

BROKEN COVENANT



HOW STEPHEN HARPER SET OUT TO SILENCE DISSENT AND CURTAIL DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN CANADA

By Maude Barlow

Photos

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“This budget is about redefining the purpose of government and undoing, brick-by-brick, in the slowest of motion, but inexorably, the institutions and programs built over decades following the Second World War by governments of quite different stripes.”

Alex Himelfarb
former Clerk of the Privy Council,
speaking about the 2012 Harper budget¹

“Good government means listening to all voices. In a healthy democracy, decisions should be accompanied by respectful consultation and ongoing dialogue with all sectors of the population – not just with those few who share the same ideology.”

Paul Taillefer
past President, Canadian Teachers' Federation²



INTRODUCTION

This report tells a story – a story about a government bent on forever changing the relationship between our elected officials and the citizens it represents.

Over the better part of the last 75 years, successive federal governments have helped to build a strong civil society presence in our country.

Governments have funded rights movements, such as those for women, refugees and gays; environmental groups and independent environmental research; indigenous health, healing and education programs as well as the more formal indigenous institutions such as provincial and federal chiefs' associations; legal advocacy groups that speak for the disadvantaged and challenge the status quo; civil society organizations that promote good health and maintain independent statistics; anti-poverty groups and non-governmental welfare research programs; union advocacy on behalf of working people; farmer co-ops and programs to support food producers and rural communities; and cultural programs and artists to promote Canadian culture at home and to the world.

This government support created a form of government-citizen partnership in order to empower and strengthen civil society, enhance the democratic process, and help build a check on government (and more recently on corporate) power and has led to many critical policy initiatives and legislative changes. It is important to note that political parties of all stripes agreed with the notion of building a strong civil society presence and supported the creation of the organizations and institutions to allow such a project to be successful.

The Conservative government of R. B. Bennett created the Canadian Wheat Board. Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King created the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the latter of which has had support from every government – Liberal and Conservative – until 2011 when funding for it was ended. Conservative John Diefenbaker adopted the Canadian Bill of Rights and extended voting rights to all native people.

The Liberal government of Lester B. Pearson introduced many of the great social programs of the era, including

the Canada Pension Plan and universal health care. The National Council of Welfare was passed into law by Conservative John Diefenbaker and came into being under Liberal Pierre Trudeau.

Conservative Joe Clark championed access to information and tabled legislation that established a broad right of citizen access to government records. After his minority government was defeated, Trudeau's government adopted the law. Trudeau also set up Status of Women Canada out of which spun many civil society projects for women. The Canada Health Act was enacted by a unanimous vote of Parliament when Pierre Trudeau was in power and then clarified with the provinces under Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Mulroney also established the Montreal-based human rights institution, Rights and Democracy.

The Canadian Environmental Network was created during Trudeau's tenure and was supported by all political parties until it was terminated in 2011. The National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy was created by Mulroney and supported by Liberal prime ministers Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin.

The Kyoto Accord was signed under Chrétien, ratified by Martin and supported by Mulroney.

While it is true that the New Democratic Party (NDP) has never yet held power federally, the party and its predecessor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), have powerfully influenced Liberal and Conservative governments to create both universal social security and a vibrant progressive civil society presence. The NDP under Tommy Douglas led the charge for medicare in Canada, and the NDP must be credited with the fight for pensions in Canada. In particular, the NDP has championed the rights of working people and helped foster a strong labour movement that, in turn, has promoted and supported social justice groups of many kinds.

Until recently, despite their many differences, governments of all political stripes in Canada believed that promoting and defending a strong civil society was good for our democracy. To one extent or another, they all helped to build a covenant between elected officials and the people they serve for the greater good of all.

STEPHEN HARPER CHANGES THE RULES

Stephen Harper does not share this vision for Canada.

This is a Prime Minister that prorogued Parliament not once, but twice, when it suited his political agenda. This is a Prime Minister that runs a secretive, highly controlled operation. The group Canadian Journalists for Free Expression gives the Harper government the lowest possible grade for transparency, saying it takes longer than ever to access government information. This is a Prime Minister who uses omnibus budget implementation bills hundreds of pages long to enact sweeping non-budgetary changes such as gutting environmental legislation with no opportunity for debate or dissent.

Debate in the House of Commons is increasingly limited and parliamentary committees meet more and more behind closed doors. The PMO compulsively monitors and oversees all government communications and senior bureaucrats, embassy staff and government scientists are regularly muzzled.

So it can come as little surprise that Stephen Harper set his sights on his political opponents in civil society. He has called those who oppose his policies “terrorists” and “enemies of Canada.” There has been a relentless siege by this government against those who advocate for equality, justice, the environment and peace. The clear message is that those who are not on board with this government’s ideology will be punished.

Dozens of organizations and advocacy groups have had their funding removed and others are threatened with the loss of charitable status. Government scientists and environmentalists have been muzzled and many have been fired. Institutions that have promoted a vibrant cultural community have had to close their doors. First Nations advocacy groups are scrambling in the wake of deep cuts. Agencies that promote human rights internationally have been eliminated. Anti-poverty and women’s groups have been gutted. Unions are fighting for the right to stand up for workers and the very right to unionize. And the government departments and agencies that service this civil society outreach have also been gutted.

The toll on our democracy is breathtaking. Lacking the private foundation base that supports citizen activism in the U.S., Canadian civil society organizations and institutions have come to count on some government support, even while seeking funds from other sources. Suddenly having their government funding end, many have folded, while others are hanging by a thread. Perhaps most disturbingly, many have fallen silent – victims of a “chill effect” – afraid that voicing their opinions on the urgent issues of the day will draw unwanted scrutiny from a government bent on silencing dissent.

Some of the damage is documented here in 10 key areas that affect all of our lives.

DEMOCRACY

The Harper government has extensively tracked its political opponents since 2006. Through the Government Operations Centre, over 800 public demonstrations and events were observed and information was collected, including university panels, meetings of environmental organizations, union rallies and First Nations protests. The Harper government also gives out multi-million dollar contracts to keep tabs on political opponents. In a two-year period between 2012 and 2014, the Harper government

spent more than \$20 million on the media monitoring of journalists, critics and opposition parties.³

The government has also earmarked \$13.4 million so the Canada Revenue Agency can audit civil society opponents that have charitable status. Sixty organizations in Canada have been targeted. They include progressive think tanks such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a host of environmental organizations such as the David Suzuki Foundation

and Environmental Defence, anti-poverty groups such as Make Poverty History, and international aid and development agencies such as Oxfam. Oxfam was told that its goal of “preventing poverty” is a politically unacceptable goal for a charity.

“Our public debate is enriched when charitable enterprises – even those of contradicting viewpoints – are able to bring the information and perspective and arguments to our understanding of an issue, to motivate us to think about things, to influence us to donate our time or money or change our behaviour, and yes, sometimes convince us to change the laws.”

Edward Keenan
Toronto Star columnist

They also include clearly non-partisan organizations such as Dying With Dignity and the Kitchener-Waterloo Field Naturalists for “exercising moral pressure” on the issues dear to their hearts – the former for promoting a dialogue on patient choice and the latter for worrying about chemicals that cause bee deaths.

The Harper government has also made it harder for citizens to vote with its Fair Elections Act, which came into force in 2014 despite public outcry.

In May 2013, the Federal Court ruled it had “been established” that misleading calls about the locations of polling stations in the 2011 federal election were made in ridings across the country and that the purpose of the calls was to suppress the votes of electors who had made their voting preferences known. Justice Richard Mosley ruled that the “likely source” of the information used to make the misleading calls was the database maintained and controlled by the Conservative Party of Canada.

In response to the ensuing call for electoral reform, the Harper government introduced the so-called “Fair” Elections Act, which has been roundly

condemned as retrogressive and anti-democratic. The bill would dispense with the use of Voter Information Cards used now by Canadians who lack ID that proves their current address. Students, senior citizens in facilities, and First Nations citizens will be negatively affected by the new rules. In 2011, 120,000 Canadians relied on the vouching provision in order to vote.

Further, the bill has removed the enforcement arm of the agency from Elections Canada and moved it to the office of Public Prosecutions, where it no longer reports to Parliament. The “Fair” Elections Act fails to provide Elections Canada with the powers necessary to properly investigate election infractions, such as the ones that took place in the 2011 federal election, and severely restricts Elections Canada’s ability to promote democratic participation. Restrictions on the Chief Electoral Officer also make it much less likely the public will ever learn about this kind of widespread election fraud if it takes place again.

Not content with this affront to democracy, the government is seeking new voter suppression powers in Bill C-50, which would undermine the right to vote of Canadians living abroad.

