

25 June 2004

The *Globe and Mail*, Canada's premier business daily, is calling for the re-election of the Liberals, who have formed the country's government since 1993. Owned by telecommunications giant Bell Canada Enterprises, the *Globe* has long been considered the authoritative voice of Canada's Toronto-based banking and financial establishment.

In an editorial published Wednesday and titled "The safe choice is to do no harm," the *Globe* praises the record of the Liberals and in particular of Prime Minister Paul Martin, asserting that "by and large" the Liberals have governed "well." It credits Martin, the shipping magnate who was finance minister from 1993 to 2002, with "wrestling the [federal budget] deficit to the ground," then authoring "the largest tax cut in Canadian history." Needless to say, the *Globe* is silent about the human cost of what it itself describes as Martin's "fiscal shock therapy"—increased homelessness and hunger, hospital overcrowding and lengthy waiting lists for life-saving medical procedures, growing economic insecurity, and social inequality.

The *Globe* does make serious criticisms of Martin and the Liberals, but they are of a different order. It chides the Liberals for failing to court unpopularity by pressing for "health care reform" and fashioning "a modern foreign policy." These are euphemisms for shifting much of the responsibility for financing health care from the state to patients and their families; drastically increasing the role of private, for-profit companies in the management and delivery of health care; substantially increasing military spending; and allying Canada still more closely with the US in the world arena.

Canada's premier business paper is especially critical of Martin's record since he became prime minister. In effect, it is demanding he stop temporizing, get on with the job of implementing the policies of big business, and defy the public will to do so. Declares the *Globe*, "To put it succinctly, Paul Martin, or whoever is inhabiting his body, has proved a monumental disappointment.... His pronouncements have displayed all the consistency of Pablo. Intent on winning every vote in the country, he lived in fear of offending someone, somewhere, somehow. On Iraq and [the] Kyoto [accord on greenhouse gas emissions] he was incomprehensible.... On missile defence co-operation [with the US], first he was openly for it, then secretly for it."

The *Globe*'s verdict that Martin "deserves a second chance to prove himself" is based firstly on its appreciation of the services that he rendered big business during his tenure as finance minister—after all, the rich have never been wealthier and their proportion of the national income has soared—and secondly, and no less importantly, on its concerns about the fitness of the opposition Conservatives and their leader, Stephen Harper, to govern.

The *Globe* suggests that the Conservatives—only recently formed through a merger of the Progressive Conservatives, the Canadian bourgeoisie's traditional alternative party of government, and the right-wing populist, Western-based Canadian Alliance—are

inexperienced and untested. It acknowledges that the Conservative platform is in many respects more in accord with the demands of capital than the Liberals'. "On issues such as health care," asserts the *Globe*, "Mr. Harper is better positioned to bring new approaches to old problems"—in other words, he has been readier to declare Medicare broken and call for privatization.

But the *Globe* raises a host of concerns about the Conservatives and Harper. Many of these relate to the anti-Quebec posture of the Canadian Alliance and its precursor the Reform Party, their advocacy of greater power for the Western provinces, and their ties to the religious right.

The *Globe* is critical of the Conservatives' attacks on the courts, their condemnations of what Harper and company term "judicial activism," in respect to gay marriage and other civil rights issues. Its fear is that a Conservative government could provoke a conflict between the government and the judiciary that could damage the popular legitimacy of both. Also, the Conservatives' pandering to the religious right might immerse it in controversy, making it less able to press forward with the socioeconomic agenda of big business.

These, however, are secondary to the *Globe*'s misgivings about the Conservatives' stand on Canada's chronic constitutional crisis—the wrangling among Canada's political and economic elite over the division of powers between Ottawa and the provinces and over the power various regionally based sections of capital have in national decision making. The *Globe* fears the Tories' proposal to hold elections to the Senate, the upper house of Parliament, could undermine the House of Commons's authority and reopen the constitutional Pandora's box. It is even more wary of the Conservatives' championing of provincial rights and readiness, in the event of a hung parliament, to seek the support of the pro-indépendantiste Bloc Québécois or BQ.

The *Globe* speaks for the most powerful sections of Canadian capital, who view a strong federal government as pivotal to promoting their interests across Canada and internationally. Under conditions in which the Canadian nation-state's power is being eroded by growing economic integration with the US and by the breakdown of the multilateral institutions Canada has traditionally used to try to contain US influence, key sections of Canadian capital are loathe to see the federal state's power further weakened in the interests of other, more regionally based sections of capital, whether in Quebec or western Canada.

The *Globe* editorial makes specific mention of the response of Harper, then the head of the right-wing National Citizens' Coalition, to the re-election of the Liberals in the 2000 federal election. Shortly after that election, Harper and a number of other new-conservative ideologues in Alberta issued an open letter urging that Alberta's Conservative government erect a political-constitutional "firewall" around the province, to protect it from Liberal policies, and assert Alberta's autonomy to the maximum possible within the existing

constitution.

