

# Election drama does not equal effective government

By **MATTHEW LITTLE**  
*Epoch Times Staff*

Canadians may have little interest in heading to the polls any time soon but the political drama unfolding in Ottawa is enough to keep even the most passive political observers on the edge of their seat.

With the fourth election in six years looming, headlines are recounting rumours of defecting MPs while Prime Minister Stephen Harper is racking up half a million hits on YouTube singing about getting high with his friends. (For those not in the loop, Harper sang the Beatles' "With a Little Help from My Friends" on the piano at the National Arts Centre gala on Saturday night.)

The New Democrats—who in the past have opposed the Conservatives at every turn—have become the closest thing the government has to a political ally, while the Bloc Quebecois can see their fortunes rise as the Liberals implode in Quebec.

But the feast of juicy headlines could mean Canadians will be starved for effective government.

In September, The Globe and Mail's John Ibbitson raised the question of effective government with his piece, "Is Canada Broken?" Ibbitson cited research from Queen's University political scientist Ned Franks that found Parliament sits over 60 percent fewer days than it did 40 years ago, and passes half as much legislation as it did in the early 1950s.

A month later, Maclean's Magazine answered in the affirmative with an article by Andrew Coyne and Paul Wells entitled "Canadian Democracy is Broken" which was coupled with a forum on the same theme. They

Depending on how one interprets the polls, the harder the Liberals push for an election, the further they fall.

pointed to problems such as a lack of power among individual MPs, elections over nothing of substance, and the need for electoral reform.

Of course, Canada continues to function well, is rebounding

quickly from a global economic downturn, and offers its citizens among the highest standard of living in the world. But to some observers, the country is just coasting by on the merit built up by previous generations.

Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff has said that as a matter of principle, he can't support the Conservatives any longer. But one has to wonder what principle would guide him to force an election that would bring his party back in a weaker position than it is now.

The current Parliament began with Harper giving a throne speech that talked about putting partisan politics aside. Then his government tabled a budget that would cut public funding for political parties and threatened the very survival of the opposition parties who already received only a fraction of the donations the Conservatives do. The idea may have had merit, but many found the delivery shocking.

In response, the three opposition parties joined together in an effort to replace Harper with Stéphane Dion, who was already doomed to step down as the leader of the Liberals after leading them in their worst

election showing ever. Canadians, particularly in the west, gasped at the idea of an opposition "coup" and the Conservatives put parliament on hold so they could try to find some way to stay in power.

When Parliament resumed, the Liberals forced the Conservatives to introduce a most unconservative stimulus budget that would pump billions into the economy. Appeased, the Liberals, now led by Michael Ignatieff, let the Conservatives stand. That changed after disputes over Employment Insurance were not resolved over the summer break and on August 31, Ignatieff announced that his party would bring down the government.

But with the support of the NDP, which had previously fiercely denounced the Liberals for supporting the Conservatives, the government has managed to avoid an election.

So far, the only thing that has fallen is the Liberals' polling numbers in comparison to those of the Conservatives.

A Strategic Counsel survey released Monday put the Conservatives in reach of a majority with 41 per cent, 13 points above the Liberals' 28 per cent. But despite the prospect

of defeat, Ignatieff is pushing ahead with plans to bring down the government. He has said it is a matter of principle and not polls, but if the polls have it right he will be forcing an election so that Harper can finally get a majority government.

And while EI remains a major issue for the Liberals, the Conservatives have already introduced key measures EI experts identify as needing reform. Much beyond that would have the Liberals undoing cuts they made while in power to make EI sustainable.

Currently, the Conservatives need either the support of the BQ or the NDP for survival. But rather than seek cooperation, the Conservatives dismiss the smaller parties as "socialists and separatists."

Depending on how one interprets the polls, the harder the Liberals push for an election, the further they fall. That fall was likely accelerated somewhat when Liberal MP Denis Coderre resigned as the party's Quebec lieutenant and denounced "Toronto advisors" for meddling in Quebec, stoking a concern held by Quebec voters that the federal Liberals are outsiders.

Meanwhile, the Conservatives

have moved firmly toward the centre, displacing a position the Liberals prided themselves on holding. That move was symbolically reinforced with Harper's performance at the National Arts Centre gala. In the last election, Harper doomed his prospects in Quebec by cutting arts funding and denouncing exactly those kinds of "rich galas."

It all adds up to great theatre, but makes it hard to argue against assertions like Coyne's that parties have been reduced to leadership cults, or Ibbitson's that major concerns languish in Parliament while politicians play "an elaborate and futile game of political chicken."

More frequent elections tend to feed into voter apathy, particularly when nothing of substance is at stake. Worse, with each election, a giant parliamentary reset button is hit and the long process of passing laws in the House of Commons grinds to a halt and has to start all over again. Which means each bill in process has to be reintroduced, re-debated, and re-reviewed.

So while politics in Canada may be getting more interesting, it is getting less effective. Even if the Liberals do rise in the polls, an election is

## Feds consider random breath testing to combat drunk driving

CONTINUED FROM P1

The 2008 Road Safety Monitor (RSM) survey done by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation reported that 18.1 percent of Canadians admitted that in the past 30 days they drove after drinking alcohol, an increase from 15.8 percent in 2003.