“The Fair Elections Act would damage the institution at the heart of our country’s democracy: voting in federal elections... This bill contains proposals that would seriously damage the fairness and transparency of federal elections and diminish Canadians’ political participation.”

Group of pre-eminent Canadian professors⁴

In 2010, the Harper government took away another important tool when it killed the long-form census, robbing Canadians of vital information about our culture and society. Researchers across the country say that they are missing information in key areas such as immigrant integration into the labour market, income inequality trends, housing needs and the adequacy of services for low income Canadians.

“We need freedom of information to participate meaningfully in our democracy. It has become abundantly clear that ending the long-form census has restricted this crucial freedom in Canada. Now is the time to reinstate the census to put important data back in the hands of researchers, scholars and civil society.”

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression⁶

Charles Beach, professor emeritus of economics at Queen’s University, says ending the long-form census “has inhibited research into inequality and identifying winners and losers in economic growth, research into understanding the national problems of the have-nots in the economy, and research into how best to provision local government services.”⁵ Given that the voluntary census that replaced the long-form model cost substantially more to administer, it can only be surmised that suppressing this kind of information was the reason behind the change in the first place.

Not content with going after civil society organizations, the Harper government has cracked

down on its federal watchdogs, each tasked with defending a democratic pillar such as privacy, transparency in government spending, or ensuring fair elections. Cuts are affecting the work of the Privacy Commissioner, the Information Commissioner, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General.

Now, a private member’s bill supported by Prime Minister Harper would require that all staff of these agencies make an official account of any political positions they have held in the last decade. Bill C-520 is designed to intimidate independent watchdogs whose job it is to keep governments accountable. Mary Dawson, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, says the bill would allow people to complain that an officer of Parliament acted in a partisan way with no evidence. “Under this act, nobody needs to think up reasonable grounds – they can just fling mud,” she told a parliamentary committee.⁷

Former Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page says there is so much power coming from the top these agencies can no longer do their work. He says the government is dismantling the watchdogs, institution by institution, and calls Harper’s style of governing “Putinesque.”⁸



SOCIAL EQUALITY

The Harper government has taken deliberate steps to widen the income gap and undermine decades of programs aimed at achieving social equality and social justice in Canada. One of its first acts upon taking office was to lower corporate tax rates, a gift to big business worth \$60 billion since 2006. Canadian corporate tax rates are now among the lowest in the world and rob Canadians of much needed funds for social programs, job training and infrastructure. They are a major cause of the current deficit.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer says that even a modest one per cent increase in corporate taxes would put an extra \$1.3 billion annually back into federal coffers, but Harper refuses to listen.⁹ The government also allows between \$100 billion and \$170 billion dollars a year to leave Canada, untaxed.¹⁰

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that in order to balance the budget (having lost so much income from lowering corporate taxes), the Harper government has deeply cut federal spending in a way that has led to weaker economic growth and a weakening job market in precarious times. Over successive budgets, cuts have been implemented, one on top of the other. The cumulative effect of these cuts by 2016 will be \$14.5 billion a year.¹¹

(This is done at the same time the Harper government can find pots of money to advertise its political agenda. In the fiscal year ending March 2015, the federal government spent \$65 million on advertising.)¹²

The most affected government departments serve the most needy in our society. Human Resources and Skills Development – now called Employment and Social Development Canada – will have lost one-quarter of its work force by 2016. A program supporting homelessness initiatives has had a 62 per cent cut to its staff. Eight Veterans Affairs offices across the country that served disabled and unemployed veterans have been closed.

Core funding for national disability organizations no longer has a “protected envelope,” meaning there is more competition for less money. Much of the funds that went to grassroots organizations that advocated

on behalf of the disabled was re-routed to apolitical service providers or cut altogether.

Cuts have affected social housing right across the country. Nearly 200,000 low-income Canadian households depend on federal rent-geared-to-income to pay their rent. The Harper government is taking millions a year from the budget of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. By 2016, there will have been a 52 per cent cut over six years and 100,000 units will be affected. At current defunding rates, by 2030, nearly 85 per cent of the entire federal housing budget will have been cut.¹³

Cuts to literacy organizations across the board will remove the only literacy programs in some communities. The federal funding for the P.E.I. Literary Alliance has ended after years of supporting this amazing network. “When we are gone,” said Catherine O’Byrne, the Alliance’s Executive Director, “there won’t be anybody promoting literacy on the Island, or pointing out how important it is to provide programs for people with low literacy skills.”¹⁴ Nearly half of all Islanders have such low literacy levels, they are ill-equipped to deal with today’s complex world, reports the Alliance.¹⁵

The cuts hurt communities and people. In a presentation to the Nova Scotia Standing Committee on Community Services, the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities talked about the triple whammy of being poor, unemployed and disabled, and passionately argued the case for funds to continue its work. For years, Service Canada has been a major contributor of core funding that allowed organizations such as theirs to pursue initiatives such as providing wheelchairs to children, community-based transportation, and scholarships for young people. But deep cuts to federal funding started in 2013 are to continue until there is no funding for this group by 2016.¹⁶

Independent Living Vernon in British Columbia is losing most of its funding from Employment and Social Development Canada. The organization provides community access programs, employment planning, crisis intervention and peer support to disabled and

unemployed people. It has already had to rent out part of its offices and the number of staff has been cut back. The agency fears that these funding cuts will strip the disabled of their independence.

“People need to know that the disabled and their families will be impacted. We will have to start saying no to people. To have to say no to people will kill me because we have always said ‘Yes, yes, yes.’”

Laura Hockman

Executive Director, Independent Living Vernon¹⁷

As a consequence of these policies, inequality has grown and the income gap has deepened during the Harper years. Today, the bottom half of the population owns just six per cent of the wealth. Since 2005, the top 10 per cent saw their wealth grow by 42 per cent while the bottom 10 per cent saw their median net worth shrink by 150 per cent.¹⁸ This demographic is actually poorer today than it was a decade ago. Meanwhile, by 11:41 a.m., January 2, 2015, Canada’s 100 highest paid CEOs pocketed what most Canadians will work all through 2015 to earn. Due to Stephen Harper’s policies, Canada has the fastest growth in income inequality in the OECD.

“It’s changing Canada. Unchecked, if we continue down this path, the big danger is a more regionalized and more unequal nation.”

Roy Romanow

former Saskatchewan Premier¹⁹

Growing inequality is not an issue for Stephen Harper, except that he wants to rid himself of those who keep raising it. So he has taken strong measures to silence the voices of dissent and close the institutions that independently track these trends.

The National Council of Welfare served as an independent advisory body to the federal government on poverty and the issues facing low income

Canadians since 1962. Its members included low income people, anti-poverty advocates, labour unions, teachers, youth, First Nations and others working for social justice. The Council conducted independent research on poverty and inequality, published hundreds of reports, and developed a national anti-poverty strategy that informed government policy. Its modest \$1.1 million budget was axed in the 2012 omnibus bill and the organization was forced to close its doors.

“With no federal poverty strategy, no official poverty measurement tools, and now no National Council of Welfare, how can we assess what we are doing?”

Campaign 2000

national education movement to end poverty

Kellie Leitch, former Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources, said other NGOs, such as Canada Without Poverty, would take up the slack. This is sheer nonsense. Canada Without Poverty does not have any official role in advising the Harper government. The government is free to ignore it. And as Leitch well knows, the Harper government cut all its funding to that charity, whose aim is to eradicate poverty in Canada, back in 2007. Canada Without Poverty is also one of the organizations being audited by the Canadian Revenue Agency for being too political in its advocacy on behalf of the poor.

Other important Canadian civil society institutions and organizations working on social equality that have had their funding cut partially or entirely by the Harper government include: Canadian Council on Learning, Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation, Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, Canadian Council on Social Development, and the Federal Youth Employment Program.

WORKERS

The Harper government has aggressively targeted workers and the unions that represent them. The government wants to re-make Canada into a low-tax haven for the rich and globalize the labour market, making Canadian wages more competitive. Stephen Harper welcomed the merger of Burger King and Tim Hortons, citing Canada's business-friendly tax laws as the reason for the new parent company setting up shop in Canada. But he had nothing to say when the new company immediately laid off hundreds of employees in breach of an agreement to maintain jobs in Canada.

There are many ways the Harper government has attacked workers and unions.

One is the dramatic expansion of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, originally intended to allow employers to import migrant workers in the absence of qualified Canadian workers. The Harper government not only oversaw a dramatic increase in migrant workers, it passed a law allowing employers to pay temporary foreign workers 15 per cent less than their Canadian co-workers.

