

By Frances Russell

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Industry Minister Tony Clement's tweets aside, Stephen Harper's Conservatives know that changing the 2011 long form census from compulsory to voluntary makes it useless for public and private Canadian decision-makers. In fact, that's exactly why they're doing it.

An economist, the prime minister understands the value of statistics. He appreciates that authoritative statistics on the relative social and economic well-being of individual Canadians empower the disempowered to demand government programs (higher taxes) to reduce poverty and disparity and promote upward mobility.

He also appreciates the need to dumb them down to facilitate stripping government back to what he sees as its core functions: a strong military to defend the nation abroad, more police, prisons and tougher justice to defend the citizen at home, and an unfettered free market to create wealth and employment through ever-lower taxes, especially on business and the well-to-do. In his view, addressing social and economic inequality should be left to individual initiative and private charity.

That's why he's decided simply to stop gathering the numbers that provide an accurate socio-economic profile of Canadian society and, in the process, allow Clement to spread so much prevarication and misinformation that Canada's Chief Statistician, Munir Sheikh, was forced to resign.

"I don't believe any tax is a good tax," Harper has said. His patriots on the conservative right have chimed in with similar aphorisms. "There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women," former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher opined. "If anybody redistributes my income, it had better be me," former Manitoba Conservative premier Sterling Lyon pronounced.

University of Ottawa political scientist Paul

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Saurette says the Harper decision defines Canadian post-modern populist conservatism. It hopes to hit two home runs. Killing the long form compulsory census simultaneously rallies the Conservatives' "Tea Party North" libertarian base and propels dismantling "the octopus-like configuration of arms-length organizations" created by previous Liberal administrations that "mine" Statistics Canada data to demand social programs.

Unlike British Red Toryism, which accepts a role for government in reducing structural inequality, Canadian post-modern populist conservatism considers inequality as natural, the outcome of individual free choice. Individuals, not governments, must "bootstrap their way up," as Saurette puts it.

Saurette notes that from the day it was sworn in, the Harper government has been determined to eliminate government funding for any and all forms of social advocacy, their agencies and research, at home and abroad.

The elimination list is long and getting longer, and it is stunning. Here's a small sample: the Court Challenges Program, the Status of Women, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Canadian Council on International Cooperation, StatsCan's workplace and employer survey, which tracks job vacancies, benefits, and private pensions; StatsCan's survey of financial security, and StatsCan's longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada.

Canadian post-modern conservatives, like their American Tea Party counterparts, "know that winning the war of ideas can offer significant returns for political movements" and "have been explicitly planning what exactly conservatives need to do to win that war and capture the institutional structures and resources that dot the ideological battleground," Saurette writes in the online journal, *The Mark*.

Harper's ideological goal, he continues, is nothing less than "the transformation of the broad public philosophy of Canada and the cultivation of an enduring set of conservative values and principles in Canadians."

Harper is a graduate of the Calgary School, a group of University of Calgary political scientists, neo-conservatives all, who follow the teachings of German-American political philosopher Leo Strauss. Strauss had a deep antipathy towards liberal democracy and its "moral relativism."

Harper, too, denounced the "moral relativism" of the liberal state in a 2003 speech to the libertarian and socially conservative Civitas Society: "Moral relativism simply cannot be sustained as a guiding philosophy," he said. "It explains the lack of moral censure on personal foibles of all kinds...[I]t leads to...tribalism in the form of group rights."

Shadia Drury, Canada Research Chair in Social Justice at the University of Regina, is a leading expert on Straussian conservatism who taught at the Calgary School for 27 years. Drury warned in a 2004 interview with *The Globe and Mail* that the Strauss philosophy displays "a huge contempt for democracy" and exploits populist sentiment to strip away the

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rights of minorities and dismantle what is left of the welfare state.

"They want to replace the rule of law with the populism of the majority," she said.

But the subsequent fallout over the census makes clear that the majority of Canadians are not interested in right-wing populism, not interested in exchanging knowledge-based decision-making for flying blind.

At last count, over 300 of Canada's best-known social, economic, visible minority, immigrant and business groups have condemned the government's decision, from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business to emergency doctors and from virtually the entire academic community to all but three of Canada's provincial governments, plus Canada's entire social policy establishment.

Polling data is now showing that the Conservatives have lost their key beachhead among Canada's elites.

So far, Harper has governed as if he has a majority because his solid 30 per cent support trumps the fragmented 70 per cent dispersed among four parties. That could be about to change. The Liberals, whose leader, Michael Ignatieff, may have finally found his voice and stride during his summer bus tour, are showing signs of life and creeping closer to the Harperites.

