

The return of toryism and the religious right in Canada

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He heads a minority government pledged to cut the size of government, cut taxes, transfer more spending for social services down to the provinces where they are already being privatised, introduce a law and order agenda with minimum mandatory sentencing, bolster the military, withdraw from Kyoto and end plans for a national child care programme. He has pledged to try and rescind the same sex marriage bill and may try to introduce a bill restricting abortion.

The election was dominated by the 'Federal Sponsorship Scandal', a \$100 million pay-off to supporters of the previous Liberal government. An investigation revealed that the money was paid as fees and commissions but no actual services were delivered. The Government had intended to use the money to promote Canadian unity and undermine sovereignty in Quebec so the scandal not only enraged voters across the country but particularly boosted the Bloc Quebecois, which is now the third party in Parliament with 51 seats to the Conservatives' 124 and Liberals' 103.

The National Democratic Party (NDP, Canada's Labour Party) has never been a federal contender for power and, while it did better in this election than previous ones with 21 seats, it has historically missed the opportunity to become a third player because of its anti-sovereignist position. It has virtually no support in Quebec.

Despite the importance of this lurch to the right, Harper's government is not in a strong position. Not a single Tory was elected from any major urban centre other than Quebec City. Even to form a minority government he had to bring in an unelected member of his campaign team and an opportunist defector from the Liberal Party.

The other Cabinet ministers are a range of fiscal and social conservatives, including some bible thumping fundamentalists, and former members of the arch reactionary regimes in Ontario and Alberta.

While the immediate priority must be a campaign of mass mobilisations against Harper's programme, a more fundamental necessity is to fight within those campaigns for the building of new mass-based workers' party.

In order to fight effectively for the interests of all Canada's workers, that party will have to be built on a programme that recognises the right to self-determination of Quebec and of the Inuit peoples while itself fighting for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism across the whole country.