The foreign worker program suits the ideology of the Harper government. Even though the highly respected former Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney warned the House of Commons that the program should not be used to drive down wages or to fill lower-skilled jobs, Harper has used migrant workers to do just that and undermine the gains of the labour movement. The program also lets the government off the hook to provide funding for training and apprenticeships.

Meanwhile, vulnerable workers from poor countries do not have the protections and benefits of Canadian citizenship, and those who raise concerns about unsafe working conditions or unfair labour practices face the risk of deportation.

While a national outcry forced the government to place some restrictions on this program in 2014, the abuse continues, say labour leaders, and business pressure to open the floodgates is intense.

“The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is not immigration. It’s exploitation. These workers, many of whom are desperately seeking a better life, are being used to create an underclass to drive down the wages and working conditions of Canadians.”

Provincial and territorial Federation of Labour presidents²⁰

Then there are the changes to Employment Insurance. After years of defunding, only 37 per cent of unemployed Canadians qualify for EI benefits. New rules require laid-off workers to take jobs they may consider unsuitable and that pay substantially less. If they refuse, they could lose their benefits. More than \$50 billion has been siphoned off from the EI fund and channelled into general government revenues.

The Harper government also announced that in 2023, the age of eligibility for the Old Age Security benefit will increase from 65 to 67 years, forcing many seniors to work at low paying jobs and expanding the pool of desperate workers. There are now more than 11 million Canadians without workplace pensions and the Harper government has blocked CPP expansion despite broad-based public support and the support of the vast majority of provincial and territorial governments.

The federal government has also come down hard on the federal public sector, wiping out the jobs of nearly 37,000 people, reports the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. And more cuts are to come, with as many as 50,000 jobs lost before it is over. Veterans Affairs will lose about one-quarter of its workforce by 2017, with negative impacts for unemployed and disabled veterans. Employment and Social Development Canada could lose one-quarter of its workforce, affecting its ability to help unemployed and young Canadians.²¹

The government also unilaterally changed the pension plans of new federal public sector workers, increasing their pension contribution costs and raising their retirement age from 60 to 65. The clear intent is to create a two-tiered system within the public sector where younger workers have fewer benefits.

The Harper government also cancelled a program of sectoral councils that brought business, education, labour and governments to the table in a strategic alliance to come up with ways to ensure Canadians have what they need to succeed in the labour market. Paul Moist, President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, says the sectoral councils played a valuable role in creating and implementing training and skills development programs. He questioned the timing of these cuts given the Harper government's claim to care about jobs and the economy.

The abuse of back-to-work legislation has also seriously undermined workers' collective bargaining rights.

The most direct assault on unions and workers has been in three pieces of legislation. Bill C-4 strips away the right of workers to refuse unsafe work, and eliminates the responsibilities of health and safety officers to enforce safety laws. It also gives the government the unilateral power to determine which civil servants are essential and thus disqualified from striking, and to decide which unions and disputes will be sent to arbitration, a process that is more and more politically controlled. Federal public service

employees will no longer be allowed to access the Canadian Human Rights Commission and Tribunal over workplace discrimination complaints.

Bill C-377 would require labour unions to provide extensive financial disclosure details to the Canada Revenue Agency such as how much time union executives spend on political activities. The rules for unions are much tougher than for other organizations, including those financed by tax-deductible membership dues. The bill is currently before the Senate.

Bill C-525 establishes that a majority vote in favour of joining a union is no longer enough to establish a union, while a minority of the union membership can sign a petition to trigger a decertification vote. By forcing a mandatory vote on employees who have already signed union cards, the bill makes the union certification process more difficult, allowing employers to intimidate employees. Basically, this bill is an attack on the very right to unionize.

“These bills are an all out declaration of war on unions coming from the highest levels of the party. We have never encountered this level of animosity and ill will from the government before.”

Bob Jackson

Vice President, Public Service Alliance of Canada

WOMEN

Perhaps no other sector in Canada has been more of a target of the Harper agenda than women. One of its first acts upon becoming government in 2006 was to dramatically reduce the budget of Status of Women Canada, forcing most of its regional offices to close. Founded in 1976, Status of Women Canada provided crucial funding to women's groups, including shelters and research institutes, and advised the government on implementing the UN Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Harper government also changed the agency's mandate, forbidding it from funding any organizations that advocate for women. This means that government support for groups that conduct research on women's issues, or raise concerns about government policy in areas such as pay equity, violence

against women, or the promotion of women in public life had to end. The new rules were a complete negation of the very reason Status of Women Canada was formed in the first place: advocacy for women.

The fallout has been dramatic. The National Association of Women and the Law had worked for 30 years to improve legal rights for women by winning amendments to the Criminal Code regarding sexual assault laws, improvements to the Divorce Act, and adoption of equality rights in the Charter. In 2007, due to the cuts, the association was forced to close its doors.²²

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, formed in 1976, helped set up women's studies departments at universities across the country and published groundbreaking research on the issues facing racialized women and violence against women, among other accomplishments. The institute lost all its federal funding as well. Federal funding was also cut for the Feminist Alliance for International Action, which measures and publishes Canada's record on its international human rights obligations to women.

All funding for the Court Challenges Program, which provided support for women to bring equality cases to court, was terminated. The program died in 2006. This, in turn, affected the work of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund that supports challenges to discriminatory laws and practices. The Court Challenges Program was its major source of funding until 2006.

Another early act of the Harper government was to cancel the national childcare program initiated under the previous Liberal government. Funding was also pulled from the Canadian Child Care Federation and the Child Care Advocacy Association, the major civil society groups fighting for universal childcare. The Harper government stubbornly refuses to understand how important affordable safe childcare is for women. Almost 75 per cent of mothers with children aged five and under are in the workforce now. But spaces in licensed daycare centres are available for only 22.5 per cent of Canadian children. Many parents find the price of childcare to be unaffordable.

In 2012, women's health took a hit when the Harper government eliminated the Women's Health

Contribution Program, set up to conduct policy research and provide policy advice on gender issues and health as well as environment and health. This removed funding for the Canadian Women's Health Network, the National Network on Environments and Women's Health, the Réseau québécois d'action pour la santé des femmes, the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, and the British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health. Some of the programs have closed their doors, while others are struggling to survive.²³

These cuts and others are having a negative impact on the lives of women. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives reports that the percentage of women living in poverty has actually increased over the last 20 years to more than 13 per cent today. Women's employment levels have been stagnant over the last decade. In the same period, there has been almost no improvement in the level of violence against women and sexual assault has increased. Twenty years ago, Canada ranked first amongst nations in international measures of gender equality. In 2013, Canada had fallen to twentieth place in the Global Gender Gap rankings and twenty-third place in the UN Gender Inequality Index.²⁴

“As a result of the ideologically-driven changes made by the Harper government beginning almost 10 years ago, grassroots women's equality organizing has largely disappeared, with organizations being forced to close or reduce their activities to a minimum, even as we dance around ever more restrictive regulations with respect to advocacy work and both charitable status and eligibility for funding.”

Pamela Cross

Past Executive Director of the National Association of Women and the Law

FIRST NATIONS

Since 2012, the Harper government has cut \$60 million from Indigenous organizations, reports the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and APTN. First Nations organizations saw their overall funding drop by 65 per cent and Inuit organizations by 71 per cent. Ontario First Nations had their federal funds cut by 76 per cent, British Columbia by 73 per cent, Manitoba by 78 per cent, and Saskatchewan by 91 per cent. Tribal Councils, which represent smaller groups of First Nations, were cut by 40 per cent.²⁵ These cuts to First Nations organizations were accompanied by cuts to the Aboriginal Affairs department of \$255 million in these same years.²⁶

Cuts of 50 per cent to the National Child Benefit Reinvestment Fund mean that 133 Ontario First Nations will no longer get help for school meal programs, food banks and childcare for low income families. Grand Chief Derek Nepinak of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs said that projects that were lost with the deep cuts to his budget include renewable energy solutions for northern communities and environmental research and food security programs, as well as helping First Nations residents make the successful transition to urban living when they leave remote rural reserves.²⁷

These cuts were far from the first, however, during the Harper years. The AFN lost \$25 million in federal funding between 2009 and 2015. In 2010, the government cut all funding to the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society after it and the AFN filed a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal over the fact that children who live on-reserve receive substantially less welfare than children living off-reserve. For its punishment in the matter, the AFN budget for child and family services was cut by 85 per cent.

Also in 2010, the Harper government cut all funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation whose mandate was to help address the terrible legacy of the residential schools through community-based healing initiatives. This left 134 foundation-funded healing projects across the country unable to continue.

