of policy.
- The president of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission was fired.
- Using enormous omnibus budget bills to hide legislation and decimate environmental protection laws including sweeping cuts to water, air and wildlife monitoring programs.
- Among the hardest hit departments were the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Agriculture Canada which had responsibility for food recalls and meat safety. In 2014, the Dept. of Fisheries and Oceans closed all its labs monitoring pollutants in our coastal waters.
- A January 2013 report on environmental performance, using indicators such as air quality and bio-diversity, ranked Canada 15th among the world’s 17 most developed nations
- Core funding was eliminated for the Canadian Literacy and Learning Network and its provincial agencies that look after adult literacy and essential skills. The whole organization shut down.
- The charitable status of ‘Dying with Dignity Canada’ has been eliminated. The Canadian Revenue Agency said its campaign “to expand choice in dying” is a political activity!

No wonder that as scientists paraded in the streets of Ottawa in the summer of 2012 they chanted, “No science, no evidence, no truth, no democracy. They repeated the protest in 18 cities across Canada in 2013. The anti-science policies of the Harper Conservatives have one objective: to disarm well-informed and well-educated critics of government policies. It

operates on the theory of the 'big lie', which when repeated often enough tends to become the 'truth'.

As we saw, the Harper Conservatives used omnibus legislation to gut environmental protection laws and cut funding for environmental departments. Environmentalists have been branded as "radicals", "un-Canadian", and "money-launderers" by government spokesmen. As a result, the Canadian Climate Action Network discovered that the "Media coverage of climate change science has been reduced by over 80 per cent". This, of course, was one of the specific goals of the Harper government.

The 2014 report of the Professional Institute of the Public Service, entitled *The disintegration of public science in Canada*, showed that between the budgetary years of 2012-2013 and 2015-2016, ten departments and agencies with a scientific function were forecast to lose \$2.6 billion.

The whole sad process came to a head in the autumn of 2014 when the anger and frustration of the international scientific community bubbled over in a full page advertisement in the form of an "Open Letter for Canadian Leadership in Science" addressed to Prime Minister Harper by 800 academic researchers from the United States and other countries. They referred to barriers that inhibit collaboration with the media and with scientific colleagues in Canada and around the world. They asked the government to remove excessive and burdensome restrictions and barriers to research and communication aimed at overcoming threats to the planet and public health. An editorial in *New York Times* had described the restrictions as "an attempt to guarantee public ignorance".

Writing in the *National Post*, Stephen Maher claimed, "It is all Stephen Harper's doing. To avoid stories that may contradict his message, he has created a centralized machine that makes it impossible for scientists to communicate without political approval" (21-05-2015).

Cutting off Canadian access to information

"Ottawa's obsession with controlling the message has become so all-encompassing that it now threatens both the health of Canada's democracy and the country's reputation abroad... it's like an Iron Curtain has been drawn across the communication of science in this country. Jonathon Gatehouse, Maclean's Magazine, 13-05-2013

In 2005, as leader of the Opposition, Stephen Harper said "Information is the lifeblood of democracy". Since becoming prime minister, his government has constantly shown a disregard for openness. It started with the abolition of the 'long form' census document which is the crucial underpinning of most basic, comparative information on the Canadian society and economy

By 2015 the results were in. The cancellation of the long-form census has damaged research in key areas, from how immigrants and the middle class are doing to cities not being able to ensure their tax-dollars are well spent. Toronto says it has become more expensive and requires more staffing to obtain data of less quality. The key areas of concern are tracking long-term shifts of population and understanding what's going on at the neighbourhood level.

Every bit of information is micro-managed. The government stopped the annual release of federal cabinet records after the traditional 30 year holding period; in trade talks, only the government negotiators and big business representatives know what is going on – not even MPs. This caused the *Ottawa Citizen* to conclude in an editorial that, "A government that doesn't listen and thinks it can do what it wants unencumbered by the institutions that underline our democracy, **is an elected dictatorship.**"

One of the major objectives of the Harper Conservatives has been **cutting off access of Canadians to information**. Supposed threats to 'public security' are used to 'black out' huge sections of public documents requested through Access to Information. Worse, the important

government information registry (the Co-ordination of Access to Information Requests System) was simply eliminated. The government also stopped publishing the plans, priorities, performance and annual reports of its top-secret Communications Security Establishment. But, the number of 'information officers' in the Harper government has exploded. Their job seems to be to conceal as much information as possible.

After observing the government's first year in power Lawrence Martin of the Globe and Mail, described the way Conservatives managed information: "Don't answer questions in the Commons. Just slam the other side's previous record. Don't wait for elections campaigns to run your cheap attack ads. Run them before the new Opposition leader is out of the gate. Don't open the information channels, as your transparency campaign promised. Shut the channels down. Don't listen to critics. Silence or smear them. Don't admit a mistake. Act like you know everything."

Cabinet Ministers' statements are centrally controlled. The RCMP Commissioner is gagged. He, like other top officials must have all meetings even with parliamentarians approved by the central office (the PMO). Civil servants cannot provide information to people outside the government without the written consent of the Prime Minister's office.

Another way the Conservatives found of blocking access to information was to close libraries. The first to be targeted were scientific libraries. Seven of the eleven regional libraries of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans were closed with their decades of aquatic research being scooped up for private use by companies or hauled off to the dump. This soon extended to most of the libraries of the federal government. These closures do away with much specialized knowledge and irreplaceable documents as well as our capacity to do research and understand Canadian history.

Politicizing Canadian History

The Harper Conservatives want to 're-form' Canada and the way Canadians think. It is the first government to come into power with this aim. It was not in their election platform and Canadians never gave them a mandate to transform Canadian culture. Nothing is spared. They even want to re-write Canadian history. References to Conservative politicians such as 'Diefenbaker' and 'Macdonald' started popping up all over. The Harperites also want Canada to be like many other countries – aggressive and warlike. So they started to glorify the history of the War of 1812 and use scarce funds to build war monuments. No word about Canada's trend-setting record as peacekeepers.

Next they turned the globally respected Canadian Museum of Civilization into the Canadian Museum of History. Some observers thought it was a commitment to Canadian history until they understood the true motive. As professor and author Andrew Cohen described it, "The government's record is disturbing. Its telling of history is consciously selective and relentlessly political... What we're getting is Conservative history. In the choices it makes, in what it commemorates and doesn't, it reflects a narrow, partisan perspective". For instance, references to unions and the worker's movements have been removed.

Government communications controlled and misused

The Harper Conservatives are accused of being less not more accountable, of using taxpayers' money to pay for party promotion, and of blurring the lines between political and administrative functions. By 2014, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation estimated there were 3,325 information officers costing \$263 million a year working for the public service. But the main problem is not the numbers but what they do.

The lines between the public service and their political masters need to be kept as distinct as possible. Under the Conservatives the opposite has happened. At the top, the lines have been blurred between the political staff of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the administrative

staff of the Privy Council Office (PCO). This does away with the PCO's role as a neutral, expert advisor to the PM.

Because both the PMO and the PCO come under the prime minister, the Conservatives have worked hard to use them together to advance party as well as government communications. By 2008, the 40 people who worked for these two offices in the 1940s and 50s had escalated to 234 – just to serve the prime minister. By 2011, the PCO's budget alone was nearly \$160 million. This was to allow it to carry out its new communications and publicity functions. The task is to manage the Government's \$136 million advertising campaign promoting the 'Economic Action Plan' – even if it is doubtful the PM can legally or ethically employ the public service for self-serving marketing purposes. In 2013 a *Canadian Press* survey revealed the public considered the on-going ads to be "Political advertising, a waste of tax-payers money, or junk".

The *Globe and Mail* editorialized, "The Harper government has indulged its unfortunate habit of using federal dollars for partisan ends – from ads touting a post-recession economic plan that continued to air years into the recovery, to the attack ads aimed at the country's biggest telecommunications companies... to ads trumpeting a child-care tax credit regime that had yet to be approved by Parliament – in an egregious misallocation of public funds." A further example came in May 2015 when two government ministers were blasted for using public funds and departmental staff to prepare 'vanity videos' extolling government policies.

This is not all there is to the Conservatives' control and abuse of government communications. The Prime Minister **rarely holds press conferences** – only photo ops. He sidesteps the Parliamentary Press Gallery. News is presented by ministers in question period or by ministerial aides doggedly repeating approved lines. Finally we have a seemingly small Conservative action with potentially enormous repercussions. The Websites of all

the federal government's departments and agencies are being eliminated and concentrated in one website called 'canada.ca'. So imagine this: you want specific information or you want to communicate with your government. Where will you look in this new monster site? So much for transparency and openness.

Intimidating Civil Society

In Putin's Russia public demonstrations are closely observed and the tax authorities used against opponents. Here in Canada we do the same.

In June 2014, Canadians learned that the **Harper government is monitoring 'all known demonstrations' in the country**. Reports are collected in a central registry in the Government Operations Centre. Tolerance, dissent and civil liberties do not rate very high among Conservative values.