MADD says impaired driving causes an average of four deaths and 207 injuries daily in Canada, and progress on curbing drinking and driving has stalled since 1999.

"We still have about 40 percent of the deaths on roadways, trails, and waterways that are alcohol- and impaired-driving-related. That's a lot—1,400 a year, 70,000 injuries," Mr. Murie said.

He estimates that random testing would be able to reduce these figures "conservatively by 25 percent in the first year."

In 2003, the European Commission recommended that all member countries implement comprehensive random breath testing programs.

In the first four years after introducing random breath testing, New South Wales, Australia, saw a 36 percent decline in driver deaths where the breath alcohol concentration (BAC) was over the 0.05 percent legal limit.

Under Canada's Criminal Code, the BAC limit is 0.08 percent. Driving with

a higher BAC or failing to comply with a demand for a breath sample carries a minimum \$1,000 fine for the first offence. If the impaired driving caused bodily harm or death, the maximum penalty is 10 years' and life imprisonment, respectively.

In addition, each of the provinces and territories has its own BAC limit, typically 0.05 percent, and has authority to impose sanctions including suspending licences and impounding the vehicles of repeat offenders.

This power to take immediate preventive action is in sharp contrast to efforts to enforce the law under the Criminal Code.

Many police officers report not laying charges because "the process is too time consuming, complex and not rewarding," according to background information prepared for a 2007 impaired driving survey done for Transport Canada and MADD.

The RSM also found that Canadians are more concerned about drinking and driving than any other societal issue, with 79.8 percent saying they were very or extremely concerned. Moreover, 66.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed that police should be allowed to do random breath tests to detect drinking drivers.

But critics say it infringes on Cana-

dian Charter provisions that protect people against "unreasonable search" and being "arbitrarily detained."

David Eby, executive director of the B.C. Civil Liberties Association, says "Canadians generally have a feeling that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is a good thing, that being free from arbitrary search and detention at the whim of a police officer is a good thing," according to a CTV report.

Although it acknowledges that "there can be no guarantees when it comes to Charter litigation," the committee provided arguments in its report to support its belief that the proposed law targets a pressing and significant problem and its measures cause minimal impairment to people's rights and are reasonable and justified.

Noting that driving is not a "right" but a "privilege," Mr. Murie said that "historically the courts have always ruled that driving is a privilege and has allowed reasonable violation to the Charter in the best interest of public safety." "The public has to understand that when you look at the numbers of 400 lives saved a year, 15,000 less injuries, that's well worth it," he said.

Mr. Nicholson is expected to respond to the committee report by October 19. His office did not return a call seeking comment.

## Publicity stunts put spotlight on marriage fraud

CONTINUED FROM P1

Subsequently, seven months after his arrival in Canada Soumah was issued a removal order for failing to disclose that he had a child in Guinea. Soumah, however, has appealed the order, which is his right as a permanent resident. The removal order is unrelated to Towell's allegation of marriage fraud.

'USE SOME COMMON SENSE'

Towell is one of a growing number of Canadians, both male and female, who are finding themselves victims of marriage fraud—one of the most frequent forms of immigration fraud.

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), Canadian officials at missions around the world constantly monitor for fraudulent activity and fake marriages.

In an interview with CTV's Canada AM, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney said migration integrity officers conduct in-depth interviews with would-be spouses in an effort to discover whether their intentions are legitimate.

He added, however, that fake marriages can be difficult to detect and Canadians need to "use their own vigilance, use some common sense."

"I want to crack down on this kind of practice that leaves so many Canadians stranded here in Canada, but people have to take responsibility as well and make sure they're getting into relationships that they can really trust," Kenney said.

CIC says sponsorship should not be taken lightly, and those involved are responsible for ensuring that their marriage is genuine.

But advocates for marriage fraud victims say Canada's laws are unfair because the victim usually has no control over the situation. In addition, there is no binding responsibility on sponsored spouses, who are

granted permanent resident status as soon as they enter the country.

Organizations such as Stop Marriage Fraud.ca and Canadians Against Immigration Fraud (CAIF) want Canada to adopt an approach similar to that used in countries such as the United States and Australia, where foreign spouses must wait three years before they can become permanent residents.

"I want to crack down on this kind of practice that leaves so many Canadians stranded here in Canada, but people have to take responsibility as well"

They also want legislation in place that would protect Canadian sponsors, and complain that CIC is slow to act in deporting or penalizing those guilty of marriage fraud.

But Kenney told Canada AM that once a sponsored spouse arrives in the country, removing him or her on allegations of marriage fraud in a timely manner becomes difficult.

"As soon as someone has abandoned their spouse, if they've left, an investigation can start. But frankly, the sponsored spouse has all sorts of legal rights once they hit Canadian soil and it's impossible to remove someone like that quickly."

In February, Toronto-based CAIF launched a class action lawsuit against CIC and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) over their alleged failure to go after sponsored spouses guilty of marriage fraud and for "denying the rights of victims."