“We saw 190 clients here last month that we won’t see next month. Just because our funding stops, the needs don’t stop. People should be telling their government that we need this money. They created the social problems here. They should know they take a lot longer to fix.”

Marie Ingram

former Director of the Cambridge Bay Community Wellness Centre in Nunavut²⁸

The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), which was founded in 1973 to advocate for the rights of Indigenous women, has been left reeling from deep cuts. Between 2005 and 2010, Status of Women had funded NWAC for its Sisters in Spirit initiative, which promoted research, documentation and advocacy on the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Under Harper’s “no advocacy” rules, all funding for this project was cut.

The 2012 budget viciously targeted projects aimed at improving the health of First Nations communities. All funding was cut to the National Aboriginal Health Organization, which worked to advance the health of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people since 2000. All of the NWAC’s funding for its health programs was terminated. The Pauktuutit (the national organization representing Inuit women in Canada) also lost all of its health care funds, as did the Métis National Council. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanantami (the National Inuit organization) and the Assembly of First Nations each lost 40 per cent of their funding.

Together, these organizations conducted research and oversaw outreach programs in areas such as suicide prevention, Indigenous child and maternity health, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, drug and alcohol addiction, and midwifery.

As the Globe and Mail’s André Picard reports, Aboriginal people are the most vulnerable in the

country. They will live a decade less than other Canadians. They have higher rates of disabilities and live, on average, 12 more years with a disability. Their children are three times more likely to die than non-Aboriginal children. Their suicide rate is six times higher. They have three times the rate of diabetes and more heart disease suffered at a younger age. Tuberculosis rates are 16 times higher in Aboriginal peoples, HIV/AIDS is growing fastest within their population and water borne diseases such as dysentery and shigellosis are common. Contaminants such as mercury, PCBs, toxaphene and pesticides harm the health of Aboriginal communities.²⁹

On top of the unprecedented funding cuts, in 2014, the Harper government changed the rules for the Tribal Council Funding Program. No federal money can be used for advocacy or political activities. Just as Status of Women Canada was stripped of its ability to fund any advocacy work leading to policy change for women, and environmental groups are having their charitable status removed for advocating for a healthy environment, First Nations are now being told they cannot use any funds to advocate for better laws and conditions for their communities.

“The Conservatives want to get out of the aboriginal business.”

Jack Hicks
an Iqaluit-based suicide researcher

Why has the Harper government cut back so drastically on its decades-long commitment to fund First Nations organizations advocating to improve the health, well being and human rights of Canada’s first people? Mohawk policy analyst and writer Russell Diabo, says that by destroying the infrastructure of the people’s movements speaking for First Nations, the government is making protest and resistance much harder.³⁰

That, in turn, makes it easier for the federal government to seriously erode inherent and treaty rights and undermine the collective rights of First Nations by focusing on individual rights and offloading federal responsibilities onto First Nations themselves and to the provinces. The 2006 Conservative Party

platform clearly stated Harper’s intention to replace the Indian Act and devolve full legal and economic responsibility to individual Indigenous people for their own affairs. This sets the stage for the slow, but inevitable removal of the federal government from its constitutional obligations to First Nations.

The less collective clout First Nations have, the less power they have to stop resource development in their communities. Canadian journalist Martin Lukacs published documents from Aboriginal Affairs showing that the Harper government is increasingly worried that the growing clout of Indigenous peoples’ rights could derail its aggressive resource development plans. Since 2008, Aboriginal Affairs has run a risk management program to evaluate and respond to “significant risks” to the government’s agenda, including the assertion of treaty rights, the rising expectations of Indigenous people, and new legal precedents that are at odds with government policies, Lukacs reported. The failure to manage the risks could lead to the delay of economic development projects.

The Harper government is planning to attract \$650 billion of investment to mining, forestry, gas and oil projects in the next 10 years, much of it on or near traditional Aboriginal lands. “There is a tension between the rights-based agenda of Aboriginal groups and the non-rights policy approaches of the federal government,” says the Lukacs report.³¹

“Our legal challenges and direct actions are creating economic uncertainty and risk, raising the heat on the government to change its current policies. The Harper government is committed to a policy of extinguishing Indigenous peoples’ rights, instead of a policy of recognition and co-existence.”

Arthur Manuel
Indigenous Network on Economics and Trade

ENVIRONMENT

The Harper government is the most openly hostile to the environment of any government in Canada's history. Stephen Harper sees Canada's future as an energy superpower and has done everything in his power to smooth the way for unfettered oil, gas and mineral extraction. The International Monetary Fund reports that Canadian energy companies received more than \$34 billion in subsidies in 2014.³² While meeting with energy sector executives and lobbyists thousands of times since 2008 (a number that outstrips meetings with environmentalists by 463 per cent),³³ the Harper government has closed the door on consultations with environmental organizations and scientists and shut down dissent both inside the public sector and within civil society.

Harper took Canada out of the Kyoto Accord – making Canada the only country in the world to ratify and then abandon this commitment – and signed onto a voluntary set of targets for greenhouse gas emission reductions he has no intention of meeting. In 2013/2014, his government spent nearly \$22 million to market the Alberta tar sands outside of Canada. Access to Information documents clearly show that the energy sector has outlined its demands for environmental deregulation and the Harper government has complied, revoking or weakening 70 environmental laws.

Three changed laws in particular threaten Canada's water. Harper gutted the Fisheries Act, once the strongest piece of Canadian legislation to protect water. It is no longer a criminal offence to deposit a deleterious substance into waters inhabited by fish.

The government modified the Navigable Waters Protection Act, giving pipelines and interprovincial power lines the green light to cross over and under more than 31,000 lakes and 2.25 million rivers without federal scrutiny.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was replaced with a watered-down version that immediately resulted in the cancellation of 3,000 active assessments. More disturbing, the new rules give Cabinet the right to determine which projects will be assessed and to ignore the findings of ones they

permit. As well, Cabinet can also overrule the findings of the National Energy Board, leading many to say it has become a "captured regulator."

As a result of these changes, federal oversight of Alberta's tar sands is now compromised, putting local water supplies at greater risk. Major pipelines are free of regulation. The proposed Northern Gateway Pipeline would carry chemically diluted tar sands bitumen across 800 unprotected rivers to the B.C. coast. The proposed Energy East pipeline – the biggest of them all with a carrying capacity of 1.1 million barrels of bitumen a day – would cross over at least 90 unprotected watersheds and 961 unprotected waterways along its route to Saint John, New Brunswick where most of the crude would be exported.

“The Navigable Waters Protection Act no longer protects water. The Fisheries Act no longer protects fish. The Environmental Assessment Act no longer requires environmental assessments be done before important decisions are made.”

Lake Ontario Waterkeeper³⁴

The Harper government is also savagely slashing the budget for environmental protection. In 2013, it cut \$100 million from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and eliminated 500 department jobs. A year later, the government announced budget cuts of 42 per cent for Environment Canada by 2017. Money for water protection will decline to \$88 million from the current \$108 million, and programs, including weather services, biodiversity protection, conservation and wildlife protection, will be dramatically downsized.³⁵

Parks Canada is no longer required to conduct environmental audits. Environment Canada gutted the unit that responds to oil spill emergencies. Fisheries and Oceans has shut down its marine pollution-monitoring program and laid off all habitat inspectors in B.C.

The Harper government has also singularly targeted independent science and scientists, laying off about 2,000 scientists and researchers from the government and shutting down dozens of research projects, facilities and institutes conducting basic scientific research. It pulled all government funding from the Experimental Lakes Area, the world's leading freshwater research centre, and gutted the internationally renowned ozone monitoring network of stations that tracked the ozone layer in the Arctic.

“The cuts go so far the network won't be able to do serious science... My international colleagues are shocked by what happened to Canada. We were a leader in environmental science and research for so long.”

Thomas Duck
atmospheric scientist, Dalhousie University.³⁶

The Harper government also slashed staff at the Canadian Centre for Inland Waters, the most important science-monitoring agency for the imperilled Great Lakes, and killed the Global

Environmental Monitoring System Water Program, a Canadian research network that monitored the health of freshwater lakes around the world for the United Nations.

The Harper government has also invited energy companies to begin drilling for oil in the ecologically fragile Gulf of St. Lawrence, having watered down the Coasting Trade Act and gutted the Centre for Offshore Oil, Gas and Energy Research, the only agency that had the ability to assess offshore projects.

And as in other sectors, the Harper government has come down hard on civil society environmental organizations.

