

Aide to Canadian prime minister replaced for calling Bush a "moron"

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28 November 2002

Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien caved in November 26 to pressure from the US and Canada's political right and accepted the resignation of Françoise Ducros. The prime minister's communications director, Ducros had been vilified for calling US President George W. Bush a "moron."

Ducros made the "moron" remark November 20 during an off-the-record conversation in the media briefing room of the NATO summit, which was held in Prague. But Canada's ultra-right-wing *National Post* decided to publicize the remark, in the hopes of providing Chrétien's domestic political opponents and the Bush administration with political ammunition.

The Canadian Alliance and the Tories immediately went on the attack, accusing Ducros of imperilling Canada-US relations. Declared Tory leader Joe Clark, "When she [Ducros] insults the president of the United States, it is the prime minister of Canada insulting the president of the United States." Not to be outdone, Canadian Alliance MP Jason Kenney accused the Liberals of "a consistent attitude of anti-Americanism" that is hurting Canada's trade relations with the US.

Ducros is hardly the first person to comment on Bush's lack of intellectual mettle. It is common knowledge that he is an ignorant man with limited mental capacities, whose ideas, arguments, and sound-bites are supplied by free market ideologues and militarists.

But Chrétien was neither willing nor able to mount a political defence of his aide, or expose the right-wing forces behind the Ducros furor. Instead the prime minister tried to appease them. He told a November 22 press conference that Ducros had made a mistake while trying to defend Bush in an argument, then added the US President "is a friend of mine." Ducros had submitted her resignation, said Chrétien, but he had not

accepted it.

Sensing weakness, the right wing and the media amplified their attacks, recycling diatribes from the US to argue that Chrétien was mishandling what is far and away Canada's most important foreign affairs file and commercial relationship. The Bush administration, meanwhile, claimed it was satisfied with Chrétien's explanation.

The truth was otherwise. According to the *Globe and Mail*, several Canadian diplomats said US officials gave them a frosty reception at various bilateral talks last weekend.

The White House decided in this instance to contract out its retaliation to various Republican Congressmen and media jackals. Much of the November 25 broadcast of CNN's *Crossfire* program was given over to ranting against Canada and the Chrétien government by right-wing commentators Bob Novak and Jonah Goldberg. One-time Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan condemned Canadians as the "spoiled brats of the new world order."

Chrétien's surrender was as predictable as it was spineless. On Tuesday he announced he had accepted Ducros' resignation.

Whilst the right in Canada and the US routinely denounce the Chrétien government as "socialistic," it has imposed the biggest social spending and tax cuts in Canadian history, and since September 11 has emerged as a strong supporter of the US in its worldwide expansion of military power.

Ironically, just before the NATO summit Chrétien gave his strongest signal to date that Canada's Armed Forces would participate in a US war against Iraq. "We will see what we have got, what they need," said Chrétien in reference to an official US inquiry as to what Canada could contribute to an invasion of Iraq.

Chrétien added, “We have already ships there. We have planes there ... So it will be the same thing.”

Relations between Canadian prime ministers and US presidents have often been testy, a function of the extent to which the two countries are bound together by history, geography and economics and the extreme imbalance in their economic and geo-political power. That said, the Ducros incident says much about the state of inter-imperialist relations in general, and Canada-US relations in particular.

Ducros referred to Bush as a moron while voicing her anger over the fact that the US had used the NATO summit, convened to discuss NATO expansion, as a platform for drumming up support for “regime change” in Iraq. “Of course,” she hastened to add, “our official position is that he is not trying to hijack the summit.”

Like many European governments, the Chrétien Liberal regime is deeply troubled by the Bush administration’s aggressive assertion of the interests of US big business. It fears that US militarism and unilateralism will redound against imperialist interests as a whole by inciting mass opposition and destabilizing traditional institutions and regimes. A second fear, no less great, is that its attempts to maintain its world position by mobilizing its own military, economic and geo-political power will add a new and explosive dimension to class relations at home.

Whilst the bourgeoisies of Europe are seeking to make the European Union a basis for resisting US power, geography and economics leave Canada’s rulers with no alternative but to accommodate themselves to the demands of US imperialism. It is this bind that so frustrates the current Liberal government and has added such tension to Canada-US relations. According to the lead editorial in the November 26 *Globe and Mail*, Canada-US relations are already so “deeply strained” that “a fresh insult here or there will hardly matter.”

Meanwhile, the Official Opposition Canadian Alliance and a growing section of Canada’s corporate elite argue that the best means to protect and assert Canadian capital’s independent interests is by embracing the new international geo-political order. Rather than clutching at the ghost of multilateralism and only grudgingly accommodating itself to the US’s Fortress America strategy, the Canadian government,

they argue, should become its biggest booster. As a first step, Canadian military spending should be massively increased and Ottawa should give full support to the US “war on terrorism” wherever it leads.

These right-wing elements calculate that by helping fell Ducros they have not only earned brownie points in Washington, but have further diminished Chrétien’s political stature and perhaps advanced the date of his political retirement, currently set for February of 2004.



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