

## May has been a bad month for Harper

Written by Joan Russow

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GERALD CAPLAN



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May has been a splendid month for foes of the Harper government. It's been one humiliation after another, with only two exceptions all of its own making. Stephen Harper's rancid chickens are coming home to roost.

The two exceptions are, of course, the orange crushing of Tory Alberta by Rachel Notley's

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NDP, and the election of somebody called Brown as new Ontario PC Leader. With a general election looming, these developments leave Conservatives in both provinces badly split, though the Harperites hope that a coup against the NDP government of Alberta won't be long in coming. Indeed, greedmeister Kevin O'Leary has already begun the patriotic campaign to "[bring Alberta to its knees](#)".

Of their many other May woes, the government is merely reaping what it's sown. Here are a few.

- Canadians discovered that the government didn't bother to spend a much-needed \$97-million it had budgeted for the disabled, youth employment and adult literacy. This followed other recent revelations that it also failed to spend \$1.1-billion that was available for the urgent needs of veterans.

- Twice already this month, the courts have found for Omar Khadr and against Stephen Harper. His government's visceral hatred for the man, its relentless attempts to destroy the rest of his life, has blinded them to law and Constitution alike. These last two judgments join a long series of embarrassing judicial defeats for the government.

- Each day, the Mike Duffy trial makes not only Mr. Duffy but the Harper government look worse. The other week brought to light direct interference from the Prime Minister's Office with a Senate audit involving Mr. Duffy, using senators known to be particularly loyal to the Prime Minister. How long before Stephen Harper is directly implicated?

- For the third time in a year, it was revealed that the government has betrayed Canada's 94 surviving thalidomide victims. First the government ignored their call for appropriate compensation until it was called out by this newspaper. Then it offered a support package only half as much as they fought for. Now the survivors fear their annual pensions will be similarly slashed, but can get no information from a bizarrely unsympathetic government. Meanwhile, they age, their suffering intensifies, they die – three since their campaign for compensation began.

- Out of the blue, [stories materialized](#) that the government intended to use hate-crime laws against Canadians who advocated boycotting Israeli products. The purpose seems to have been, once again, to pander to Jewish voters while intimidating critics of the Netanyahu government, just as the Prime Minister insists that criticizing Israel is a form of anti-Semitism, even if the critic is Jewish. Public Security Minister Steven Blaney says he takes a "zero tolerance" approach to any talk of boycotting or sanctioning Israel. What might this conceivably mean? The government permits Canadians to call for sanctions against Iran and Russia but not Israel? The government can stop us from expressing opinions different from theirs? After embarrassing questions from bemused media, the government abruptly dropped the entire dangerous scheme, even denying it ever existed.

- Finally, Mr. Harper was forced into yet another humiliating retreat. How much his government really cares about Canada's troops has always been open to debate; ask our veterans. But Conservative politicians just love being seen with our soldiers – even if it puts

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those soldiers at serious risk. For the government, using the armed forces as a propaganda tool is job number one, as it demonstrated again two weeks ago in a truly reckless way.

The PM was in Iraq with Defence Minister Jason Kenney and the camera crew that follows Mr. Harper everywhere at public expense. Fearing IS reprisals, the military had twice explicitly instructed Mr. Harper's party that all soldiers must remain anonymous for security reasons. Any violation of this rule is considered to be a serious breach of security that endangers the safety of the troops in the field as well as their families here at home.

But for the government, crass photo ops trumped security and safety. A series of videos of the politicians and troops were immediately posted, with soldiers' faces plainly visible. Well-trained Harper spokespeople went to work; covering up is job number two. First they denied violating security protocols. That was not true. Then they claimed the military had vetted the videos before posting. This was a two-in-one lie. The military had known nothing of the videos being posted and had approved nothing. It took eight hours for them to come down.

For years, Stephen Harper has scaremongered about terrorist threats to Canada. "Terrorism will come home if we don't confront it here." That was said not yesterday but in 2007 when Canada still had troops in Afghanistan. Yet it was the government's own opportunism that has just endangered Canadian soldiers and their families back in Canada. We can guess what CSIS and the Mounties would do if you or I did such a thing. What are they doing now that it's our own government?

Are these Stephen Harper's ideo of May? You'd almost think he was deliberately trying to prove a legendary Elizabeth May assertion – that Omar Khadr indeed has more class than his entire darn cabinet.

COMMENT Joan Russow

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