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"If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

~ Desmond Tutu

Right to reject now

As Canadian voters are gearing up for the election and party leaders crisscross the country with promises of change and redundant platforms on a variety of issues, those who are fed up with the current electoral system have limited choices to make.

The fight is mainly between the three parties, the right wing ruling Conservatives, the centrist Liberals and the so-called leftists, the New Democrats. The Green Party and the Bloc Quebecois are also in the fray, besides 15 smaller registered parties (ranging from the Christian Heritage to the Communists and the Libertarians - visit the Elections Canada website for the complete list). Those who are done with ten years of the Conservative regime have already made up their minds, and if polls are any indication, the popularity of PM Stephen Harper is on the decline. Whether it is a time for change will only be known on Election Day, October 19. But will this change be fundamental? Not at all. So what needs to be done?

Radical Desi is delighted to inform its readers that we have launched an online petition seeking the right to reject in the elections.

There are many countries, including India, where the voters enjoy this privilege and have None of the Above (NOTA) option on the ballot paper. Interestingly, Indian voters got the opportunity to vote for NOTA in the 2014 general election for the first time. In a country widely known as the world's largest democracy, 6,000,000 people exercised their right to reject all candidates and political parties, at a time when "Modi mania" had attracted international curiosity. Although Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power with a Parliamentary majority for his right wing Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party, these voters remained unaffected by the so-called wave generated by a leader who became popular worldwide. In fact, in his home state of Gujarat 454,880 people voted for NOTA.

For social justice activists this was a huge development, sending a message to both Modi and his electoral opponents that the right to elect cannot be taken for granted.

There have been several attempts to get this right in Canada in the past, but they never succeeded. Whether or not Radical Desi succeeds in its mission, we would like our readers to go to the Care2 petitions website and register their signatures. The petition is addressed to the Governor General of Canada and asks for the inclusion of NOTA option on the ballot paper.

Those who believe in real democracy cannot deny that the right to reject is equally important, as voters will have power to convey their disillusionment with all the parties and candidates in any given situation, rather than just picking the lesser evil. The dissent vote will count and force the parties and the candidates to reflect on their performance and behave responsibly. And who knows - this may actually encourage more and more people to come out and register their votes, rather than not to exercise their right to franchise due to disillusionment with the political system. The Indigenous communities, for example, generally remain away from the process because of their mistrust in the electoral system since the days when Canada was built on stolen lands.

Those who oppose this demand are generally apologists of the status quo, or party loyalists who always see their favoured party as a real alternative. The established parties in Canada will never understandably accept this demand, which they see as an attempt to distract voters who might be inclined to vote for them.

Some feel that this kind of petition is a waste of time, or it indirectly goes in favour of Harper when everybody wants to get rid of him and there are already alternatives to replace him, and so on. It is not surprising therefore that the petition has generated very little response on Facebook. Going by the polls, Harper seems to

be in bad shape, whereas the NDP is surging. So for the supporters of the NDP or Liberals or the Green Party at this time, any debate on NOTA seems irrelevant and inconvenient, because they think that these parties are a better alternative to the right wing Harper government. But they are missing a point that this campaign is not about defeating one party or choosing the other. It's only about a fundamental right to reject, which again is a democratic right. If a voter honestly is disappointed with these so-called alternatives, what choice does he or she have? Liberals, for instance, supported Harper's controversial Bill C-51, so why anyone should vote Liberal just to defeat Harper? The NDP and Greens, for example, are on the same page as the other two parties on the issue of Palestine, and lack the political will to oppose Israeli aggression, so why vote for them? In the absence of a choice to reject, these parties which claim to be close to the working class have also become arrogant. Out of this arrogance, they not only scoff at any voice of dissent from within their own constituents, but take their support and inability to vote for anyone else for granted.

In the current situation, voters who want to see change in Ottawa are also upset with the fact that this is not going to bring a fundamental change in the current political system. Replacing one evil with other is not a solution, so we really need an alternative where at least the right to reject can send a strong message to everyone in Parliament. Never forget, those who did not vote for anyone in India were not carried away by the pro-Modi tide, even though they did not vote for others, so why be scared if such a right is given to voters in Canada? It is for the opponents of Modi to figure out why they did not get the votes of 6,000,000 people, and that is the key to understand the essence of the right to reject which should be given to us to strengthen real democracy.

-Editors

Fall Falling for Harper

Campaign against Conservatives gain momentum, but will it translate into change?

When social justice activist Brigitte DePape stood up with a sign "Stop Harper" in the senate during the Throne Speech in 2011, nobody imagined that her message would one day become phenomenal. As a protest against the policies of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, she showed up with the sign while participating in the Canadian Senate Page Program, only to be dismissed for breaching the non-partisan nature of the Senate. So much so, the official opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) leader Jack Layton disapproved her action, saying that protest should

be at the proper place and at the proper time.

Within four years, with the NDP surging in the polls on the eve of the October 19 federal election, and the Harper government losing popularity, the Stop Harper Campaign has virtually gripped Canada from coast to coast, proving both Harper and Layton politically incorrect. DePape's message spilled over across Canada as "Stop Harper" has now become the mantra at rallies and demonstrations.

A recipient of the Loran Award in 2007, DePape was associated with Students Without Borders, but her story did not end

there. She established a "Stop Harper Fund" to support individuals and groups seeking direct actions through non-violent means against the Harper government and its policies. A trend was therefore set for the rest of the activists. Soon, different organizations started a campaign targeting the Prime Minister through social media. At Google one can find many groups seeking change and dumping of Harper. Some offer "Stop Harper" stickers and signs, while others list his "crimes". The diversity of their agendas show how the campaign has drawn across the board support from environmentalists, trade

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unionists, feminists, racialized communities, refugees, Indigenous peoples and even some disgruntled right-wingers. Each group has its own grouse against Harper.