One of the first actions of the new government in 2006 was to pull the funding plug on the Climate Action Network. In 2012, it pulled funding from the National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy, whose mandate was to bring diverse interests to a common table to create a model of sustainable development. The group closed its doors in 2013, but not after publishing a scathing report on Canada's failure to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. Federal funding was pulled from the Canadian Environmental Network, a network of more than 600 environmental NGOs, which now operates on a volunteer basis.



No sector has been harder hit by the Canada Revenue Agency crackdown on charitable status than environmental groups. Eight influential environmental organizations – Environmental Defence, David Suzuki Foundation, Sierra Club Canada Foundation, Tides Canada, West Coast Environmental Law, Pembina Institute, Equiterre and Ecology Action Centre – are undergoing audits so intense some have had to sideline their environmental work to deal with the mountains of paperwork demanded by the government.

All are victims of a government that has accused them of having a “radical agenda” and “laundering offshore funds.” In attempting to silence these and other environmental groups, Stephen Harper hopes to take the eyes of the world off his appalling record of environmental destruction.

“The legislation changes have created great uncertainty about what is legal or illegal anymore. This, in turn, will compel environmental groups to enter into judicial challenges most cannot afford. My focus has now turned to restoring the cultural connections between people and their water and building a community of water leaders and lovers beyond just the environmental movement.”

Mark Mattson
Lake Ontario Waterkeeper

HEALTH CARE

Before he was elected, Stephen Harper was clear about his views on medicare: Canada should encourage the privatization of health services and the federal government should turn most funding responsibilities over to the provinces. As Prime Minister, he has taken Canada a long way down this path.

The Harper government strongly promotes a host of trade and investment agreements that threaten public health care. The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement would lengthen the patent protection for brand name drugs and give European pharmaceutical companies the right to sue Canada if we do not comply. Not only would this cost Canadians substantially more in drug costs, it would make it almost impossible for a future government to introduce a national pharmacare program.

Leaked documents show that negotiations for the World Trade Organization’s Trade in Services Agreement include “reforms” to national public health care systems that would create “a huge untapped

potential for the globalization of health care services, creating massive business opportunities from what is now a \$6 trillion a year industry.”³⁷

In 2014, Harper refused to renew the Canada Health Accord, a legal agreement signed in 2004 between the provinces and territories and the federal government that recommitted them to the Canada Health Act and to working together on issues such as wait times, home care, prescription drugs and team-based primary care. The accord provided stable funding after the deep cuts of the 1990s and the federal portion of funding started to grow again after years of decline. The accord also increased health care funding by a minimum of six per cent each year.

As the Canadian Union of Public Employees explains, with the accord gone and the federal government unwilling to return to the table with the provinces, Harper is now able to fulfil his plan for health care. In 2011, he announced a new funding formula to the provinces and territories – without their input – that will cut the Canada Health Transfer by \$36 billion over

the next decade, bringing the federal share of health funding down to a mere 13 per cent by 2024.

Without the clout of federal cash transfers, the federal government will not be able to uphold the principles of the Canada Health Act and we will see a patchwork of health services across the country. We will also see the proliferation of private services.³⁸

The Harper government is cutting the federal health care footprint in many other ways. Cuts to Health Canada, health agencies and civil society advocacy organizations are not only taking their toll on our health care system, they are sabotaging democratic participation in the struggle to maintain medicare.

The government announced large cuts to the overall health portfolio in the 2012 budget. It cut Health Canada's budget by \$200.6 million. The Public Health Agency of Canada, which prevents infectious diseases, responds to public health emergencies and promotes intergovernmental collaboration on public health, lost \$68 million.

The Canadian Institute for Health Information, a non-profit organization formed in 1994 to provide independent and essential information on Canada's health system and the health of Canadians, was docked \$45 million. And this was also the budget that cut so deeply into funding for women's and First Nations health programs, as described in earlier sections.

Victims of these cuts included Health Canada's Controlled Substances and Tobacco programs, the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, the Drug Treatment Funding Program, the Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund, the Hazardous Materials Information Review Commission, and the Patented Medicines Prices Review Board.

Statistics Canada's budget was cut by 12 per cent, affecting data collection on health. The ability of the government to deal with mental health issues and emergency response to unexpected threats to public health have been compromised, the latter program cut by 26 per cent.³⁹

“Given these massive cuts, will the federal government be able to fulfil its leadership role to protect and safeguard the health of Canadians when the next public health emergency occurs?”

Ian Culbert

Canadian Public Health Association

In 2013, Harper terminated funding to the Health Council of Canada, a blow described by the Canadian Health Coalition as an announcement to wind down national medicare. The Health Council was formed in 2003 following the Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, to provide accountability, oversight, planning and national coordination for our health care system. The federal role was to facilitate national approaches to health system issues, promote common standards across the country, and encourage the pan-Canadian adoption of best practices and innovation. This commitment was the glue that held medicare together and kept it responsive to the evolving needs of the Canadian people.⁴⁰

“National surveys consistently show that Canadians and the provincial and territorial governments want federal leadership in health care. Instead, Harper is choosing to cut and run – cut the funding and then put distance between his government and universal health care.”

Mike McBane

former Executive Director, Canadian Health Coalition

In 2014, the Harper government cut most of the funding for agencies that offer mental health services to thousands of traumatized refugees. The Vancouver Association of Survivors of Torture calls the situation “a crisis in refugee mental health care.”⁴¹ This latest

assault on refugees came on the heels of a decision by the Federal Court of Canada that the earlier Harper cuts to health care for refugees targeted innocent and vulnerable people and constituted “cruel and unusual punishment.”

As with science research in other sectors in Canada, under the Harper government health and medical research has been hit hard by cuts. In 2013, Health Canada closed the doors of its main library, forcing the department’s scientists to rely on university libraries and on contacts in other agencies. Scientists and researchers fear that critical health and medical information contained in the books and reports built up over decades will be lost.

Scientists, researchers and medical experts have roundly condemned steady cuts to project funding of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) across Canada over the last several years. A chill effect has taken root in the community and many young medical researchers say there is no future for them here.

Funding has been cut for major drug trials, eliminating a critical safeguard for the health of the public. One hundred and forty doctors and scientists wrote to the president of the CIHR saying that funding cuts “would decimate the field and have substantial negative consequences to scientific progress and the health of Canadians.”⁴²

In late 2014, the Harper government introduced a new set of funding rules for the 13 research institutes funded by CIHR, which specialize in such areas as Indigenous health, child health, gender studies, nutrition and aging. It cut each budget in half and pooled the remaining money into a common fund. To access the money, the institutes will have to not only compete with one another, they will have to find matching funds to be eligible.

Further, the government has made it clear that these matching funds should come from the private sector. This poses a problem for health researchers that may be looking into some of the health issues caused by industrial or extractive pollution. First Nations are particularly concerned as they are being told they have to seek funds from the very resource industries they are opposing.⁴³

The Harper government has also shown pro-corporate bias in its review of charitable tax status of organizations doing health-related work. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, a research institute that favours public health care, has gone through a gruelling two-year audit by the Canada Revenue Agency. The right wing Fraser Institute, which promotes the privatization of health care and receives funding from the U.S. oil billionaire Koch brothers to advocate for the oil industry, has not.

The Alberta-based Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms, a registered charity, is using the courts to strike down laws that block access to private health care, but also has not been audited. But as CBC’s Kelly Crowe points out, Dying With Dignity recently lost its charitable status for promoting a debate on the right to die on your own terms. It would appear that advocacy in favour of the Harper agenda is permitted. Advocacy that opposes, or even questions it, is not.

And as with all its watchdogs, the Harper government has done its best to stifle the reports of Dr. Gregory Taylor, the Chief Public Health Officer. The Public Health Agency of Canada was created in 2004 in the wake of the SARS epidemic to report annually to Parliament and strengthen Canada’s ability to respond to public health threats, outbreaks and emergencies. As the Globe and Mail’s André Picard reports, not only has the government removed much of Dr. Taylor’s authority by removing his designation as a deputy minister, it tried its best to bury his 2014 Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, releasing it only on a website with no press release, no distribution and no debate in Parliament.

Why did the government treat this report like “a bag of stinky garbage you sneak out to the curb late at night?” asks Picard. Because it held a warning that the Harper government does not want to hear – namely that climate change is already negatively affecting the health of Canadians, causing more infectious diseases and respiratory problems. Like all independent information on anything to do with the environment, Harper does not want to hear it and does not want the public to know. When a report of this importance falls silently and invisibly, says Picard, the sound we are hearing is of Canadians suffering harm.⁴⁴

CULTURE

Another sector very hard hit by cuts and Harper government disengagement is culture.

