

SUHARTO'S LAST ACT OF LARCENY

By Daniel Casey

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Stalin and Mao killed millions in the service of their own megalomania. Their crimes are chalked up to communism, while any economic successes are rightly derided as the fruits of violence and misery. General Suharto and his military cronies killed as many as one million Indonesians during the two years he spent maneuvering his way into power, and hundreds of thousands more liquidating his critics and opponents during the rest of his rule. Because his murders were incurred in the service of “stability” and anticommunism, however, today’s papers are happy to give his bloody thirty-two-year military dictatorship and corrupt life a balanced assessment. What’s more, despite the untold blood spilled by Suharto while ruling a country that spans tens of thousands of islands and is home to two hundred million souls, the major Canadian media somehow failed to prepare obituaries for him. Only [the Globe](#) manages to publish an obituary with its own byline, and it offers a fair but tiny glimpse at the titanic corruption, murder and theft that characterized the reign of a man with whom the CIA and Canadian firms were all too happy to do business.

The rest of today’s news sources make do with obits from foreign sources that were apparently better prepared to acknowledge Suharto’s death. The Post runs a shockingly positive obituary from [the Telegraph](#), which goes into great detail cataloguing the growth in GDP over Suharto’s years in power, but spends merely three paragraphs discussing his genocidal suppression of “separatist movements” in East Timor and West Papua—culturally distinct countries that were annexed to Indonesia during Suharto’s tenure, rather than integral parts of Indonesia that attempted to break away—and the Sumatran region of Aceh. [The Citizen](#) runs a reasonably balanced obituary from the Times of London that focuses on Suharto’s fall from power, but acknowledges the “extended period of political stability” that he bought with blood. [The Star](#) lists some of the legal entanglements that Suharto—who went by only one name—got himself into while amassing a \$40-billion fortune for himself and his family. [La Presse](#) goes with an obituary from Agence France-Presse, which notes the US statements praising Indonesia’s “remarkable economic and social development” but is the only piece that quotes one of Suharto’s victims. Budiman Sudjatmiko, who was imprisoned during the dictatorship and is lucky to have escaped Suharto’s “remarkable” rule with his life, told AFP that “his death is a tragedy for all the victims of his crimes, who will never get justice.” In dying a free man, this justice is the last and most precious thing Suharto stole from Indonesia.

THE LEADS:

CBC NEWS: SUNDAY NIGHT: [“Harper to face tough questions as Parliament resumes”](#)

CTV NEWS: [“Sudden Impact: The sudden impact in a winter whiteout”](#)

GLOBE AND MAIL: [“Campbell, McGuinty to push climate agenda”](#)

TORONTO STAR: [“Death of a dictator”](#)

NATIONAL POST: [“Bill’s remarks damage Hillary”](#)

LA PRESSE: [“Quebec closes one-quarter of housing spaces reserved for the mentally ill”](#)

OTTAWA CITIZEN: [“Recession jitters escalate”](#)

THE STRAIGHT GOODS:

Parliament returns to work for a contentious session that will discuss Afghanistan, the economy, the Mulroney/Schreiber affair and the Chalk River reactor dispute. Provincial premiers meet in Vancouver to work out a common front on climate change. Former president Bill Clinton comes under fire for highlighting racial divisions as Barack Obama wins the South Carolina primary.

NEW SESSION, OLD DEBATES

[CBC News: Sunday Night](#) leads, while [CTV News](#), [the Globe](#), [the Post](#), [the Star](#), and [the Citizen](#) go inside with the Afghan mission and the other issues that are likely to provoke sharp debate during the new session of Parliament that starts today. With the NDP and the Bloc firmly

opposed to further Canadian combat in Afghanistan, Prime Minister Stephen Harper will have to get the Liberals onside to assemble the parliamentary majority he needs to extend the mission past February, 2009. The Liberals are thus in an enviable position to make the decision, but will have to explain and defend their choice in the face of profound divisions within their own caucus and the wider public. Liberal leader Stéphane Dion has let deputy leader and former leadership rival Michael Ignatieff—who came to international prominence as an academic calling for more aggressive Western military action against governments that fail to respect human rights—take the point on the Afghan issue, and [the Globe](#) and [the Star](#) both note that Ignatieff took cool aim at Harper during yesterday's interview on CTV's *Question Period*.

