

# NDP LEADER'S LOSS CAN NEVER BE COMPENSATED

By Satheesan Kumaaran

Give alms to anyone who survived the deadly disease of cancer. The NDP leader Jack Layton, a charismatic leader of Canada's official opposition, lost his battle with cancer on August 22<sup>nd</sup> around 4:45 a.m. at his residence in Toronto at the age of 61. Tamils in Canada and Tamileelam can not forget what he had done when the Tamils in Eelam faced the genocidal war instigated by the Sri Lankan State.

His demise comes just months after leading the left-wing New Democratic Party to its best-ever showing and reshaping Canada's political landscape. Mr. Layton showed compassion towards the oppressive communities. He believed that the Canadian Tamils lived in Canada as second-class citizens just as they lived under the oppressive Sinhala regimes for the last sixty years.

When the Eelam War IV was peaking at the end, nearly 40,000 Tamils were massacred within matters of weeks or perhaps days. The world governments maintained silence. The Canadian government, led by right-wing Conservative Party Stephen Harper, maintained mum. Rather, his government branded the LTTEs terrorists. This warned many Canadian mainstream politicians to remain silent because they did not want to get branded as supporters of a terrorist outfit.

Mr. Layton was born on July 18, 1950, in Montreal of the French-speaking Quebec province. Mr. Layton was raised in nearby Hudson, Quebec, a comfortable and largely Anglophone community. He studied political science at McGill University. In 1970, the family moved to Toronto where Layton attended York University to obtain his MA, PhD in political science. Mr. Layton then became a professor at Ryerson University. He also became a prominent activist for a variety of causes. He wrote several books, including *Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis* and, more recently, a book on general public policy, *Speaking Out*.

At age 19, Layton married his high school sweetheart, Sally Halford, in 1969, with whom he had two children, Mike, currently a Toronto City Councillor, and Sarah. Layton and Halford's marriage ended in divorce in 1985.

Layton first met Olivia Chow in 1985, during an auction at Village by the Grange, where Jack was the auctioneer and Olivia was the translator for the Cantonese

language observers. Mr. Layton married Olivia in 1988. Mr. Layton won the city council election in 1982 and became the favourite son of Toronto.

## Jack Layton: the bold man

Mr. Jack Layton never feared repression by the Harper government. He spoke against the Sri Lankan government and he even met with the NGOs and conducted seminars in support of Eelam Tamils to stop the bloodshed. He managed to get the support of various human rights organizations as well as mainstream politicians.

Mr. Layton was the one who raised a young Tamil Canadian woman into being as a first Canada's Tamil MP. Ms. Rathika of NDP contested in the May 2, 2011, federal election and won. Mr. Layton wanted minority voices heard in the parliament. He worked tirelessly for the empowerment of oppressive communities.

Layton's political instincts, his cheerful personality, and relentless campaigning style propelled the NDP from one of the smallest parties in the House of Commons to the largest opposition party, pushing aside the venerable Liberal Party that had battled the Conservatives for control of Parliament for much of Canadian history.

Layton had been diagnosed with prostate cancer in late 2009. Yet, he continued working throughout his treatment. Earlier this year, he also battled a broken hip. Layton used a cane for much of his time on the campaign trail this spring as he led the NDP to its historic victory on May 2, 2011.

But on July 25<sup>th</sup>, looking gaunt and drained of his usual energy, Layton announced to the country that he was fighting a new form of cancer and was taking time off for treatment. The bold man fought many battles, but he was not able to conquer the deadly cancer disease which took the life of Mr. Layton while his family looked on helplessly.

After heralding the death of Layton, tens of thousands of people mourned his death. The Canadian government announced that Layton's death would be honoured as a State funeral as it is a heritage to offer for the governor-generals, prime ministers and ministers. Tens of thousands of people tributed the late politician, their support flowing from across Canada: from Twitter to local radio shows.

Political allies and foes alike praised Layton's personal qualities. "On behalf of all Canadians, I salute Jack's contribution to public life, a contribution that will be sorely missed," said Prime Minister Stephen Harper. "I know one thing: Jack gave his fight against cancer everything he had. Indeed, Jack never backed down from any fight."

## The man never be forgotten

Ms. Alexa McDonough was the NDP leader with 13 MPs when Mr. Layton was replaced in 2003. The NDP was ranked fourth in the Parliament. Mr. Layton helped the party to obtain 19 seats in the 2004<sup>th</sup> election. He worked hard to win in 29 seats in the 2006 election

Under Mr. Layton's leadership, NDP managed to swept 37 seats in 2008 election. He created a history in Canadian politics in 2011, when his party swept 103 seats becoming the main Opposition in Parliament.

Canadians shed their differences, paying their respects by attending his funeral in large numbers. The funeral attendance shows that Mr. Layton will not be forgetton. He will be remain a notable leader in Canada's history.

Canadians are grieving for this great leader, including the ethnic Canadian Tamils respect to the late leader as more than a parliamentarian; he was a dear friend who supported the Tamils in many ways during difficult times and often engaged with community members to gain a better understanding of their concerns.

Layton and his party played an instrumental role in organizing the emergency debate during the war two years ago in Sri Lanka; and more recently, after Layton had consulted Tamil community, the NDP passed a resolution at their policy convention in Vancouver calling on the United Nations to establish an independent, international, and impartial mechanism to ensure truth, accountability and justice in Sri Lanka.

Tamil Canadians will forever remember Jack Layton. They will keep Mr. Layton in their hearts and souls forever. For some, Mr .Layton was a advocate for human rights abuses taken anywhere in the world; for some, Mr. Layton was a instrumental in becoming a leader like him; for some, Mr. Layton was a man with mission with clear vision; for some, Mr. Layton was a great leader; and for others, Mr. Layton was a true friend.

Of course, no one will forget Mr. Layton. His last letter to Canadians, penned just hours before his death, read: "Canada is a great country, one of the hopes of the world. We can be a better one - a country of greater equality, justice, and opportunity. We can build a prosperous economy and a society that shares its benefits more fairly. We can look after our seniors. We can offer better futures for our children. We can do our part to save the world's environment. We can restore our good name in the world."

Mr. Layton's heartbreaking words continued: "My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world."

A man with clear vision has just left the world, but he will never leave the hearts and minds of all Canadians. Tamils in Canada and Tamileelam will keep Mr. Jack Layton in their hearts and minds forever. Mr. Layton, your compassion, integrity, and passion for a more just society has inspired many of us. You will be missed by all of us forever and may you rest in peace.

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*Courtesy: The Tamil Mirror*