For decades, governments of all political stripes have supported a strong, vibrant Canadian cultural environment and funded not only artists and the cultural industries, but civil society organizations that promote arts and culture. In 1949, the federal government created the Royal Commission on National Development of the Arts, Letters and Sciences. Its report – the Massey Report, published in 1951 – warned that Canadian culture had become invisible, nearly indistinguishable from that of the United States owing to “years of invasion by film, radio and periodicals.” The report concluded it was in the national interest that the federal government actively promote both cultural expression domestic to Canada and artists themselves.

“Good will alone can do little for a starving plant; if the cultural life of Canada is anaemic, it must be nourished, and this will cost money.”

Massey Report, 1951

Over the years, and with strong input from civil society, arts and culture groups and successive governments helped build an environment that produced internationally recognized writers, visual artists, musicians, actors, dancers, filmmakers and broadcasters who reflect the lives, values and history of Canadians.

Governments created policies to enhance opportunities for Canadian culture, including Canadian content rules in television and radio, preferential tax treatment and copyright rules for producers and broadcasters, and restrictions on foreign ownership of Canadian cultural businesses and federal agencies such as Telefilm Canada and the National Film Board. Key to promoting Canadian culture was a strong partnership between the federal

government, its cultural departments and agencies and civil society.

Under Stephen Harper’s government, all of this has changed. One of the first groups to get hit was the International Network for Cultural Diversity, which was created in 1998 to counter the homogenizing effects of globalization on world culture. Made up of artists and cultural organizations from around the world, the network was in large part responsible for obtaining exemptions for culture in trade agreements. It was also in the forefront of the campaign that led to the adoption of the UNESCO 2005 Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expression that gives countries a range of tools they can use to protect and promote local artists and cultural producers.

Successive Canadian governments supported the network financially until 2006 when the Harper government terminated its funding without warning or giving any reason. It now exists only as a voluntary network unaided by Canadian funds.

Two years later, Harper angered the arts community when he cut \$45 million out of a number of cultural funding programs such as PromArt, an artists’ travel support fund, and Trade Routes, which supports film and music exports, affecting the ability of Canadian artists, composers, writers and filmmakers to compete internationally. He poured salt on the wounds when he glibly declared that “ordinary folks” don’t care about the “niche issue” of arts.

“Abolishing the PromArt program is the equivalent of killing the entire culture market abroad.”

Alain Dancyger
Les Grands Ballets Canadiens

The 2012 budget took a sledgehammer to Canadian culture as it did to so many other sectors. Canadian Heritage was hit hard, resulting in a \$115 million cut to the CBC. Other cuts include \$9.6 million to Libraries

and Archives of Canada, \$10.6 million to Telefilm Canada, and \$6.7 million to the National Film Board.

Reactions to the CBC cuts were swift and strong. Friends of Canadian Broadcasting called the cuts “vindictive” and predicted deep staff cuts, reduced depth, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of CBC News, a smaller lens on the world, and further reductions to cultural programs.

The shortwave services of Radio Canada International – the “Voice of Canada” internationally for decades – were silenced and programming became accessible only by the Internet. It was also reduced to providing service in five languages compared to the 14 languages used in 1990.

By 2014, the CBC cuts were hurting and CBC President and CEO Hubert Lacroix announced staff cuts of up to 1,500 by 2020. This came on the heels of lay-offs of 657 jobs. The Canadian Media Guild, which represents CBC employees, called the cuts a “scorched-earth plan for the CBC.” In January 2015, thousands of people across Quebec marched to protest the staff and program cuts. Of greatest concern was the potential loss of Radio Canada as a strong tool for the preservation of francophone culture and political life.

“Lacroix should resign. He is helping Stephen Harper drive the CBC into the ground. Today he told CBC employees that the government is the shareholder. That’s false. All Canadians are shareholders.”

Ian Morrison
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting⁴⁵

The Harper government’s abandonment of the CBC should come as no surprise. Harper and his MPs regularly attack the CBC as being a “Liberal mouthpiece” or “left wing.” They use every opportunity to sway public opinion against public funding for an “elitist” institution even though at \$33 per-capita, the funding is modest, particularly given our huge geography and the need to broadcast in English, French and First Nations’ languages. Among 18 major Western countries, Canada had the third

lowest level of per-capita public funding for public broadcasting in 2011. Only New Zealand and the United States were lower.⁴⁶ Polls consistently show that a strong majority of people, including those who vote Conservative, support the CBC and want its funding to be maintained or increased.⁴⁷

Yet Harper stacked the CBC’s board with Conservative loyalists who have not questioned the cuts. Every one of the board members of the CBC is a donor to the Conservative Party, including President Lacroix, a career lawyer with no previous experience in broadcasting.

The 2012 budget eliminated many libraries and archives throughout government. Library and Archives Canada had to cut its workforce by 20 per cent and libraries at Transport, Immigration and Public Works were shuttered. Seven out of nine libraries at Fisheries and Oceans were closed and thousands of books and periodicals were destroyed, a move the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada said was the Harper government’s attempt to do away with evidence that might counter its political ideology.⁴⁸

Library and Archives Canada has stopped collecting historic and cultural books, maps, letters and journals and its decade old service of lending rare books has all but dried up. As well, the National Archives Development Program that provides resources to small local archives was eliminated. The government cut almost \$2 million in funding to hundreds of community-based archiving programs across the country. Librarians, archivists, researchers and historians lamented the closures, calling them a war on our culture, history and ultimately, on Canada.

Meanwhile, the Harper government managed to find \$28 million to celebrate the 200-year anniversary of the War of 1812.

Cuts of \$300 million to local literacy groups across Canada have devastated the movement. The Harper government has also changed the conditions for funding literacy programs, putting the focus entirely on job training and ignoring the need for a national literacy strategy. Not content to destroy local literacy programs, in 2014, Harper cut the funding to Copian, formerly the National Adult Literacy Database, a non-profit network that for 25 years has provided

communities with access to the best information available as well as an on-line training centre.

“For Ottawa, it’s all about productivity, competitiveness and enhanced efficiency. For the people who run shoestring literacy organizations, it is about sharing knowledge and spreading hope.”

Carol Goar
columnist, Toronto Star⁴⁹

Canada’s cultural heritage is also threatened with funding cuts of \$29 million and the loss of 638 staff at Parks Canada in just two years. More than 80 per cent of archaeologists and conservators have lost their jobs and the few left are responsible for millions of artifacts and the archaeology at 218 national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas, many of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The Canadian Association of University Teachers points out that already, 53 per cent of Parks Canada’s heritage sites and structures are in poor condition. Many parks and sites are facing closures, loss of public access, and the elimination of interpretive staff.

“At this moment there are more people employed in a single Tim Horton’s than are employed by Parks Canada nationally to preserve and care for millions of archaeological and historic objects on display.”

Parks Canada Conservator⁵⁰

Perhaps the most aggressive assault on cultural advocacy in Canada came with the elimination of funding for the Canadian Conference of the Arts, a national, non-profit, membership-based organization that represented the interests of more than 400,000 artists, cultural workers and cultural producers of all disciplines. Originally formed in 1945 as the Canada Arts Council by a distinguished group of Canadian artists, including Group of Seven artist Lawren Harris, the conference advocated on behalf of arts and culture, conducted research and contributed to a national debate on cultural policy. It received funding and support from every single federal government since 1965 until the Harper government pulled its support in 2011.

The deliberate shutting down of this voice is to culture what the elimination of the Health Council of Canada was to health – a declaration of the Harper government that it will no longer tolerate advocacy either for public health care or the arts in Canada. When the Canadian Conference of the Arts closed its doors on October 30, 2012, National Director Alain Pineau issued a statement expressing great sadness, saying, “How difficult it has been to write those words and how we have tried our best not to express them.”⁵¹ An era had come to an end.



FARMERS

Long before he became Prime Minister, Stephen Harper set his sights on the Canadian Wheat Board, one of the world's largest, longest-standing and most successful trading enterprises. Established in 1935, the board was a pro-farmer marketing monopoly supported by the clear majority of wheat farmers. The Wheat Board guaranteed farmers a base price for their grain and protected them from the vagaries of the market. On August 1, 2012, the Harper government abolished the Wheat Board without holding a vote of its members as was required by law, which the National Farmers Union called an "act of infamy."

In losing the Wheat Board, grain farmers lost the service it provided identifying markets, negotiating prices and managing the storage and transport of their wheat. They also lost the guarantee of a base price for their product and now find themselves not only competing with one another, which puts small farmers at a disadvantage, but having to deal with a half dozen agribusiness giants, a number of them foreign based.

