



Campaign against charities absurd

Orillia Today

With a year left in its mandate, the Harper government seems determined to continue its absurd campaign against Canada's charities.

The Canada Revenue Agency is conducting more than 50 audits of charities, forcing them to divert precious financial and administrative resources to audits rather than helping people.

Not surprisingly, some of those audits target environmental organizations that dared to be critical of the oil sands projects in Alberta, "requiring them to turn over emails, memos, letters and a range of other internal documents on threat of losing their charitable status," reported The Canadian Press.

Others are groups fighting poverty and advocating for human rights.

Charities are allowed by law to devote up to 10 per cent of resources to political activities, provided they do not endorse political parties or candidates.

Yet, somehow the Harper Conservatives have determined that these charities are, in reality, hives of left-wing activism and potential tax cheats to boot.

Former journalist Gareth Kirkby, in his recent master's thesis, says Harper's crew is deliberately attempting to muzzle potentially dissenting opinions.

"The data suggest that the current federal government is corrupting Canada's democratic processes by treating as political enemies those civil-society organizations whose contributions to public policy conversations differ from government priorities," Kirkby wrote.

He added: "What is unprecedented is the ... coupling of that rhetoric with action. This action entails specifically politicized use of the associated governmental regulatory body (the Charities Directorate at CRA) to pursue harassing actions seemingly designed to muffle and distract."

Charities are responding to the pressure by being far more circumspect in their public communications.

The CRA, meanwhile, has been granted an additional \$5 million to continue spreading intimidation, anxiety and the waste of resources through 2017.