# Canada: Report whitewashes federal police's intervention in 2006 elections

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The Commission for Public Complaints Against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) published March 31 the results of its inquiry into the role Canada's national police played in the January 2006 federal election. Public Complaints Commissioner Paul Kennedy determined that the then head of the RCMP, Giuliano Zaccardelli, personally insisted upon publicly implicating the finance minister of the incumbent Liberal government in a police investigation into insider-trading allegations.

The report conceded that the RCMP's revelation that it was conducting a criminal investigation of Finance Ministry and possibly other government officials was unusual, all the more so since the country was in the midst of an election campaign, and termed unprecedented Zaccardelli's personal intervention to ensure that the sitting finance minister's name was linked to the investigation.

The Commissioner's analysis of voter intentions before and after the RCMP's intervention strongly suggests that RCMP's action heavily influenced the outcome of the January 2006 elections—a fact noted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and many other political observers at the time. (See "The Royal Canadian Mounted Police's "inexplicable" intervention into Canada's election campaign")

Nevertheless, Kennedy sought to minimize and excuse the role of Zaccardelli and the RCMP top brass on the basis that they did not formally break any laws or internal RCMP regulations and that his investigation found no evidence that the RCMP's actions were politically motivated. In doing so, Kennedy has ignored a number of troubling questions raised by his report, including the outright refusal of Zacardelli and the RCMP leadership to cooperate with the Public Complaints commission's investigation.

Given the way Kennedy framed his inquiry—in the absence of a "smoking gun", i.e., a document or testimony containing a blunt statement that the insider-trading allegations provided the RCMP with an opportunity to tar their Liberal political masters—it was all but certain that he would conclude that there was no evidence that Zacardelli or anyone else in Canada's national police acted in bad faith. That said, the systematic refusal of the RCMP top brass to cooperate with the inquiry meant that his commission did not even have the opportunity to peruse key RCMP internal documents or question Zacardelli and others about their actions, thus ensuring no light could be shed on the RCMP's actions.

While Kennedy confined himself to a mild protest over the RCMP high command's boycott of his investigation, it is, in and of itself, highly significant. Not only does it exemplify the RCMP leadership's opposition to any public scrutiny of the actions of the national police, it adds to the already compelling case that the RCMP's intervention in the 2006 elections was a politically calculated move. At the very least, the RCMP top brass's attempt to thwart Kennedy's inquiry shows that it is cavalierly indifferent to the fundamental democratic issues raised by its actions during the 2006 election campaign.

While Kennedy can at least be credited for having tried to compel the RCMP leadership to explain its actions, the mainstream media—which from the beginning refused to question the motives of the RCMP and presented the insider-trading "scandal" as simply further proof of Liberal Party corruption—has sought to hurriedly bury his report and the whole affair. The corporate media's consistent refusal to investigate and publicly debate an episode that saw the highest-ranking police officer in the country overstep his jurisdiction and meddle actively in federal politics indicates the ruling elite's profound disinterest in basic democratic principles.

The alarming events brought back to light by Kennedy's report began in late 2005, in the middle of the campaign for the January 23, 2006 federal election. Before the fall of their government in late November 2005, the Liberals introduced tax cuts on dividends and, unexpectedly, extended a tax holiday on income trusts. Barely hours before Finance Minister Ralph Goodale announced these tax concessions, there was a surge in the shares of companies that were income trusts or in the process of transforming themselves into income trusts, raising the possibility that Bay Street financiers had been informed in advance of the contents of Goodale's announcement.

A month later and in the midst of an election campaign, the RCMP let it be known that it was conducting a criminal investigation to determine whether anyone in the government was involved in insider trading. At the express request of Zaccardelli, an RCMP press release singled out the role of Liberal Finance Minister Ralph Goodale. "It is important to mention," read the release, "the RCMP emphasises that it possesses *at this moment* no evidence of illegal or reprehensible acts by any individual, including Finance Minister Ralph Goodale" (emphasis added).

It is rare for the federal police, which cloaks its operations in secrecy, to publicly announce that it is conducting an investigation. (As a result of its investigation, the RCMP ultimately did charge a single employee of the Finance Ministry who personally benefited from insider knowledge by placing investments that yielded $7,000 worth of profits.)

Moreover, such a direct intervention in the Canadian political debate was without precedent. Zaccardelli and the top brass of the RCMP could not have doubted the profound impact of their announcement. In the year prior to the election, the Conservative Party led by Stephen Harper had sought to hide its ultra-right program behind charges of widespread corruption directed at the incumbent Liberal government.