The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was privatized and has since been purchased by the world's largest commodity broker, Glenore.⁵²

Farmers are also at the mercy of the CN and CP rail companies, now also largely controlled by foreign interests. In recent years, the railways have been glutted with oil transports and, in the absence of the Wheat Board to play hardball with the railways, grain farmers have had to try to get the federal government to intervene. In 2014, Canadian grain farmers produced 27 per cent less than in 2013, and wheat prices fell by 13 per cent.⁵³

Harper also took the axe to Agriculture and Agrifood Canada in 2013, announcing funding cuts of 14 per cent in 2014 and 20 per cent in 2015. Seven hundred employees, many of them researchers, were laid off. The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada said the targeting of scientists and researchers for lay-off shows the Harper government does not want to listen to the independent voice of research when making policy regarding agriculture.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, whose work includes inspecting and certifying animals and meat products, as well as food recalls and emergency response, lost 308 jobs, 100 of them front line inspectors. These cuts reverse a government pledge to protect the food safety of Canadians after the 2008 deadly listeriosis outbreak that came after the Harper government took the primary inspection function away from federal regulators and handed it over to the meat packing companies.

"A lot of this [food inspection] is being turned over to the industry and unfortunately, we've seen the results of that. It's downright dangerous when people are policing themselves."

Bob Jackson

Public Service Alliance of Canada and former meat inspector.⁵⁴

The National Farmers Union also opposed the 2013 decision to reduce financial support from the federal government for farmers by 15 per cent at a time when so many were vulnerable. As well, it fiercely opposed changes to the Plant Breeders' Rights Act contained in the omnibus Agriculture Growth Act that gives more power to transnational seed companies to claim property rights and reduce the ability of Canadian farmers to save and reuse seed. The bill will give multinational agri-business much more money and control, while increasing farmers' costs and reducing farmers' autonomy and Canadian sovereignty, said the union.

Harper is also trading away democracy with the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, says the National Farmers Union. The protections for corporate investors will impede the implementation of agricultural policy that is in the public interest. The fear of being sued by foreign companies may prevent the government from taking action to limit the use of harmful pesticides, mitigate climate change, or support local food initiatives.

As well, with the new intellectual property rights in the expanded Plant Breeders' Rights Act, transnational seed companies are already being given additional control over seed in Canada. They could use this trade agreement to lock up assets of Canadian farmers.⁵⁵

Other partners in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a proposed free trade zone of 12 countries, have made it clear that Canada's supply management protections for dairy, milk, eggs and cheese will have to be abandoned – or at least deeply reduced in scope – if Canada is to remain one of the members.

This total contempt for the needs and rights of Canada's farm families is mirrored in the abandonment of rural Canada.

The Harper government's decision to support Canada Post eliminating urban home delivery – a first for an OECD nation – was largely seen as a blow to urban dwellers. But it is impacting rural Canadians as well.

The Canadian Postmasters and Assistants Association, whose members deliver mail to 3,300 rural post offices, reports that there have already been layoffs and reduced services. In the first few months of 2014 alone, the hours of postal service to 50 rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador were reduced. Post office hours in seven rural communities in the Peace River area of Alberta were cut by 33 per cent. The association says these cuts are the precursor to the privatization of Canada Post that will result in increased prices and reduced services to rural Canada.

Harper also decimated the Co-operative Development Initiative, a project to promote people-centred local development based on a co-operative model that emphasizes farmer-driven projects and rural development. Nine thousand co-operatives across Canada are potentially affected. Farmers' organizations decried this decision, saying it has cut the lifeblood of support for locally-run rural businesses in Canada.

“The constant drive for expanding global trade in agriculture at the expense of community economic development of our own rural communities is short-sighted and something we will regret.”

Cammie Harbottle

Youth President, National Farmers Union⁵⁶

In his infamous 2012 omnibus bill, Stephen Harper killed the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA), which was created in 1935 to stop the erosion of Prairie land in the wake of widespread drought, farm abandonment and land degradation that was the legacy of the Dust Bowl. The agency rehabilitated vast areas and introduced sustainable farm practices and land utilization, including tree culture, grassland preservation, soil conservation and enrichment, biodiversity and watershed protection. It has been called one of Canada's greatest success stories. The PFRA also created and protected 85 community pastures – collectively twice the size of Prince Edward Island – to provide for grazing land and protection of the Prairie ecosystem.

We must remember that not only could the drought of the 1930s come again to the Prairies – all climate change models assure us it will – but on a more permanent basis in the coming decades. Of course the Harper government has done everything it can to exacerbate global warming, from abandoning the Kyoto Accord to withdrawing in 2013 from the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the only country in the world to do so.

Saskatchewan naturalist and writer Trevor Herriot says that 20 per cent is all that is left of the original Prairies and that the pastures are protecting ecosystems that go back as far as 8,000 years. The program has also been a bulwark against the forces now consolidating and globalizing the beef industry. “With large feeder cattle operations and foreign-owned meat processors tilting the marketplace their way, community pastures have helped to sustain smaller operators, keeping our national livestock herd connected to local economies,” he writes.⁵⁷

Now pasture managers and their families will be put out of business and off the land as it is given over to the provinces that are free to put it up for sale. Much of it will go to the oil and gas industry, it is feared. Canadian Cowboy Country Magazine says the move to hand over this land to the provinces is a brilliant stroke on the part of the Harper government as ultimately, it will be the provinces that take the heat for allowing the public land to become private. For any right wing party like the Saskatchewan Party, inheriting the PFRA land is like catching a “political hand grenade.”⁵⁸

“Once grassland is ploughed to grow crops... the appropriation is total. The public values and natural capital found on the prairie – its capacity to store carbon, foster biodiversity, stabilize fragile soils, filter and hold water, and provide recreation for hunters, hikers and naturalists and stirring beauty for the rest of us – do not survive.”

Trevor Herriot
naturalist and writer

HUMAN RIGHTS

Concerns mounted steadily in the weeks after the Harper government unveiled its new Anti-Terrorism Act, Bill C-51, earlier this year. The NDP, the Greens, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and four former Prime Ministers – Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, Joe Clark and John Turner – spoke out with concerns about the far-reaching nature of the bill.

The question on everyone’s mind was whether the sweeping new powers given to CSIS could be used to undermine peaceful dissent and non-violent civil disobedience. While the Harper government denied any such possibility, an internal RCMP memo leaked to Greenpeace clearly stated that the government sees the growing “anti-petroleum” movement as a security threat to Canada, raising fears that environmentalists and others could be targeted under the law.

Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien said the act might allow the government to share personal information on all Canadians, including those who may not even be suspected of terrorism. Former CSIS officer Francois Lavigne was so alarmed by the bill he accused the Harper government of using “fascist techniques” to push it through Parliament.⁵⁹

“So what is this other class of security-underminer the bill refers to? A political party that advocates Quebec independence? Indian activists who disrupt a train line? Environmental activists denounced as radicals by a cabinet minister? These things are on a par with terrorism now?”

Globe and Mail editorial⁶⁰

But those watching the Harper government’s record on human rights and civil liberties were not surprised by the sweeping nature of this bill. Harper’s years in power have been marked by relentless moves to weaken critical human rights infrastructures and his government has shown aggressive opposition to steps that might strengthen human rights protections. Oversight bodies such as the CSIS Inspector General, mandated to oversee the activities of Canada’s spies, and the Military Police Complaints Commission were cut altogether (the former), or downsized (the latter).

Harper’s government changed the refugee determination system in a way that creates a

two-tier system of refugee protection, making it vulnerable to political whim, rather than ensuring a fair and independent decision-making process. It reversed Canada's long-standing policy against using information extracted under torture, directing CSIS, the RCMP and the border agency that they can now use information that may have been obtained in this way in "exceptional" circumstances. This directive completely violates Canada's international obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture.

The abandonment of human rights has extended to foreign policy and foreign aid. Called "economic diplomacy," under Harper, Canadian policy shifted international development away from alleviating poverty and promoting peace to enhancing Canada's commercial interests abroad. Foreign aid is now seen as an investment that should bring a return to the Canadian private sector. In its 2012 budget, the government axed the Canadian International Development Agency that had delivered aid since 1968 and, in keeping with the new mandate to make money from our good deeds abroad, placed it under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development.