Ottawa **goes after "whistle blowers"** - public servants who believe it is their duty to denounce wrong-doing. The government has opened more than 25 inquiries on media leaks in six different departments since 2005.

Not only is the right of peaceful protest under pressure, so is the right of peaceful association. Private associations, community organizations, advocacy groups, churches, unions and charitable organizations are collectively called civil society. The **Harper government has worked aggressively to intimidate and silence these groups**. They include the Institute on First Nations Statistics, the Institute on Governance, the National Organization on Aboriginal Health, the National Council on Social Welfare and the Canadian Council on Learning. The Research and Analysis Services on Remuneration was disposed of. It was the only independent unit providing comparative data on salaries in the public service and the private sector.

At the same time, the Conservatives had the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), one of its strong-arm tools, ferreting out every last financial

document of -- you guessed it -- Canada's charities! They are protectors of democracy which have a first-hand knowledge of what government is doing in specific fields.

To have enough money, charities have to have 'charitable status' that gives their donors tax deductions. The CRA controls charitable status. All the CRA has to do is start investigating a charity and it takes up energy and time and instills fear. The CRA becomes a bureaucratic tool the government can use to intimidate and silence its critics.

The onslaught began in 2012 when the Conservative government ordered the CRA to undertake a wave of audits, covering eventually some 60 religious, foreign aid, environmental, democratic and developmental associations. The cost to the taxpayer is an additional \$13 million in the CRA's budget to create a special team of auditors. Some of the most popular associations were included: the Suzuki Foundation, the United Church, Amnesty International, Tides Canada Initiatives Society, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Oxfam and Equiterre. Some audits stretch for more than two years. Government spokespersons have alleged these organizations were associated with terrorists, money-launderers, and foreign radicals.

All audited organizations had one thing in common: they had dared criticize the Harper Conservatives. The result has been: "censorship by audit", "selective targeting", "advocacy chill", "gagging charities with red tape" and "self-censoring for fear of displeasing the CRA". Silencing and discrediting were the goals. The very basis of modern democracy is under attack. Conservative think-tanks have not been targeted.

Chapter 4: Speak loudly and carry no stick: Harper's Foreign Policy

The title of this chapter was in a letter to the editor in *Le Droit* comparing Harper's style to that of President Teddy Roosevelt's famous

summary of his foreign policy, "Speak softly and carry a big stick".

It is just one of the sayings used to describe Harper's foreign policy including: 'megaphone diplomacy', 'bullhorn diplomacy', 'hit and run foreign policy, and 'policy without vision'. Another is that Harper's foreign policy is 'pugnaciously simplistic' because it sees the world as 'polarized' between 'good and evil', 'right and wrong'.

Harper's policy is noted for the following:

- A simplistic, black and white, for or against, attitude, which depends on gut feelings and ideology and ignoring Canada's highly respected expertise in foreign affairs.
- The rejection of Canada's traditional positive engagement in international affairs and contributions to peace and security.
- An attempt to change Canada from a peace-making society into an aggressive war-making country.
- One-sided support for Israel in Middle East politics.
- Obstructing measures to correct climate change: Canada has become a pariah in the field.
- The lack of a coherent defence policy.
- Shameful treatment of veterans.
- Confusion about the Arctic.
- Trashing Canada's international development program.
- A drastic decline of Canada in the eyes of the world

In his recent book, *How We Lead: Canada in a Century of Change*, Joe Clark has a chapter on 'Canada's Foreign Policy Today'. As a former Prime Minister and long serving Foreign Minister, as well as coming from a Conservative tradition, Mr. Clark has excellent credentials for providing us an overview of Canada's present foreign policy.

Mr. Clark reminds us that international issues played virtually no part in the platforms. Nonetheless, his party has pursued a more pugnacious foreign policy and promoted Canada's profile as a war-fighting nation. Even so, there is no coherent and consistent approach to defence policy. On the other hand, there has been a deliberate decline in the funding and priority assigned to Canada's diplomatic capacity and foreign aid.

One of Clark's major themes is that this government has been moving away from traditionally important areas of Canadian concern – diplomacy, pursuing broad multilateral relations, partnerships with civil society and NGO's, international development, a balanced role in the Middle East and robust support for the United Nations. Clark says Harper's hostility toward the United Nations is framed regularly in the context of solidarity with Israel. At the UN, our participation in peacekeeping missions has fallen from first place when it began to fifty-fifth in 2012. Clark says, "Canada now talks more than we act, and our tone is almost adolescent – forceful, certain, enthusiastic, combative, full of sound and fury".

In the *Toronto Star* the journalist Haroon Siddiqui summarizes Clark's arguments in an article entitled, "Harper has ignored Canadian ways while destroying our reputation". He says of Clark's book, "It's a damning critique of how Harper has changed Canada's image in the world, from a nation admired for its sophistication in mediating, peacekeeping, and working co-operatively in multilateral institutions to one that's belligerent, divisive and dismissive of the United Nations and other international institutions, such as the Commonwealth, La Francophonie, and the Organization of American States".

Joe Clark is not the only former prime minister who has criticized Harper's foreign policy. Former Conservative Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, used a series of interviews in September 2014 to "stick his stiletto into Harper". Mr. Mulroney criticized the Harper

orientation to foreign policy, climate change, and the Supreme Court. Mulroney told CTV "When Canada, for the first time in our history, loses a vote at the United Nations to become a member of the Security Council ...losing it to Portugal, which was on the verge of bankruptcy at the time, you look in the mirror and say I think we have a problem".

Little knowledge of foreign policy explains simplistic approach

When he came to government neither Harper nor the members of his cabinet had ever traveled much outside of Canada let alone had any experience in international relations. So, lacking any knowledge of foreign policy, their basic approach has been to apply their world view (ideology) to world affairs, to try to replace liberal internationalism with a belligerent Canada, to use the world stage to attract domestic ethnic audiences to their electoral base, and to use bluster and bullying on the world stage just as they do at home.

A compelling explanation for Harper's international outlook comes from his Civitas speech in Toronto in 2003 when he provided clues to his foreign policy beliefs. He wanted, he said, to "rediscover" the traditional conservatism of the political philosopher Edmund Burke. The emerging debates on foreign affairs should be fought on moral grounds of right and duty. John Ibbitson is probably the closest to the mark in assessing the present government's foreign policy. In a way, he says, the changes were so profound to the point of being baffling: "*What was elitist became populist; what was multilateral became self-assertive; what was cooperative became confrontational; what was foreign affairs became an extension of domestic politics. What was peacekeeping, foreign aid, collective security ... became a relentless focus on trade agreements.*" "What motivates Harper?" asks journalist Mark Kennedy. "It's about the simplicity of right and wrong, of good and evil."

In a book called *The Ugly Canadian*, Yves Engler has proposed that the two common **threads of Harper's foreign policy are growing militarism and support for corporate interests**. We will look at militarism below. We all know that the Alberta tar sands are perhaps the biggest extraction enterprise in the country but few will know that overseas investment by Canadian mining companies rose from \$30 billion in 2002 to \$230 billion in 2011. Accordingly, the federal government provided \$15 million for a new Canada School of Energy and Environment, essentially an industry think tank. At the same time, our diplomats have been retrained as apologists for the tar sands and mining. Our development projects lend moral support to corporations and diplomats press foreign governments not to enact stricter mining laws. However, a report from the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada concluded: **"Canadian companies have been the most significant group involved in unfortunate incidents in the developing world"** – incidents include: the displacement of indigenous communities, environmental damage, and violent confrontation with protesters.

Canada's reputation as a diplomatic state has been in free fall. By 2012, as the *Globe and Mail* journalist Jeffrey Simpson pointed out, the Conservatives were running on **blind ideology blended with profound parochialism**. Foreign Affairs and aid budgets were seriously cut, embassy residences in prime locations sold off, staff at missions hollowed out, consulates closed, and budgets for outreach reduced. Canada, Simpson maintained, "Had retreated into an anglospheric worldview coupled with a focus on trade deals, but lacking any sense of a wider conception of international affairs."

'Hit and run' diplomacy, it has been said, does not work because it does not bring opposing sides together or give Canadian diplomats a chance to make a difference. On the other hand, Canada being a small, open economy we must recognize that being a negotiator, 'an honest broker', is still the best role that we can fulfill in

international politics. The world does not need another aggressive state full of threats and bluster. And yet this is exactly what the Harper Conservatives have given us. They decided to take a hard line on Iran and closed our embassy there thus cutting off all diplomacy. When a new government was elected in Iran, the U.S. and Europeans started to negotiate with it. The result was a seeming halt in Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief in trade and financial sanctions. Canada followed Israel in scoffing at the deal, further marginalizing itself in the Middle East and with the United States.