Critics are upset with his foreign policy (especially his pro-Israel position and transforming Canada from a peacemaker to nation at war), austerity measures, cuts to social spending, censorship, stopping federal scientists from speaking to the media, reluctance to order a national enquiry for missing and murdered aboriginal women, tightening of immigration laws, police state legislation, and measures seen as detrimental to the environment. The anger has grown since Harper took office in 2006, but some observers argue that the Stop Harper Campaign can be traced back to years when he became the leader

of the Conservative Party, that was formed by the merger of the far right Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives (PC) in 2003.

Harper was formerly associated with the Canadian Alliance, whose policies many feel were more regressive than the PCs. As the Canadian Alliance dominated the newly formed Conservative Party, there was a feeling that Harper would change the character of Canada if he became Prime Minister, more so than when the PCs ruled in the past. His drastically right wing policies therefore never surprised those who have been following his ascendancy to power over the years. He first got elected as Prime Minister in 2006 and led a minority Conservative government. He gradually led the Conservatives to a majority in 2011

with 166 seats out of 308 in the House of Commons.

Those fearful of his "extreme right" agenda have been rattling the cage since then. His critics note that some prominent PC faces have already left the Harper government. Among them is Peter Mackay, who was the leader of the PCs before the formation of the Conservative Party. Mackay was the Justice Minister in the Harper government when he made the announcement last May that he won't run this time.

Whatever may be the period of its origin, the signs of the Stop Harper Campaign began showing up in different communities in 2014. This year, in Prince Rupert, the city staff had to replace many stop signs at different street corners that were slapped with "Harper" stickers underneath the letter Stop. A CBC

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report described this as "guerilla political advertising".

If the number of likes received at the "Stop Harper" Facebook page means anything, he has become an unpopular PM. At the time of filing of this cover story, this page had received over 11,000 likes. One anti-Harper website claims that since it went viral all "Stop Harper" stickers have been sold out.

On September 5, the Fraser Valley Peace Council held a "Stop Harper" rally in Surrey where members of different ethnic groups showed up. Among those present were members of the Indigenous communities, Latinos and a significant number of South Asians from India and Pakistan. Since the immigration policies of the Harper government have proven to be highly controversial in the immigrant communities, their presence was understandable. The rally was held close to the tragic death of a three-year-old Syrian child Alan Kurdi, whose family was seeking refugee status in Canada. The Harper government denied their application; as a result the family was trying to leave Turkey by sea when Kurdi and his brother and mother drowned. The story sparked outrage across Canada, and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander was forced to temporarily suspend his election campaign.

Minakshi Sidhu, one of the key organizers of the rally said that her heart goes for the family of the dead child and so many other refugees who are not being allowed in Canada under the Harper government. She pointed out that the immigrant community is upset as this government has tightened rules for family reunions and has been

threatening to strip citizenship through Bill C-24. But the reasons she listed for organizing the event go beyond immigration policies, including government's austerity measures affecting the working class, its failure to address the concerns of Indigenous groups, and creating divisions between the communities through fear of terrorism and attacks against Islam.

Such initiatives are not confined to places like Surrey where a sizeable number of immigrants live. A day later, a big rally was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery to protest against the circumstances leading to the death of Alan Kurdi, where many participants were seen carrying "Stop Harper" signs. In fact rallies were held on that day in at least twenty cities with the same message. Not long ago, there were angry demonstrations against Harper over his controversial Bill C-51, which in the name of "fighting terrorism" gives security agencies sweeping powers to monitor dissent, with the potential to put visible minorities and the supporters of civil disobedience in harm's way. Some political observers believe that Kurdi's death is going to strengthen opposition against Harper during the election season.

Among the supporters of Stop Harper Campaign is Karla Lottini, a journalist from Mexico who had exposed corruption in high places back home. Fearing for her life there, she came to Canada as a refugee in 2008 with her husband. After battling with the system and campaigning, she got the right to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds in 2011. She has been associated with No One is Illegal, a grassroots level advocacy

group for migrants' rights. According to her, more than 87,000 immigrants have been detained and locked up inhumanely during Harper's regime. She is upset that Harper never offered a public apology for the death of Lucia Vega Jimenez, a Mexican woman who committed suicide while awaiting deportation after being arrested and handed over to the Canadian Border Services Agency. She sees many similarities in the stories of Lucia and the Kurdi family, and finds Harper government's policies responsible for these deaths. "Harper symbolizes colonialism and imperialism whose success depends on exploitation and slavery. Human beings and nature, including indigenous lands where the Canadian government has no jurisdiction, are merchandise, the private property of a bunch of entrepreneurs without any ethics or love for humanity."

One can brush aside these campaigns as non-serious and emotional venting through social media or otherwise, but several polls conducted over the past few months show how these messages resonate. Harper's popularity continues to decline, although the three major parties - the Conservatives, the New Democrats and the Liberals - are locked in a tight race. The polls predictably will keep on changing until election day, and no one can be one hundred percent sure about who will be the next PM. The NDP has high hopes of change ever since last spring when they formed the government in Alberta, the traditional territory of Harper's Conservative Party. For them, if Alberta can be won, anything is possible. In last federal election, the NDP became the official opposition after bagging 103 seats, following

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the so called "orange crush" that gripped the mood of voters throughout the country. It was a major leap for the NDP under the charismatic leadership of Layton, who later passed away, whereas the Liberals, who always saw themselves as the party born to rule, were nearly decimated with only 34 seats.