Foreign aid and spending for poverty reduction are plunging, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In 2014, funding for international poverty reduction shrank 23 per cent, leaving aid agencies to scramble to meet their commitments. Foreign aid dropped to 0.27 per cent of the GDP, down from 0.34 per cent in 2010 and a far cry from Canada's promise to reach the UN aid target of 0.7 per cent of the GDP.⁶¹

Furthermore, the Harper government will only fund those aid and development agencies that are willing to work with Canadian mining companies in the Global South. The Canadian mining industry has been identified in an industry report as having the worst record of environmental and human rights abuses of any country in the world.⁶² Yet Harper not only blocked a private member's bill that would have created some level of accountability on the part of the mining industry back in Canada, he favours aid to poor countries that make these mining companies welcome with friendly investment policies. This means that Canadian tax dollars, aid agencies and even some embassies may be implicated in the violent

suppression of local anti-mining activities in the Global South.

"Now the [Harper government] tells us that the aid program will, in future, be a handmaiden of Canadian 'national interests' presented mainly as the support of Canadian exporters and investors, with emphasis on the resource extraction industries... There is abundant evidence of the dangers to a country's reputation and interests when a government underwrites – and thus assumes some direct responsibility – for the actions of its individual and corporate citizens abroad."

Bernard Wood

international development expert and former OECD official⁶³

And as in every other sector, the Harper government ruthlessly defunded government agencies that promote human rights and silenced those independent organizations and institutions that spoke out against the commercialization of Canada's foreign aid policy.

Among the first victims was the Canadian Human Rights Commission, established in 1977 to oversee the Canadian Human Rights Act. When he was still with the right wing National Citizens Coalition, Stephen Harper said that human rights commissions are a threat to fundamental freedoms and represent a form of totalitarianism. Starting in 2006, he froze funding for the Commission, forcing it to close its offices in Toronto, Vancouver and Halifax, three of the busiest.

The Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC), a coalition of several dozen Canadian organizations working to end global poverty and promote social justice, received federal government funding – from Liberal and Conservative governments – for almost four decades. It expressed strong

concerns about trade and human rights and the need for the government to maintain its core obligation to reduce poverty through international aid policies. For this, and for standing up for some of its members when they were defunded, CCIC's federal funding was suddenly terminated in 2010, forcing it into a dramatic restructuring that led to the layoff of two-thirds of its team.

The Harper government targeted a key number of major foreign aid and international development civil society organizations, in many ways gutting the NGO landscape in Canada. In 2009, it pulled funding from KAIROS, a 40-year-old ecumenical justice network uniting Canadian churches and religious organizations to advocate for social change in Canada and internationally. KAIROS fights for human rights in such war-torn parts of the world as Congo, Sudan, Colombia and Palestine and Israel, and was devastated when the government pulled its annual funding of \$7 million.

MATCH International has been "matching" resources in Canada with the needs and resources of women in the Global South since 1976. It was Canada's only gender specific international development organization and worked on a model of equality and justice, not charity, which is the Harper government's mandate for aid work. MATCH too had its funding cut in 2010 with no explanation.

In 2012, the Harper government dramatically cut the funding to Development and Peace, founded in 1967 by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Its mandate is to support and work with partners in the Global South who promote alternatives to unfair social, political and economic structures and to educate Canadians about the root causes of poverty. Development and Peace could only maintain its projects in seven countries, down from the 33 it had been working in when it had federal funding.

In the same year, Harper shut down Rights and Democracy, a Montreal-based international human rights agency created by the Mulroney government in 1988 to provide non-partisan support and advice to Canada's foreign policy. This followed several acrimonious years following the appointment by the government of a right wing fundamentalist as chair of the board.

Several more organizations have been hit recently. In September 2014, following deep funding cuts, the North-South Institute closed its doors after operating for more than 40 years. The Ottawa-based think tank, whose mission statement was "research for a fairer world," provided evidence-based advice to government on international development policy and won several major international awards. The institute was recently revived and will operate out of Carleton University's Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, but this is a rare example of post-funding renewal.

Alternatives is a Quebec-based international solidarity organization founded in 1994 whose mission is to create a world where international solidarity, environmental rights, democratic rights and human dignity are universally respected. It is little wonder then that Alternatives was faced with both of the weapons in the Harper arsenal – funding cuts in 2011 resulting in deep staff cuts, and a protracted Canada Revenue Agency audit that ended in late 2014 when the group lost its charitable status. A decade ago, Alternatives had programs in 30 countries; today it has projects in just 10.

"The [funding] cuts had a severe impact on our partners and we had to pull out of Sub-Saharan Africa, one of the poorest places on Earth. Not a month goes by that we don't receive new requests for funding from our former partners in Mali. When we look at the recent history of that country, we certainly see the need is there to support civil society in communicating another vision for the future of their country."

Michel Lambert
Executive Director, Alternatives

CONCLUSION

Stephen Harper has clear-cut an entire movement. Like an old growth forest, the complex and intricate landscape that made up the civil society/federal government relationship took decades to create. Like a clear-cut, the damage was meant to be absolute. And like a clear-cut, there is no easy blueprint for how to rebuild the rich and multifaceted diversity that made it unique.

Stephen Harper's decision to go after organized national and grassroots civil society movements was a deliberate strategy to silence dissent and abolish the power of these movements to stand up against an ideologically driven agenda. The strategy included gutting advocacy funding for the government's enemies and potential critics while encouraging advocacy for its friends.

But the Harper government did not stop with going after those working on behalf of human rights, social justice and environmental accountability. It has gutted the agencies, government departments and government staff that interface with civil society movements. By making the clear-cut so wide and so deep and breaking so completely those bonds between government and civil society, it is the intention of the Harper government that these changes become permanent. Long after Stephen Harper is out of office, his legacy will haunt us.

Yet there are many signs of hope. Despite a number of recent Conservative appointments to the bench, the Supreme Court has proven to be surprisingly feisty in denying the government its way in a number of recent cases. Similarly, the Parliamentary watchdogs continue to speak out with criticism of the Harper government despite funding cuts and threats.

New and powerful civil society institutions and movements have been created and are coming together to fight the Harper agenda. First Nations groups like Idle No More and the Indigenous Environmental Network are working with grassroots movements across the country. Local anti-fracking and anti-pipeline groups working with national environmental and First Nations organizations have had an amazing impact on these projects, gaining

fracking moratoriums in a number of provinces and holding up pipelines across the board.

Students in Quebec and elsewhere have been the backbone of an amazing activist resurgence. Scientists and supporters came together to create Evidence for Democracy, a new non-partisan, not-for-profit movement that advocates for the transparent use of science and evidence in public policy and government decision-making.

Unions are fighting back and claiming more power as they do. The Canadian Labour Congress is leading a national election outreach to ensure that workers' concerns and values are well represented in the upcoming 2015 election and deliver a "win for fairness." The Public Service Alliance of Canada is standing up publicly and strongly to the government in defence of its scientists and others who have been targeted.

The Canadian Auto Workers and Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union came together to forge a powerful new union called Unifor that is putting deep roots down into communities and working with non-unionized sectors. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) made a clear decision to forge coalitions with social justice and civil society groups and has been very generous in its support of grassroots mobilizing.

The Council of Canadians is involved in many such cross-sectoral coalitions: fighting for public health care and against water privatization with CUPE; calling for fracking bans with Unifor; taking the government to court with the Canadian Federation of Students over its so-called "Fair" Elections Act; working with First Nations across the country to stop extractive industries from polluting their waters; partnering with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and others to fight terrible trade deals such as CETA; forming part of the new Right to Know Network to reinstate the long-form census; defending independent science through the Evidence for Democracy Network; as well as many others.

“Harper’s moves to silence all dissenters has served to ignite a rainbow coalition of Canadians, all of us dedicated to reclaiming our country and our government. Our belief in social justice for all unites us in common purpose.”

Paul Moist

President, Canadian Union of Public Employees

In some ways, the creation of new groups and coalitions is a very positive development. It could – and might already be – leading to a new and more independent voice for civil society movements, one less likely to be co-opted by governments or vulnerable to their political views and threats. Certainly we at the Council of Canadians have never applied for charitable status, or accepted any government funding as we have always valued our

independence and the voice it gives us to speak out. Moving to build these independent movements must be part of our strategy now.

However, it is not acceptable to let governments off the hook. Civil society can never replace the multitude of services and supports that government-funded agencies and grassroots groups have delivered over the past decades. We have every right to demand that some of our tax money goes to fighting for justice and building support for the most vulnerable in our society. After all, so much of it now goes to subsidizing corporations and the wealthy.

It is essential that we replace Stephen Harper in the upcoming federal election and start building a strategy for a renewed democracy based on the knowledge that a strong and well-funded civil society advocacy movement enhances public participation, positively influences government policy and strengthens democracy.



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