Harper has refused to repudiate this letter; he continues to promote the idea that the federal government should be scaled back to so-called “core functions,” and has made the decentralization of power to the provincial governments an important element in the Conservative platform. According to the *Globe*, there are “troubling signs” that Harper “has not yet matured into a truly national leader.”

As the coup de grace of its critique of the Conservatives, the *Globe* points to their claim that they can balance the budget while slashing taxes and significantly increasing spending on the Canadian Armed Forces and health care. The Conservative platform, says the *Globe*, “sails too close to the deficit wind for our comfort.” A Conservative victory would place Canada’s finances at “risk” and represent a “gamble” in terms of “our national unity.”

Sections of business and the corporate media have expressed concern over the prospect that the June 28 election will result in a minority government, fearing that such a government will shy away from implementing controversial policies. Having weighed the respective merits of both the Liberals and Conservatives, the *Globe* appears, however, to welcome such a result, as a means of submitting both of the principal big business parties and their leaders to a further test and thereby determining which can best advance its interests.

The endorsement of the Liberals by the principal media voice of Bay Street underscores the ludicrousness of the claim that the Liberals represent some type of lesser evil to the Conservatives. Yet the social democrats of the New Democratic Party (NDP), with the support of the trade union bureaucracy, are readying themselves for a post-election scenario in which they can sustain a Liberal minority government in power, on the claim that this is the only way to thwart the anti-working-class Conservatives from taking office.

In truth, the Liberals have been the preferred governing party of Canadian capital for a century, precisely because, with the connivance of the trade union officialdom and social democrats, they have been able to pass themselves off as a party closer to the people and less beholden to big business.

From the standpoint of big business, as the *Globe* spells out, the Liberals have governed “well” over the past decade. Pivotal to the Liberals in their ability to impose the most right-wing socioeconomic agenda of any Canadian government since the Great Depression has been their use in successive elections of the Mulroney Conservatives, Reform and Canadian Alliance as a right-wing foil. Time and again, the Liberals have railed against the right, then implemented its program. Thus in 1993, the Liberals were elected promising to make jobs their priority and denouncing the Tories’ “fixation” on the deficit. Subsequently, they instituted the greatest public and social spending cuts in Canadian history. Likewise in 2000, the Liberals attacked the Alliance for advocating tax cuts for the rich, even while introducing a five-year, \$100 billion schedule of personal income and corporate tax cuts that even the neo-conservative *National Post* hailed as an “Alliance budget.”

The *Globe*’s principal rival, the *Post*, has come out in favor of a Conservative victory. Founded by Conrad Black in 1998 with the express aim of militating for neo-conservativism, the *Post* is currently owned by Canwest Global. The Asper family, Canwest’s principal shareholders, have longstanding ties to the Liberals. Nevertheless, under the Aspers’ ownership, the *Post* has remained faithful to its neo-conservative origins, acting as the house organ of the Canadian Alliance and now the merged Conservative Party.

It was thus all but inevitable that the *Post* would editorialize for the

Conservatives. Nonetheless, Wednesday’s *Post* editorial, “On June 28, vote Conservative,” merits comments for two reasons. First, it further underscores the lurch of big business ever rightward. Though the *Globe* criticizes Martin for not showing “leadership” by pressing forward with unpopular right-wing policy changes, the *Post* expresses its disappointment over Harper’s “retreat” from his support for the US invasion and occupation of Iraq. Many of the *Post*’s columnists have been much harsher in their criticisms. They have accused the Conservatives of crowding the “center,” even though the Conservative platform is the most right wing ever advanced by a party at the national level with a genuine chance of forming the government.

The *Post* editorial is also noteworthy for its failure to make any mention of the possibility that a minority Conservative government could be dependent on BQ support for its survival. Clearly, one reason for this is that the *Post* calculates that with the Clarity Act—Liberal legislation that makes the federal parliament the arbiter of the fairness and success of any future referendum on Quebec’s secession and that threatens a seceding Quebec with partition—Ottawa has decisively changed the rules of the game in the favor of the federal state.

But the *Post*’s apparent indifference to the “national unity” question also indicates a mindset within sections of big business that, in their impatience for an acceleration of the assault on the working class, are willing to destabilize, even jettison, instruments and mechanisms that the ruling class has developed over decades to uphold its interests.

This has been graphically illustrated in the US, both in the Republicans’ ferocious campaign to unseat Clinton from the office, then steal the 2000 elections, and in Bush’s drive to conquer and plunder Iraq.

Although the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* have staked out different positions in regards to the June 28 federal election, each in its own way has made clear that whatever the electoral outcome, the bourgeoisie is determined to see an intensification of the assault on the working class—beginning with a frontal attack on universal public health care, rearment and closer geopolitical cooperation with US imperialism—and that the coming period will, therefore, see a major intensification of class conflict.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact