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### "Leaders' Debates" to Be Held This Week

## The Cartel Party Campaign with Two Weeks to Go

- *Pauline Easton* -

The 43rd general election campaign lacks lustre. So say the pundits, pollsters and monopoly-controlled media. They complain that no cartel party has managed to distinguish itself to become the leader of the pack. The Liberals and Conservatives are said to be running neck and neck.

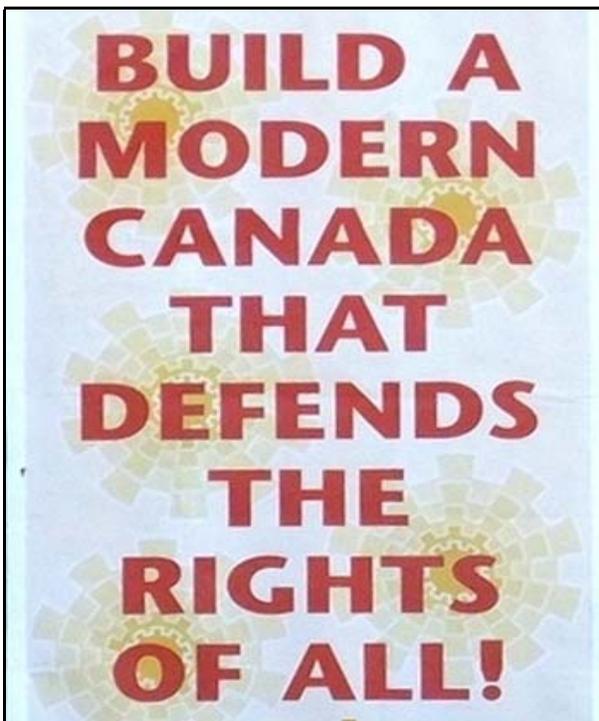
So, with two weeks to election day, can Scheer mobilize the considerable base which abhors Liberal opportunism and hypocrisy to overcome the bad memories of the Harper years? He is vying with Trudeau to lead the next government but he is basically an unknown quantity and this is a problem. His penchant for saying politically incoherent and incorrect things has to be reined in



from time to time which contributes to the fact that nobody knows what to expect.

Will the scandal politics which have the stamp of foreign U.S. interference in the campaign prevail and be the death blow to the already tarnished image of Justin Trudeau? Will Quebec bashing and the manipulation of the values people espouse succeed in dividing the polity in Quebec to achieve a Liberal victory there? Justin Trudeau was brought to power by the financial oligarchy in 2015 for his image -- a person they declared to be a cool young dude whose promise of sunny ways would keep the minds of every section of the people in Canada and even abroad off their worries. This cool young dude is now trying to reinvent himself as passionate about his beliefs and the values he espouses. These values are presented as progressive and essential to oppose the alleged narrow nationalism of the Quebec people and "right wing." But, what emerges from the displays of passion, sincere apologies, hugs and kisses if not the same cardboard character whose only talent seems to be that he was trained in the art of debating the pros and cons of any issue no matter the social consequences of his actions? On the basis of his passion and sincere apologies are we to presume that Trudeau can be trusted? It is not rational.

What is known, however, is that no matter which cartel party is brought to power, in the name of high ideals it has to represent the concerns of the rich minority to reap the spoils of robbing the state treasury, resources and labour of Canadians. All the while, it has to maintain the illusion of a democracy of the majority even as it pays the rich with impunity and the people have no role to play in decision-making at any level.



No matter what the cartel parties and monopoly controlled media declare are the "issues," no matter who they declare to be the "winner" of the exclusionary debates which are taking place, or how many photo ops or media promos they mount, it is to no avail. The people are rising to speak in their own name. They are shunning the desperation, hypocrisy, corruption, double talk and impunity of the ruling circles and their nefarious claims about what they stand for. This is why the pundits, pollsters and monopoly-controlled media say the campaign lacks lustre. The people are not falling for it. They know that the treachery of the cartel parties is based on more sell-out, more appeasement to U.S. homeland security and war machine in the name of a fictional national interest, security and prosperity. Canadians are in no mood to drink their Kool-aid.

