

# EI BENEFITS



Ontario residents are facing one of the greatest inequalities in access to EI. p. 28



# TORIES

Gerry Nicholls offers some insights into the Conservatives. Exclusive Q&A. p. 28



# LEVANT

Ezra Levant, he's Canada's Michael Moore for the right. Feature p. 15



# THE HILL TIMES



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## Conservative and Liberal MPs likely won't face any nomination challenges

'This is essentially protection, barring some hideous revelation,' says one top Hill insider.

By **ABBAS RANA**

Not one Conservative or Liberal MP will face a nomination challenge across the country because the nomination rules in held ridings for the two major political parties make it next to impossible for potential challengers, say

Please see story on Page 22

## Libs buy same voter-targeting software used by U.S. Democratic Party and Obama

Grits say the new 'Liberal 360' system will allow them to canvas, listen and respond better to voters.

By **HARRIS MACLEOD**

If you live in a town where a factory recently shut down or your neighbourhood has a high number of middle-income Chinese-Canadians then the federal Liberal Party wants to know, and recently purchased the same voter-targeting software used by the U.S. Democratic Party to find out.

"Liberal 360" is the name of the party's new voter database system, which was purchased from a Massachusetts-based company

Please see story on Page 3

## What the economists are saying



Photograph by Jake Wright, The Hill Times

**The financial crisis:** Finn Poschmann, of the C.D. Howe Institute, and TD Chief Economist Don Drummond. Mr. Drummond forecasts a slight recovery in 2010 and 2011, but deficits of \$82-billion over the next two years. Mr. Poschmann praised the government's \$12-billion auto leasing and loans plan, but said it had to be implemented by June, at the latest.



**Jim Flaherty**  
'Strongest fiscal fundamentals'  
\$64-billion in deficits in 2009-10, 2010-11.



**Mark Carney**  
'Sharp declines in activity, increases in unemployment'  
GDP to decline 1.2%.



**David Dodge**  
Unemployment could top 10% and 'recovery not going to be as quick as everybody thinks.'



**Kevin Page**  
385,000 jobs will be lost before July and deficit will hit \$38-billion in 2009-10 fiscal year.



**Glen Hodgson**  
'We're beginning to form a bottom of the recession' and surge in equity markets.

## MPs push on \$3-billion transparency

Government creates a new committee of deputy ministers to track progress of budget's extraordinary spending.

By **BEA VONGDOUANGCHANH**

The Liberals, who again threatened an election call last week over the lack of transparency and accountability surrounding the government's

\$3-billion emergency stimulus bridge funding, which they voted for in Parliament, now say if the government does not comply with a non-binding Grit motion asking to list the departments and programs that will access the "extraordinary" fund, it will be disobeying the will of Parliament.

The government says it is likely not to "duplicate a process that's already in place."

The House voted last Tuesday, 154 in favour and 139 against, on the Liberals' opposition day motion

Please see story on Page 16

## House eyes Breitreuz's explosive gun bill

Conservatives say Liberal Party 'destroyed itself in rural Canada with the gun registry.'

By **ABBAS RANA**

Conservatives are being "dishonest" by trying to win support on both sides of the divisive gun control issue by relying on Conservative MP Garry

Breitreuz's private member's bill to end the long-gun registry rather than bringing in a government bill, says Liberal public safety and national security critic Mark Holland.

"They're trying to whisper in one ear to people who have concerns about the need to continue the registry which includes the chiefs of police by the way, 'Don't worry, it's not our bill, this

Please see story on Page 20

## Scientists say Obama gets it, and Canada doesn't

More scientists may follow funding dollars to the United States.

By **HARRIS MACLEOD**

Scientists say they are not worried about whether Canada's Minister of State for Science and Technology Gary Goodyear believes in evolution, but are concerned that his understanding of research will see scientists follow funding dollars to the United States.

"Are [Gary Goodyear's] beliefs around religion, evolution, cre-

Please see story on Page 18

## NDP loses ground, Hargrove questions why party doesn't look for a new leader

Pollster Nik Nanos calls it a steady decline in support for the NDP with voters

By **HARRIS MACLEOD** and **ABBAS RANA**

Former NDP activist and president of the Canadian Auto Workers union Buzz Hargrove says the New Democrats are losing ground to the Liberals because the party has lost touch with its roots, and instead focused too heavily on building leader Jack Layton's profile.

"Jack as a leader has developed a hell of a profile for himself, but I don't believe he's developed a profile for the party on the issues that are critical to Canadian families. He's assumed that if he built Jack, the party support would follow and,

Please see story on Page 6

## FEATURE

# Levant wants to know: what exactly counts as a human right?

Ezra Levant sees human rights commissions as encouraging a society where citizens outsource minor grievances to the government.

HARRIS MACLEOD

Ezra Levant makes a lot of good points in his new book, *Shakedown: How Our Government Is Undermining Democracy in the Name of Human Rights*, about the largely unchecked power of Canada's human rights commissions, and the increasingly broad definition of what exactly counts as a human right.