Political pundits often talk about the "ah-ha" moment, when voters finally start putting all the pieces together. Harper's summer began with the massive, police-state abuse of civil liberties during the G20 Summit in Toronto and ended, during Harper's Arctic tour, with him commandeering an RCMP ATV and proclaiming, "I think I make the rules."

In between, making a narrative of it all for many among the vast majority of Canadians, was the obdurate, out-of-the-blue census decision that chooses ignorance over knowledge, stupidity over information and blind ideology over common sense. ♦

Jennie Lifschitz: A Canadian-Born Holocaust Survivor

By Rachel Mines

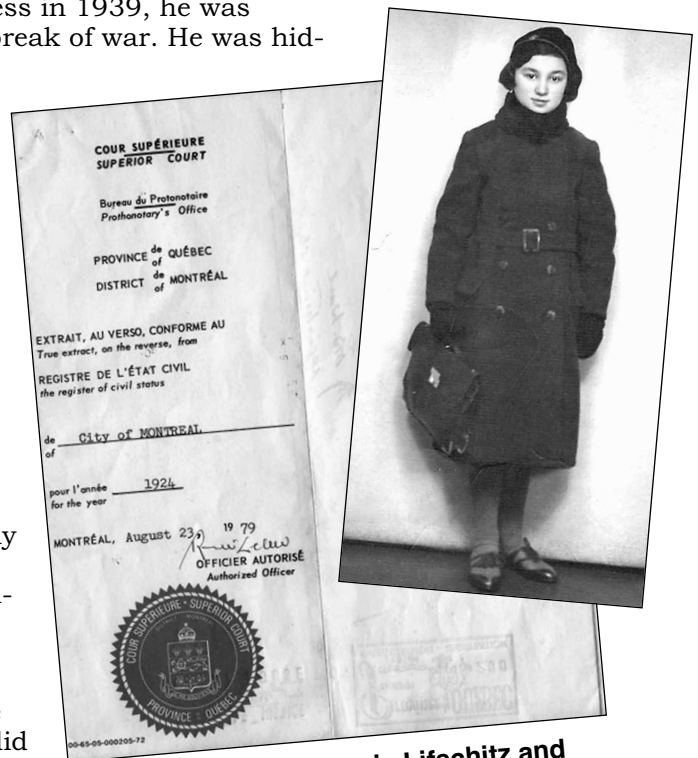
In his 1996 article "From Montreal to Auschwitz: Harry Cohen was the only Canadian to die in the Holocaust," journalist Gil Kezwer describes the life and fate of Harry Cohen, "believed to be the only Canadian citizen to die in the Nazi genocide of the Jews" (*Montreal Gazette*, April 16, 1996). Born in Poland, Mr. Cohen emigrated to Montreal in 1919. On his return to Poland on business in 1939, he was trapped by the outbreak of war. He was hidden by a Christian family but discovered in 1942 by the Nazis and deported, most likely to Auschwitz, where he died.

The tragic story of Harry Cohen provides a small but important link between Canada and the events of the Holocaust. But Harry Cohen was not, in fact, the only Canadian victim. Another is my mother, Jennie Lifschitz, who may have been the only Canadian-born survivor of the Holocaust. Jennie did not like to speak much about her tragic past, and it was only after her death in 2005 that my family and I began to piece together her remarkable story.

Jennie Lifschitz was born in Montreal on July 8, 1924. Her birth certificate records her parents as "Abraham Lifschitz, merchant ... and ... Paola Bloomberg, housewife." Jennie's parents and their first child, Rubin, had immigrated in the early 1920s from Libau, now Liepaja, Latvia. Their second child, Dora, was born in Montreal in 1922.

Abraham and Paola's marriage did not last long. A few months after Jennie's birth, her parents separated, and Paola returned to Libau, taking the three children with her. Six years later, in January 1931, the two older children returned to their father in Montreal. For some reason, perhaps because Abraham wanted a caretaker for his elderly widowed mother in Libau, Jennie remained and grew up there.

On June 17, 1940, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, the USSR annexed Libau. Although the takeover had a great impact on the Jewish community—a year later, 550 Libau citizens, including 200 Jews, were deported to Siberia—it did not seem to have affected Jennie much. A lively 16-year-old, she welcomed the chance to sneak out of



Birth certificate of Jennie Lifschitz and Jennie as a schoolgirl in Libau.

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