Along came the Ukrainian crisis and once again Harper and Baird outdid themselves in their insults to Vladimir Putin as the **West's "most vocal hawks" with little to back it up except bluster**. When it came to direct tangible aid Canada's was modest, slow and highly conditional relative to Ukraine's massive, urgent needs. Though Putin's threat to Europe was compared to Hitler's, when the US and UK proposed higher defence spending our Prime Minister led the opposition. Mr. Harper also recognizes that his hard line on Moscow plays well with Canada's Ukrainian and Polish populations.

The Conservatives boast about standing up to dictators, but **their democracy agenda does not meet their rhetoric**. In 2008, Harper promised to establish a new, multi-party, democracy promotion agency. But by 2010 the atmosphere for multiparty cooperation had been poisoned; the agency had disappeared from the government's agenda; the existing Democracy Council was disbanded; funding was terminated for the Forum of the Federations; the Office of Democratic Governance within CIDA vanished; the Democracy Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs was folded in with other units, and then they closed the internationally respected Rights and Democracy agency. Ottawa went on to disband the Sudan Task Force at a time of renewed fighting in Darfur. This coincided with the expiration of the government's Global Peace and Security Fund.

But, the Conservatives still found \$5 million annually for an 'Office of Religious Freedom'.

Down with the United Nations

Until the arrival of the government of Stephen Harper, Canada had played a leading role at the United Nations. Since its founding, Canada has been one of its great champions. It was a Canadian, Prof. John Humphrey, who was the principal architect of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. More recent Canadian initiatives include campaigns to ban land mines and curtail the trade in blood diamonds, the establishment of the International Criminal Court, and orchestrating awareness of the plight of child soldiers.

But, Canada did not just go along with the wave. We have never thought the UN was a perfect institution. Canadians have always tried to improve and reform the UN. Former Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work in introducing peacekeeping to the UN. We were fundamental in developing the 'law of the sea'. For years, we worked to improve the openness of the Security Council. More recently, Canada funded the Commission that created the idea of the international community's 'Responsibility to Protect' citizens. "R2P" is slowly reconstituting notions of sovereignty so that the world can get on with modernizing international relations.

Working positively on the UN is no longer the case. The Harper Conservatives have accused the UN of 'moral relativism', 'going along to get along', and 'having to please every dictator in the UN'. Liberal internationalism (of which multilateralism and the UN are among the key components) was caricatured as "weak and wrong". It is clear that the Harper Government's aim has been to diminish the UN in the eyes of Canadians and indeed of the world.

Increasingly, the government of Canada is undermining the UN and global cooperation. Some recent examples: We have not signed the treaty to regulate arms trade; Canadian

diplomats at the UN make lacklustre contributions to debates on the Responsibility to Protect; we have withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and the Convention on Desertification; our legislation to implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions will nullify the convention's intent. Our record on the issue of climate change has been so deplorable that we have received several 'fossil of the year' awards. In addition, cuts to the Department of Foreign Affairs and to the salaries of its officers have reduced our diplomatic capacity. We have drastically reduced the number of refugees Canada accepts and our aid program has been cut and folded in with the Department of Foreign Affairs. Where Canada was strong, it is now weak; where we were once prudent participants we are now hostile to much of what the UN represents.

Harper's unilateral support for Israel

The Harper government explicitly rejects even-handedness in the Middle East. "Israel has no greater friend in the world today than Canada" former Foreign Minister John Baird told the American Jewish Committee. And yet this is precisely the time when Israel could benefit most from constructive examination of its options.

The Israeli author Ari Shavit has warned that Israel needs to confront the "moral, demographic and political disaster" that is the military occupation of Arab lands and the expansion of Israeli settlements. Unlike other international leaders, Harper steadfastly refused to bring up these issues on his 2013 trip to Israel. One wonders why? Some suggest it is for electoral advantage. This appears clear from the Conservatives efforts to woo Jewish voters and turn their money away from the Liberals.

All Canadian governments have always supported Israel's right to exist in security ever since the first UN vote on the State of Israel in 1947, of which Lester Pearson was one of the architects. What has changed is Harper's single-minded, abrasive support of Israel right or

wrong. The problem with this is that it is neither in Canada's interest nor in the interest of effective diplomacy. Our interest, as a country with both Arab and Jewish citizens is not to work for either one but to strive for a more secure Middle East for the good of everyone. As retired diplomat Jeremy Kinsman has written in the *National Post*, "Helping Israelis find an equitable solution, rather than mere cheerleading, is what friends are for." To prove the point, 300 Holocaust survivors and their descendants condemned Israel's 'genocide of Palestinian people' in an advertisement in the New York Times.

What we see here is another example of Harper's divisive politics. To make his point, he insinuates that anyone who disagrees with him is his enemy. He vituperates against a 'balanced' approach to foreign policy as "weak and wrong" and "moral relativism". He finds "dark corners" in civil society, on campuses and at the United Nations. This is an obvious attempt to paint everyone who disagrees with him on Israel as racist, full of hatred. The opposite is the truth. In reality, Harper's unblinking support for Netanyahu's Israeli government is a microcosm of all that is wrong with his foreign policy. It is simplistic, narrow, ill-informed, and in the end, aimed at domestic audiences.

The Ups and Downs of Defence under the Conservatives

'Inconsistent' is the one word that describes the defence policy of the Harper Conservatives. The historian and military expert Jack Granatstein went so far as to claim the Conservatives had no defence policy at all. The lack of consistency can be seen throughout their defence initiatives but here we will concentrate on the ups and downs of the defence budget, the on again off again procurement policies, the fragility of the armed forces and the inhuman treatment of our veterans. But, we should never forget that the man who spent more than 18 billion of our dollars in Afghanistan, and after many Canadian soldiers were killed or wounded, was one of the first to run away leaving behind a state of

warlords, Taliban and narco-traffickers where women can't go out without a male guardian.

The bare facts are striking enough. Determined to give Canada the means to be a 'warrior state', the markedly pro-military Stephen Harper increased the Department of Defence's budget from \$15 billion in 2005 to \$21 billion in 2011. But, in 2013-14 the budget was cut by 22% or \$3.1 billion. It was the third consecutive year the expenditures for military equipment, arms and infrastructure had significant reductions. This brought the Defence budget down to the lowest level since the Second World War, just one per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This did not stop the Conservatives from spending a quarter of a million dollars on new army insignia to replace the maple leaf with the older British 'pips' and crowns as part of the government's push to re-instate symbols of the monarchy.

The Canadian military is now woefully underequipped as a result of budget cuts and poor procurement policies by the Conservatives and previous governments. Our ancient CP-140 Aurora airplanes started patrolling the Arctic in 1980. Similarly, our jet fighters are so old that they were bought under Pierre Trudeau, also in the 1980's. In 2010 the Conservatives announced they would buy the largely U.S. built Joint Strike Fighter only to freeze the file in 2012 to make a new review which still has not been made public. There is no decision on a replacement fighter, nor even a decision on how a decision will be made. But, then, the sneakiness came back. A leaked, classified high-level Pentagon briefing revealed that Prime Minister Harper's government was secretly seeking early delivery in 2015 of four of the F-35 deep-strike fighters. A signed letter of intent would be a firm commitment to buy the rest of the order while officially maintaining that Canada is abiding by an open and transparent evaluation of Canada's combat aircraft needs – all this while not informing Parliament and continuing to deceive Canadians.

At the same time, the Navy's supply ships were decommissioned with no replacements in sight.

Other ships are years behind schedule and over budget.

The list of Conservative military equipment blunders and delays is revealing of their back and forth decision-making. According to Prof. Elinor Sloan of Carleton, as of September 2013:

- There had been no delivery on marine helicopters promised in 2008.
- No request had been made for Search and Rescue aircraft anticipated in 2005
- No start made on support ships promised for 2012.
- No design chosen for Arctic Patrol Ships planned for delivery in 2013.
- No design for replacement destroyers now expected for first delivery in 2022.
- Government cancelled the army's Close Combat Vehicle.
- The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter still under review.
- The promise for three armed, heavy ice breakers died after a year.
- The National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy failed to deliver a single vessel four years after the shipyards were chosen in 2011.

As recently as May 2015, we have had further reports that the shipbuilding program is headed for trouble because no contract has yet been signed with Vancouver's Seaspan shipyard, nor has construction of coast guard vessels begun. The Canadian military armoured vehicle project (promised for 2014) has been further delayed by 'significant' problems. Such a perilous state of affairs led the columnist Michael Den Tandt to ask, "For how much longer can the federal Conservatives shamble along with a national defence and procurement posture that is disjointed, underfunded, poorly understood, chronically secretive, obviously unequal to the challenges at hand?"

All of this was disquieting background for the run up to the government's decision to participate in the war against the Islamic State (ISIL) using its decades-old equipment. The government was

given plaudits by some for acting to support its allies against a barbaric terrorist movement. Others including the opposition parties said the government was once again reacting in its typical black and white mode. The Conservatives decided all alone, never taking the opposition or the public into their confidence. There was relatively little for humanitarian assistance or to help refugees. There is a major gap between Harper's rhetoric about countering Putin and ISIL and his slashing of military budgets. His preference for military history, monuments, medals, ceremonies, parades and words of praise do not help with equipment, deployment, budgets and veteran's services.