The book, published by McClelland & Stewart, and its title was inspired by Mr. Levant's own run-in with the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, which he was called before in 2006 to explain why he published the controversial Danish cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed that had enraged Muslims around the world when they were originally printed. Mr. Levant said he published the cartoons in the *Western Standard*, an Alberta-based conservative magazine that he was editor of at the time, for "newsman's reasons."

"It was not a provocative act," said Mr. Levant. "The reason the cartoons were interesting was because they caused the riots and the West was self-censoring in the reporting of it. That's what the story was about. The story was not, 'Here's something offensive, let us show it to you.'"

The publication of the cartoons, which Mr. Levant said were "actually fairly poorly done," and "mostly not funny," sparked a complaint to the Human Rights Commission from Syed Soharwardy, an Albertan imam. When Mr. Levant was summoned for an interview with a commission official, he videotaped it and then broadcast it on YouTube, creating something of a media sensation and a debate over the place of Canada's human rights commissions.

Mr. Levant uses the example of his own case, which was dismissed by the commission last August, and a slew of others to paint a picture of an institution that began as a noble idea but through ambiguous

guidelines, and overly generous judicial-like powers, has gone awry.

Maclean's columnist Mark Steyn, who was the subject of a human rights complaint from the Canadian Islamic Congress for a column he wrote in 2007 that the Congress said incited hatred against Muslims, wrote the foreword to *Shakedown*. Mr. Steyn, whose case was also dismissed, and Mr. Levant say they believe the human rights commissions represent an attack on freedom of speech.

"It shouldn't be against the law to try and persuade people of a certain point of view. It should be against the law to say, 'Let's go kill an aboriginal, let's have a lynching, let's do something violent,' in fact we have something called a Criminal Code that stops that, and the good thing about the Criminal Code is that there are also some checks and balances that these human rights commissions don't have," said Mr. Levant.

Mr. Levant said he's reviewed every case the Alberta Human Rights Commission has heard since 2000 and that, other than those that were dismissed, in his opinion the commissions haven't done any good work. He sees the commissions as encouraging a society where citizens outsource minor grievances to the government.

"Life is full of ups and down. Every time you have a tiny setback in life do you run to the government and complain?...My point is everyone has setbacks in life and [through the human rights commissions] they've ruined other people's lives," he said.

Mr. Levant's argument is somewhat weakened by the fact that, while he acknowledges the rights commissions were started with noble aims in mind, in the book he does not even pay lip service to trying to see the perspective of those who have lodged complaints. Nor is he open to the argument that the human rights commissions handle complex cases that are not always black and white, and therefore might not be best-served by following the more rigid Criminal Code.

In the case of Kimberly Nixon, a male-to-female transsexual who launched a human rights complaint after being told that she still looked too manly to counsel rape victims, Mr. Levant seems to make a point of referring to Ms. Nixon as "he" and his tone is often condescending. While Mr. Levant told *The Hill Times* that he tried to



Photograph by Cynthia Münster, *The Hill Times*

**A Michael Moore of the right:** Ezra Levant pictured in Ottawa last week told *HT*. 'Life is full of ups and down. Every time you have a tiny setback in life do you run to the government and complain?'

write about the case with "some sympathy to the guy," it certainly doesn't come across in the book.

"What Nixon really wanted was to satisfy his own psychological needs, not theirs; being permitted to move freely among women in their most vulnerable state would provide the ultimate validation that he's officially entered the sisterhood," he wrote.

In addition to being a well-known conservative activist, Mr. Levant, like a Michael Moore of the right, needlessly allows his biases to show through in the book. For instance, in a chapter about the case of Jim Pankiw, a former Reform and then Canadian Alliance Saskatchewan MP who was the subject of a human rights complaint for circulating a brochure that said "Stop Indian Crime Now" on the cover, Mr. Levant prefaces it by stating that "there is no disputing that aboriginal crime rates are high in Saskatchewan and that the law treats aboriginal criminals differently."

Mr. Levant's confidence in Canadian citizens to weed out inaccurate information and hate speech on their own, without the government getting involved, is thoughtful in many ways, however ultimately it's overly optimistic. From reading the book and from talking to Mr. Levant one doesn't get the sense that he truly believes in concepts like systemic prejudice, or that it can be oppressive for people from certain groups. He

portrays Canadian society as being almost utopian in its level of tolerance, and paints those who launch complaints as a bunch of whiners trying to take advantage of a system built on excessive political correctness.

This isn't that surprising, considering that *Shakedown* is an account of Mr. Levant's own encounter with persecution, which included being interviewed by a seemingly impassive civil servant, which gave him the material for a widely-viewed YouTube video and then subsequently the whirlwind book tour that he's currently on.

"I accept the criticism that my book is somewhat one-sided. It's an advocacy book—I'm trying to change the system. But I assert that I make that advocacy fairly, true facts and fair comments. And I even give the HRCs' founders the benefit of the doubt as to their good faith intentions decades ago," said Mr. Levant in an email.

*Shakedown* is well-researched and Mr. Levant is sincerely passionate about protecting freedom of speech that he rightly believes is jeopardized by human rights commissions, which he argues have strayed from a mandate that was already vague. It would have been more effective as an "advocacy book," however, had Mr. Levant wrote it more like a journalist, and less like an advocate.

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