

Editorial

The Federal Election and the Necessity for a Pro-Social Agenda

For the second time in a year and a half Canadians will be going to the polls in a federal election. This time the prospect of any party forming a majority government is even more remote than it was in 2004, so all of the parliamentary parties are jockeying for position within another minority government. The Liberals are trying desperately to hang onto power, knowing that they can rely on the support of the NDP. The Conservatives would like to replace them as the governing party, but it is difficult to conceive of how they could gain the cooperation of any of the other parties in forming a government. The NDP is satisfied with being a junior partner in a Liberal government, but hopes to increase its numbers and, therefore, its influence over the Liberals. For its part, the Bloc Quebecois hopes to capitalize on the outrage of Quebecers over the sponsorship scandal in order to sweep the Liberal party out of Quebec.

Commentary

“Buzz” Hargrove Reaffirms the Liberal-Labour Alliance

The Liberal-Labour alliance was forged during and shortly after the Second World War. In return for union recognition and an automatic dues check-off, the major trade unions agreed to line up the working class behind the capitalist system in general, and behind the Liberal Party in particular. By the 1970s and 1980s many trade union leaders were sitting on tri-partite boards alongside government and corporate leaders as members of the ruling elite. This arrangement began to come apart during the 1990s with the open adoption of neo-liberalism by both the Liberals and Conservatives, as well by the

As in last year’s election, Quebec is key and unless support for the Bloc Quebecois plummets over the next few weeks, which does not seem likely, it appears that nothing much will change in the new parliament. The Liberals have dusted off their standard scare campaign about the horrors of a Conservative government in order to pressure NDP supporters into voting Liberal. However, it is questionable whether Canadians will fall for that ploy again, since it is clear that there is no possibility of a Conservative majority government and a minority Conservative government would be forced to implement the Liberal agenda in order to stay in power. Furthermore, the Conservatives are already faltering and a long campaign gives them plenty of time to make mistakes. Therefore, the most likely scenario is for the Liberal plurality to be reduced, the

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NDP provincially. Increasingly, the trade union leadership was shut out of the decision-making process.

These developments led some observers to speculate that the Liberal-Labour alliance was coming to an end. However, last week “Buzz” Hargrove, the National President of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), reaffirmed that the Liberal-Labour Alliance is alive and well when he embraced and endorsed Liberal leader Paul Martin on the podium of the CAW convention in Toronto. Hargrove

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Americans Intensify Threats Against Syria

Over the past six weeks, the Bush administration has stepped up its campaign against Syria. It has promoted several international resolutions condemning Syria and made a number of inflammatory comments about the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad.

This comes amid mounting evidence that the Americans and their allies have been cooperating with the Syrians since September 11, 2001 by sending terrorist suspects (detained but not charged with committing any crimes) for interrogation by Syrian police and army forces. Torture is reported to be a routine part of these interrogations. For example, Mehar Arar, the Canadian citizen who was deported to Syria by the U.S. was tortured by the Syrians until he “confessed” to a number of criminal activities. Once back in Canada he recanted and said that he only confessed to stop the torture.

Whether the Americans are now stepping up the pressure on Syria to distance themselves from the al-Assad regime while continuing to depend on its security forces to do its dirty work or whether Syria has balked at some recent American requests is unclear. It is, however, clear that the latest American attacks on Syria have nothing to do with holding the Syrians accountable for an assassination, as the U.S. alleges, but rather with isolating Syria in the world community.

In November, the U.S. was successful in getting the UN Security Council to pass a resolution unanimously calling on Syria to detain Syrian suspects identified in a report on the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The resolution, adopted at a special ministerial-level session of the Security Council, endorsed the findings of the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIC) into the assassination and threatened that there could be “further action” by the Security Council if the Syrians do not comply.

Immediately after the resolution was passed, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice embarked on a tour of the Middle East, urging American allies in the region to put pressure on Syria, which Rice described as a “pariah state”. Following a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Rice told reporters “Syria has isolated itself from the international community through its false statements, its support for terrorism, its interference in the affairs of its

neighbours and its destabilizing behaviour in the Middle East.” She also castigated the Syrian government for what she described as its failure to cooperate with the UN in its investigation of the Hariri assassination.

Her comments on Syria come in stark contrast to the Bush administration’s continued support of the use of assassinations as a legitimate means of dealing with political enemies for itself and its allies. Most recently, the Americans floated a trial balloon over the possibility of killing the democratically elected president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez. The U.S. also implicitly endorses a policy of targeted assassinations by Israel, which has systematically killed almost every significant Palestinian leader to emerge over the last 40 years.

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called on workers to “agree that this minority government deserves to go back to Ottawa with even bigger numbers.” Hargrove also called on workers to vote strategically in order to prevent the election of the Conservative Party and return the Liberals to power.

While, to date, Hargrove is the only national leader of a major trade union to publicly endorse Paul Martin’s Liberals many others have done the same thing in private. Clearly, a new arrangement has been worked out with a new role for the trade union leaders. One of the indications of this new role for the trade unions is the fact that trade union leaders are increasingly lobbying governments for financial bailouts for “their” capitalists. This has the effect of providing a pro-worker façade to the profoundly anti-social practice of taking money out of the pockets of working people and putting it into the pockets of the rich. Hargrove has been in the forefront in this regard, arranging the recent bailout of General Motors, as well as various other companies. However, he has not been the only one. In return for Liberal “favours” these trade union leaders offer tacit – or in Hargrove’s case, open – support for the Liberal Party. Historically, this Liberal-Labour alliance has been the main block to the Canadian working class adopting its own, independent politics and this remains the case today.