Whether the polls will be proven right only time will tell, but Harper has already indicated that he would step aside if the Conservatives finished in second place.

In spite of a militant mood generated by the supporters of Stop Harper Campaign, the activists are not unanimous on a strategy to oust their enemy from power. The ideological divisions within these activist groups and among the individuals associated with the campaign are also visible. Those who believe in electoral politics have different choices, ranging from the Liberals to the NDP and the Green Party. They can certainly vote for one over the other to defeat Harper, but the real challenge is before the activists, for whom choosing non-Conservative candidates can be equally frustrating. The Fraser Valley Peace Council, for instance, has no definite answer. They have been vocal against Bill C-51 and the Israeli aggression against Palestine, organizing a number of events on these two issues in the past. While the Liberals and Conservatives both supported Bill C-51, the NDP and the Greens are on the same page with other two parties when it comes to the Palestine issue. At least two potential NDP candidates recently had to step aside for being highly critical of Israel. Likewise, Green Party MLA Andrew Weaver opposed the

display of a billboard on Vancouver Island calling for a boycott of Israel. The dilemma is therefore inevitable, as some associated with the Fraser Valley Peace Council see NDP as closest ally.

Minaskhi Sidhu categorically noted that people must reject both Harper and Liberals, but left the question of supporting NDP open to interpretation. "NDP has certainly disappointed us on the Palestine issue, but they have a solid progressive record on many other issues. So let the people decide. As far as Fraser Valley Peace Council is concerned we are not endorsing any political party."

Imtiaz Popat, a renowned broadcaster and a social justice activist, also supports the Stop Harper Campaign because of the "anti-immigration policies" of the Conservatives, but he also has problem with NDP's "Zionist policies". He is thinking of voting Greens or any other small party to send a message.

Ana David Emery of Latinos in Action is upset with the increase in number of deportations and cuts to social services under the Harper government. She is now volunteering for the NDP. Her explanation is she will volunteer where she can make a difference.

Former BC Human Rights Commissioner Harinder Mahil is silent over the question of alternatives to Harper, but he insists that Harper government must be defeated as "it has cut thousands of jobs, programs and services, and muzzled federal scientists, and eliminated regulations protecting Canadians' health, safety and environment."

Anita Lal, the General Manager at the Vancouver

International Bhangra Celebrations cultural group, thinks alike. She is disappointed with Harper, who according to her never showed interest in the missing and murdered aboriginal women case, and thinks his controversial laws such as Bill C 51 and mimicking Republicans across the border remain problematic. Although her family and friends mostly support the NDP, she would like to do more research before voting.

Zoe Blunt, an activist with Wild Coast, is also excited with Stop Harper stickers on street signs, but has nothing to say beyond that these are "signs of a grassroots uprising".

Some within the activist communities have a more critical look at this campaign. Alnoor Gova, a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia feels that though it is good to have a Stop Harper Campaign, it can easily slide into an issue of personalities and not substance that concern Canadians. "What is the use of stopping (Harper) if Liberals continue the policy like backing Bill C-51 or the NDP who are committed to the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) Agreement? So wouldn't it be better if rather than stopping Harper the emphasis was stopping specific legislation or agreements?"

Harjap Grewal of the Council of Canadians, a social justice advocacy group, thinks that a real alternative lies outside the current system. He is not averse to the campaign, as he thinks Harper is "the worst of the electoral options", but he does not feel there is an electoral alternative within the current system. "It is more important to question why we allow so much power to be concentrated in the hands of a small group of politicians. Why do

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we allow central rule, a colonial governing model that is designed to impose such drastic and oppressive policies upon people against their will?"

Lakhbir Khun Khun, a member of the East Indian Defence Committee, is equally critical of the other parties, while agreeing that the Stop Harper Campaign is relatively logical. "We have seen more autocracy and fascism during Harper's time. With a little or less varying degree, quantitatively, similar could be said about the NDP and Liberals, or if you consider the Green Party as another alternative. The point for Canadian workers is to avoid getting caught in this drama of electoral politics and organize and work for creating a state of their own."

The complexities of the campaign apart, it has registered itself as a movement that identifies Harper as a symbol which its proponents are calling for change. Whether they will succeed cannot be guaranteed, yet the campaign has created shock waves across Canada. The immediate fallout could be heavy polling, which is one indicator of a potential change of power. Indigenous communities have seen lower voting rates on account of their historic distrust of the political system since the days of John A. Macdonald. Until 1960, Aboriginal people were required to give up their treaty rights and renounce their status under the Indian Act in order to qualify for the vote. This time, Assembly of First Nations Grand Chief Perry Bellegarde made a significant statement when he said that he had never cast a federal ballot, but may (or may not) do so this fall. If this was not enough, Ashley Callingbull, a Cree woman who was crowned as Mrs. Universe, called upon the First Nations

to vote out Harper. The most telling comments were offered by Cecilia Point, an Indigenous activist from the Musqueam Band. "Normally I'm not as engaged in Canadian politics, because all parties have implemented detrimental legislations toward First Nations. Unfortunately, PM Harper has been the most dangerous since John A. Macdonald who tried to starve us out of existence. Mr. Harper has no respect for treaty and non-treaty First Nations and is poisoning our environment which again will starve us and ultimately kill us. Therefore anyone else would be better choice than him. And hopefully the next person who takes office will have more respect for our existence."

