

# PM Stephen Harper misleads Canadians

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has falsely claimed that Parliament does not have the right to defeat his minority government and replace it with a coalition government without having another election.

Under our system, a minority government can only govern so long as it has the support of the majority of the Members of Parliament.

When a minority government loses the confidence of Parliament, it is entirely democratic and constitutional for another party to take power – so long as it can demonstrate that it has the support of the majority of MPs.

When the Conservative government lost the confidence of the majority of MPs and the Liberals and the NDP entered into an agreement on December 1, 2008, to form a coalition government with the support of the Bloc Quebecois, Mr. Harper falsely claimed that they were trying to “overturn the election result” and that they did not “have a right to take power without an election.”

He even went as far as to claim that: “It’s now up to all of us to stand up for the right of Canadians to choose their own government.”

When he broke his own word by appointing 18 senators on December 22, 2008, Mr. Harper said vacancies in the Senate “should be filled by the government that Canadians elected rather than by a coalition that no one voted for.”

He’s got it all wrong.

First, as Mr. Harper well knows, there is no such thing as “the government that Canadians elected”. We do not elect a government in the manner that the people of the United States elect a president.

We elect individual MPs, riding by riding. The party with the most seats in the House of Commons forms a government. That government, in turn, only governs for as long as it can demonstrate that it has the support of the majority of MPs.

Second, when a minority government loses the confidence of the majority of MPs, it is entirely democratic and constitutional for two parties to form a coalition government without having another election.

On December 1, 2008, the leaders of the Liberal Party of Canada, the NDP and the Bloc Quebecois issued a statement in which they said:

“Since the recent federal election [October 14, 2008], it has become clear that the government headed by Mr. Harper has no plan, no competence and no will to effectively address this [global economic] crisis.

“Therefore, the majority of Parliament has lost confidence in Mr. Harper’s government, and is resolved to form a new government that will effectively, prudently, promptly and competently address these critical economic times.”

The Conservative government had clearly lost the confidence of Parliament and the majority of MPs clearly had the right to defeat the government and replace it with a coalition government formed by the Liberals and the NDP.

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion informed Governor General Michaëlle Jean of the agreement and requested that she exercise her constitutional authority to call on him as Leader of the Official Opposition to form a new coalition government.

And that is what would have happened if Mr. Harper had not asked the Governor General to shut Parliament down on December 4, 2008, so that the MPs couldn’t defeat his government and replace it with a coalition government.

If Stephen Harper had shown some willingness to work with the other parties and bring forward a proper economic stimulus package we would not be in this situation. During a time of global economic crisis, Mr. Harper chose to play political games rather than behaving like a Prime Minister. He lost the confidence of Parliament.

Whether or not you support the idea of the Liberals and the NDP forming a coalition government – some of my constituents do and some don’t – the important point to remember is that Stephen Harper has misled Canadians on this important issue and that he cannot be trusted.

***Maria Minna, M.P.***