Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Recent Canadian Immigration and Refugee Law

Canada is not a country of revolutions, so dramatic political changes have to do. Rarely has there been a change at the national level as dramatic as the one that occurred in October 2015, when the Conservative government of Stephen Harper that had been in office for almost a decade was defeated by the Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau. In many respects, the fulcrum of the election were the parties’ positions on citizenship, immigration and refugee law, and cultural identity.

The 2015 election may have been a case of ‘living by the sword and dying by the sword.’ The Conservative government engaged itself more with refugee and immigration matters than any other area of social policy, developing a discourse of protecting Canada from the ‘stranger’, mostly in the form of refugee (asylum) claimants depicted as defrauding the legal system and posing a threat to national security. For the first time, Canadian citizenship was made revocable. The wearing of the niqab at citizenship ceremonies was forbidden. Then, in the midst of an election in which these issues were expected to help the government retain power, the Syrian refugee crisis occurred. And to the surprise of many, the Canadian electorate rejected the Conservatives’ immigration agenda.

This talk will review these events by looking at legislative measures adopted in the three years leading up to the 2015 election, the fraught relationship between the Supreme Court of Canada and the government in that period, and developments since October 2015.

Wednesday, April 13, 2016
Buffet Lunch at 12 noon followed by Lecture at approximately 12:20pm. 223 Moses Hall.