All the polls and predictions can be proven right or wrong on the Election Day, but this fall certainly marks the fall-falling for Conservatives if the voices of dissent are any indication.

-RDNB

Opinion

This election is (mostly) about the future

My mother's favourite uncle Oscar died fighting against fascism, shot by a Nazi sniper in the streets of Caen 71 years ago. We owe it to him, and to all those before us who have struggled for a better world, to cast a ballot on October 19. But we also need to be clear about what's at stake.

So, is this election about the past nine years of Harperism, or about the future? Or both, perhaps?

On one level, this campaign revolves around a single question: how can we defeat the most militarist, racist, misogynist, anti-democratic, environmentally destructive, pro-corporate government in history? During the last two months of collecting nomination signatures and leafletting voters, I've heard that question hundreds of times. Everywhere on the streets of Vancouver Kingsway, people are desperate to dump the Tories and their divisive politics of hate and fear.

Anything could still happen before October 19th. But Harper and his clique seem to be heading for heavy losses at the ballot box, including in the Vancouver region. If that does happen (i.e. if we all vote!), there will be celebrations across the country on election night, including at the Communist Party campaign offices.

Yes, dumping Harper is the crucial next step. But here's where it gets more complicated, because this election is about much more than putting an end to the terrible legacy of the last nine years. Electing a different party doesn't change the system. As we saw in Greece last summer, it might not even slow down the corporate austerity agenda.

When we wake up on October 20, Canada's capitalist economy will still be owned by huge transnational and domestic corporations. The extraction and export of unprocessed tar sands and other fossil fuels will continue, along with the colonial oppression of indigenous peoples. Women will still earn 30 percent less than men, a million and a half working folk will still be unemployed, and students will keep sinking deeper in debt. Canadian troops will still be bombing Iraq and Syria (and training pro-Nazi militias in Ukraine!), and any criticism of Israel's apartheid occupation of Palestine will still be condemned by the parties in Parliament.

No matter who wins this time, much bigger struggles are needed to win a future in which our economy is owned by the people, not the one percent. The only way to reach a future of global peace and disarmament, justice for indigenous peoples, full liberation for women,

an end to exploitation of workers, and true environmental sustainability, is to build a truly powerful coalition of people and movements, in the streets and workplaces and schools, and ultimately at the electoral level.

Such a coalition is the only way to achieve the socialist future that many of us want for ourselves, for our families and friends, for our community, and yes, for the working class of Canada in all our glorious diversity of languages, ethnicities, cultures, colours, genders, and ages.

Before then, on October 19, people in Vancouver Kingsway have a number of choices on the ballot. How can we connect our votes on this date with the longer term goal of ending the toxic system of capitalism? My answer is to vote for grassroots people's politics and truly fundamental change. That means a vote for the Communist Party, which has the most comprehensive platform to create sustainable jobs, build social housing, tax the wealthy, and slash military spending.

Kimball Cariou is the Editor of People's Voice, a social justice activist, and a member of the Radical Desi Editorial Team. Kimball Cariou is the Communist Party of Canada candidate in Vancouver Kingsway.

Courtesy: Georgia Straight

Reality of Canadian Immigration

I wonder what two-year-old Alpha Anawa thinks about the refugee crisis — the largest since Second World War — unfolding in Europe. While global attention is focused on unprecedented refugee flows and deaths across the ocean, Alpha quietly spent his birthday behind bars this weekend at the Toronto Immigration Holding Center. He is a Canadian child born on the other side of barbed wires and Plexiglas. His mother Glory Anawa came to Canada seeking refugee status from Cameroon and despite never being charged, she has been jailed for 2-1/2 years. Since 2005 to March of 2015, at least 4,392 children have been forced into detention.

Even though the Tories opportunistically court the immigrant vote, the reality is that their policies keep out immigrants.

Politicians courting the immigrant vote

Since 2006, the Conservative Party has been courting immigrant voters across two of Canada's largest cities, Toronto and Vancouver. Its "Ethnic Strategy," as the party calls it, includes targeted advertizing, close media monitoring, and regular interviews for community media. Microtargeting of immigrant

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communities is not unique to the Conservatives, but they have made it a priority. Given that two decades ago it would be unthinkable for the Conservatives to have inroads in immigrant communities, this is quite unprecedented.

According to the CBC, the Conservatives actively targeted more than 30 ridings (voting districts) in the 2011 election explicitly based on their high proportion of ethnic minorities, what they referred to as “very ethnic ridings,” and won two-thirds of them. There are diverse opinions on what caused this Conservative Party upsurge in immigrant communities – from putting up racialized candidates and symbolic presence at cultural events, to policy promises of tax cuts and reduction in immigration wait times.

Ultimately all major political parties have sought the immigrant vote by, in some way, branding themselves as a pro-immigration party. This usually involves platitudes to allow in “record numbers of immigrants” and create a “fairer and more efficient” system. But the reality is different.

Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration

A new multimedia project *Never Home: Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration by No One Is Illegal* chronicles a decade of drastic immigration changes by the federal government and its devastating effects on families in Canada.

Never Home is a 10,000 word researched report that finds

the number of immigration avenues that grant permanent residency — including those as young as 16, face mandatory incarceration. A new report finds these policy changes mean reduced access to justice for refugees for whom consequences of refugee protection decisions are frequently life or death matters.

Between 2006 and 2011, the number of family-class immigrants dropped 20 per cent, while the number of accepted refugees dropped 30 per cent.

