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COLUMNISTS

Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Harper's contempt shows in ad

By: Frances Russell
Posted: 02/16/2011 1:00 AM | Comments: 47



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Prime Minister Stephen Harper told a crowd of 600 party faithful celebrating the Conservatives' fifth anniversary Jan. 23 that he "loves" Canada. But Harper's "love" of the Canada he inherited often appears more like contempt.

There's his infamous 2000 "firewall" letter advocating Alberta semi-secede from Confederation, his derision of its "second-tier socialistic" status, his excessive and combative partisanship, his secrecy and control and his determination to graft U.S. patriotic and militaristic forms onto the Canadian psyche.

The prime minister's admiration for all things American is transforming the Canadian political process. Canadians now endure a U.S.-style permanent election campaign, perpetual attack ads coarsening public discourse, contempt for the institution of Parliament and authoritarian attacks on public servants, universities, charities, churches -- indeed, anyone who dares challenge Conservative thought and power.

Among the torrent of new political attack ads the Conservatives unleashed was one quite definitely not like the others.

Sombre and, yes, presidential, it features shots from all angles of Harper working alone late at night in the historic Prime Minister's Office on the second floor of Parliament Hill's Centre Block. A respectfully hushed announcer croons maudlin sentiments to lull Canadians into thinking this isn't an ordinary "first among equals" prime minister. He's our very own head of state. He's Canada's president.

Queen's University constitutional scholar C.E.S. (Ned) Franks said this is the first time he has seen a prime minister use his Commons office to record a partisan TV ad. The ad "runs against the idea he's the prime minister for all Canadians and presents an image of him as only prime minister for those who vote for him," Franks continued. "The responsibilities of the office go well beyond simply the people who vote for him or donate money to the party and that's part of the problem."

Another constitutional scholar, the University of Toronto's Peter Russell, agreed. "We've got to the point where this PMO is just too big, too large, too involved in policy, no role for it in the constitution, there is no precedent for it in Westminster, the mother of parliamentary democracy."

The ad, Russell warned, was the inevitable result of the politicization of the entire PMO.

The use of any federal government property or services by public servants for partisan or election campaign purposes is prohibited and regulated under federal law. But federal Ethics Commissioner Mary Dawson, a Harper appointee, rejected a Liberal request for an inquiry.

With his unprecedented commandeering of the Prime Minister's Office, Harper has out-Americanized the Americans -- and struck another blow against our constitutional tradition.

No U.S. politician, not senators, not congressmen, not even the president, can conduct fundraising, campaign ads or any overt political activity from Capitol Hill, the White House or federal buildings or facilities. The House of Representatives Ethics Manual prohibits the use of House recordings for "any political purpose."

Harper's attack on Canadian traditions doesn't stop there. The prime minister has his minions looking for ways he can appropriate the role of the Governor General as Canada's head of state to hand out honours and awards to Canadians.

He's already created the Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards. And he has been fighting his defence minister for two years to get one of the military's troop and cargo Airbuses repainted white.

Pollster Frank Graves told *The Hill Times* he believes Harper is trying to assume "symbolic office, similar to the president of the U.S., which is one of the things they have been shooting for."

In a telephone interview Monday, Graves, author of the multi-year rethinking government public policy surveys, went further. "I worry as a student of government and institutions that they are making changes to the institutional fabric that will make it very difficult for another government. It's going to be very hard to reverse the kind of institutional changes Harper has made to the courts, the public service, the elimination of policy and research, all these things that were pretty key ingredients as to how Canada was governed."

Frances Russell is a Winnipeg author and political commentator.

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POSTED BY: **Blue Rod Blog**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 9:08 PM

Mhimatsu
um, no, I think Frances is far left. She's for sure left of the Liberals. She only sort of likes them, whereas she really does love the NDP

[2](#) [2](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Intangible**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 8:30 PM

Such a delightful intercourse. Common themes:

1. Frances Russell is a hack, is obsessed with Harper, and should retire.
2. The FP is a hack newspaper and is degrading itself.
3. The Liberals and NDP suck.

Facts? Serious debate?
::crickets::

[5](#) [0](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **bropete**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 8:26 PM

Carefull Francis, Harper may cancel your old age pension cheque. You may have to go begging to Iggy for leftovers and table scraps. After all, he owe's you.....

[2](#) [2](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Art Cramer**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 8:21 PM

Come on Free Press, I am not posting anything abusive or libelous; this is my second attempt to post this comment. Please post it.

@DaPegger: What? Chill brother; chill.

I would agree you Cons haven't managed to meaningfully make your case regarding Ms Russel's editorial bias, as you see it.

Over all, Ms Russel has grown to be very sympathetic to the Libs and her writing reflects that. At one point she was pretty much solidly New Dem friendly, but frankly the rise of Harper and his fellow travellers has driven her into the, "the Libs are our only choice if we are to avoid Harper" school. And frankly, all you Cons are doing is driving her further to make that case. As a New Dem, I am not all that enthusiastic about editorialists who become nothing more than "Liberal cheerleaders." However, I respect her right to make her case; I am not going to go after her personally for it. I'll engage and challenge her instead.

You Cons are simply not making your case in any real way at all. So, knock off the personal stuff, grow up, and engage with real argument. We're waiting. We'll engage you back, but you need to raise the level of conversation and start approaching this discussion like adults

Arthur Cramer, Winnipeg

[2](#) [2](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Politicallyjaded**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 8:12 PM

I was so shocked reading this article. This is so unlike Frances. I don't understand. ZZZZZZZZZZ
Frances, your writing can be summed up in one word. BORING!

[4](#) [3](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Mhimatsu**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 6:29 PM

Observant,
Ba-ha-ha-ha-ha. I almost wet myself reading that. Thanks for the best medicine.

[2](#) [3](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Mhimatsu**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 6:27 PM

"Where bourgeoisie character attributes usually associated with conservative beliefs such as integrity, initiative, achievement, honesty and productivity are to be exterminated."

I wish that those virtues were usually associated with conservative beliefs. They were briefly while I was too young to vote, but unfortunately, since I have come of age, those virtues have been lacking. I'm not saying that there are any other parties that better display those qualities, as that is a subjective judgment.

[1](#) [3](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **OnceBlue**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 5:31 PM

@Duhpegger
Manitoba a socialist mecca? Why then did Gary Filmon become one of the longest reigning Premiers in Canada? I live in B.C. and the ReformaCons and Harper are just as disliked here! They did decrease the GST,23698412,but are replacing it with the HST like here in B.C. The same HST which is currently destroying the province's economy. More ReformaCon commentary,still devoid of FACTS.

[2](#) [0](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **Observant**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 4:46 PM

Liberal hacks like FR are piling on the demonization of All-Canadian Stephen Harper because they know come the next election, the Conservative attack ads will slaphop Iggy into bits and then shammow the Liberal party to be wrung out to dry and blow away like dust in the wind.

They cry out that only 'issues' be discussed and then they go on their hate-Harper binge because they know Iggy has near-zero credibility with Canadians. Liberals are a contemptible and pitiful lot now.

[6](#) [5](#) [REPORT ABUSIVE COMMENT](#)

POSTED BY: **dsaint**
FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 4:28 PM

I love Frances, Harper not so much.

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" AT the game last Night... The parking lot was empty so I'm not sure who's going to pay for parking when there's no one there! "

Posted by: [taxman1](#)
Article: [LIVE BLOG: Glendale holding special meeting on Coyotes sale](#)

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