Across the country and in many places in the world, the ruling class has to contend with an experienced workforce. This workforce is laying its claim on society for what belongs to it by right. The corrupt financial oligarchy is mired in ruthless competition within its own ranks to dominate resources, markets, sources of cheap labour and zones of influence to export the social wealth it controls. The oligarchs are pushed to do whatever it takes to control any situation. Within this, they are pushing forward as a better fit those leaders who wreck without the pretension of sunny ways even if that was their persona a mere four years ago. Thus we have Trump in the U.S., Macron in France, Johnson in Britain, Kenney in Alberta, Ford in Ontario,

Legault in Quebec, Modi in India and others in various provinces and countries all claiming to represent the popular will as they slash and burn whatever arrangements stand in the way of controlling the situation in their favour.

All of it shows that the real issue facing Canadians in this election is not to choose a lesser evil but the need for democratic renewal so that they can become the decision-makers and secure the future for themselves and the coming generations. It shows that this is not a problem for solution tomorrow. It is a problem for today. At this point in the election, Canadians are trying to figure out how to vote. How can they empower themselves in this election in a manner which strengthens their ability to deal with whatever party or configuration of parties the bourgeoisie decides will best serve their interests? So long as they deliberate on this themselves and amongst their peers, an advance will be made. Their vote will make a statement as decided by them, not the rich and their cartel parties, pundits, polls and monopoly-controlled media. Join In!

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## The Role of the "Leaders' Debates" in Confounding What Is at Stake in this Election

- Hilary LeBlanc -

Before the holding of the so-called leaders' debates on October 7 and 10, Canadians are nonplussed about what distinguishes the parties vying to form the next government. Will the "leaders' debates" enlighten them? Not at all. Canadians are sure to be even more nonplussed after the debates than they are now. This is because they are exclusionary, present no alternative and have nothing to do with what matters to the people.

The "leaders' debates" are said to be the epitome of our democracy -- the expression of its substance. This is because people allegedly become informed about what each party stands for so they can exercise an "informed vote" on October 21 and during advance polling, which begins the day after the final debate. In this way, the electoral system is said to have fulfilled its democratic mission of ensuring people can exercise their right to chose the next government.

The people are reduced to a role of spectators to an exclusionary debate in which a media consortium chooses the questions it declares are the concerns of the "man on the street." The farce is such it is no wonder that confidence in what are called the democratic institutions is at an all time low. Nobody really believes the present electoral process confers a mandate on whatever party or coalition of parties forms the next government.

Despite this, the parties forming the cartel party system together with the monopoly-controlled media persist in suggesting what they say during their campaigns is meaningful and sincere and not a cynical ploy designed to confound the issues and permit a winner to be declared that has a mandate to do whatever it wants.



Whereas a democracy is generally understood to be an inclusive sort of thing that constitutes the rule of the majority, the debates are exclusionary of anything that could possibly represent the majority, starting with the definition of what are called leaders and what the media consortium determines are the "issues." This all flows seamlessly from the same neo-liberal and anti-social agenda of the nation-wrecking and warmongering ruling elite, their cartel parties and media.

The cartel parties are steered by a cabal of election agencies and marketing firms and other private interests of like kind whose aim is very narrow -- to make money for themselves, come out on top of their rival and ensure the status quo of a system that pays the rich stays in place. They determine the "questions" for the debates, the answers, the format and the invited participants. The cabal determines who is "legitimate" and allowed in, and who is "illegitimate" and excluded. So much for democracy of the majority.

The desperation of the ruling class to form a party government that will carry on implementing its neo-liberal agenda is no less in this election than any other occasion. Faced with slim pickings, they are gearing up to pull out all the stops so that one of its champions pulls ahead and this is what the so-called leaders' debates are all about. It is happening at a time the people are disgusted with the performance of all the parties which form governments to pay the rich.