When the *MV Sun Sea* carrying 492 Tamil women, children and men landed in B.C. in August, 2010, after a treacherous three-month journey, the federal government fomented nationwide hysteria about terrorism. They asylum-seekers were all immediately jailed, and within two years the federal government passed wide-ranging legislation to make it more difficult for refugees to remain in Canada. Asylum seekers now face a discriminatory two-tier system based on nationality with restricted legal avenues. Refugees

designated as irregular arrivals, including those as young as 16, face mandatory incarceration. A new report finds these policy changes mean reduced access to justice for refugees for whom consequences of refugee protection decisions are frequently life or death matters.

Furthermore, permanent residency and citizenship are becoming conditional. Most parents and grandparents can now only arrive on a temporary Super Visa that requires the purchase of private Canadian health care insurance. Many spouses now have to come on a two-year conditional sponsorship, leaving immigrant women more vulnerable to abuse since their legal status is contingent on their partner. As of this year, two-tiered citizenship is in effect and dual citizens can be at risk of losing their citizenship.

Legal challenges have been filed at the Federal Court of Canada to end this new regime of second-class citizenship. While that outcome is pending, in July 2014

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the Federal Court did strike down the Conservative government's cuts to refugee health care. Even though the Court ruled these cuts were cruel and unconstitutional, the government is appealing the decision and has spent more than \$1.4 million in taxpayers' money to fight this in court. In 2014, the Federal Court also struck down the ban on niqabs at citizenship ceremonies. Last month, the Court ruled against the government's new two-tier refugee system.

These Court decisions lay bare the federal government's punitive agenda against migrants and refugees. Over the past 10 years, the federal government jailed an average of 11,000 migrants per year, including up to 807 children, without charge. Canada is one of the only Western countries to have indefinite detention. This means that some people, such as anti-apartheid icon Mbuyisa Makhubu, are jailed in Canada for over a decade without charges or trial. Permanent residents are also being torn apart from their families and face deportation for traffic offences. For the first time since records are available, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention strongly chastised Canadian immigration detention.

Meanwhile, over the past decade the federal government has vastly expanded the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Since 2008, more migrants arrive through migrant worker programs that grant temporary status, than via avenues that grant permanent

residence. Workers in the low-wage TFWP have no access to unionization or guaranteed access to social services, despite often paying into them. Migrant workers are not granted permanent residency on arrival and as Hessed Torres, a certified nurse from the Philippines who came to Canada as a live-in caregiver, explains in a Never Home video: "The reason why the caregiver program is precarious is because our work permits are tied specifically to our employer."

Conclusion

The main findings of Never Home can be summarized as:

- 1) The majority of migrants to Canada are now temporary: Federal governments always boast about "record levels of immigration," but a growing number of migrants are coming on a temporary basis.
- 2) No, politicians don't really care about our families: All federal parties love appealing to "family values," but the number of family-class immigrants has dropped by 14,000 people, or 20 percent. Parents and grandparents now come on a temporary visa program that requires the pre-purchase of private Canadian health insurance. The Auditor General's office has found that wait times have tripled.
- 3) Migrants are increasingly incarcerated and surveillance: With the government's 'tough on crime' and 'tough on terror' agendas, immigrants and refugees are being torn apart from their loved ones and facing deportation for minor offenses, including traffic offences, or for being alleged security risks.

The new "Stealing Citizenship Act" allows for revocation of citizenship in certain circumstances, while anti-terror legislation expands government powers of surveillance, preventative detention and secret trials. Heightened Islamophobia casts Muslim, Arab, and Sikh communities as omnipresent threats, leaving migrant families, especially women wearing the hijab or niqab, susceptible to hate crimes and legislated racism.

Some would argue this is nothing new; from the Komagata Maru to the Chinese head-tax exclusion and exploitation has been key to solidifying colonial Canada. Still, the current government has been one of the most hostile when it comes to inclusive policies. Politicians' linguistic contortions — militarization as liberation, indentured labour as immigration, refugee as terrorist — have justified immense indignities against families in Canada. Never Home sets the record on immigration straight.

Never Home is available at <http://neverhome.ca> and translations are available in Punjabi and other languages on the website.

Harsha Walia is a social justice activist who is associated with No One is Illegal. She has also authored a famous book, "Undoing Border Imperialism" and is very articulate on issues like racism and colonialism. She is part of the editorial team of Radical Desi.

Eklavya of United States

The story of Ahmed Mohamed, the 14-year-old student arrested in Texas for bringing a clock to school, is more than just an ugly reminder of systemic racism and Islamophobia in United States.

What was his fault? He brought a homemade clock to show to his teacher. But instead of appreciating his skills, the clock was mistaken as a bomb, and the police were called to investigate. Understandably, he was not charged when the truth was revealed, bringing embarrassment to the US government and those involved in moral policing in the name of national security and patriotism.

Ahmed Mohamed's only fault was that he happens to be a Muslim, the community which has been under the microscope in the US especially since after the 9/11 terror attack widely blamed on Islamic extremists.

This story needs to be understood in a broader context of discrimination on the basis of caste, race, religion, gender or sexual orientation, which is deeply entrenched in human societies across the world. This is not to suggest that the US should not be blamed. After all, the United States and Canada are built on the stolen lands of the Indigenous peoples. Racism is deeply rooted in North

America since the beginning of settler colonialism on Turtle Island. White supremacy has always been a dominant narrative in these societies. Ahmed's case can not be brushed aside as an example of ignorance. Rather it should be seen as an act of racial arrogance that refuses to die since the times when Indigenous lands were occupied.

