

Door-to-Door Democracy

Sinking the Harper agenda with grassroots power

by Dylan Penner

The Harper government engaged in a systematic assault on democratic rights and institutions on an unprecedented scale since winning power.

Just a few examples from a very long list include undermining the right to vote with the “Unfair” Elections Act, muzzling organizations and individuals critical of government policies, eroding collective bargaining rights, cutting public services, and trampling Indigenous rights to self-determination.

With just one year left until the next fixed election date – October 19, 2015 – the question is, what can we do to prevent Harper’s Conservatives from winning the next election?

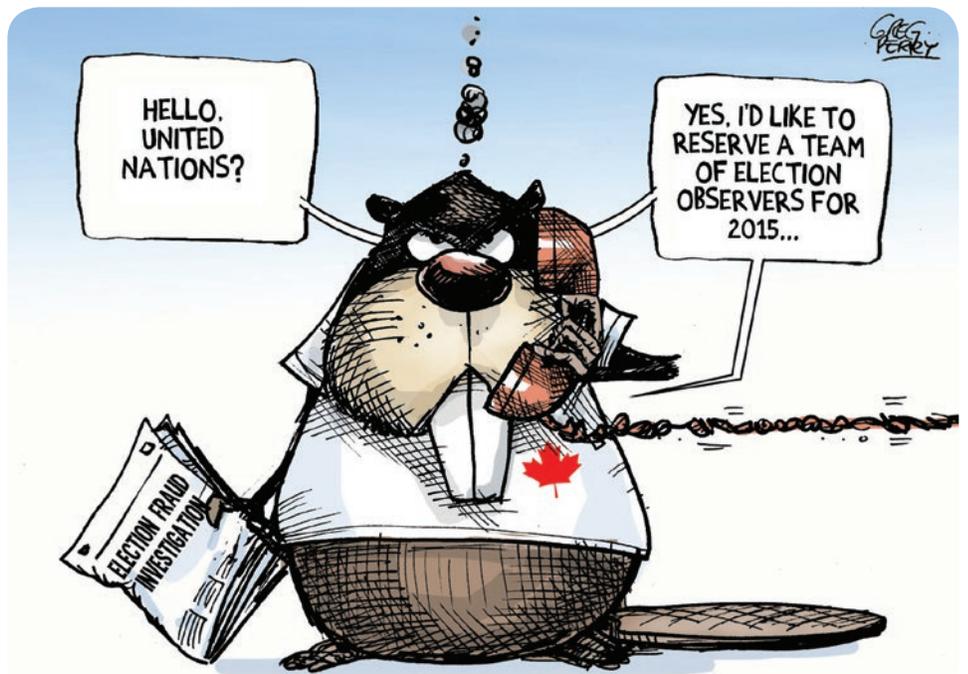
Uniting our Common Causes

The Council’s Democracy campaign is rekindling the Common Causes network – a common front of environmental, social justice, Indigenous, student, human rights, faith, and labour groups among others – to derail the Harper agenda. We are organizing on many fronts and building alliances while fostering the spread of grassroots democracy by supporting local organizing.

Defying the silencing of dissent

The Harper government has targeted a long list of groups and individuals who have spoken out against its agenda. The latest in the cross hairs are charitable organizations. Common Causes is organizing in defence of civil and political rights impacted by this shrinking democratic space.

Common Causes is working to support groups under attack, including groups that are being muzzled by onerous



audits and funding cuts; unions that are challenging attempts to change labour laws, back-to-work legislation, and cuts to public services; and Indigenous peoples whose rights have been infringed by the gutting of environmental legislation, to name a few.

Resisting austerity

Austerity – the government practice of “balancing the budget” by cutting social programs – is also undermining democratic rights. Austerity erodes democracy by attacking the collective bargaining rights of trade unions (among the largest democratic institutions) and cutting public services.

Building a Peoples’ Platform

A concrete way of pressuring all of the federal parties to adopt more progressive positions is to produce a Peoples’ Platform. The platform would articulate a positive vision that reflects the aspirations of social movements and communities. This would be a strong part of our on-the-ground organizing before, during and after the next election.

The Hamilton Civic League, with the support of the Hamilton chapter of the Council of Canadians, has already begun a Peoples’ Platform initiative for their municipal election in October 2014. As they describe it, “We’ll present that plan to the candidates in the municipal election and ask them to support it.

This way, we all get to say what we want before we decide who we want.”

The work to create a federal Peoples’ Platform began at the recent Peoples’ Social Forum, which was held in Ottawa in August. We will be working with groups and communities across the country to further develop it.

Out-organizing Harper

The Conservatives won the 2011 election by a margin of 6,200 votes in just 14 ridings. These ridings were won by mere hundreds, or in some cases dozens, of votes.

Studies have found that making personal contact with people who don’t plan to vote, either through phone calls or door-to-door outreach, can increase voter turnout by 5 to 10 per cent. Given how many ridings the Conservatives won by less than 5 per cent of the vote, we are planning a “Get Out the Vote” campaign large enough to influence the outcome of the next election, while also building grassroots power to keep in check whoever wins the next election.

Door-by-door, we can defend democracy from the Harper agenda. The question is: Are you in?

Dylan Penner is the Democracy Campaigner with the Council of Canadians. For more information about the campaign, visit canadians.org/democracy and commoncauses.ca.