

## Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News

Written by

Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45 - Last Updated Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45

---

### Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News

**PEJ News** - C. L. Cook - Back in the saddle! Having made of the last week a media holiday, (a blessed relief I highly recommend) it's time to grasp again the cudgel where I left off. Last week, commencement week for Canada's new "transparent" government, Stephen Harper's Tories quietly axed the country's Kyoto Protocol commitments on global climate change, and as an ominous extra measure, muzzled the public release of a novel detailing the possible effects of climate change on Canada written by an employee of Environment Canada.

*www.PEJ.org*

### **Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News**

**C. L. Cook**

PEJ News

April 21, 2006

Borne in large part of the arrogance and duplicity of its predecessor Liberal government, Stephen Harper's newly minted Tory minions were working overtime to come up with inaugural legislation designed to both reassure the majority of Canadians not electing to see a Conservative government in power, and to take a post-election swipe at the disgraced Liberals.

On April 11th, with much fanfare and self-congratulation, the minority Tories introduced their first legislation as a sitting government since Brian Mulroney's spectacular self-immolation on Canada's political stage more than a dozen years ago. The so-called ['Federal Accountability Act'](#)

s dedicated to, as the party's website intones:

"[C]reating a new culture of accountability that will change forever the way business is done in Ottawa."

The government "Action Plan" accompanying the details of the proposed legislation also released reminds, for those too-thick-to-recall Canadians who may have forgotten how bad the Liberals were, that the new legislation:

"includes additional measures the Harper government will undertake in order to deliver on all its campaign commitments to clean up government... putting the legacy of political scandal behind us and restoring Canadians' trust in government."

In Stephen We Trust?

Few Canadians doubted the Conservatives under Harper would "change the way things are done in Ottawa," (if not *forever*, then as long as the Conservatives were running the show). An excellent reason, they most sensibly agreed, to refuse to grant Harper a majority government.

## Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News

Written by

Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45 - Last Updated Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45

---

Most voters also agreed; things were bad under the corpulent and ultimately complacent Liberals, the perennial governor's hubris perfectly embodied by their ill-chosen and unlamented erstwhile leader, Paul Martin. Another excellent reason to refuse a majority to his long-awaited stab at the country's top job. But, Mr. Harper is being ingenuous when he assumes Canadians' "trust" in their government needs "restoring."

Unlike Harper's south of the border philosophical mentors, most Canadians both respect and trust the institutions created over the last century and half in this country. According to them, the fault, dear Stephen, lies not in the Institution of Canadian governance, but in those that would disregard the intent of those institutions, and dismiss the will of the people in pursuit of personal objectives; regardless if that pursuit is purely venal, as in much of the circus witnessed in the latter days of the Liberals, or consists of high-minded reformation, galloping along heedless of a culture Canadians are rightfully proud, and traditions they have grown comfortable with.

### Heading the Charge

Much has been made in the Canadian press of Mr. Harper's take-charge, top-down management style in these early days. With typically dim-wittedness, the ever subservient media here is breathlessly extolling the new PM's manly mastery of the reins of power. Whether he be mounting a tank in Afghanistan in support of the overwhelmingly unpopular and deepening mire "we" find ourselves entangled in there, or clear-cutting Kyoto, the fourth estate seems to find little more to talk about than Harper's wardrobe. But, last week's actions by Harper reveal, the Emperor is not so much transparent as naked.

### Hotter than Hell

Mark Tushingham is a scientist working with Environment Canada. In his spare hours, Mr. Tushingham writes fiction. But, the scheduled launch of his recently published novel coincided last week with the low key, late in the day pre-long weekend public release of the government's plan to eliminate 15 Kyoto related programs, (for a start) and the effective cutting of Canada's climate change budget by about 40 percent. At a time when Canada's emission targets, agreed at the Kyoto conference back in the early nineties, are failing spectacularly, this new measure was to be a missive slipped discretely under the media door when most Canadians were scrambling to book flights and locked in line-ups to secure long holiday weekend cheer. Clearly, the prospect of a climate doomsday book, written by one of their own, was unwelcome.

### Killing the Message

Tushingham was [told he was not to attend his book launch](#) . This, despite the fact it had been pre-arranged, and his publisher had already made the trip from New Brunswick to Ottawa's Press Club to attend the event. According to publishers at DreamCatcher Press, it is an unprecedented move. DreamCatcher's Elizabeth Margaris says:

"He got a directive from the department, cautioning him not to come to this meeting today. So I guess we're being stifled. This is incredible, I've never heard of such a thing."

## Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News

Written by

Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45 - Last Updated Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45

---

Tushingham's book, "Hotter than Hell" depicts a world made too hot to inhabit, leading to a water resource war between Canada and the United States.

A spokesperson for the Environment Ministry explained the directive forbidding Tushingham's attendance at his book launch, saying:

"Due process for this event was not followed and that's why it was cancelled."

What that "due process" entails was not elucidated, but spokesperson Ryan Sparrow, added:

"Publicity for the planned book launch identified Tushingham as an Environment Canada scientist, and it was assumed that he would be representing the position of the department. We would not have objected to Mr. Tushingham's appearance if he had been referred to as a private citizen."

### Private Citizen, Professional Risk

The implication of Mr. Sparrow's comment lead to some unsettling questions: Is the "position of the department" consistent with fiction, if only those acceptable to the department? Is the muzzling of artistic work, created off-the- clock warranted in any case involving government workers, or is it just in those instances where those works could prove an embarrassment to the government? What does it say of Mr. Harper's "transparent" administration that they would unreservedly attack free speech and expression on a moment's notice, and will that include subtler forms of intimidation employed against those that follow Mr. Sparrow's diktat and deny their professional qualifications?

### Hub and Spoke

Harper's neophyte acolytes in power like to describe the leader's style as "hub and spoke management." It's a kinder and gentler way of saying "top down," meant to convey an image of the PM as being, spider-like, at the centre of a web of information and decision-making conduits, nothing getting done without first going through the "hub." When asked about the extraordinary prohibitions ordered against fledgling novelist, Mark Tushingham, Harper claimed he wasn't aware of the details of the situation. But, he was quick to remind, his [sic] government was elected on a platform that includes developing "new" strategies to tackle Canada's so far dismal climate change performance. Adding the vaguely chilling rejoinder:

"I obviously not only hope, but expect, that all elements of the bureaucracy will be working with us to achieve our objectives."

Just whose "objectives" the good bureaucratic spiders are expected to further, and what fate will befall they that fail remains unclear, but clearly, if Mark Tushingham values his tenure on "the spoke," he'll do well to introduce himself to his next book signing as "Citizen Tushingham."

## Canada: Killing Kyoto, Burying the Bad News

Written by

Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45 - Last Updated Friday, 21 April 2006 13:45

---

**Chris Cook** is a contributing editor to [PEJ News](#) , and host of [Gorilla Radio](#) , a weekly public affairs program, broad/webcast from the University of Victoria. You can check out the [GR Blog here](#)

.