

Chronicle Herald: Canada under Conservatives not what it used to be
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It is interesting that Laurent Le Pierrès seems to believe that Canada hasn't fundamentally changed, and that he feels he can still look his "country in the mirror". [Justin jumps in where angels fear to tread, *Chronicle Herald*, 17 February 2012]. I was also happy to read that he thinks our nation has survived worse crises than a Conservative majority. I'm just not sure he's right.

Canada has never before had a neo-conservative majority that espouses neo-liberal unfettered capitalism that enriches only, well, the already rich. We do now. The Harper Government, as Mr. Harper would have us call the Government of Canada, comprises hardline ideologues slinging insults and slogans from an out-dated and discredited handbook used by George W. Bush in the US for eight long, war-filled years, which have left our southern neighbour in a politically and economically polarized shambles.

Now, the Harper Government is intent on imposing the same failed Republican ideologies on Canada. It was bad enough even before he had a majority. Twice he prorogued parliament, showing his contempt for democratic process and coalitions, which, ironically, he tried to orchestrate himself when he was in opposition. He managed to transform Canada from a highly respected beacon of democracy and peace on the world stage into an aggressive pariah that has made many people around the world ask, "What has happened to Canada?"

With his unquestioning support of the Israeli government, and his preference for a photo op at Tim Hortons over addressing the global community at the United Nations General Assembly, he succeeded in losing Canada's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council. He embraced militarism and a new pugnacious foreign policy, disparaging dialogue and diplomacy, all the while claiming he was standing up for "Canadian values".

Remember this is the man who would have had Canada join the deadly US-led debacle in Iraq. He favoured deregulation of the banking and financial sectors, and then, when deregulation elsewhere caused a global melt-down, he boasted about the solid and

regulated Canadian banking system that he had previously criticized. The list of his assaults on democracy and decency is far too long to document here, but a fine summary of them was put together by the group “Catch 22” in its “[100-plus reasons to stop Harper Conservatives](#)”. And that was before he got his majority.

Now that he has, Mr. Harper has ratcheted up his attacks on the values that make for a civilized and healthy nation. He is waging war on truth, statistics, science, access to information, tolerance, sharing, equality, enlightenment, the arts, social justice, the environment, gun safety, labour, civil rights, openness and transparency, and any kind of welfare (except that he grants as tax breaks to his petro-friends and other corporate buddies). He has no qualms about smearing, demonizing, muzzling or firing anyone that dares to stand up for these values.

The Harper Government has cut or refused funding to aid groups that work with the world’s most vulnerable people. But it has found millions of precious Canadian tax dollars to whitewash the harmful operations of giant Canadian mining companies in Africa and Latin America. As many Canadians have noticed recently when they travel internationally, the maple leaf brand has lost its lustre. Merely admitting you’re Canadian in some places can prompt angry outbursts about Canadian mining companies, the tar sands and our country’s shameful inaction on climate change.

The multi-million dollar spin machine in the Prime Minister’s Office churns out divisive and hyperbolic sound bytes intended to foster resentment and stifle informed debate. By attaching words such as “bogus” to refugees, “dubious” to migrants, “radical extremists” to responsible Canadian citizens who care about climate change, clean air and water, the Harper Government whips up fear, anger and hatred that have no place in this country. Billions are available for stealth fighter jets and unneeded prisons, but we’re told programs protecting human health and welfare are not “sustainable”. With their attacks on old age security and health care, the Harper Conservatives are pitting young against old, rich against poor, Canadian against Canadian.

Mr. Harper once said that we wouldn’t recognize the country when he was through with it. This is only the first year of his majority, and already many of us cannot recognize this mean-spirited, jingoistic and belligerent face of Canada. As for me, I can’t

look at the neo-Canada that this Conservative majority is creating without grieving for my country.

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