The columnist, Andrew Coyne was clearly offended by what he called the 'F-35 fighter fiasco', he concluded, "In sum, virtually every safeguard that was supposed to protect the public purse and public interest was subverted, evaded, or rolled over. Ministers failed to exercise oversight over their departments; Parliament was prevented from exercising oversight over ministers; the public was kept in the dark throughout... If ever proof were needed of the weakness of our democratic institutions – and of the urgent necessity of reform – this is it."

International aid subverted:

The Conservatives imposed a five year freeze on international aid expenditures in 2010 as well as amputating \$378 million from the aid budget in 2012. By 2013, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Canada's expenditures on international aid were at their lowest point in ten years. They are down from 0.27 per cent of GNP to 0.24.

Not satisfied with cutting the aid budgets, Mr. Harper took an equal amount of money for his one and only international program for Maternal and Child Health, for which he is given personal credit. Then the whole organization devoted to distributing aid, the Canadian International Development Agency was killed and the program folded into the Department of Foreign Affairs. This will make it all the more difficult to track aid projects and budgets to know what

Canada is doing in this field. Finally we have learned that to balance Mr. Harper's budget all the (purposefully?) unexpended funds voted by Parliament for foreign aid had to be returned to the treasury. With all these facts there is no need for commentary on the subversion of Canada's once outstanding aid program.

The shameful treatment of veterans:

It was Veteran's Affairs Minister Julian Fantino who arrived very late one evening to meet a delegation of veterans. He proceeded to fight with them and then stamped out. This is the government that wanted to stop the public from seeing the bodies of our Afghanistan heroes being brought home. But these insults were nothing in comparison to the abominable treatment of veterans by a government that flatters itself to be a champion of the military.

There are some 700,000 veterans of whom 200,000 were in contact with the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2013. Under this government some 40,000 Canadians fought in Afghanistan and more than 2,000 were wounded physically or mentally. In 2013-14, 18 soldiers committed suicide. They obviously needed our help. What did Ottawa do?

In 2006 it instituted a 'New Charter for Veterans'. One of its principal weapons was to condemn wounded veterans to a *one-time* pay-out of an average of \$45,000 – whereas wounded veterans used to receive a non-taxable *annual* stipend of \$31,000. The difference is staggering. When veterans sued the government to get the money back, the Harper government tried in vain to stop them going to court and then dragged its feet during the trial. The Minister was given \$4 million more to advertise false claims of aiding veterans on TV.

But there was more to come. The Conservatives next cut the Veterans department budget by \$226 million, equal to 30% of its administrative funding for 2011-2014. It was one of the deepest ministerial cuts. To add insult to injury the Conservatives took away the Integrated Centres of Personal Support and the nine regional

bureaus of Veterans Affairs Canada attached to them. For wounded veterans these centres were their lifeline for help, treatment and information from the government. If most Canadians knew about this they would be sick to their stomachs – but not the Conservatives.

All this came to ahead in November 2014 when two new facts were revealed. The Department of Veterans Affairs had 900 fulltime positions eliminated between 2011 and 2014, representing 25% of its workforce. Veterans were waiting for up to eight months for service because the remaining public servants each had between 750 and 1200 files to deal with. Then it became known the Department had returned millions of its unexpended budget that had been voted by Parliament! That is why the Veterans had all their services cut. The *Montreal Gazette* called it an "Insult to Veterans". In his attempt to explain the situation, Pat Stogran, the first Veterans Ombudsman, said the senior bureaucrats run Veterans Affairs like an insurance company, "just trying to write these people off as an industrial accident" rather than as an agency to help vets. The Government certainly encouraged them in this view. It offered senior bureaucrats some \$5 million in bonuses if they trimmed their budgets and had unexpended funds to return to the Treasury Board. As a run-up to the federal election the Harper Conservatives started making new promises to the veterans.

The veterans began fighting back. A group of Afghan veterans started a lawsuit against the federal government (what a spectacle!) over their pensions. Six other groups of veteran advocates formed a coalition to boycott government announcements and galvanize votes against Conservatives. Others plan to criss-cross the country campaigning against the Conservatives.

Arctic Farce

Since becoming prime minister, Stephen Harper has made an annual summer visit to the people of the Canadian North to show them they are loved by Ottawa. This is all well and good. Of

course, it is also an opportunity for a picture such as the Titanic-like photo of our hero on the prow of a ship plunging through the ice with a Canadian flag streaming in the wind behind him. Like the Titanic, Harper's Arctic policy was soon to sink.

As noted, the Conservatives decided to change Canada into a war-fighting state and to turn its back on more peaceful traditions. This can even be seen in the vaunted '**Northern Vision**'. In 2007 Harper promised an Arctic port at Nanisivik, the construction of eight armed Arctic patrol ships and the construction of a fleet of three heavy duty ice-breakers. Due to budget cuts, regulatory snags, and short-sightedness there is uncertainty about when or if the Nanisivik port can start. The three ice-beakers have reportedly become one and the plan for the patrol ships cut back from eight to five. Seven years later, **nothing has been done** except to make a start on the first highway to the Arctic. While Canada blusters, Russia has moved ahead on all fronts. Ottawa is still reported to be cutting marine safety budgets and closing down more coast guard stations.

Article 76 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea gives coastal states rights over "an extended continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles". Countries wishing to assert these rights must submit supporting scientific evidence. Norway filed its claim in 2006. Despite Harper's recent claim of the North Pole, Canada still had not made a complete submission by 2014.

Harper has also worked to make polar sovereignty a priority. There are three goals: keeping control over the 1,500 kilometer Northwest Passage as global warming opens the possibility of shipping (52 vessels made full transits in 2012 and 2013); preparing for resource development; and cultivating a Conservative legacy as champion of the North. But the leitmotif is sovereignty. As Harper told Steven Chase of the *Globe and Mail*, "The government's position is unequivocal. Canada's Arctic is sovereign territory." To which northern specialists, Heather Exner-Pirot and Joel Plouffe

respond, "It is in Canada's interest to use its position to advance common interests in the circumpolar world. But Prime Minister Harper's sovereignty rhetoric is proving detrimental to Canada's ability to do so."

There are strong reasons for not basing development of the North simply on notions of sovereignty. The people of the North would like to see transport and living subsidies that would make living in the Arctic region more economical and open it to development projects. Also, it has been said that only one thing can overcome the challenges of weather and distance in the great white North, and that is 'cooperation'. In an era of global politics, Harper's 'sovereignty' rhetoric is out-of-date. It is our increasing isolationism that is most dangerous to Canada's interest in the Arctic. Perhaps the best way to use our claim of sovereignty would be to cooperate with the others in the Arctic Council to advance our common interests.

Instead of this, the Harper government has been systematically weakening the state-based Arctic Council during the past two years when we served as Chair. At Canada's suggestion, the Council agreed to create an Arctic Economic Council. Non-Arctic states are laying out their primarily economic interests in the region. They may well switch their attention to the Arctic Economic Council with its business interests dealing with private policy and dismissive toward environmental, climate and sustainable development issues.

Chapter 5. Economics and Politics: Mostly for Business and the Rich

Chapter 1 was an overview of how to remember and to think about the great harm the Harper Conservatives have done to Canada. The second, third and fourth Chapters looked at the specific damage done to our democracy, our sources of information and Canada's world reputation. In this last chapter, before the conclusions, we look at various injurious Conservative policies, economic and political. It

is impossible to cover all policy areas in depth. The objective is to cover the main activities of the Conservatives and show how they have marred Canada and its citizens.

From the beginning the principal objective has been to minimize government and to serve business interests and the wealthy. We can see this in support for the resource industries, free trade [explain], tax reduction, income splitting, and child care. The Conservatives have hung on to policies that satisfy their electoral base, especially those such as crime and guns. They have pet enemies like the CBC, the telecommunication companies, unions, the environment, and government regulations and services. It is well known the Harper Conservatives did not care for government in general and the public service and Ottawa in particular. They don't understand very well Quebec, the native peoples and health policy. These flew under their political radar.

The Canadian economy: NOT a National Action Plan

One of the great boasts of the Harper Conservatives is that they know how to manage the Canadian economy. The record shows this boast is false. Let's look at the setbacks during the Conservatives' hold on office:

- They destroyed the federal government's economic capacity to lead and protect;
- They focused on balancing the budget and reducing taxes, thus neglecting Ottawa's role in the growth of the economy;
- They looked after the rich and the business class while leaving the poor and the middle class to fend for themselves.
- Instead of investing in jobs, technological innovation and reinforcing leading edge industries, they threw Canada back into dependence on oil and other resources, a policy vulnerable to change in global demand.

The Conservatives didn't lose any time in showing their political orientation in their first round of \$1 billion program cutbacks in 2006-7. The cutbacks included an end to medical marijuana science funding; cabinet posts; foreign missions; the High-Frequency Surface Wave Radar Project; museums; the Status of Women Canada program; the Court Challenges Program; the Centre for Research and Information on Canada; the Law Commission of Canada; RCMP drug-impaired driving program. In other words, the Conservatives found that spending on women, museums, law, research, foreign affairs and science could be savagely cut.

