

At 7:00pm on December 3, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a speech to Canadians. The speech text is included below with my comments on it. My thoughts meander between objective assessments to direct responses to the Prime Minister. I share it to any who care to read it. The text of the speech has been taken from the Toronto Star website on the evening of December 3, 2008.

Background:

About six weeks after a Canadian election, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative government were returned to power. Before the election they formed a minority government, which means that they did not hold a majority of seats in the House of Commons of Canada's Parliament. The election enabled the government to increase its seat count, but they remained a minority government.

Governments in Canada are formed from the members of Parliament that have been elected to Parliament through a general election. Since we have a strong party system, usually the privilege of forming a government falls to the leader of the party that holds the most seats. Governments are formed when the Governor General of Canada asks a member of Parliament or a Senator to form a government and that person becomes the Prime Minister.

In a majority situation this is a relatively easy task. The Prime Minister will have the *de facto* confidence of the house, since his/her party will hold a majority of seats. In a minority government, the Prime Minister must build coalitions or alliances with members of other parties in order to secure enough support for bills and legislation that the government would attempt to pass.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper started this latest Parliament with a throne speech about two weeks ago. This speech is considered a confidence measure. The opposition parties supported the speech, even though it was considered by most to be vague and generally unacceptable. There was no intention at this point to bring about the fall of the government.

Then the Finance Minister of the government gave a financial update. In this update, the government included a number of very partisan policy elements that would not normally be matters of confidence. However, since budgetary matters are considered to essential government business, a failure of a budget motion is deemed a vote of non-confidence in the government.

The Prime Minister has enjoyed a great deal of freedom in the previous Parliament to push policy items through by tying them to confidence motions. Because the primary opposition party was not in a position to fight a general election, they were forced into a situation of either supporting the government and passing policy they did not like or bringing about the fall of the government and facing a general election. For two years the Prime Minister pushed this kind of agenda on the opposition.

He gambled that things would not be different with this new Parliament. He anticipated that the opposition would resign themselves to the government's partisan policies by voting for the budget update since they could not afford to wage a general election.

The opposition decided enough was enough. They have declared that they would not support the government's budget update. That they could not work with this Prime Minister and his very partisan government, so they determined to form a coalition and seek to form a government to replace them. To express their sincerity in this matter, two of the parties, the National Democratic Party and the Liberal Party signed a coalition to work together for more than two years. To ensure the stability of this coalition, they received a signed agreement of support from the Bloc Quebecois, yet another party in Canada's Parliament. The Bloc has agreed to support the coalition for 18 months.

Facing a confidence vote in which the majority of Parliamentary members have agreed to vote against the government, the Prime Minister faces an almost certain loss of power.

The Prime Minister has yet one more card up his sleeve. Since the government sits at the pleasure of the Governor General, the Prime Minister can request the Governor General to do one of three things. First he could offer to resign and ask her to accept his resignation on the realization that he has lost the confidence of the house. Second, he could ask the Governor General to dissolve Parliament which would also result in the need to call a general election. Finally, he can request that the Governor General prorogue Parliament. To prorogue parliament is simply to suspend it. It is like a time out in a sports game, in which the action stops but the game is still basically in session.

It is unlikely but not impossible that the Prime Minister will resign. If he did, the Governor General would almost certainly ask the opposition coalition to form the government and Stephan Dion the leader of the Liberal Party would become Prime Minister.

It is also unlikely that he would ask for a general election. If he did, it is unlikely that the Governor General would accede to his request as this would be forth or fifth election for Canadians in four years and the second one in three months. Again, she would very likely ask the coalition under Stephan Dion to form a government.

Most likely he will ask for Parliament to be prorogued. Most pundits think that she would accede to this request, however she is not obligated to do so. She could instead decide to dissolve parliament, but that would be the same as if the Prime Minister asked it and as unlikely for the same reasons that she would accede to the request by him to do so. She could also deny the prorogue the Parliament and instead send him back the house to face his fate before Parliament. Reasons for granting his request to prorogue Parliament are that it would give time for the fury of the recent events to subside and allow the Prime Minister time to put together a budget that he could then present to the house and hopefully in a time of greater reflection regain their confidence.

She may also accede to his request on the grounds that there never has been an instance where it has not been granted. Normally parliament is prorogued when the government has finished its legislative agenda but is still not obligated to call for an election. During the period of prorogue, the government establishes a new agenda which it then presents to the house in the form of a Speech from the Throne when parliament resumes in a new session. In this case, the Prime Minister has only just presented his speech and has not even begun to work through the agenda he set forth in it. To prorogue Parliament at this time would be unusual. She may decide that it is too soon to break.

In an effort to gain support from Canadian, the Prime Minister made the following speech on national radio and TV. The purpose was to garner public support for his bid to prorogue parliament. My comments are in the column to the right. I have added paragraph numbers to identify paragraphs. Otherwise, the speech is unchanged from *The Toronto Star* website. from which it was retrieved.