Tidy summaries of the other disputes that will be fighting for attention in Ottawa are on offer from CBC News: Sunday Night, the Globe, and the Citizen. The economy is emerging as the major issue of 2008, and Harper will face tough choices between fiscal probity and loud calls to take some kind of action to avoid a downturn and help out the troubled resource and manufacturing sectors. In the Citizen, TD Bank economist David Drummond points out that the minority-government strategy of "economic updates" between formal budgets—a maneuver Harper picked up from Paul Martin—leaves him with little fiscal room to make major funding announcements, even as the federal government continues to rack up big surpluses. Former chief nuclear regulator Linda Keen is scheduled to testify before the natural resources committee tomorrow, which will mark her first public appearance since she was fired over the Chalk River reactor shutdown. Karlheinz Schreiber certainly knows how to get public and political attention, and will be making an appearance before the ethics committee later in the week. These "red flag" issues, as pollster Nik Nanos dubs them in the Globe, will pose a fierce challenge to the Conservatives' wounded communications machine.

SEEKING ENVIRONMENTAL CONSENSUS

[The Globe](#) fronts, while [the Star](#) and [La Presse](#) go inside with the provincial premiers' conference that starts today in Vancouver. The meeting is squarely focused on climate change and environmental issues, as the premiers seem to have judged that the federal Conservatives perceive the environment as a potential weak point, and no rival federal party has managed to successfully identify itself as the green alternative. The premiers believe that, with the federal government racking up another large surplus, Prime Minister Stephen Harper can afford to fund provincial environmental efforts if the premiers present a united front. Tom D'Aquino of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives wrote the premiers a letter outlining corporate Canada's concerns, which take the form of hand-wringing over the "different objectives and often inconsistent policies" pursued by different provinces. The Star and the Globe give prominent play to the letter as a sign of the pressure from various interests to achieve some kind of inter-provincial agreement on basic environmental objectives. British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell is quoted in the Globe as saying that unanimity on tough green issues is a "false hope," and that, instead, the premiers "have to see where we can take concerted action." To do this, the conference will avoid the contentious issue of how to avoid climate change, and work instead on common measures for adapting to it. All three of today's reports identify Alberta as the lone likely holdout, after Premier Ed Stelmach disappointed many with his government's plan to cut emissions sometime in the distant future.

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OBAMA ROMANCE REKINDLED

[The Globe](#) and [the Post](#) front, while [CBC News: Sunday Night](#), [CTV News](#), [the Star](#), [La Presse](#) (not available online), and [the Citizen](#) go inside with Barack Obama's massive victory in the South Carolina primary. Obama finished a whopping twenty-eight points ahead of Hillary Clinton, with 53 percent of the vote, as native son John Edwards came in at a distant third, with 18 percent. African-American voters make up just more than half of the South Carolina Democratic electorate, and Obama won four out of five black votes. [The Globe's John Ibbitson](#) sees this figure and reiterates the traditional view of the Democratic nomination contest as a

race to assemble “solid, ethnically defined bases of support.” Bill Clinton was quick to take a similar tack, comparing Obama’s win with Jesse Jackson’s victories in the same state in the 1984 and 1988 Democratic contests. The subtle jibe was seen as one hit too many, especially when compared with the mellifluous, unifying rhetoric that is Obama’s stock in trade, and both Clintons face a backlash over their frantic efforts to halt the rival campaign. The Clintons’ race-baiting strategy is widely seen as the reason Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy will come down from the fence today, and endorse Obama at a Washington rally, three days after his niece Caroline (sole surviving member of John F. Kennedy’s tragic brood) compared Obama to her revered father in a New York Times opinion piece. Coupled with the media’s unabashed love for Obama, the Kennedy endorsements add further candlepower to the young Illinois senator’s already considerable halo, and [La Presse’s Richard Bérubé](#) nails it when he calls the press love- in “the coronation of Barack Obama-Kennedy.”

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