But his story needs to be situated in a wider geopolitical context, as Muslims the world over are being seen as potential terrorists, people who lack loyalty to their adopted or even home countries.

So much so that Taslima Nasrin, a prominent Muslim author who is on the hit-list of Islamic fundamentalists for writing against religious orthodoxy within her own community, blamed Muslim extremists for the whole episode. Well certainly, Islamic extremists have been killing people and using bombs, but how can the entire community be painted with the same brush?

Many times, when Caucasian teenagers bring guns to schools and kill people, such acts have been called "individual crimes" rather than terrorism. Why do apologists of the establishment like Nasrin overlook similar acts committed by members of the dominant society, both in US and even India, where she has taken refuge fearing death in her home

country of Bangladesh?

When white supremacists in the US and Hindu extremists in India have been caught committing bombings, why do such individuals never dare to use similar framing while criticizing them or blaming their communities entirely? For the record, the Indian government gave refuge to Nasrin, overlooking resentment in the Indian Muslim community, while failing to protect the Muslim painter M.F. Hussain when the threats of Hindu fundamentalists forced him to leave India. Hussain was accused by the latter of making objectionable paintings of Hindu goddesses. It is not surprising that India's current Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) government recently extended Nasrin's visa to stay there.

Ever since the BJP came to power, Muslims are being increasingly hounded by the Hindu fanatics. The Muslim religious schools have come under scrutiny, and often the patriotism of Muslims – who have been part of Indian civilization for centuries – is questioned. Muslim students are sometimes forced to sing national songs with Hindu religious content. The harassment of Muslims for terror incidents continues, even as Hindu extremists have also been involved in bombings.

The current Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the Chief

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Minister of Gujarat in 2002 when an anti-Muslim pogrom broke out following the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims. More than 50 people died in the incident which was blamed on Islamic fundamentalists by the Modi government. As a result, an anti-Muslim massacre started. Human rights groups allege Modi's complicity in the violence, which was well organized.

Like in the United States, students in India from the Muslim community and other religious minority groups, and those coming from oppressed classes, continue to face prejudices both in schools and outside. A 2014 report of Human Rights Watch; "They Say We're Dirty: Denying an Education to India's Marginalized," revealed instances of discrimination against Muslims and so-called untouchables in schools. The scenario is only likely to worsen under the BJP government which has now intensified the process of rewriting the history and school syllabus to promote its right wing reactionary ideology through academic bodies. The penetration of pro-BJP men in these bodies with an agenda to produce a narrow nationalist narrative has already begun.

I myself faced such prejudices as a school kid in India. As a young Sikh, I used to sport long hair and a beard and wear a turban, a common practice in the Sikh community. It is a separate matter that I have given up religious faith over these years. What I do remember though still hurts. Most of my schooling took place outside Punjab, where Sikhs are in a majority. Since my father was a government servant and had a transferable job, I got my schooling in

different parts of India. Students belonging to the majority community frequently mocked my appearance and made fun of my faith. Although bullying was common, what was more painful was the attitude of the teachers, who somehow condoned these prejudices. Once a teacher made a joke about Sikhs going crazy at 12 pm when I played a prank. On another occasion a teacher mockingly said that if I did not get good marks, I could live on the charity of the Gurdwara, which is known for offering free community kitchens to devotees. During the 1980s, when the Sikh militancy was at its peak and Sikh separatists indulged in violence in Punjab, many students used to call me "Hey underground" or "Jinda" (a famous Sikh militant). Notably, the BJP was not in power during those times. It was the so-called secularist Congress party that ran the government in New Delhi. If minorities were being harassed under the Congress government, one can imagine what it would be like under a Hindu nationalist government. However, I still came from a privileged society and could fight back for myself with the backing of my family, but there were many unfortunate students from the oppressed groups, especially those treated as untouchables who had no say and had to pocket humiliation everyday.

So I can completely understand the pain suffered by Ahmed Mohamed and students like him anywhere else. What happens to the marginalized students resonates with the famous Indian story of Eklavya, an ancient hero of the tribal community. He wanted to be an archer, but the orthodox

Hindu society did not allow him to learn archery. The skill was reserved for the warrior class under the brutal caste system that banished tribals and so-called untouchables. Yet he learnt the skills and considered Dronacharya, the teacher of the royal clan, as his guru. When Dronacharya refused to enroll him as a disciple, Eklavya began practicing shooting with bow and arrows in the presence of Dronacharya's statue. Gradually he became an excellent archer who could become a threat to the disciples from the royal family. Upon learning this, Dronacharya cunningly asked Eklavya for a thumb of his right hand as *Guru Dakshina* (a customary gift students give back to their teachers). A gullible Eklavya agreed and parted with his thumb that was necessary for archery. The institutionalized discrimination which has been allowed to corrupt and pollute the system of education and learning needs to be challenged collectively. Eklavya's tale is a perfect example of how the educational bodies function as a tool of the establishment and work for the betterment of the privileged classes against the interest of ordinary people. Mohamed's case should not be seen in isolation. There is a need to examine the state of schools across the United States to discover where others like him are facing classroom discrimination because of the colour of their skin or faith.

Gurpreet Singh is the founder of Radical Desi. He is a newscaster and talk show host at Spice Radio in Burnaby and freelances for Georgia Straight, People's Voice and Hindustan Times.

Interview with Sanjiv Bhatt

“I have been framed to ensure that I lose public sympathy”

The former police officer who blew the lid off the meeting where Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly asked the cops to look the other way in an event of anti-Muslim violence alleges that he has been fired on “flimsy grounds” to ensure that he lose public sympathy.