Exclusionary debates and incessant media coverage of the cartel parties are coupled with pernicious and vicious attempts to divide the people on every conceivable basis. This includes Quebec bashing, bashing of Albertans, manipulation of matters related to identity based on every conceivable consideration including religion, nationality, gender, beliefs, aspirations, lifestyle and so on. Nothing is beyond their reach so long as discussion is taboo on the actual conditions of life itself and the social and natural

environment, on the need for democratic renewal and to establish an anti-war government by getting Canada out of NATO and NORAD and ending big power interference in the internal affairs of sovereign nations that has the intention to bring people to their knees and achieve regime change.

Everything is done to make sure the people have no voice. The people persist in rejecting the anti-social offensive with strikes and other actions. They oppose the destruction of manufacturing jobs, the pillage of the natural resources and the undermining of social programs and the public services on which so many Canadians depend. The people despise schemes to destroy social programs and the social fabric so as to pay the rich. But a deafening silence is imposed on this striving of the workers and people for empowerment. The election and "leaders' debates" play a big role in covering up the silence.

Any suggestion that the "leaders' debates" bring clarity to the people so that they can cast an informed vote or the electoral process brings to power representatives of the people is seen as a bad joke. The "leaders' debates" to be held on October 7 and 10 will once again present fictional accounts of what the people want and how they can achieve it by voting for this or that cartel party. The MLPC calls on workers, women and youth to speak with their own minds and in their own name to express their concerns and what they want at this time for this country and the world. Speaking with your own voice is the necessary starting point.

# How the Prerogative Powers Are Used to Determine Electoral Outcomes

- Anna Di Carlo -

The ruling elite present the leaders' debates as an important, if not the most important means for guaranteeing the right to an informed vote during an election campaign. To shore up the fiction that the vote is free and fair, an impression is deliberately created that the Leaders' Debate Commission, which organizes the debates is an independent body. This is not the case. The Commission and its orientation were mandated by an Order-in-Council of the Liberal Cabinet in power. The mandate makes sure that the cartel parties, the government, the state bureaucracy with its police, intelligence and security forces, and the monopoly-controlled media dictate what views are worthy of being heard and who is allowed into the debate.

The creation of a government Leaders' Debate Commission was a 2015 election promise of the Liberal Party, which was miffed at the time because former Prime Minister Harper did not agree to participate in various debates. The Liberals declared that this deprived Canadians of the most important event during an election. An independent commission, they said, would ensure that "twisting the rules for political advantage" and "partisan gamesmanship," would be eliminated.

The Liberal Party subsequently used its prerogative powers to establish a Leaders' Debate Commission by Order-in-Council on an exclusionary basis. It dictated that the Commission must make sure that the "leaders' debates" include only political parties that the state determines can form a government. This was a significant development since it enacted by decree Justin Trudeau's infamous apologetics for retaining the existing first-past-the-post cartel party system when he did not get his way on how to reform the voting system.

"If we were to make a change or risk a change that would augment individual voices -- that would augment extremist voices and activist voices that don't get to sit within a party that figures out what's best for the whole future of the country, like the three existing parties do -- I think we would be entering a period of instability and uncertainty," Trudeau pompously declared in Yellowknife on February 10, 2017.

The Liberals initiated the creation of the commission by directing the Committee on Procedures and House Affairs (PROC) to study the matter in November 2017. This led to all the cartel parties singing hosannas to the importance of leaders' debates to the democratic process. Even before PROC tabled its May 2018 report, the Liberals announced a \$6 million fund for the Leaders' Debate Commission in their February 2018 budget. The debates commission, the budget stated, "would ensure that federal leaders' debates are organized in the public interest and to improve Canadians' knowledge of the parties, their leaders and their policy positions."



It added: "In the coming months, the Minister of Democratic Institutions will bring forward potential

approaches to leaders' debates. The Government may introduce legislation to implement the approach taken to establish the new process for leaders' debates."

