



FOCUS ON SOCIALISM

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SPECIAL BULLETIN 7

THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES!

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Focus On Socialism

FOS is the political journal of Canadians For Peace and Socialism (CPS). In it we address current national and international issues. We strive to bring a Marxist-Leninist viewpoint to the struggle of Canadians for peace, progress and socialism.

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THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES!

BY: DON CURRIE, CHAIR CPS, SEPTEMBER 29, 2007

Parliament reconvenes on October 16th 2007. It is an opportunity for working people to demand of all members of the House of Commons who claim not to be in the pocket of Bay Street and Wall Street to speak up for an entirely new direction in federal government foreign and domestic policy. That direction can only be away from the Harper Government's agenda of imperialist war and slavish dependency on an unstable US market towards a new agenda of peace and a made-in-Canada working people's economy.

Now is the time! Public weariness and impatience with Prime Minister Harper's participation in the Bush Administration's US-NATO war in Afghanistan has left his Conservative government with little room to evade the question of how and when to end the war. The war with no end has gone on for six years. The war is killing combatants and civilians in larger and larger numbers. Harper and his cabinet continue to send Canadian soldiers to their death in the front lines of an illegal and unjust war. The war budget consumes more and more taxpayer dollars. Funds are cut from programs that benefit Canadian families to buy US armaments and fund a NATO war.



The war is the pretext used by Harper, to spend large sums of Canadian taxpayer's dollars on "border security" to placate right-wing members of the US Congress, who have built political careers on accusing Canadians of being "soft on terrorism." In practice Harper's collaboration with US Homeland Security subverts the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms designed to protect the democratic, civil and individual rights of Canadians. This is Prime Minister Harper's special relationship with President George Bush.

There is nothing good in this US-NATO war for Canadians or Afghans. It must end. If it were up to the Canadian and Afghan people it would end today. Harper knows that. To avoid confronting opposition motions on the war in the scheduled September 17th 2007 session of the 39th Parliament Prime Minister Harper prorogued the first and called a second session set for October 16th. The Conservatives will present a new speech from the throne and a new budget. Prime Minister Harper has opted for a tactical retreat to buy time and divide the opposition parties. He and his advisors are working feverishly to repackage all Conservative war and domestic policies to make it appear that they are responding to growing Canadian and international criticism. It is a sign of weakness and desperation not strength. It is a moment of opportunity for the democratic left.

Harper is losing the political initiative because he threw in his lot with President George Bush who is sinking like a stone and dragging all of his supporters with him. Prime Minister Harper tried and failed to align Canadian public opinion behind the Bush US-NATO War in Afghanistan. Harper is discredited because from the get-go he set the interests of the Bush administration above the interests of Canadians.

The corporate media and pundits from "left" and right treat Harper as though he were just another capitalist politician. He is not. Canadian voters retain a healthy skepticism about the motives of the Harper Conservatives. Instinctually wage earners and farmers, pensioners and the poor, distrust the Prime Minister. They are right. Harper is incapable of abandoning his neo-con agenda. He is simply going to greater lengths to conceal it.

Prime Minister Harper has contempt for the democratic movements and organizations of the Canadian people. He has been condemned by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) for failing to act to prevent the decline of eastern Canadian manufacturing jobs. He has been condemned by the National Farmers Union (NFU) for breaking the law governing the



Canadian Wheat Board. He has been condemned by anti-poverty, women's and child care advocates for budget cuts. First Nations and Aboriginal organizations have condemned Harper for voting against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's and for breaking the federal government commitments negotiated in the Kelowna Accord. Harper has been condemned by the environmental movement for reneging on Kyoto and for standing with President Bush and Australian Prime Minister John Howard and their attempt to set up a "polluters club" in opposition to the world wide UN campaign to address climate change. He has been condemned by the peace movement for attempting to indoctrinate Canadians to accept an alien US New American Century ideology of regime change and pre-emptive war. Harper has set his government against the deeply held beliefs of Canadians in a non-belligerent foreign policy of peace and their support for the resolving of international disputes by détente and negotiations.

The dominant anti-Harper trend is clear. Public support for the war in Afghanistan is waning. There is irritation with the hectoring of the Harper government to support the troops in Afghanistan while ignoring the problems of young families struggling to cope with soaring housing prices, expensive child care, stagnating wages and falling purchasing power at home. It is clear to everyone who has broken free of corporate media spin, that Harper uses the war in Afghanistan as cover for a reactionary domestic agenda.