For Your Information

Political Disequilibrium in Israel

Recent events have caused Israeli politics to enter a period of disequilibrium unseen in recent history. The election of Amir Peretz as head of the Labour Party on November 10 shocked the entire Israeli political establishment. Peretz, head of Israel's national trade union organization, is the first Jew of Arab origin (he is Moroccan) to lead the Labour Party since the creation of Israel in 1948. He is a traditional social democrat who favours state investment in education, housing, welfare and other social programs and argues that the money spent on implementing the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip has robbed the state of its ability to provide services to Israelis. He has also repeatedly said that Israel must withdraw to its 1967 borders so the Palestinians can establish a viable state. Those in the Israeli peace camp have greeted his election with surprised joy.

Shortly after the election of Peretz, Labour withdrew from the coalition with Likud that has allowed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to govern for the past three years. Sharon then dissolved the Knesset and quit the Likud party, a party which he helped found, to form a new party, Kadima (Hebrew for 'Forward'). He has recruited several of his former cabinet ministers from both Likud and Labour to run as candidates for this new party, including Shimon Peres, the Labour leader whom Peretz unseated.

Sharon's campaign slogan is "A strong leader for peace" and he has said that Kadima will continue with the plan he embarked upon with his unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip – solidifying Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, finishing construction of the separation wall and at a later date, unilaterally declaring the boundaries of a Palestinian state. Israeli political commentators have characterized this as a "centrist" approach.

Who will replace Sharon as leader of the Likud party is still uncertain, although the battle is between a number of far-right candidates, including former

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. All of the candidates vying for the Likud leadership opposed the withdrawal from Gaza and have strong ties to the Israeli settler movement. Netanyahu also has close ties to the American evangelical Christian political movement which is closely aligned with George Bush's administration.

Sharon's Likud government was able to cobble together a coalition with Labour to govern only with the support of the Bush administration. The withdrawal from the Gaza Strip along with plans to entrench the occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem came only after the Americans signed off on the plan, with some commentators speculating that the Gaza withdrawal was meant to be followed by a partial U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. However, the Americans' inability to either crush the Iraqi insurgency or withdraw on their own terms was making Sharon increasingly vulnerable to pressure from within Likud itself and from the Israeli left. The left of the Labour Party, virtually wiped out after the failure of the Oslo Accords, was reinvigorated by the fact that every prediction it made about Iraq turned out to be true, while every prediction Sharon made, including providing the Americans with Israeli intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction program, turned out to be false.

Sharon's new party is widely expected to win the most seats in the March 2006 elections, but it is not clear with whom he will be able to form a coalition that would enable him to govern. Similarly, if the Labour Party under Peretz wins the most seats, there are very few options for forming a coalition government, although a Labour victory will be seen as a rebuke of Sharon and the Bush administration's unilateral approach to the Palestinians. In either event, the March 2006 elections will only deepen the political crisis in Israel.

UN General Assembly Issues Call for an End to U.S. Embargo Against Cuba

On November 8, for the fourteenth year in a row, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly approved a resolution calling for an end to the more than 40 year old commercial, economic and financial embargo by the United States against Cuba and objecting to laws and regulations compelling third countries to adhere to it. The resolution passed with a vote of 182 in favour to four against (Israel, Marshall Islands, Palau and United States) with one abstention (Federated States of Micronesia). Last year's resolution garnered 179 votes in favour.

In the resolution the General Assembly reiterated that, since its first resolution on the matter in 1992, the United States had taken further measures to strengthen and extend the restrictions, adversely affecting the Cuban people at home and abroad. It also expressed concern about the implementation of

laws and regulations, such as the U.S.'s Helms-Burton Act of March 1996, "the extraterritorial effects of which affect the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interest of entities or persons under their jurisdiction and the freedom of trade and navigation." It noted that the declarations and resolutions of different governments, intergovernmental forums and bodies had rejected those laws and regulations and it called on all states to repeal or invalidate them as soon as possible.

Among those countries speaking on lifting the United States embargo against Cuba were the representatives of Jamaica, on behalf of the "Group of 77" developing countries, China, Saint Lucia, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and Uruguay, on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR).

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NDP and Bloc to increase their number of seats and the Conservatives to remain about the same. However, regardless of the outcome, one thing is certain – the neo-liberal anti-social agenda which has been pushed by successive Liberal and Conservative governments will continue.

The problem confronting the Canadian people, therefore, is not how to prevent a Conservative victory or how to ensure good government. Rather, the problem is how to put an end to the neo-liberal anti-social agenda, block the Liberal-Conservative pursuit of deeper integration with the United States and implement a pro-social policy which benefits a majority of Canadians. However, there is also another problem, namely that none of the current parliamentary parties is prepared to rise above its own narrow, sectarian interests, let alone champion a pro-social agenda.

This leaves the Canadian people without a national electoral vehicle to represent their interests. Within this situation they can continue to hope, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that one of these parties will undergo a fundamental change and place itself at the service of the people. Alternatively, they can decide to give themselves that which they lack by building such

a vehicle for themselves. Rather than getting caught up in the media circus that passes for Canadian democracy, *Modern Communism* encourages workers and all progressive and democratic people to use these elections to develop discussion about a pro-social alternative to the anti-social policies of the current parliamentary parties, as well as to explore various possibilities to establish a national electoral vehicle capable of advancing the people's movement against neo-liberalism and the anti-social agenda of the Canadian ruling elite.

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