

## PM pushes NDP alliance

### Martin-Hargrove appearance sends shock waves through campaign

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Prime Minister Paul Martin is openly encouraging the notion of a Liberal-New Democrat minority government on Jan. 23, recruiting the high-profile leader of the Canadian Auto Workers to back his plea.

CAW chief Buzz Hargrove, whose membership has a long-standing affiliation with the NDP, sent shock waves through the election campaign when he appeared at Martin's side yesterday and spoke in favour of a Liberal-NDP alliance.

"The overwhelming majority of our delegates endorsed what the Prime Minister stands for here today," CAW chief Buzz Hargrove told reporters after Martin laid out his election themes before 900 union members at a convention in Toronto.

In the event of a Liberal minority on Jan. 23, Hargrove would like to see a formal deal between Martin and the NDP to join forces to eliminate instability in Parliament. "It could be an accord on issues or it could be a coalition," he said.

Martin, essentially acknowledging that he can't win without strategic NDP voting and support, says the election is "a clash of values" over social, economic and environmental issues and he is telling voters to choose carefully.

"One of two people is going to become prime minister," said Martin, 67. "It's going to be (Conservative Leader) Stephen Harper or it's going to be myself."

"With Stephen Harper and the Tories in power, we would see a much different Canada, a much more divisive Canada. And also we would see him and (Bloc Québécois Leader) Gilles Duceppe, if they get enough seats, working together to dismantle this country that all of us are so proud of."

The Prime Minister has been careful during the first few days of this campaign not to slam the NDP as hard as his other opponents, but yesterday's developments took his courting of New Democrats to another level.

It comes as a new *Toronto Star/La Presse/EKOS* poll is released today, showing that Liberals and Conservatives are almost equally distrusted by Canadians — a distrust that is standing in the way of a majority for either of them.

For Conservatives, the main obstacle is their perceived party platform, which 54 per cent of respondents said was the reason they wouldn't vote for the Tories. Another 27 per cent said Harper was not trustworthy.

For the Liberals, it's ethics, with almost two-thirds of respondents saying corruption was the main reason they wouldn't vote to return Martin's government to power.

This double-barrelled antipathy of the two main parties makes the NDP vote critical and soft voters of that stripe could well help determine the fate of the election.

But Hargrove's foray didn't land well with the New Democrats yesterday. It unravels NDP Leader Jack Layton's carefully crafted push in the campaign's first week to persuade voters to abandon the strategic voting tactics that have cost his party in past elections.

At campaign stops in Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia all week, Layton has been urging NDP supporters to stick with the party and not be scared into voting Liberal to stop a Conservative victory.

Then yesterday, Hargrove stopped well short of offering his full endorsement of the NDP, traditionally the

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party with closest ties to labour. Instead, he advocated voting NDP only where they have the best chance of beating a Conservative.

Specifically, Hargrove recommended that the CAW endorse incumbent New Democrats (the party held 18 seats at dissolution of Parliament) as well as "NDP candidates in potentially winnable ridings.

"I recommend that in other ridings, the CAW not endorse any specific candidates; rather, individual voters will need to decide what best contributes to electing a Liberal minority with NDP balance of power, and stopping Conservatives."

Equally bad for Layton was the visual message — the sight of Hargrove and Martin sharing a stage, with Layton nowhere to be seen.

Layton, 55, told reporters yesterday, "Mr. Hargrove is well-known for having his opinions and expressing them. ... Our view is that the Liberals don't deserve people's support. We believe that having as many New Democrats as possible in this House produces the best results for working people. ... I think we've shown that in the minority Parliament."

Hargrove said he hasn't discussed his political stance with the NDP leader. "I haven't talked to Layton," he said. "I don't report to Jack."

The Liberals, with only 133 out of 308 seats in the last Parliament, relied on the NDP to keep them from being toppled on confidence votes. But Layton withdrew his support this fall, leading to the Liberals' defeat.

Martin also raised the ante in his bid to make the unity issue a key factor in the campaign. He said that, for Quebec, the vote on Jan. 23 will amount to a "referendum election."

Martin has been warning that the Bloc, which has joined forces with charismatic new Parti Québécois leader André Boisclair, is using the current election as a staging ground for another referendum on Quebec independence.

Martin is telling Quebecers that the best way to halt this sovereignist stratagem is to vote Liberal.

"I think it is certainly a referendum election according to the Boisclair-Duceppe duo," Martin said. "They said clearly they have made a pact."

Martin suggested only the Liberals could convince Quebec to stay in Canada and lead the federal cause in the next referendum campaign.

with files from Graham Fraser

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