The opposition parties in the last session of Parliament underplayed the connection between the state of the economy and the war in Afghanistan. That is just what Harper's policy advisors wanted them to do. That is exactly what the opposition leaders must stop doing in the upcoming session. The Harper government's support for the US-NATO war in Afghanistan is a disaster for every Canadian except an inner circle of investor classes and the military brass who profit from war. The opposition must stop allowing Harper to disconnect the war from domestic politics. Imperialist war abroad means political reaction at home. That reality needs to be exposed in Parliament by all Members of Parliament who truly believe the "will of the people" transcends naked political ambition. No politician that claims to uphold "fairness" "Canadian values" and the well being of "hard working Canadian families" can at the same time support or worse, remain silent about the squandering of vast sums and resources on war.



Taking all of the above into account, what should be the stance of the opposition parties when Parliament reconvenes on October 16th?

Harper has stalled in the polls and there is nothing in current politics that is likely to give him new momentum. The standings in the 308 House of Commons after the recent Quebec by-elections are 126 Conservatives, 96 Liberals, 49 Bloc, 30 NDP, three independents and four vacant seats. The Harper Government must have the support of at least one of the opposition parties to survive. He doesn't deserve it and he shouldn't get it. The Harper Government cannot be reformed, it can only be defeated. There is no "shopping list" of progressive policies of peace or economic and social advance for working Canadians that the opposition can compel a Harper Government to enact. That has been the experience in the US Congress with a Democratic majority and a lame duck President mired at 20% in the polls. The war in Iraq continues because Bush retains power until the next US election.

In Canada it is different. Harper's minority government remains in power so long as the opposition permits it. There is nothing in our electoral system that says he must stay in power until his mandate expires in October 2009. Harper's strategy is insultingly simplistic. He aims to postpone the next election as long as he can to consolidate his right wing base with Timbit tax cuts for working people and Super Size tax cuts for the wealthy. Harper, McKay and Flaherty will spend budget surpluses to accelerate the militarization of the economy and underwrite the profit goals of the energy sector. Harper will talk about "artic sovereignty" while ensuring that Canadian oil and gas floods south to the US market while eastern Canada is starved for cheap energy. Harper is counting on the opposition parties to rail against this moronic policy but to keep him in power all the same.

The NDP by-election victory in Quebec is encouraging but far from a trend. The heady predictions of newly-elected Thomas Mulcair, NDP member for Outremont and now NDP finance critic and deputy leader, that Jack Layton is poised for a major breakthrough in Quebec needs some sober analysis. Four way races in which the NDP, Bloc and Liberals fight it out can also be a formula for Conservative victories as much as it is for more NDP victories. When confronted with war, a go-it-alone foreign policy cannot win peace. Only anti-Conservative unity at the polls will win.

No party including the NDP can claim ownership of the issue of peace. Peace belongs to everyone who fights for it. The war in Afghanistan has



compelled the Bloc and some Liberals to re-evaluate and abandon past policies and move away from war towards peace. That is to be welcomed. It is not productive or supportable to attack those who are abandoning bankrupt policies and beginning to realign their thinking with the desire of the Canadian people for peace.

It is time for Jack Layton, Gilles Duceppe and Stephane Dion's to stop listening to their clever advisors and start listening to the Canadian people. The Harper Government doesn't deserve another reprieve because he and his advisors have betrayed the deeply held beliefs of the Canadian people that Canada should be a peace maker not a NATO "power monkey". Harper must be defeated because it is the only way for the opposition parties to give meaning to their demand to bring the troops home. Dion, Duceppe and Layton advisors must know that to demand that the troops be brought home while Harper continues in power is opportunist posturing. Immediate withdrawal or withdrawal in 2009 cannot be allowed to be the issue that divides the opposition and lets Harper off the hook and free to continue the war indefinitely.

There is a much bigger issue at stake for the people of Canada than which opposition Party will be up or down after the next federal election. That issue is to break Canada free of the Harper-Bush-NATO Doctrine and the entire neo-con agenda of war. The political leaders that find the courage to say to their supporters and the Canadian people, that the Harper vision of the world reeks of imperialist ambition and we will have no part of it will seize the initiative. Leaders who challenge Harper's program of war, militarism and energy sell-out, breaks the grip of neo-con ideology over the media and places the supremacy of the people above the tyranny of the corporate profits will win the hearts and minds of all Canadians and in all likelihood the next federal election.

Don Currie, Chair,
Canadians for Peace and Socialism



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