To go into a little greater depth, let us start with **the federal budget**. Stephen Harper believes his Master's Degree in Economics allows him to call himself an economist. Whatever the reason, he felt justified in keeping his Finance Minister, Jim Flaherty, on a short leash when Flaherty moved to Ottawa after having made a botch of the Ontario economy under Premier Harris. So we can name the Canadian economy for the eight years from 2006 to 2014 as the Harper-Flaherty economic experiment. What happened?

They inherited a \$14 billion structural surplus from the Liberal government and then, for purely ideological reasons and against all economic advice, Harper-Flaherty cut the GST by 2 percent. That wiped out the surplus and went on to cost the federal treasury \$115 billion between 2006 and 2015. Yes, the word is BILLION. If one adds the GST tax cuts to the income tax cuts of \$17 billion a year and the corporate income tax reductions of \$13 billion annually, we find the federal government \$43.4 billion a year poorer since 2005. In other words, "Canada doesn't have a deficit problem. Canada has a revenue problem".

The deficit justified them in a policy of expenditure restraint which is still leading to cuts in Ottawa's programs. The Conservative ideological reasoning is simple. If they can starve Ottawa of its tax revenues they can justify

cuts to the federal government's services and shrink the government's role in the economy while allowing the private sector to rule. The government's balancing role is destroyed.

The second major economic jolt appeared to be contradictory -- in the short run. In 2008, Harper-Flaherty, despite the rapidly worsening economy, denied that Canada was going into recession. But because of Harper's commitment at the G-20 international economic meeting and the threat of being replaced by a coalition of the opposition parties, Harper-Flaherty turned 180 degrees and adopted a huge temporary stimulus package with increased expenditures of \$45 billion over three years – **leading to a \$55 billion deficit in 2009-10, the largest federal deficit ever.**

The seeming Conservative ideological reversal did not last long. They were soon back to what they like best: firing people in the public service, attacking the unions, cutting back services to reduce the deficit, and reducing the size of government.

Two former leading officials in the Finance Department, Scott Clark and Peter De Vries, recorded the tragedy that followed, "During the time Flaherty was Finance Minister from 2006 to 2014, **Canada's federal debt increased by \$160 billion**, the country recorded record trade deficits, investment growth stalled, economic growth declined year over year, the unemployment rate remained stuck at seven per cent and the labor force participation rate declined, as did the percentage of the adult population employed." The principal error was to fix on austerity and deficit reduction to the exclusion of investment and economic growth. It was not until the end of 2014 that the Bank of Canada could announce that the economic recovery might be 'broadening'. Remember this is the party which trumpets that only it can manage the economy!

The third slap of Harper-Flaherty to Ottawa's economic integrity was to **hobble budgetary transparency**. Information and data became unavailable; and the public defender, Kevin

Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, came under attack – unjustly as it turned out. Then the Conservatives hid the 2012 and 2013 budget details and much additional legislation in mammoth budget 'omnibus bills' stretching to nearly 1000 pages and designed to avoid in-depth parliamentary review.

The omnibus budget bills of more than 400 pages each were a stab in the back for Canadian democracy. In the case of Bill C-38 in 2012, MPs were forced by the government to vote for 8 consecutive hours into the night so the government could use its majority to turn back every one of the 1,600 opposition party amendments. "These omnibus budget implementation bills subvert and evade the normal principles of parliamentary review of legislation... involving complex technical legal matters... with flaws and hidden implications lurking in their hundreds of pages", stated parliamentary expert, Prof. C.E.S.Franks.

Fourth, Harper-Flaherty **spurned tax fairness and after-tax equity**. For instance, the income-splitting policy only benefited the rich as did the Tax Free Savings Accounts which may cost the treasury some \$10 billion annually. As a result of Harper's cutting *in half* the federal government's contributions to the Canadian economy, we are now living in a stagnating country where standards of living have flat-lined, the middle class is shrinking, productivity and competitiveness rates are down, and - in the provinces if not in Ottawa - deficits and debt are exacerbated.

Fifth, as in other policy areas, **Harper-Flaherty didn't bother consulting the provinces** when they decided to cut the Health Transfer to provinces by \$30 billion and to increase the age of entitlement for Old Age Security by two years. Today's fiscal imbalance between the federal and provincial governments is real, not imagined. Across Canada, with the exception of B.C. and Quebec, provincial balance sheets have deteriorated considerably while Ottawa looks forward to surpluses.

The Harper Conservatives like to claim that the average Canadian is paying less in taxes now. But wait: if Ottawa is going to balance the budget (a turn-around of \$29 billion) from where do all the federal revenues come? Surprise, surprise! They will come from the average Canadian taxpayer. It is all sleight-of-hand. The annual income taxes that we average Canadians pay will rise from their present \$126 billion to \$168 billion. **So the average Joe will be paying more.** Of course, this whole house of cards could collapse if the tanking commodity markets rob the government of its revenues. But then Harper will find someone else to blame -- just as he did with the budget.

The other sources of the turn-around in the federal budget are program cuts carried out in stealth by the **enormous funds, voted by Parliament, but returned to the treasury as 'unexpended'**. The federal government held on to "stealth cuts" of \$18 billion in lapsed spending from 2012 to 2014 to balance its budget in time for the 2015 election. In the meantime, departments and agencies were starved for funds.

Not only are Canadian finances not what the Conservatives claim, but **Canada's wealth inequality is a national disaster**. The past 13 years have seen a pronounced increase in wealth in Canada, but that wealth has flowed into the hands of a relatively small group. For every new dollar of real wealth generated in Canada since 1999, 66 cents have gone to the wealthiest 20% of families, 23 cents to the 20% middle class and 10 cents to the other 60%. Canada's richest 20% take home almost 50% of all income and 70% of all wealth.

In Ottawa, one of Canada's wealthiest cities, the number of poor people forced to use the Food Bank jumped by 34% during 2014. Poor working conditions were the main cause including unstable jobs and the absence of regular salaries, along with the increased cost of living. During the past seven years of Conservative government, the number of people using food banks in Ontario grew from 314,000 to 375,000

on average per month. As Ed Broadbent has written, evidence shows that more equal societies do better for everyone for health, life expectancy, levels of social trust, opportunities and upward mobility. A large majority of Canadians also believe that severe inequality is bad for our democracy.

Another indicator of poverty and inequality are the poor living conditions of the **one million Canadians, nearly 20 per cent of the workforce, who are forced to work part time and have no health benefits or pensions**. Nor are things getting better. Part-time work accounted for 80 per cent of net job creation in 2013-2014. Not only are these people poor but their lives are thrown into turmoil, they have no guarantee of minimum hours and their savings have evaporated. They live on the edge in a brutal world. The percentage of those working for the minimum wage between 2006 and 2012 (under the Conservatives) has grown by 59 per cent.

At the other end of the spectrum is **the unending support of the Harper Conservatives for the wealthy, for business and for the resource industries**. The *Toronto Star* reporter, Thomas Walkom summarized the process in his analysis of the 2010 budget. As always with the Harper Conservatives, he writes, the real nuggets are in the fine print. In the Arctic, environmental regulations are "streamlined" to make it easier for oil companies to drill and mining firms to dig. Federal environmental assessments are to be moved to the more industry-friendly National Energy Board). A "red-tape commission" will be set up to eliminate all kinds of federal regulations deemed to interfere with business. Foreign ownership restrictions will be further weakened for the telecommunications sector.

Canada is ranked by KPMG as the most favourable tax environment for business in the developed world. This helpful context is in addition to tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. We just saw that Ottawa reduced its taxes by \$43 billion. Guess where the benefits

went? According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the bottom fifty per cent of Canadian households averaged benefits of \$1,130 while the richest five per cent of households received tax breaks of \$4,170, *almost four times as much*.

The Conservative support for the resource industries and particularly for the oil sands of Alberta knew no limits. Canada became an international climate change denier so Alberta could increase its oil production. We insulted the Americans (remember Harper saying “It’s a no-brainer”) over the southern pipeline to carry Alberta crude to the southern states. Harper put \$200 million for a road to reduce costs of petroleum exploration in the Beaufort Sea. Even so, the Conservatives eliminated 100 ‘green energy’ jobs in the Natural Resources Department in 2013.

We put all our economic eggs in the resource industry basket to the neglect of innovative energy exploration. In 2000, raw resources accounted for 40 per cent of Canada’s economic activity. By 2011, it had risen to close to 65 per cent. It was a first class blunder. Resource dependence hobbled the development of the entire economy. The few years of easy money pumped up our currency. That and high labour costs hurt other export and service sectors. Competitiveness plunged. We ran up our national and international debt. We became dependent on imported goods. Then the price of petroleum plummeted. This is the wrecked economy the Conservatives have bequeathed to Canadian citizens.