Sanjiv Bhatt was fired in August after a video leak of his look-alike in the company of a woman. Accusing him of moral turpitude for having a relationship with a woman other than his wife, the Gujarat government removed Bhatt from his job.

In an interview with Radical Desi, Bhatt not only denied being in the video, but also said that he had offered to present himself for investigation to prove his innocence, yet he was fired without being given a chance to defend himself.

Bhatt was a senior police officer in Gujarat, when the anti-Muslim pogrom broke out in 2002. Modi was the Chief Minister of the state when the violence against Muslims started after the burning of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims left more than 50 people dead. Modi's government blamed Islamic extremists for the incident, following which Hindu fanatics began targeting Muslims across the state. Though Modi was never convicted, human rights groups allege his complicity in the mass murders.

Bhatt, a whistle blower, continues to claim that Modi asked police officers to look the other way and let Hindu protestors vent their anger in the aftermath of the train incident. He has always maintained that he was in the meeting where Modi gave these directions.

According to Bhatt, he has been fired on grounds of moral turpitude only to ensure that he loses public sympathy. “All this was done to malign me in public eye.” As soon as he received a show cause notice, he says that he offered to cooperate if there was an investigation. He was also open for forensic probe. “But that never happened.”

Bhatt is not sure at this time whether he is going to take this matter to the courts, as he is occupied with other things.

He lamented that police officers who wanted to bring justice to the victims of violence and expose the

truth are being punished, while those who helped the mobs during the anti-Muslim violence were promoted and rewarded by the government.

He pointed out that Modi is still not off the hook, as the trials in the Gujarat violence continue, and his testimony might be needed in future. Cautioning those fascinated by Modi, who was elected as India's Prime Minister in 2014, Bhatt said there is no amount of truth in the claims of Gujarat's development under his leadership.

Bhatt's wife Shweta unsuccessfully contested the Gujarat assembly election against Modi in 2012. Interestingly, she was the candidate of the secularist Congress party which was responsible for the anti Sikh-pogrom in 1984. Bhatt had once refused to share an award with Jagdish Tytler, a Congress leader allegedly involved in the anti-Sikh violence. He had categorically declined to accept the award which was being given to Tytler alongside himself and others. Asked why his wife contested on the Congress ticket, Bhatt said that her idea of fighting Modi was symbolic. But at the same time he does not think that the Congress party is as bad as Modi's Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party. While he agrees that the Congress blundered by organizing the anti Sikh-massacre, on the whole the Congress Party's basic ideology is close to the founding ideology of the Indian nation.

Rally in protest against Kalburgi murder held in Surrey

Slogans were raised against the killers of MM Kalburgi and Hindutva terrorists at a rally held in Surrey on September 12.

Organized under the aegis of Taraksheel Sabha, an Indian rationalist group, the rally was held at famous Holland Park, where speakers condemned the murders of rationalists and secularists by the alleged Hindutva extremists. The participants marched with banners and placards, including those reading; "We All Are Kalburgi".

Kalburgi was a rationalist thinker who challenged superstition and Hindu religious orthodoxy. He was recently assassinated in Karnataka. At least two Hindu extremists were arrested for welcoming his murder through

social media.

The speakers at the Surrey rally warned that the forces seeking to transform secularist Indian society into a Hindu state have become emboldened under the Modi government. They also paid tributes to Kalburgi and two more rationalist activists, Narendra Dahbolkar and Govind Pansare, who were murdered during the recent past.

A visiting Taraksheel leader from India, Balwinder Singh Barnala, alleged that the Hindutva forces have intensified their hate propaganda against minorities and secularist activists ever since the Hindu nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party came to power with a brute majority under Narendra Modi.

Harbhajan Cheema, who is associated with the East Indian

Defence Committee, pointed out that the process of turning India into a "fascist state" began much earlier under the "so-called secular regime" of the Congress party and called upon all the progressive forces to unite against repression which has increased under a right wing government.

The key organizer of the rally, Gurmail Gill, said that pressure is needed on the Indian government to ensure the safety and security of secularist activists. Others who spoke on the occasion included eminent atheist writer Sadhu Binning and another rationalist leader Avtar Gill. Among those present was famous progressive filmmaker Rajeev Kumar.

-RDNB

RADICAL HISTORY OF THE MONTH

Remembering Durga Bhabhi

This month marks 108th birth anniversary of Durgavati Devi, a daring activist associated with the revolutionary camp of freedom fighters who sought the liberation of India from British occupation through armed resistance.

Born on October 7, 1907 in Allahabad, she was married to Bhagwati Charan Vohra of Lahore at the age of 15.

Vohra's family was well to do and his father was patronized by the British government. But Vohra developed a disliking for the British authorities during his school days. When he did his matriculation in 1919, his father threw a party for British officers. However, Vohra remained absent from the event and revealed to Durgavati his resentment against the British.

He gradually grew up as an ideologue of the radical camp. Being a progressive man with academic interests, he encouraged his wife to study and get enlightened.

When Vohra started getting involved in politics, he roped Durgavati into his activities. He tried to organize the masses against the British imperialism through slideshows and propaganda. He was one of the brains behind the Hindustan Socialist Republican

Association (HSRA), the group that believed in an armed revolt and wanted to establish an egalitarian society in post-British India. Its struggle was not just confined to India's freedom from the British rulers, as it had vowed to carry on their mission until the end of human exploitation and disparity between the rich and poor.

In 1929 Vohra circulated the manifesto of HSRA with the help of his wife at a political conference. His comrades in HSRA affectionately addressed Durgavati as Durga Bhabhi (brother's wife). When she became a known figure, Bhabhi remained permanently suffixed to her name.

