

# Canada on the brink of mass social struggles

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By propelling Stephen Harper and his Conservative Party to a majority government in the May 2nd elections, the Canadian ruling elite has revealed that its aim is to force workers back to conditions of class oppression not seen throughout most of the twentieth century.

Canada, like the United States and other major industrialized countries, stands on the brink of explosive class struggles. As the elections' results show, the bourgeoisie's program of social reaction is opposed by the majority of the electorate. While the Conservatives now hold 54 percent of the seats in the Canada House of Commons, they in fact won the support of less than a quarter of the electorate.

The votes Harper did win were based on a political fraud—claims that the Conservative Party, the result of the merger of the remnants of the Progressive Conservatives and the hard right Reform/Canadian Alliance, are moderates. Warnings about the character of Harper's policies were dismissed as conspiracy theories about a "hidden agenda."

The Canadian ruling class is not hiding Harper's reactionary agenda, however, but shamelessly flaunting it.

Canadian big business is clamoring for the dismantling of Canada's purportedly "unsustainable" universal public health insurance plan, Medicare. According to a recently released report co-authored by a former Bank of Canada governor and quickly endorsed by the corporate media, Medicare is "suffering from chronic spending disease." Through a combination of sharply reduced coverage and privatization, responsibility for providing health care is to be shifted from the state to individuals and their families.

The scale of the attacks that are being prepared is revealed not only by the Canadian bourgeoisie's plans,

but also by similar cuts being announced internationally. In all the old industrialized powers, the bourgeoisie has responded to the 2008 crash and the global slump by trying to destroy what remains of the social benefits that workers wrenched from big business through colossal social struggles in the last century.

In Europe, there is rising discussion of the collapse of the euro, as bank bailouts paid for by public funds are cited as pretexts for imposing bitter social cuts on the workers—with workers in Greece reportedly losing 30 percent of their income as a result of these cuts.

In the United States, after trillions of dollars were handed over with no questions asked to Wall Street criminals, both big-business parties are preparing unprecedented cuts to Medicare and the Social Security pension program.

Canadian capitalism has the same agenda and, from its standpoint, cannot do otherwise if it is to stay ahead in the global competition for profits, markets, and strategic influence. This means, however, the end of the period in which Canadian capital could posture as a kinder, more civilized relative of its unrestrained American cousin to the south.

Tectonic shifts in the world capitalist system are propelling the Canadian ruling class towards social reaction and war, to increase its profits and maintain the strategic advantages that flow to it from close ties with US imperialism.

Canadian imperialism has responded to the erosion of US global hegemony by expanding and rearming the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). The CAF is currently playing a leading role in wars against Afghanistan and Libya. At the behest of the most powerful sections of Canadian capital, Harper has made negotiating a still closer partnership with Washington in the form of a Continental Security Perimeter a top priority.

The ruling elite are well aware that their agenda will

be opposed. Canada's newspapers, for example, are full of commentary complaining about the popular support for Medicare. In response, the *Globe and Mail*, Canada's newspaper of record, lauded Harper for his "bullheadedness"—that is his readiness to defy public opinion and run roughshod over democratic rights.

The most important example of Harper's bullheadedness was his use of the arbitrary powers of the unelected governor-general in December 2008 to avert defeat in a non-confidence vote and avoid being replaced by a Liberal-led coalition. The *Globe*—owned by David Thomson, reputedly the seventeenth wealthiest person in the world—and all the most powerful sections of Canadian capital supported this constitutional coup, so as to prevent the coming to power of a government they deemed unsuitable.

This agenda places the ruling class on a collision course with the working class, and places revolutionary struggles on the political agenda.

In this regard, the state provocation the Harper government staged last June during the G20 summit in Toronto, where police arrested hundreds without cause and peaceful protesters were violently attacked, takes on new meaning. Harper's ally, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford, is preparing to use strikebreakers to ram through his privatization plans. On the pages of Toronto dailies, there is discussion of preparing for "French-style" mass protests.

The central political problem facing the working class is the vacuum of political leadership. In the current election, popular hostility to Harper's platform took the form of a sizeable protest vote for the social-democratic NDP. It was catapulted from fourth place into the Official Opposition, winning 64 additional seats, including 57 in Quebec, where it hitherto had a lone MP.

The NDP is, however, a wholly undeserving beneficiary of the rising political discontent from the working class. The party of the trade union bureaucracy, the NDP is an instrument for politically suppressing the working class.

Like social-democratic parties the world over, the NDP long ago repudiated even its reformist program. Little more than two years ago, it was ready to serve as junior partners in a Liberal-led coalition committed to waging war in Afghanistan and implementing Harper's

corporate tax cuts, with "fiscal responsibility" as its first principle.

In its platform for the just-completed election, it promised to balance the budget in the same time frame as the Conservatives, proposed no tax increases on the rich and proposed to maintain the current levels of military spending—the highest in real terms since World War II.

The working class in Canada as around the world is being thrust into struggle and will fight courageously and tenaciously. But if it is to prevail, and to escape defeats of even greater consequence than the reversals of the past three decades, it must make a new perspective based on a rejection of the capitalist profit system and the common interests of workers all over the world the basis of its struggle.

The Socialist Equality Party of Canada sets as its fundamental task the fight for this perspective in the working class. The many struggles of the working class against plant closures and social cuts must be fused into an independent political movement aimed at bringing to power workers' governments, in Canada and internationally, that will base economic life on social need, not profit.

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