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

ATTENTION The public performance Towell staged last Thursday, which was filmed by W5 for use in an episode about marriage fraud, wasn't her first. In April she walked through parts of Ottawa—including past the CIC and CBSA offices—in her wedding dress with a door strapped to her back.

The door symbolized the burden she will have to carry should her ex-husband be able to collect welfare while he appeals his removal order, which could take up to two years.

The stunt captured national and international media attention, she says, with the result that she has been invited to participate in a panel discussion in Seattle with Canadian and American immigrant experts. She will also speak at the premiere screening of The Promise of Plenty, a documentary about immigration policies in both countries which features her case.

"I've been extremely vocal about my case," she says. "After immigration told me that I had no case, and Canadian Border Services said the same thing and ditto for the RCMP and my MP, I basically called the media up and told them what had happened."

Since going public, Towell says "people from across Canada" who were also duped by their spouses have been contacting her. She has written a book on the subject, and says she hopes the publicity she has generated—which has helped her case "move at the speed of light"—will in some way help other marriage fraud victims.

"I came to realize that it's not just about me. I realized this is a huge issue, but it's a silent issue because people don't want to speak about it—they're embarrassed, they're destroyed, they're crushed."

## Conservatives criticized for forgetting rights on communist anniversary

By **JASON LOFTUS**  
*Epoch Times Staff*

Stephen Harper once said his Conservative Party would not "sell out" to the "almighty dollar" in exchange for silence about human rights concerns in China. But this week the government was criticized for the warm greetings it sent to the communist regime as it marked the 60th anniversary of its wresting control of the country.

Stephen Shi, a Chinese exile living in Ottawa, wrote to MPs and media this week decrying what he called Canadian politicians' "continuous kow-towing to the communist murderers." He noted an event in Ottawa marking the anniversary in which the Chinese ambassador was joined by several Canadian politicians, including local Conservative MPs Pierre Poilievre and Gordon O'Connor.

Shi was sentenced to six years in a Chinese prison and labelled "anti-revolutionary" in 1990 after he wrote letters to the Chinese regime criticizing its massacre of pro-democracy students in Beijing the previous year. He later fled to Canada because he said he could live here "without fear of being imprisoned for expressing my views."

"China has a glorious 5,000-year history, not 60 years," Shi wrote to the MPs this week. "The communist regime does not represent China. The communist history is not China's history. Couldn't those few Canadian politicians figure it out?"

Shi must not have been pleased to read the comments by Canada's For-

eign Minister Lawrence Cannon, who was quoted in Chinese media on the eve of the Oct. 1 anniversary events in China.

"I would like to warmly congratulate the people of China on the eve of this 60th anniversary," Cannon was quoted in the regime's official mouthpiece, Xinhua. "Tomorrow is a truly historic day, and our Chinese friends have reason to be proud of their achievements."

After gaining a reputation as advocates for Chinese human rights and democracy, the Conservatives have recently left Chinese rights activists confused about their stance.

Some, like Mr. Shi, believe the Canadian government has been swayed by a pro-regime lobby that is in fact a front for the regime.

"While they believe that they are pleasing the Chinese voters, they are not," Shi said of the politicians. "The Chinese Communist Party front organizations who claim to be representing the Chinese community but are really the voice of the Chinese embassy do not represent me, nor the majority of Chinese Canadians who came to Canada for freedom."

But not everyone in the Conservative caucus has gone quiet on Chinese human rights.

One example is Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, who has continued to publicly champion human rights issues while Conservative ministers have made numerous trips to China.

Kenney recently spoke out in favour of a monument planned in Ottawa for victims of communist regimes. And in May he thanked a Falun Gong group in Calgary both

for their cultural contributions and for "always reminding us about the victims of religious and political persecution around the world."

At the time, Kenney told The Epoch Times: "Our government has always said that Canada should advance both our values and our interests. We obviously have strong interests in promoting trade and commerce with China but we also want to promote our values, our belief in democracy, and human freedom, and we believe that we can do both of those things."

However, it was also Kenney's office that circulated the Xinhua news article quoting Cannon's remarks to Canadian media. The article, like the comments by Canadian officials, made no mention of Chinese peoples' suffering under six decades of communism.

The Xinhua article Kenney's office sent out speaks of friendship, noting that Canada sent grain to China in 1960 "when China was hit hard by famine." It fails to mention that the "famine" was caused by the ruthless policies of communist dictator Mao Zedong, who in his lust for nuclear arms shipped grain to the Soviet Union while millions of his own people died of starvation.

Shi is bothered by what he sees as Western officials' cozying up to the regime by downplaying the atrocities it has inflicted on the Chinese people.

"October 1 should be a day of mourning and remembrance, not celebration, for the tens of millions of Chinese killed, tortured, and imprisoned and for the 1.3 billion still oppressed," he said.

## Buying a House is Stressful Enough These Days...

Let me make it as straightforward and simple as possible for you. Rates through me are the lowest anywhere. Call me to discover all the ways I can make your home-buying easy and affordable.



**Art Price**  
Mortgage Specialist

**1-866-999-9740**

SELECT  
MORTGAGE CORP

VERICO  
MORTGAGE BROKERS NETWORK

MBABC  
Mortgage Brokers  
Association of BC