The Liberals never introduced legislation for the creation of the commission. By right, the creation of an official body responsible for organizing leaders' debates should be treated as an amendment to the *Canada Elections Act*, the legislation that is supposed to govern all electoral matters. Instead, in October 2018, the Liberals issued Order-in-Council P.C. 2018-1322, using their prerogative powers to establish the commission. Why they did this is worth exploring. The Order-in-Council was not simply a matter of appointing a Debates Commissioner, which is a matter of normal business for the Privy Council and Cabinet appointments. It spelled out in a lot of detail how the debates must be organized.

The Order-in-Council declares the debates should be "effective, informative and compelling" and "benefit from the participation of the leaders who have the greatest likelihood of becoming Prime Minister or whose political parties have the greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament."

It includes an Annex that specifically sets out the criteria to be used by the "independent" Commissioner. Only those parties that meet two of three criteria are to be invited to participate: 1) having a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party; 2) endorsing candidates in at least 90 per cent of electoral districts; and 3) the party's candidates received at least 4 per cent of the valid votes in the last election or "based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Debates Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question."

No matter how the elite try to spin the significance of the leaders' debates, their exclusionary character reveals them as anything but democratic. Far from rescuing what are called the liberal democratic institutions, the debates and the entire undemocratic electoral process quickens their demise. They clearly reveal the need for the working people to take up history's call to renew the democratic process so as to exercise control over the decisions that affect their lives.

*Anna Di Carlo is the national leader of the MLPC. She is also the MLPC candidate in Mississauga East–Cooksville.*

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## Information on the Debates

The two main publicly funded "party leaders' debates" will be held this week. The English debate is on Monday, October 7 from 7:00 to 9:00 pm EST; the French will be held on Thursday, October 10 from 8:00 to 10:00 pm EST. Both will be held before a live audience at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Quebec. The two debates will be broadcast on eleven television stations, three radio networks, twenty social media/digital platforms and in four different accessible formats (Closed Captioned, Described Video, American Sign Language, and Quebec Sign Language). The English debate will be available in Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Punjabi, Italian, Plains Cree and Inuktitut. The French will have no Inuktitut translation and have East Cree instead of Plains Cree. "Live viewing parties" are scheduled for select bookstores, libraries and 24 Cineplex movie theatres.

A "Leaders' Debate Commission" was appointed by the Trudeau government to organize the debates on the basis of a mandate and instructions issued by the Liberal Party. When the government introduced the Commission, it stated that "leaders' debates play an essential role in Canada's federal elections." They "provide a platform through which all Canadians can take part in the public discourse on issues of national importance," it added. It appointed former governor-general David

Johnson to lead the Commission saying, "Given that debates are an important exercise in our democracy, establishing an independent commissioner to organize the debates would help ensure that the interests of Canadians, rather than private entities and political parties, are central to how leaders' debates are organized and broadcast."

Commissioner David Johnson said that the debates will have a scope and reach "unprecedented in our political history." He expressed the hope that Canadians "will come together in this shared experience," and described the two events as "an opportunity for the country to come together; to watch or listen to the same thing, at the same time, to gain a better understanding about the issues at hand and what they mean to people throughout the country."

The Commission was given a budget of \$6 million. It tendered a contract for producing the debates, which was won by the Canadian Debate Production Partnership. The "partnership" is a consortium of the following broadcasters and newspapers: CBC News/Radio-Canada, Global News, CTV News, *The Toronto Star*, HuffPost Canada/HuffPost Quebec, *La Presse*, *Le Devoir* and *L'Actualité*. It is responsible for the format, questions and topics. According to Johnson, the "core responsibility" of the Commission will come in at \$4.63 million. It is expected to provide the next Minister of Democratic Institutions with a report summing up the debates and providing recommendations for their future.

The debates will include the leaders of six of Canada's 21 registered political parties: the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party, the Green Party, the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party and the People's Party of Canada.