A major turning point came into her life in November 1928, when

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a senior nationalist leader, Lajpat Rai, died following a severe beating by British police during a public rally. Taking this incident as a challenge, the HSRA decided to avenge the humiliation. As a result, a British police officer was murdered by the revolutionaries. Among those involved was Bhagat Singh, the towering figure of HSRA, which did not want to lose him. It was decided to disguise him and send him elsewhere.

Born in a Sikh family and sporting long hair, Bhagat Singh was easily identifiable because of his turban. He decided to cut his hair and leave for Calcutta, donning a hat and British attire. Durgavati came to his rescue at this crucial time. She disguised herself as his wife to dodge the police, and took along her small son, risking his life against a potential police crackdown. In those times it was unthinkable in an orthodox Indian society for a married woman to disguise as somebody else's wife, but Durgavati did it for the sake of their cause.

Vohra commended Durgavati for her daring step. Bhagat Singh succeeded in evading the police dragnet with her help, but was later arrested after throwing a bomb in the national assembly.

In 1930 Vohra and his associates conspired to free Bhagat Singh from jail with the help of explosives. During the bomb testing, Vohra died. This was a major shock for Durgavati, but she continued to assist revolutionaries whichever way she could. She and her son had to live

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separately, as she went underground to escape from the police. Her sufferings continued for several years until she was arrested and later went to Ghaziabad in 1934 after being released. She began teaching at a girls' school and joined the pacifist Congress party.

Durga Bhabhi passed away in post British India in 1999, leaving behind her legacy of struggle. Her name resonates with Durga Devi, the Hindu goddess revered for her bravery.

There is little doubt that Vohra

had a great role as a husband and a partner in shaping Durga Bhabhi's ideas, but the courage with which she carried forward the struggle was her own. She cannot and must not be seen as a shadow of her husband.

Although she is no more, her legacy remains alive. As long as gender-based discrimination, neo-colonialism, and exploitation of the poor and marginalized continue in India, it will remain relevant.

-RDNB

RADICAL NARRATIVE

Farewell

■ send this letter to you,
to tell my grief and pain,
and as i lie imprisoned
i long to see again

you, my beloved mother,
and all my comrades dear.
i write these words in my heart's blood:
no ink or pen is here.

my friends in arms and children,
please weep and pray for me.
i fought to keep our country
so that we might be free.

when you receive this letter
please weep for me and pray
that i may die with bravery
upon that fearful day.

Louis Riel was the hero of the Métis rebellions of 1869-70 and 1885. This poem is believed to have been written by him in jail after the defeat of the Métis at Batoche, and is reproduced here in recognition of his birthday on October 22, 1844. Riel laid down his life resisting colonial encroachment against the Métis homelands, and he was executed in Regina in November 1885.

1984 wasn't the only novel Orwell wrote

The critics of Prime Minister Stephen Harper frequently portray him as Big Brother and try to invoke the image depicted in *1984*, a famous novel by George Orwell.

Big Brother is an imaginary dictator of a totalitarian regime, where public dissent is impossible and everyone is under surveillance. Any voice of opposition in such an environment is totally marginalized and silenced by use of torture, or forced to conform to the norms.

Ironically, the traditional left in the past used to see Orwell as apologist of capitalism and anti-Communist, whereas in the contemporary world the left forces in Canada see no problem equating Harper, a right-wing political figure, with Big Brother, the villain created by Orwell. This is despite the fact that Big Brother can be easily identified by readers with any dictator across the political spectrum.

Ever since the Harper government started showing the signs of intolerance by muzzling the voices of the federal scientists and disallowing media transparency by discouraging journalists from raising questions, and much later by pushing for anti-terror laws such as Bill C-51 that gives sweeping new powers to security and surveillance agencies, Harper and Big Brother have become synonyms in the vocabulary of social justice activists.

There is absolutely no question

that the Harper government is going in a wrong direction by further transforming a peacemaker nation like Canada into a country at war, and allowing police and political high handedness to crush dissent. To equate him with the legendary Big Brother is not out of place and it makes perfect sense.

But those enamoured with other parties must also know that *1984* was not the only novel written by Orwell. He had also penned *Animal Farm*, the story of a struggle between humans and animals. The animals who later win the legendary fight establish their own farm and successfully oust humans. The animal farm symbolizes the proletarian regime after the overthrow of bourgeois. But in the end, pigs that are supposedly most intelligent of all the animals take over and

marginalize others to seek an alliance with the human race. This story is an ugly reminder of the fact that power corrupts everyone. The so-called alternatives against Harper may also turn out to be the representatives of a corrupt and brutal system. The Liberals for instance supported the highly controversial Bill C-51, while the New Democrats and Greens have proved to be apologists of the Israeli state. So how can we trust them? If Orwell's *1984* is relevant to understand Harper, *Animal Farm* also has a moral we must remember to recognize the limitations of electoral politics.

Activists especially from the left political spectrum need to understand that activism and politics are different ball games. By using selective examples you cannot convince voters that some are better alternatives. Rather the pressure must be maintained at all times to ensure that whoever is in power must behave responsibly. Harper is a symptom of a rotten electoral system where people are repeatedly told to choose between the lesser of the evils, but we need to deal with the cause that breeds leaders like him. And if we don't do that, we will keep recycling politicians and parties who will keep shaming us on one account or the other. It is time to look beyond brands and create better alternatives by bringing a fundamental change in politics for a just society.

-RDNB

