

Canada's *Globe* endorses Conservatives, lauds Harper's "bullheadedness"

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The Globe and Mail, Canada's newspaper of record and the mouthpiece of the Bay Street banks and brokerage houses, is urging Canadians to return Stephen Harper and his Conservatives to power in next Monday's election.

That the *Globe* should endorse Harper is not surprising for anyone who has followed its editorial pages in recent years or, more generally the evolution of Canada's ruling elite. Over the past two decades, the Canadian bourgeoisie has grown ever more virulent in its opposition to any restraints on the swelling of its incomes and to anything associated, even if only vestigially, with social reform.

To applause from Corporate Canada, the five year-old the minority Conservative government has:

- Extended Canada's leading role in the Afghan War through 2014 and deployed the Canadian Armed Forces to joined the imperialist assault on Libya
- Raised military spending to the highest level in real, i.e., inflation-adjusted, dollars since World War II
- Implemented a five-year plan to reduce corporate tax rates by more than a third, shoveling another \$50 billion or more to big business
- Pressed forward with a program of federal debt repayment and tax cuts aimed at hobbling the state's capacity to finance public services and at legitimizing still further cuts to the taxes of the rich and super-rich
- Launched, in the name of balancing the budget, a new austerity drive that will see billions cut from social spending.

The *Globe*'s endorsement is nevertheless significant for two reasons.

First, its editorial "Facing up to our challenges" outlines, albeit in Aesopian language, the agenda big business expects the government to implement after May 2.

The *Globe* editorial identifies "a volatile economy,"

"ballooning public debts," and a public health care system "suffering from chronic spending disease" as "the most critical" challenges ahead.

The wording is deliberately banal. But what is being called for is an assault—like that now being pursued by big business governments around the world—on what remains of the welfare state. This assault is invariably justified on the grounds that there is "no money." Yet in 2008-9, states had unlimited resources when it came to bailing out the banks and the financial aristocracy. Moreover if governments now face a fiscal crisis it is largely a consequence of a fiscal counter-revolution—years of tax cuts for big business and the rich—that have redistributed income from the poorer sections of society to the most privileged.

The other challenges identified by the *Globe* include reforming, i.e., scaling back, equalization (the program by which funds are transferred from the richer to the poorer provinces), ensuring that there is no further "thickening of the Canada-US border" by negotiating a North American Security Perimeter (that is a deeper strategic partnership with US imperialism) and expanding Canada's "global influence." The *Globe*, it need be added, has been among the strongest voices advocating the deployment of Canada's military overseas so as to promote "Canadian interests and values"—that is the predatory interests of Canadian big business.

However, the most important and revealing aspect of the *Globe* editorial is its praise of Harper and his government for their "bullheadedness," that is for their readiness to disregard and defy public opinion and run roughshod over parliamentary norms and democratic rights. Indeed the *Globe* argues that such ruthlessness is one of the principal reasons big business should support the Conservatives.

"Only Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party," declares the *Globe*, "have shown the leadership, the

bullheadedness (let's call it what it is) and the discipline this country needs.”

The most important and infamous example of Harper's bullheadedness was his response to the political crisis that erupted in November-December 2008 in the midst of the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression. Faced with the prospect of his Conservative government being defeated in a non-confidence vote and replaced by a Liberal-led coalition, Harper prevailed on the unelected and unaccountable Governor-General to shut down parliament.

The use of prorogation to prevent MPs from exercising their constitutional right to defeat the government in a non-confidence vote was in flagrant opposition to parliamentary norms and democratic practice. Yet the *Globe*—which is owned by David Thomson, reputedly the seventeenth wealthiest person in the world—and all the most powerful sections of Canadian capital supported this constitutional coup. So as to prevent the coming to power of a government they deemed not to their liking, a Liberal-led coalition dependent on the support of the trade union-based NDP and the sovereigntist Bloc Quebecois, Canada's elite was more than ready to use authoritarian measures.

Other examples of Harper's “bullheadedness” were his prorogation of parliament for a second time in December 2009 and his attempt to illegally extend the powers of the executive, by refusing to turn over documents to parliament. Both were part of a still ongoing campaign aimed at covering up the Canadian government's and military's complicity in torture in Afghanistan.

Then there was the state provocation at the G-20 summit in Toronto last June—a billion dollar security operation aimed at acclimatizing Canadians to police state methods and the violent suppression of anti-government protests.

The *Globe* editors know full well that the big business agenda they advocate is unpopular and will encounter resistance.

A theme to which the *Globe* has repeatedly returned is the purported difficulty of having an “adult conversation” about health care. By this it means the popular opposition to the elite's drive to shift much of the burden for paying for health care from the state to individuals and families and a greater role for private, for-profit companies in the provision of health care.

The *Globe* argues that Harper's ruthlessness makes him the best leader to slash health care spending: “Even more determination will be needed to confront the sustainability

of publicly funded health care ... Mr. Harper has the toughness and reformist instincts to push the provinces toward greater experimentation (in private delivery, for instance) and change.”

While lauding Harper's “strong leadership,” the *Globe* does criticize him and his government for “disrespect of Parliament” and “repeated attempts (including during this campaign) to stanch debate and free expression.”

This caveat is part handwringing before the unsavory implications of the *Globe*'s own class-war agenda and part concern that Harper, in their view, has on occasion needlessly brought the political system into disrepute.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted at the time, the *Globe* criticized Harper's second, December 2009, prorogation of parliament from the standpoint that that it served to undermine the office of the Governor-General, a mechanism that enables the bourgeoisie to bypass parliament and whose legitimacy it wants to safeguard for deployment in real times of crisis. (See: Canadian press denounces Conservatives' shutting down of parliament)

In its endorsement, the *Globe* counsels Harper to be less ruthless with parliament—leaving it as understood that the opposition parties all uphold the fundamental interests of Canadian capital—so as to “bring his disciplined approach to bear on the great challenges at hand.” In other words, his ruthlessness should be focussed on placing the burden of the economic crisis on the working class.

The *Globe*'s endorsement of Harper and especially its praise for his readiness to use anti-democratic and authoritarian methods should serve as a warning to the working class as to agenda that will be carried out and the anti-democratic methods big business will increasingly use whatever party or parties form the government after May 2.



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