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# The Canada Revenue Agency becomes an arm of the PMO

By

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 [cra\\_spider.jpg](#) [6]

There is a salty expression that seems apt at the moment: "Don't p\*ss on me and tell me it's raining." A number of charities that have spoken out against various policies of the current Harper administration might well echo the sentiment expressed in that injunction.

The Canada Revenue Agency is currently auditing several Canadian charities, sniffing around for suspect "political activity." The list of targets reads like a [Who's Who](#) [7] of Canadian charitable institutions: Amnesty International Canada is included, and so is Kairos, stupidly denounced as "[anti-Semitic](#) [8]" a few years back by the egregiously dishonest Minister Jason Kenney; the David Suzuki Foundation, Tides Canada, Equiterre, Environmental Defence, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, PEN Canada, Canada Without Poverty, even the United Church of Canada.

It appears, and by no coincidence, that the Knights of Columbus and the Fraser Institute, [both](#) [9] of [which](#) [10] waded frequently into politics, have been spared a visit from the Grand Inquisitor.

But [CRA claims](#) [11], apparently with a straight face, that its hounding of charities whose missions and goals are not aligned with those of the Harper government has nothing to do with their progressive orientation. *Mon oeil*.

It's selectively seeking out environmental, human rights and international aid groups, and organizations receiving donations from labour unions. And it's spinning the process out, in order to bleed as many resources as it can from the charities under the gun, which have been forced to divert their scarce funds and staff to answering the incessant demands of auditors camped on their doorsteps, [sometimes for years](#) [12]. Only one revocation of charitable status has been made--a doctors' charity in 2012 -- since the government's omnibus bill C-38 was passed in that year, setting aside millions to launch the current persecution. But CRA has now made its witchhunt (for that is what it clearly is) [a permanent feature](#) [13] of its organization.

The purpose seems evident: to muzzle dissent -- [nothing new](#) [14], of course, for the [Harper government](#) [15] -- and to paralyze the charitable operations of these organizations.

And it's working. As researcher Gareth Kirkby [notes](#) [16]: "The government is attempting with some success to narrow society's important policy conversations."

A [chill](#) [17] has indeed fallen upon the charitable community. As Kirkby has found, charities are now afraid to speak out on public policy issues, fearing it could result in long and expensive audits that they can ill afford. They're also spending more of their donations on paperwork just in case. Kirkby puts it squarely: "The data suggest that the current federal government is corrupting Canada's democratic processes by treating as political enemies these civil society organizations whose contributions to public policy conversations differ from government priorities."

That's quite an indictment, and it should make *all* of us look over our shoulders, not just the folks on Harper's ever-expanding [enemies list](#) [18]. As Kirkby [concludes](#) [19], "It says something about the health of our democracy when these moderate organizations who many people donate to and support, peaceful organizations, are demonized...as being criminal or terrorist organizations...and then find themselves under threat of audits."

Some charities are considering [court action](#) [20] to force the CRA to cease and desist from its costly snooping. A blue-chip Bay Street law firm has [offered its services pro bono](#) [11] to PEN Canada. For its part, the NDP has demanded [a third-party inquiry](#) [21] into alleged CRA malfeasance -- which, in the unlikely event it were agreed to by the government, could not be completed before the next election.

Harper has already targeted [scientists](#) [22], and [artists](#) [23], and [First Nations](#) [24], and [trade unionists](#) [25], and [Elections Canada](#) [26], and [Statistics Canada](#) [27], and the employees of the [National Library](#) [28], and [our diplomats](#) [29], and even [weather forecasters](#) [30].

Now it's the turn of registered charities who don't toe the line. Tomorrow, who knows? But we can be sure that this government, perhaps better termed a "regime" at this point, will soon look about for new prey. "I did no more than you let me do," said the Hangman in Maurice Ogden's [poetic fable](#) [31]. It's up to every one of us to stop him -- and our window of opportunity appears to be closing fast.

Tags:

[Stephen Harper](#) [32] [Canada Revenue Agency](#) [33]

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[7] <http://www.nationalnewswatch.com/2014/07/21/list-of-charities-undergoing-tax-audits-related-to-political-activities/#.U82iS7HyRRI>

- [8] <http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/400485/kairos-responds-to-accusations-of-anti-semitism-and-renews-call-for-cida-funding-to-be-restored>
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- [30] <http://treealerts.org/region/north-america/2014/06/canadian-journalist-learns-policy-forbids-weather-forecasters-from-addressing-climate-change/>
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