The Consortium has already decided what issues are of concern to Canadians. It announced that the following themes will be addressed in the English debate: affordability and economic insecurity; national and global leadership; Indigenous issues; polarization, human rights and immigration; and environment and energy. The themes for the French debate are: economy and finances; environment and energy; foreign policy and immigration; identity, ethics and governance; services to citizens. These "issues" betray the ideological prejudices of the ruling elites. Designed to impose a veil over the eyes of Canadians on how problems can be provided with solutions, they are not only dismissive of real concerns but divisive as in the lumping together of "foreign policy and immigration" or "polarization, human rights and immigration."

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### **The Alternative**

## **Empower Yourselves Now!**

100 Debates on the Environment was a national initiative to hold "non-partisan all-candidates debates on the environment" in 100 federal ridings across Canada on October 3rd. The project was coordinated by GreenPAC and by Equiterre in Quebec. GreenPAC, which declares itself to be non-partisan, was founded by a former advisor to Ontario Liberal Premier Dalton MacGuinty.

One debate was held October 3 at University of Alberta (U of A), in the Edmonton Strathcona Riding. Two hundred and twenty people attended, mainly youth. Six candidates spoke but on different bases. Four cartel party candidates seated at the front of the room each spoke for a total of 22 minutes. The Conservative candidate did not attend the event. The MLPC candidate in the riding and spokesperson for the environment, Dr. Dougal MacDonald and a candidate from another small party were seated in the front row of the audience and were only allowed a total of 7 minutes each to

speak.

The hierarchical arrangement of the U of A climate debate directly contradicted the claims that the 100 Debates are "all candidates" and "non-partisan." What is more partisan than treating some parties and candidates as more important than others? As *TML Weekly* has pointed out: "Once registered, all political parties are supposedly equal before the law. In practice, the *Canada Elections Act* favours those parties that have a chance of forming a majority government on the basis of a framework of prejudices set behind the backs of Canadians. It divides the parties into "major" and "minor," and further categorizes them as "fringe," "extremist" or simply irrelevant. Those accorded "major" status are permitted into the sanctum of the privileged." [1]



Local organizers said the initial decision only to invite four "major" parties was made to avoid inviting the Peoples Party of Canada (PPC). However, once the federal Leaders Debate Commission, which is packed with Conservatives and Liberals including John Manley, mandated that the PPC was a major party, the organizers "had to" invite the PPC and then decided to invite the MLPC candidate also. The candidate of the other small party was also later invited. Excuses for not fully including the MLPC candidate are familiar. Along with the arbitrary designation of "major" and "minor" parties, 100 Debates claimed that there was not enough total time for every candidate to speak at equal length.

The undemocratic arrangements confirm again what the MLPC has already asserted. "According to the cartels and coalitions which control the electoral process, the cartel parties and media, the people are to be spectators to their electioneering. The cartels and coalitions decide the 'issues,' the format of 'debates,' the questions, the answers, the 'news' and who can and cannot participate and how they can participate. The process is tightly controlled and the people have no say. A pretense is given of popular participation by collecting questions or comments from random people and on this basis declaring that the issues raised are reflective of what Canadians are thinking and what they want." [2]

The solution to this problem is to empower ourselves. The MLPC emphasizes: "As a practical way to oppose that, the MLPC is encouraging its candidates in this election to participate with others in organizing discussion forums of all kinds where people can inform their peers and be informed about matters which concern them. These forums provide alternatives to the exclusionary forms which are rife in the election. They are empowering because people can together work out how matters pose themselves and stands which favour them. They see that they do not have to fend for themselves to make choices which others impose on them." [3]

One example of such people's forums is the October 6 meeting organized by Women4Rights and Empowerment in Edmonton to discuss the economy and the environment.

## Notes

1. *TML Weekly*, May 26, 2018.
2. *Renewal Update*, September 24, 2019.
3. *Ibid*