Enjoy.

Para.	Stephen Harper's Speech	My Comments
1	Good evening.	
2	Canadians take pride in our history as one of the world's oldest continuous democracies. During the past 141 years, political parties have emerged and disappeared, leaders have come and gone, and governments have changed.	This paragraph is a setup. It focuses on ideas like democracy and the legitimacy of parties. It is included as a mechanism to question the legitimacy of the coalition on the grounds that it is not a party, and thus not a legitimate force in Parliament.
3	Constant in every case, however, is the principle that Canada's government has always been chosen by the people. And following the light of this democratic tradition, Canadians have built one of the most peaceful and prosperous countries the world has ever known a land of hope and opportunity that inspires others around the globe, and has drawn millions as new immigrants to our country.	<p>“government has always been chosen by the People” This is not accurate. Government is not chosen by the people, Parliament is. Government emerges from within Parliament and exists with the confidence of the House.</p> <p>“Canadians have build one of the most peaceful and prosperous countries” Implied in this is that what is taking place in the forming of this coalition is not positive and is out of step with the peace and prosperity that has hitherto defined Canada. This is a suggestive statement that is not “straightforward with the truth.”</p>

4	<p>On October 14, for the 40th time since Confederation, Canadians voted in a national general election. We are honoured that you returned our government to office with a strengthened mandate to lead this great country through the most difficult global economic crisis in many decades. Canada's government is acting to deal with the crisis, right now.</p>	<p>Did Canadians actually return the Conservative government with a strengthened mandate? They increased their seat count, but did not give them an unchecked mandate. Especially since they elected opposition in greater numbers. The issue is not what Canadian's elected, making this idea a red herring. As with paragraph #3, this refers to matters that are properly the prerogative of Parliament and not that of the electorate per se.</p> <p>Furthermore, he claims that the purpose of the "mandate" was so that the Conservative government could lead through the economic crisis. Yet, it is precisely what they have not demonstrated that they are doing. Which is to say, they have not given evidence that they are doing anything, but rather on the contrary, has presented every indication of a lack of action.</p> <p>He claims that they are acting to deal with this crisis. To be sure, this may true. Much of the government's work takes place behind the scenes. However, the Prime Minister is well aware that optics are everything. He can claim they are acting, but the throne speech and financial update do not indicate this, but the contrary.</p>
5	<p>Further personal and business tax reductions are coming into effect. We are doubling spending on infrastructure; we are ensuring credit for businesses and consumers by injecting liquidity into financial markets; we are helping seniors who rely on RRIR income; and securing pension plans.</p>	<p>Basic information, but nothing new. They can't do this without house support, so this is either what was voted on in the last Parliament or a first declaration of what they are doing. In this case, it is too little too late.</p>

6	We are implementing the Automotive Innovation Fund and, working with the government of Ontario, we are undertaking due diligence on any further requests for assistance from the auto industry.	This will be a good thing. But what are the numbers? What kind of commitments are they proposing. They need to numbers on this. They could say something like “we are prepared to spend xxx billion dollars over the next xx years to resolve this issue.
7	We are increasing support and incentives for manufacturers, the forestry sector, and others to pursue business opportunities. We are implementing agreements with the provinces to enhance labour mobility. And, next month on January 27, we will bring in a budget which will contain additional measures to boost Canada's economy, while making sure we avoid a long term structural deficit in Canada's finances.	See above. This is the first discussion that he plans to do something. The Budget date of January 27 is the updated budget date given after the confidence of the House was lost. The additional measures are still unknown. We need concrete measures that outline in principle what is being proposed. It is not necessary to give final figures, but guideline figures.  All would agree that we want to avoid long term structural deficit.
8	In preparation for that budget we are consulting widely with Canadians, meeting with premiers of our provinces and territories, and working in collaboration with our international partners in G20. The minister of finance will be consulting with the business community and interest groups.	Why were you not doing this before? Why did you not include this in the financial update?
9	We are consulting with, and expect to hear more from, the opposition parties in Parliament. We hope they bring forward specific proposals – we have invited them to do so. In fact, we have already changed some of our proposals to meet their concerns.	How are you consulting with the parties that you've been bullying and alienating? How can you make this statement knowing full well that they have indicated both in their election platforms and in post election discussions what they would like to see. You do not mean that you are consulting with since you won't even talk to them.  Their claim is that you have rejected outright to even consider the options they have offered. You have made no compromises in