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Positioning his party to succeed the Martin Liberals, Harper repeatedly invoked the results of a highly publicized commission, chaired by Justice John Gomery, that had found the Liberal government guilty of awarding numerous lucrative public relations contracts to advertising agencies that made kickbacks to the Quebec wing of the federal Liberal Party.

In framing the 2006 elections as a referendum on "Liberal corruption," Harper sought to keep the attention of Canadian working people away from the Conservative program of reactionary social measures at home and military aggression abroad. Even today, with virtually the entire ruling class supporting the Harper government's right-wing agenda, including its championing of the use of military force to pursue the geo-strategic interests of the Canadian bourgeoisie, the Conservatives are at pains to hold on to an electoral base that encompasses even 25 percent of registered voters.

The coming to power in 2006 of a Harper government determined to carry out a sharp shift to the right in Canadian politics—in the footsteps of previous Liberal policies of deep budget cuts and overseas military interventions—could not have taken place without a major campaign to divert the attention of voters from the Conservatives' real agenda.

That was the aim of the uproar around "Liberal corruption" stirred up by Conservative supporters and the big business media and bolstered by the intervention of the RCMP at a critical juncture. In the days immediately following the announcement of the RCMP investigation, support for the Martin Liberals, as measured in opinion polls, plummeted, falling by as much as 20 percentage points. The Liberals, who had enjoyed a narrow lead in popular support, never recovered from that collapse and lost power to the Conservatives, who went on to form a minority government after the January 2006 election.

As soon as the elections were over, Paul Kennedy began on his own initiative an investigation into the actions of the RCMP, so obvious was their political significance. In presenting the results of his inquiry, Kennedy insisted that there are no laws or regulations concerning the divulgation of information about ongoing investigations, even in "highly sensitive situations," like during an election. Therefore Zaccardelli and the RCMP high command did nothing wrong. "Clearly, if you have no policy," said Kennedy "you can't break policy."

In fact, the results of the inquiry far from exonerate the former head of the RCMP as Kennedy has claimed and the media have trumpeted. Kennedy established that it was Zaccardelli that, in a move that he qualified as "without precedent," insisted upon naming the target of a federal investigation—in this case Minister Goodale—even if the RCMP had no evidence against him. If Kennedy could not gather evidence against Zaccardelli or establish a motive for him to insert the incriminating phrase into the RCMP press release, it was principally because he and other the top commanders of the RCMP refused to participate in the investigation.

The Kennedy inquiry raises far more questions than it answers. The details publicly available point directly to an intervention of a political nature, designed to favour the Conservative Party.

There exist long-running tensions between the RCMP and the Liberal Party. The RCMP and the Canadian intelligence services consider the Liberals "soft" on crime and terrorism, even as the Liberals have participated without reservation in the "war on terror," adopted laws that increase police powers, and raised the budgets for the police and the military.

The RCMP leadership were profoundly irritated by, among other things, the public inquiry called by the Martin Liberal government into the case of Maher Arar, a Canadian citizen rendered by the CIA to Syria to be tortured, after the RCMP fingered him to US authorities as a terrorist suspect on the basis of spurious evidence. The *National Post*, semi-official organ of the Conservatives, regularly published accounts of disagreements between high-ranking RCMP officials and the Liberal government, concerning its political decisions. The Conservatives, for their part, have long cultivated a special relationship with the repressive apparatus of the state, giving them even more powers and funding and glorifying the Canadian Forces.

The significance of the RCMP intervention into the 2006 elections is part of a wider trend within Canadian society as a whole. Traditionally, the ruling elite insisted that their regime was democratic, because the police and military were subordinate to civil society and did not play a political role. However, to implement their increasingly unpopular policies, like participation in the NATO-led invasion of Afghanistan, the abrogation of democratic rights, and the massive transfer of wealth from the working class to the parasitic capitalist class, the ruling elite must increasingly rely on the forces of state repression such as the RCMP and the military.

Throughout this entire affair, Canada's social-democratic party, the NDP, has played a particularly pernicious role. Fearing the reaction of big business, their leader Jack Layton refused to vigorously condemn the Liberals' decision to extend the tax exemption on income trusts and cut the tax on dividends as a godsend to the wealthy. Instead, the NDP legitimized the Conservative campaign to make "Liberal corruption" the key issue in the January 2006 election.

The mainstream media's silence on the disturbing issues raised by the Kennedy report is an indication of the profound erosion of traditional bourgeois-democratic principles in Canada's editorial newsrooms and corporate boardrooms. The *Globe and Mail*, mouthpiece of the country's financial elite, published one of the few editorials on the subject. After denouncing Zaccardelli for having once again undermined the credibility of the RCMP, the editorial concluded that "Canadians cannot but look at Zaccardelli, shake their heads and move on."

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