Despite their pretensions to the contrary, the Canadian economy has been scandalously mismanaged by the Harper Conservatives for the past ten years. The federal government is weaker; deficit reduction has been the focus but the federal debt doubled; foreign companies can sue us under Harper’s trade deals; Canadians have been misinformed or not informed about economic policies; legislation has been hidden from public view; money has been squandered – or just lost. But, what is worse is what the Conservatives have *not* done. Canadians have

to live with high unemployment, high levels of personal indebtedness, poor trade, low competitiveness and innovation, weakened research and development, high levels of poverty and inequality and continuing pollution and global warming.

Under the cover of this mismanagement, the Conservatives have been insidiously inserting their economic ideology into Canadian life. They use the old magicians’ trick. Keep the public’s eye focused elsewhere . All eyes are focused on deficit reduction (not debt reduction) while what is really going on is reducing government, getting rid of regulations, and minimizing government’s sway in the economy so that private wealth and power can be increased and predominate.

Of course, it is not just economic policy that the Conservatives have mismanaged. But to read about all the other policies that have tended to harm sectors of the population, you will have to consult the long form of this publication at www.johntrent.ca

6. Conclusion: The Necessary Renewal of Canada

I am not an advocate for frequent changes... but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more, enlightened, as new discoveries are made... institutions must advance also to keep pace with the times. Might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him as a boy as civilized society to remain under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors. Thomas Jefferson

Injustice is a classic trigger of anger. In such instances, not only is anger appropriate – it is necessary. Moral outrage can mobilize counter measures. Dr. Scott Schieman, *Globe and Mail*, 24-12-2014.

I hope I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters the numerous harms the Harper Conservatives have inflicted on Canada.

The Renewal: You hear all the time that people want to get rid of Harper. This raises a whole bunch of questions. We have spent a lot of time defining what is wrong with Harper Conservatism. Now we must ask what a more progressive philosophy might look like. It is not enough for us to just change the governing party. We must also have ideas about what a new government should do.

Poor Stephen: he has labored so strenuously to make Canada over in his own dark, dour, destructive, retrogressive conservative image. He has never been able to recognize that most Canadians already have their own conservative image – progressive conservative. Harper's conservatism wants to turn the clock back to before the enlightenment and modern progress. This is entirely unlike the *progressive* conservatism of Brian Mulroney, Jean Charest, Lucien Bouchard, and Joe Clark. They brought us cooperative, negotiated individualism, respect for the environment, constructive constitutionalism, and friendly foreign relations. Canadian electors are unlikely ever again to allow themselves to be governed by a conservative government – until a new party brings back Progressive Conservatism.

To know where we want to go we have to know where we have come from and where we stand now. The meaning of 'traditional Canada' must be explained. It must act as our anchor during present storms and our ethos for the future. Our country is the result of a series of at least five tensions that are never long-absent from the Canadian agenda: ethnic disputes, federal-provincial controversies, religious disagreements, economic power struggles, all overshadowed by relations with our American neighbour.

These complex 'forces in tension' have, in fact become the basis of Canada's modern identity. It is this complexity which requires the sort of tolerant government that the Harper

Conservatives have never understood. The 'forces in tension' are in endless evolution and they have created a distinct pattern of behaviour, a Canadian personality. Our complex and cumulative pressures have created recognition that we are a society of contending groups, none of which can be dominant, a society of minorities, each of which can only win in coalition with others. We have had to learn to deal with each other civilly. We have learnt accommodation. We search for balance among our multiple tensions. This procedural consensus for dealing with each other is the crown jewel of Canadian identity. This is the soul of Canada. The process of mutual acceptance is buttressed by attributes of civility, tolerance, fairness, balance, and compromise. They are the genuine result of the pressures of contending groups. Don't get me wrong. We all know that these competing tensions mean that it is rarely easy sailing in Canada. But beneath the rough seas is a calming set of mutual behaviour. The greatest harm the Harper Conservatives have done to Canada is to undermine our sense of civility and accommodation.

Now, where do we go for the future? If we look deeply, we may perceive that there is a growing refusal of the main ideas of right-wing conservatism and indeed of the Harper conservatives. Ideas are important. Usually it's great books that announce a change in fundamental thinking in a society. They provide the new concepts that push people to change their understanding of major social values. Three recent 'transformational books' are: Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*; Joseph Heath's *Enlightenment 2.0*. and *Transforming the United Nations System: Designs for a Workable World* by Joe Schwartzberg.

These three, deeply researched, books tell us that in the wider world new trends of economic, cultural and political thought are appearing that call into question many of the basic tenants of conservatism that have dominated the landscape since the 1980s. Piketty tells us that market-led economics, without political

correctives, have meant that inherited wealth is concentrated in fewer hands and captures a greater rate of growth than that of the economy as a whole. "The past devours the future", he says. Extreme inequalities are generated that undermine democratic values of merit, effort, and social justice. But, democracy can regain control through education, knowledge, information and the tax system – all of which the Harper Conservatives have turned their backs on.

The second book moves us from economics to social culture and philosophy. Heath calls for a return to the ideas of the Enlightenment which aimed to reform society using reason, to challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and to advance knowledge through evidence-based thought and intellectual interchange. The rapid-fire pace of modern politics, the hypnotic repetition of daily news, advertisements and government slogans all make it difficult for the voice of reason to be heard. The only way to restore sanity is by engaging in collective action against the social conditions that have crowded it out. In the third book on reforming the UN Schwartzberg tells us the world must deal with international organizations, the environment, global cooperation, surmounting inequality and decision-making institutions that base their legitimacy on inclusiveness and fairness. These traits have not defined the Harper Conservatives.

Now, how do these three transformative books help us understand the current problems in Canada and what to do about them? For the past three decades, we have been submitted to the conservative ideology that promotes the 'new economy'. According to this way of thinking, government was too big, taxation too high, and regulations too intrusive. Government should not be big brother. Initiative should come from business leaders who should be compensated for their work. All these thoughts have been implanted in the minds of the public by big business which controls big media, big think tanks, and right-wing, fundamentalist religion.

The result has been an economy that accepts permanent unemployment, reduced taxation for large capital, the marginalization of trade unions, and a reduction of the State as the regulator and guarantor of social justice. Single-minded tax-cutting means the government can no longer promote social justice because it has been starved of the funds to do so. Deregulation and greed led to the financial disaster of 2007-8 from which we have only recently started to recover. Wealth creation has pushed aside other social values such as lending a helping hand or giving a second chance. Canada's outstanding public service has been diminished to a shadow of itself. Environmentalists have been gagged. The quality of education was lowered, wait lines at hospitals became endemic and Canadian scientific leadership diminished. Veterans are neglected. Concentration of wealth and the outrageous incomes and bonuses of executives – including those who made no profits – served to enhance social divisions. They make our society more litigious and undercut Canadian values such as sharing, compromise and tolerance. Briefly stated, these are the wrongs that must be righted.

Renewal via the Elections: The only way to change the government is by electing a majority of candidates from the current opposition parties as MPs. But, even then, our job is not done. At the present time, the pollsters tell us that neither of the opposition parties may have a majority by itself. If they do not cooperate together, Harper may have a sufficient number of seats to continue governing if the votes of the other parties are split. What to do?

The answer would have been simple enough if the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party (NDP) had been public-spirited enough to work together in a Coalition. Then one could vote for the Coalition and the work would be done. So let us give a little thought to the idea of coalitions. I am not going to talk about the Greens, even if I admire them. The polls suggest they are unlikely to come anywhere close to holding a balance of power. The same thing can be said about the Bloc Québécois which has

been losing members and electoral support. From what one hears from the media, there are several in the leadership circles and in the party memberships of the Liberals and the NDP who would support a coalition. But it seems the present leadership will not accept it.

The idea of 'coalitions' also got a bum rap in 2011 when a group of parties almost succeeded in dumping Harper. He told Canadians that the Coalition of opposition parties was illegal and unconstitutional. This is wrong. Any group of MPs which musters a majority in the House of Commons and has the structure to maintain itself automatically becomes government. Harper's insults about coalitions discouraged Canadians from thinking about the many benefits of parties grouping together to govern. The reality is that most modern democratic countries are governed by coalitions and they seem to work quite well. They oblige parties to work together, to learn from each other, to develop common policies and thereby to bridge some of the harsh divides and ideological hang-ups of their societies. I insist on the constitutionality and the benefits of coalitions because it is quite likely that, despite the current protestations of New Democrats and Liberals, Canada will end up being governed by a Coalition by the end of 2015.

So, if we do not go into the autumn election with a coalition, all those who are determined to get rid of Harper will have to do it the hard way. They will have to vote strategically. This means that in each riding across the country we must all decide on which opposition candidate is most likely to win and then vote for that person – whether or not the candidate represents the party you support. You can still work for the party you prefer, but when it comes to voting you vote for the one who can win and beat the Conservative candidate. To judge who is likely to be the strongest candidate, do not be swayed by the wishful thinking of your preferred party. They all are convinced they are going to win – until they don't. So watch the media coverage and then turn to www.threehundredeight.com a website that provides up-to-date projections of

the popular vote. Then vote 'strategically' to win. Now if we all follow this advice and we elect a majority of Liberals and New Democrats, without a clear winner, our job is still not finished. We must get on the phone and write letters and use the social media plus personal conversations to convince our preferred party that they *must form a coalition*. So, you see my friend. This is not a time for apathy. This is an election that can be decided by citizens – us.

The Renewal Agenda:

Despite ten years of receiving body blows from the Harper Conservatives, the Canadian people are not duped. Surveys conducted for the Department of Finance in February 2014, showed the extent of disconnect between government policies and the priorities of Canadians. Among the 12 focus groups questioned, the economy, trade and energy exports – dear to the heart of the government – did not register among the respondents' interests. Their priorities were elsewhere and included: education, health, and the retirement benefits of veterans. Another survey in March concluded that a majority of Canadians think Canada's efforts to reduce greenhouse gasses have been dismal and they want the federal government to take the lead in creating tax policies for curbing emissions.

National Conversations: To start building a renewal agenda, we have to open some doors and windows. The last thing we want to do is to follow the path of the Harper Government. Its path was characterized by authoritarianism, ideology, control, secrecy and single options defined by the leader. What we want now is the opposite. Our method for defining the renewal of Canada should be open, analytical, participative, accessible, and the result of a deliberative process that leads to consensus. Why: because today's problems are complex and interconnected to such an extent that they frighten politicians away from 'big issues'. Leadership is increasingly risk-adverse.

In his 2013 book, *How We Lead*, to which I have already referred, the former Progressive

Conservative Prime Minister of Canada, Joe Clark, made a profound proposal: we should recommence our habit of holding 'national conversations'. He wrote that, "Many of Canada's own defining initiatives flowed from serious national conversations – royal commissions on cultural institutions, or health care, or free trade; first minister's conferences; parliamentary debates and election campaigns that reached beyond mere personalities and into the realm of ideas. Those conversations lifted us over our usual divides of culture and geography and specific interests. But for two decades now, our country has gone silent." (p. 8). The last meeting of first ministers in Canada took place in 2008. The last royal commission was in 2002.

The following proposals for a series of 'Canadian Conversations' are proof of the many subjects that have been left hanging during the dark years of Conservative rule. An even more pointed, short term series of 'National Projects' on topics that have been in the line-up for some time indicate subjects that are ripe for urgent government action. In both cases, the criteria for my choices are a sense that there is a palpable national need because the topics have already been picked up by the 'national radar' consisting of books, studies and the media.

The Renewal of Canada: Possible Topics For Pan-Canadian Conversations

- Canada's Presence in the World: A New Global Policy
- Rethinking Democracy: Elections, Parliament, Mores
- A New Look at Women's issues
- Federal-Provincial Linkages and Cooperation
- How does the Quality of Education and Access to it compare internationally?
- Stimulating Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Taking the Long View
- Inter-generational Fairness
- The meaning of Progressive Government
- Reconnecting the Bases of Society: the 'Village Effect' and 'Unifying Ideas'
- The Whole of Health Care: Psychological, Optometry, Dentistry, Pharmaceutical
- Enhancing our Municipalities
- Reducing inequalities
- Canadianizing our head of State

- Refurbishing our public service

National Projects Requiring Action

- Back to Kelowna: Coming to a Deal with the Native Peoples
- A National Energy Policy: production, transportation, sustainability
- Renewal of the St. Lawrence Seaway
- Looking After the Experienced Canadians (formerly the Elderly)
- Fast Trains, Infrastructure, Rapid Transit, Inter-modal transport
- A National Day Care Program
- Dealing with the Environment
- Commission on Native Women
- Healing the CBC/Radio Canada
- Inter-Provincial Free Trade and a Pan-Canadian Power Grid
- Enhancing Canadian Identity: TV, Film, Social Media, Culture

These two lists have very important messages for the opposition parties who want to become the new government of Canada. First, we have a lot of work to do. The Harper Conservatives are leaving Canada with a terrible backlog of unattended opportunities. Second, Canadians don't just need a new government. They need a better one. This election must be seen as an opportunity for improving Canada, not just changing it. Third, Canadians are not likely to put up with a new team of back-room boys and girls. The country needs up-front policy making. The opposition parties must not think that the policies they have dreamt up are the end of the road. If Canada is to regain its democracy, the people must be consulted regularly and continually. Election 2015 must not be squandered.

Thinking about specific topics on the Renewal Agenda:

Just so we have an idea of how Canada should move ahead, here are four major topics that the country must confront in the near future if we are to reinstate 'the country we want'. I admit right away that other problems could have been chosen. Religion would be one enormous example where we might look at Austria's recent attempts to legislate an attempt to deal with Muslim issues and head off extremist foreign influences. But, let us start with these five as major examples of what Canada needs to do. Of course they are not gospel. Just one person's ideas for your

consideration.

1. Rethinking Democracy

The strangling of democracy by the Harper Conservatives demands that our first task is to take a broad approach to rebooting democracy so that it once again corresponds to the expectations of Canadian citizens. One such approach would be for a new government to set up a 'deliberative democracy' assembly to give a thorough airing to our democratic aspirations in a public forum.

The questions we must answer are many and complex. Is the electoral law and funding fair and does it provide a truly representative parliament? Is there a constitutionally mandated division of powers between the executive and the legislative branches that would put controls on the prime minister? What about a clear definition of powers between the political and administrative sides of government?. Canada should follow the lead of its Commonwealth cousins like Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand and codify the rules of parliamentary democracy so everyone will play from the same rule book. Our Constitution could also use some modernization in the field of federalism and the structure of relationships between Ottawa and the other orders of government. .

We have seen from Michael Chong's 'Reform Act' that the whole issue of the rights and powers of MPs vs. the party leadership is a loaded issue ripe for change. The same can be said for the role of civil society and of political rights. Mr. Harper was able to shut down group after group in the government and to threaten outside groups with a loss of funding or charitable status. There is also the need to

institutionalize the process of nominations of judges to our court system and the linked issue of making the court system financially accessible to citizens who are not millionaires. Another is the question of an adequate flow of information. As the Supreme Court has decreed, Canadians should have the right to hear as well as to speak. If so, will we ever deal with the concentration of ownership of the media? Surely the record of the Harper government has shown us we never again want to allow Canadian democracy to be set aside by an executive that is autocratic, secretive, centralized, controlled and frightening – the very antithesis of what democracy is meant to be.

2. Canada's Presence in the World: A New Global Policy:

Essentially the three world challenges of the future are inequality, exclusion and environmental sustainability. In an alternative foreign policy, the government of Canada will want to play a leading role in tackling the world's problems in cooperation with other countries. To do this Canada has to be active where the debates are held and the decisions made. One of the most informative studies of Canadian foreign policy during the Harper Regime was carried out by Roland Paris of the University of Ottawa. Paris studied the three mainstays that symbolize 'liberal internationalism': support for the UN, peacekeeping and the military. He found the support for liberal internationalism has been maintained. The Canadian public has not adopted Harper's priorities. The support is found among all Canadians.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper conducted his foreign relations like a monarch where policies were elaborated, in secret, by a tiny elite and then dictated to the unwashed. We desperately need new 'White Paper' studies on Foreign Affairs and on Defence, but we must also elaborate an effective, on-going system of public deliberations and parliamentary debates about international relations. Public approval is one of the three supports of foreign policy. The second is a set of skilled, professional diplomats who

can counsel the government. The Department of Foreign Affairs must be given back its self-respect instead of having policies and strategies dictated from the Prime Minister's Office. The third foundation is a sound military. The Conservatives have recently returned to the old Canadian 'elevator' practice of up and down defence budgets. This has to stop. We need to grow up. Canada is an enormous, wealthy but vulnerable country. We must have a professional military with top notch equipment and training.

3. Reducing Inequalities

Many people are of the opinion that the two worst scourges in the world today are inequality and global warming. Let us start with the first. There are many sorts of inequality but here I will only deal with economic inequality that is, the growing gap between the very rich and the poor. A UN report recently stated that the richest one per cent of the world population owns 40 % of world assets and the bottom half shares just one per cent. The ILO estimates that corporate executives in America make 500 times more than their ordinary workers. But, greed also plays a role. The *Justice Network* estimates that between \$21 and \$32 trillion is hidden offshore, untaxed. The economist Joseph Stiglitz claims the inequality upswing began 30 years ago along with tax decreases for the rich and the easing of the regulations in the financial sector. It has worsened as we have underinvested in infrastructure, education, health care and social safety nets.

Figures from the *Canadian Business Magazine* show that the 86 richest Canadian individuals and families hold the same amount of wealth as the poorest 11.4 million Canadians combined. At the other end of the scale four million Canadians were affected by some form of 'food insecurity' in 2014, which is almost half a million more than five years previously.

As former Clerk of the Privy Council, Alex Himelfarb has said, inequality subverts the quality of democracy. It also has a harmful effect on the economy. And yet, as Jeffrey Simpson of the *Globe* points out, so far, none of the party

leaders have shown they are willing to discuss the problem of the less fortunate. Recent research indicates that the very wealthy can hardly be described as entrepreneurs but they are very good at tax avoidance. It is not certain that CEOs earn their vast salaries and bonuses. On the other hand, surveys in 2014 for the 'Americas Barometer' have shown that the Canadian public generally worries about income inequality and expects *government* to reduce the disparities.

. Solutions to poverty require good data – as in a long form census. Piketty proposes a progressive global tax on capital. Because such a global tax is a long way off, two Canadian economists have proposed a small tax on money exchanges and on sales of securities. Such taxes would target those with money and bring in billions of dollars but at low levels of tax and without harming the capital of the rich. The idea should be an easy sell.

In the final analysis, surmounting inequality will be a question of Canadian values. So let me leave the last word to Jeff Turnbull, past president of the Canadian Medical Association, writing in the *Citizen* of July 12, 2012. "As Canadians we have always been able to transcend our differences for the greater good, united by our shared values as a confederation – values such as compassion and caring, fairness and equity, and the importance we place on peace and diversity. This generation's legacy will be measured by the extent to which we have upheld these values. What virtue exists in the number of fighter planes we buy or how many people we put in prison? There is, to be sure, the need for prudent fiscal management. This, however, cannot be at the expense of what binds us together as a nation... Government's must not balance the books on the backs of some of our poorest and most vulnerable citizens." Dr. Turnbull went on to conclude that, "Fundamental change can only take place when individuals and organizations representing large sectors of our society set out expectations for our elected officials and hold them accountable for meeting them."

4. Protecting the Environment

In November, 2014, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change gave its starkest warning so far about the dangers of human-driven climate change. Forests will burn, cities will flood, and infrastructure will collapse as a result. One week after the warning it was revealed that the G20 countries were flagrantly ignoring these warning by continuing to prop up fossil fuel exploration to the tune of \$88 billion in subsidies every. Nicholas Hulot, the French President's special envoy for the protection of the planet, came to Canada to reiterate that China and the United States have started to act because the costs of natural disasters and of pollution which are rising exponentially. Businesses are realizing that energy efficiency means productivity. The costs of renewable energy are plummeting. But Canada risks being left behind in the economic gains of clean energy if the federal government doesn't get on board.

For a path forward, we cannot do better than turn to one of Canada's best environment experts, Elizabeth May, leader of the Green Party. She proposes a seven point program for tackling the climate crisis. We will start with federal- provincial conference (i.e. a 'National Conversation') to ensure a national plan to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and the end the practice of their subsidization. Next is placing a price on carbon. It might be like BCs carbon tax which is used to reduce other tax burdens and is therefore 'tax neutral'. Together, Canadians would set shared goals for energy security, maximising jobs, and the transition to a low carbon economy. Coal-fired power plants would be phased out. At the same time we should work with municipalities to emphasize the up-grading of critical infrastructure such as transportation and water works. Finally, Canada's vital Environmental Protection Act would be restored along with the Fisheries Act and Navigable Waters Protection Act and a restored National Round Table on Environment and Economy. David Suzuki added his wish that Canada would emulate 110 other countries that

have enshrined environmental rights in their Constitutions. Of course, the environment is not just about energy and climate change but, it would be a major step ahead.

5. Working with the Native Peoples

The report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminded Canadians yet once again that there is one massive piece of unfinished business in Canada's future. To overcome the harms of past relations between the First Nations and the rest of Canadians we must work together for reconciliation.

I am tempted, like so many other writers, to lay out a path of policy solutions for the First Nations. But it seems to me that this is precisely the problem. It will just be a new period of cultural imperialism. The real issue is that it is the Native Peoples who must decide on their own path forward. Only then will they get rid of their 20th century history. Once they are ready for a Canadian Conversation then the rest of us can join with them. Hopefully we will be able to work together along a step-by-step progressive path. At the very least we can show that we are ready and eager to *listen* to their proposals. In this way we can stop being an obstacle – a part of the problem.

Vote Progressive

It is to be hoped that this little booklet will have persuaded you that to defeat the Conservatives in the coming election, you must get out and vote for the strongest opposition candidate in your riding – and then you must make sure that candidate and her or his party are supporting progressive policies. Another survey at the beginning of 2015 by the public relations giant Edelman, showed that Canadians want more government regulation of the food and beverage, banking and health industries at a time when confidence in big business and corporate leaders is waning because they "failed to contribute to the greater good". Essentially being 'progressive' means believing that government can be a tool for helping citizens and for reducing disparities. Let us be careful.

Government can also be a tool for domination – of the left or the right. A progressive party would advocate the Canadian values of balance, sharing, civility, tolerance and mutual accommodation. It would also insist on a fair tax policy that can help rebuild social programs, reduce gaps between rich and poor; restoring environmental responsibility and revitalizing Canada's democracy; returning to evidence-based policies supported by research and data to produce informed governance; and greater citizen participation in the design and delivery of government programs.

.It ain't over yet: In 2015 the Harper Conservatives continue to harm Canada

I finished writing this booklet in February 2015 with up-dates to May. But, as I terminated the writing I was struck by the reality that the Harper Conservatives were continuing to perpetrate their harms to Canada. While they were trying to look all warm and cuddly in time for the election, under the surface there are plenty of signs that they are just as mean and vicious as they have been at any time in the past ten years. So when the election comes along, please do not imagine that the leopard will change its spots. Here are a few examples, each taken from newspaper reports and columns.

- Reports show that the percentage of unemployed Canadians who qualify for 'Employment Insurance' (EI) has now fallen below 40%. Therefore 1.3 million unemployed workers do not qualify for traditional benefits or job training.
- Having silenced most people who dared to criticize them, the Conservatives got one of their backbench MPs to propose a private members bill to put the fear of God into parliamentary officers who cause them problems such as the Access to Information Commissioner, the Privacy Commissioner and the Parliamentary Budget Officer. They would be forced to expose their personal political histories.

- Mr. Harper once again refused to meet with the provincial premiers at the meeting of the Council of the Federation.
- Mr. Harper, unlike the leaders in our allied countries, showed his disdain for our Members of Parliament by refusing to have a Parliamentary oversight committee for the new police powers of our intelligence service (CSIS).
- Canada ranks last of 11 advanced countries for timely health care for seniors.
- The renegade Conservative MP, Eve Adams, who quit to join the Liberals, criticized the Conservative leadership for being "mean-spirited", "fear-mongers and bullies". She took aim at the "profoundly unfair" income-splitting tax plan.
- Adding insult to injury, the Harper government has announced that just before the election it will give a \$70,000 special allowance to certain 'gravely wounded' veterans. After refusing to help veterans for years, they now try to buy their vote. Still, this amount is small in comparison to the money already taken from veterans by the Conservatives.
- The Conservatives politicize their legislation on terrorism rather than providing adequate funding or oversight for our security agencies. They allowed only ten hours of debate in the House of Commons and then suggested there would only be three committee sessions or two hours each for clause-by-clause study of the bill and testimony of dozens of experts. Here in a nut-shell we see all problems of the Harper Conservatives: disdain for Parliamentary democracy; a refusal of rational debate and informed policy; a centralized, authoritarian and secretive approach to executive government. If they are re-elected we are sure to get more of the same – and worse. One writer called Harper security

stance “a pigeon in hawk’s feathers”. Another said we are sacrificing “liberty for security”.

- The Prime Minister’s Office had no right to tamper with the audit into Mile Duffy’s travel expenses or impose its will on a Senate Committee through backdoor channels, says the appalled former clerk of the House of Commons.
- The Harper Conservatives kept the thalidomide victims hanging in the air an additional half year after Parliament voted unanimously to extend full support before granting them an aid package.
- A newspaper headlined, “the Duffy trial’s smoking gun just blew up in Harper’s face.” Falsifying audits, it was decided, ranks high in the breach of public trust. This led one columnist to conclude, “If integrity is the issue, the Conservatives are finished”.

REMEMBER

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John E. Trent lives in Chelsea, Quebec with his wife Colette and with their four children and five grandchildren nearby. He studied politics at the universities of Harvard, Montreal and Queen's with additional studies at l'Institut d'études politiques in Paris and the Ryerson Technical Institute in Toronto. He taught political studies at the University of Ottawa for 30 years becoming Department Chair. As Executive Director of the Social Science Federation of Canada he gained practical knowledge of Ottawa politics. The dozen years when he was at the helm of the International Political Science Association as its Secretary General provided him with first-hand knowledge of international relations. During 50 years of research, writing and political and social activism in Canada, Prof. Trent concentrated on the fields of education and culture, federalism, and French-English relations. His current books deal with the development of political studies and the reform of the United Nations. As a community activist, he has promoted tourism, global institutional innovation and improved French-English relations.