		<p>what you hope to accomplish in order to secure their support. You want them to support you blindly based on your possession of the most seats. But this is not how a Parliament in Canada works.</p>
10	<p>Unfortunately, even before the government has brought forward its budget, and only seven weeks after a general election, the opposition wants to overturn the results of that election.</p>	<p>They are not going to overturn the election. They are going to express non confidence in the government and have prepared, should the Governor General ask them, to form a government to ensure stability and government within the current elected Parliament. This is consistent with and in keeping with the nature of our Parliamentary system.</p>
11	<p>Instead of an immediate budget, they propose a new coalition which includes the party in Parliament whose avowed goal is to break up the country. Let me be very clear: Canada's government cannot enter into a power-sharing coalition with a separatist party. At a time of global economic instability, Canada's government must stand unequivocally for keeping the country together. At a time like this, a coalition with the separatists cannot help Canada. And the Opposition does not have the democratic right to impose a coalition with the separatists they promised voters would never happen.</p>	<p>An immediate budget was not needed. You did not provide one and will not be defeated on one unless they decide to defeat you in January should the Parliament be prorogued. But a financial update that was proactive and less partisan would have been appropriate. This action following on years of bullying and belligerence has led the opposition to lose confidence in your government.</p> <p>What does "keeping the country" together have to do with this. This is a red herring. It is an attempt to paint this as a national unity issue, which it is not. But by doing so you are creating one and are actually causing the harm you claim that you are trying to preserve.</p> <p>The coalition is not with separatists. There are no known separatists in the NDP or the Liberal Party. Unless you know something the rest of us don't, you are deliberately distorting the facts,</p>

		<p>which is to tell lies. There is no coalition with the Bloc, only an agreement that the Bloc will not defeat the coalition which is between the NDP and the Liberals.</p> <p>The opposition does have the democratic right to form a coalition. They will not impose it, but will ask for permission to govern as one. They have every right in our parliamentary system to do this and, it would seem, to expect a favourable response. What is undemocratic is the attempts to stop it by means other than by regaining the confidence of the house.</p> <p>There was no intention declared to form a coalition. They may have thought about, for to do so would be to consider every available option, for which there is nothing untoward for doing. They obviously did not expect to do so. The circumstances in which they find themselves, which are both unacceptable as a condition for their existence and somewhat opportunistic given the door you opened for them, they cannot be faulted for pushing open the door you unlatched.</p>
12	<p>The Opposition is attempting to impose this deal without your say, without your consent, and without your vote. This is no time for backroom deals with the separatists; it is the time for Canada's government to focus on the economy and specifically on measures for the upcoming budget. This is a pivotal moment in our history.</p>	<p>Again, you used the word "impose" which is not true. The consent of the people has been given inasmuch as they have elected this particular configuration to the House. To say this is to misrepresent the parliament. Your speech is basically very deceptive in what it claims of the opposition and in how it seeks to take advantage of the ignorance of Canadians in how their</p>

		<p>government works. Why would you want to govern on a bed of lies?</p> <p>This is not a backroom deal. It is very front room and very public. The documents are published, which is more than can be said about how your caucus has been conducted. If there is back room stuff going on, think of your own relationship with media and the Canadian people.</p> <p>Economy? What economy? It has not been an issue for you until now, except as a platform to pursue your own partisan interests. You have no moral authority based on your two years to lecture the opposition on propriety and good government. Even if your policies were the best, the ends do not justify the means. You have lost the confidence of the House and of this Canadian.</p>
13	<p>We Canadians are the inheritors of a great legacy, and it is our duty to strengthen and protect it for the generations still to come. Tonight, I pledge to you that Canada's government will use every legal means at our disposal to protect our democracy, to protect our economy, and to protect Canada.</p>	<p>Yes, and that legacy they inherit is a parliamentary democracy that allows for the ejection of an effective, belligerent and despotic government. They are not obligated constitutionally to sit under your governance. Thankfully, there are others that Canadians have elected that have the courage to challenge your false interpretation and deception of our constitution and your wrong headed views of what Canada looks like.</p> <p>You pledge to us that you will use every legal means to protect our democracy. Thanks. We expect nothing less from you. Your legal means to protecting our democracy</p>

		<p>include-resigning, facing Parliament, accepting you have lost the confidence of the house and working to regain it; submitting to the decision of the Governor General with grace and without bullying or contorting the facts to push her to give you what you want.</p>
14	Thank you, and goodnight.	<p>Mr. Harper. Canadians don't hate you. Many are very pleased with you. but there are very few of us that think you are behaving acceptable as Prime Minister and many of us question your fitness to hold this office. If you are unable to cooperate with the house, build coalitions and alliances with the opposition to pass your legislation then you ought to accept that you do not have the authority to govern us.</p> <p>Even if you should survive this incident of self-inflicted injury, you are now damaged goods. What has been tolerated in the last Parliament is no longer going to be tolerated. Your legacy will always be that you were the Prime Minister that bullied and pushed the house to the point of breaking. You have tried to break the democratic backbone of this country. What this says to me is that your only real option is to resign.</p> <p>As your boss, a citizen of this great country, I accept that resignation and thank you for your service.</p> <p>Andrew R. McGinn,</p>