

## NDP Landslide Victory in Outremont – Just don't mention the war!

Contributed by Alex Grant  
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Last night the Federal New Democratic Party celebrated a historic win in the Outremont by-election. In what was one of the safest Liberal seats in Quebec, the by-election victory was not even close, with the NDP winning 48% to the Liberals 29%. The NDP's opposition to the war in Afghanistan was a key issue in this election—an issue that helped them to sway the vote away from the Liberals. However, if you want an explanation for this victory, do not look to the corporate media. They are obsessed with personalities rather than politics and they have all agreed on one thing, "Don't mention the war!"

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Some readers will remember the British sitcom, *Fawlty Towers*. In regards to the Outremont by-election it seems as if the corporate media in Canada is following Basil Fawlty's advice about not mentioning the war in order to avoid offence. However, like in the sitcom, the issue stubbornly insists on coming forward.

Canada has about 2500 troops involved in the imperialist war in Afghanistan. At the time of writing, 70 of these troops have lost their lives. 12 months ago at the NDP's federal convention in Québec City, the rank-and-file of the party forced the NDP top brass to adopt a position of "troops out of Afghanistan." Initially, the NDP faced hysterical condemnation from the establishment media, and the right wing of the party wanted to water down the position, but now we see that the instincts of the party base are much better than those of the spin-doctors at the top.

Opinion against the war in Afghanistan is hardening: polls show that approximately 60% of Canadians oppose the war, and this rises to about 70% in Québec. The war itself increasingly looks like a lost cause, with the Afghan people turning away from the corrupt Karzai government and his Western puppet masters. The voters of Outremont used this opportunity to reject the Liberals, Conservatives and Bloc Québécois, who all support the war.

However, the media never lets the facts get in the way of a good, or in this case, inconvenient, story. All the major newspapers (*The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, *Toronto Star*, etc.) support the war. Around them has grown a punditry industry that peddles the myth that ideas and policies are irrelevant, while style and personality are all that matter. This is a very crass form of the "Great Man" theory of history, which explains that the motor force of society is great men (they are almost always men), while the rest of us poor, ignorant shlubs are merely bystanders, dazzled by the great and the good. In the case of Outremont, it was a battle between the not-so-great Liberal leader, Stéphane Dion, and the popular, former provincial Liberal, Thomas Mulcair. Explanations abound for the NDP victory—people supported Mulcair because they thought he was still a Liberal, or Dion was a weak leader (which does not explain why the Bloc vote also declined), or even that the Conservatives wanted the NDP to win! Any explanation that avoids actual issues (specifically, the issue of the war in Afghanistan) is good enough.

We are the last to deny the necessity of good political organizing, or to deny the role of the individual, but in politics you must not confuse the fundamental with the superficial. Marx and Engels developed the concept of Historical Materialism in opposition to the "great man theory" of history. They explained that the driving force of society is mass movements of people, the economy and the development of the means of production, wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions. Only in very specific times are individuals able to make a decisive change. For example, without the presence of Lenin and Trotsky in 1917, the Russian, October revolution would likely never have happened. However, these same great men were unable to stop the development of Stalinism in Russia, as the tide of history was against them.

The superficial focus on leaders, personalities and "retail politics" falls down because it fails to explain or predict anything. How do the pundits explain the overwhelming size of the NDP victory by personalities alone? Why are the same people incapable of achieving results in one period while they can achieve great things in another period? The by-election results are leading to a crisis for Liberal leader Stéphane Dion, but this is more a reflection of the crisis of Liberalism and establishment politics than purely a personal crisis.

Workers and youth can be enthused that the NDP has won a victory against Canada's imperialist war. Outremont shows that the path to success lies in putting forward implacable policies that work to the benefit of the working class. It remains to be seen if this experience can be repeated elsewhere, but it is an important step forward for the NDP and the anti-war movement in Canada. Imagine what more could be achieved if the NDP adopted a socialist program of full employment by reducing the working week, free education, a decent minimum wage and saving jobs by nationalizing factories closed by the manufacturing crisis. Hence, unlike the *Fawlty Towers* episode that did not want anybody to mention the war, we need to do the opposite—let's keep mentioning the war, and striving for change in our

corrupt, capitalist society.

See also:

- NDP by-election victory in York-South Weston: Working class policies only way forward for the NDP by Fightback (15 Mar 2007)
- Afghanistan: Bring the troops home! by Alex Grant (18 Oct 2006)
- NATO is waging war on the Afghan people, but resistance is growing by Lal Khan (16 Oct. 2006)
- Eyewitness report from NDP Federal Convention: Rank-and-file push leadership leftwards by Julian Benson (19 Sep. 2006)
- Jack Layton comes out against the war in Afghanistan, finally by Fightback editorial board (6 Sep. 2006)
- 17th Canadian soldier killed in Afghanistan by Julian Benson (10 Jul. 2006)
- Troops out of Afghanistan! Canadian imperialism comes of age by Alex Grant (4 May 2006)
- Mission Impossible by Rob Sewell (26 Mar. 2002)
- Afghanistan: "Fools rush in..." by Ted Grant and Alan Woods (12 Dec. 2001)
- Afghanistan: "The Marines have landed" by Alan Woods (28 Nov. 2001)
- The war in Afghanistan: Swamps and alligators by Alan Woods (21 Nov. 2001)