

# Canadians terrified of Harper's real plans [CA] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

After almost two years of all-scandal, all-the-time, the Free Press headline Monday summed it up best: "It's Tories by a nose in new poll." All other surveys still show the Liberals tied or with a slim lead.

How can this be? How can the Liberals even be close after the gaffes, the insensitivity, the dithering, the lack of focus, the culture of entitlement, the arrogance and yes, the scandals? Not to mention the 22 months of the most relentlessly negative campaign in Canadian history, staged by Harper's Conservatives.

Part of it may be public turnoff from the daily battering of words like "corrupt," "corruption," "organized crime," "criminal conspiracy" and worse, spilling daily from the Conservatives, amplified by most of the media. Like battery acid, it's corroded the civility of our political culture and is driving voters away from the ballot box in droves.

But mostly it's because, furious as all Canadians are at Liberal sins, they remain terrified of Stephen Harper and the direction he would take the country.

Like the Bush Republicans, the Harper Conservatives set groups in society against each other. Like Bush Republicans, they govern for the secure and affluent, for the "have mores," as President George W. Bush once memorably described them. And like Margaret Thatcher, they don't believe in society, only in individuals.

Their idea of public policy, as a prominent New Democrat once put it, is to give everybody a bucket of gravel and tell them to go out and build a highway.

It sounds so democratic to give individuals money to "choose." But Conservative promises of taxable allowances and credits, for day care, for public transit passes, for private but not public pensions and for children's amateur sports, don't create public services available to all. They just help individuals with above average incomes. Taxable allowances and credits do nothing for people who don't pay taxes and little for people who earn a modest living.

The single mother working at Wal-Mart on minimum wage can't benefit from a taxable allowance for child care. She needs a subsidized child-care space, a space that won't be available. A tax credit for a bus or subway pass isn't any use to her either if she can't afford all that money at once or if there is no public transit to use. As for the tax credit for sports equipment, she needs it for food and rent.

Harper's \$1,200 per child taxable allowance is of no use if there is no quality child care to be bought at any price. And his \$250 million for new child care spaces is conditional on those spaces being provided by business through tax credits, hardly comparable to the Liberals' universal national childcare program, modelled after universal public education.

Vancouver entrepreneur Jayson Kaplan recently returned to Canada from the U.S. In a letter posted on the Politics Canada website, Kaplan is urging his fellow Canadians to see the close similarities between Harper and Bush. He says Harper is using Bush's 2000 election strategy, allaying voter fears by promising to be a "compassionate" conservative, not to intrude the state into matters like abortion and only to spend "projected surpluses." Once in office, Bush did the exact opposite.

"Voting for Stephen Harper is like voting for George Bush," Kaplan writes. "The two are just too similar in their campaigns and their beliefs for it to be a coincidence."

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press

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