HARPER'S OTTAWA BECOMES REPUBLICAN LA-LA LAND

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By Haroon Siddiqui, The Toronto Star, 8 August 2010

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To his estimated $9 billion expenditure, add the $1 billion bill for security at the G20 summit and the $16 billion purchase of F-35s in an untendered contract.

Stack such expenses against Stephen Harper's commitment to halve the $54 billion debt in five years, and wonder what he plans to slash and burn to get there.
Think also of his decisions to weaken the national census and kill Statistics Canada surveys that measured the impact of government policies on Canadians, especially the poor and the vulnerable.

Throw in his silencing of independent watchdogs, from the parliamentary budget officer to the RCMP ombud, and axing funds to advocacy groups monitoring the government.

We can see where the Prime Minister is going. How he's getting there we can glean from his ideological, authoritarian, secretive, even demagogic, methodology. He and his ministers do not want to be burdened with facts and logic in order to do what they want.

George W. Bush, bent on invading Iraq, did not want to know that Saddam Hussein did not have weapons of mass destruction, did not have anything to do with 9/11 and did not have any connections to Al Qaeda.

Tony Clement, bent on cancelling the compulsory long form of the census, advances arguments that defy common sense. He says people should not be jailed for not filling out the long form but they can be jailed for failing to fill the short form. He'll spend an extra $30 million to get more voluntary data that would be just about useless. He accuses individuals and groups opposing his decision of being freeloaders when, in fact, they pay StatsCan for using its services (GTA municipalities alone pay $500,000 a year for census data).

Day, bent on building more prisons, does not want to know that the crime rate has been declining for 20 years. That even public fear of crime is down. Even an internal federal poll shows that only 1 per cent of Canadians list crime as a big issue.

But Day says that unreported crimes are up, the numbers of which he does not know, cannot know. Yet he's certain that "those (nonexisting) numbers are alarming."

He is in the la-la land of Republicans, who for decades whipped up (white) fear of (black) crime and kept building prisons across America until there was no more money to build.

They turned to private enterprise to build some more. Then some states didn't have the money to pay even the per diem rates, so they let some inmates out. Declared too dangerous to be kept out of jail, the inmates are too expensive to be kept in.

Still, the U.S. easily retains its record of the highest incarceration rate in the world — 2.3 million vs. 1.6 million in China (despite five times the population). That's 751 per 100,000 population vs. 627 in Russia and 107 in Canada.

A fifth of American inmates are sexually abused, 16 per cent suffer mental illnesses and another 16 per cent are kids under 18. About 500,000 are there on drug offences alone. Of the 700,000 released every year, more than half return within three years.

Yet the Tories are headed that way, with Day's Orwellian fear-mongering and Justice Minister Rob Nicholson announcing higher jail terms for a raft of drug-, gambling- and prostitution-related crimes. Creating a clientele for the jails they are building.

Spending lavishly on skewed priorities, from tax breaks for the rich to ordering big-ticket defence toys, has been a Republican/Conservative specialty. That's how Brian Mulroney and Ronald Reagan turned huge surpluses into record deficits. So did Mike Harris and George W. Bush.

Harper is following in their footsteps. He also shares Harris's mean streak and some of the former premier's bullying cabinet colleagues (Jim Flaherty, Tony Clement and John Baird), as well as chief of staff (Guy Giorno). Like Harris, Harper is cutting social programs and targeting employment equity, which would no doubt entail demonizing the poor as well as minorities.

If you thought Harris wreaked devastation on Ontario, Harper may have bigger plans — and on a national scale.

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