

Editorial ? Horwath got a B+, Was she expecting anything more?

Andrea Horwath remains as leader of Ontario's New Democrats, as if they really had a choice in the matter.

It is true that we had a general election earlier this year, and Horwath's party went from having the balance of power in a minority to being the third party in a majority, meaning it has next to no power.

New Democrats should not grieve too much. Horwath did not keep the Liberals to another minority, but the Progressive Conservatives under Tim Hudak didn't do a whole lot better.

No matter, the NDP faithful got together over the weekend and some 77 per cent of them endorsed her leadership. Granted, that's not an overwhelming majority for someone to receive when they are essentially running against themselves, but the reality is it's about the best that can be expected.

Another reality is it's not really Horwath's fault that the NDP seems to always occupy third party status, either at Queen's Park or on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. That's just the way things are.

The socialist message that the NDP promotes appeals to many in our society, but we have a hard time believing they represent anything close to a majority. They have their core support, and always will.

But unless the electorate has some urge to be especially bold, we submit the party is going to have a hard time moving up in the standings.

Granted, it does sometimes happen.

In 1990, Ontario voters were turned off by Premier David Peterson, and Mike Harris was still pretty much an unknown when it came to the leadership of the Progressive Conservatives. So enough voters decided to back Bob Rae and the NDP that he found himself with a majority. But that certainly wasn't the start of any kind of dynasty, as the results of the 1995 clearly showed. Rae and company found themselves back in the third party position.

The pattern is pretty much the same for the NDP at the federal level.

True, there have been occasions when they have surprised a lot of people and pulled impressive results from an election campaign.

The last campaign in 2011 was a great example. The New Democrats under the late Jack Layton put on a surge and ended up constituting Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition in the House of Commons.

Again, we don't think that was a case of a dynasty waiting to happen. It was a matter of the Liberal party that was wallowing under the ineffective leadership of Michael Ignatieff, combined with Layton's very effective and inspirational style. We fear that New Democrats hoping to build on that in next year's federal election are in for a serious disappointment. For one thing, we think Justin Trudeau is going to prove to be a much better leader than Ignatieff, although whether he can knock off Stephen Harper and the Conservatives remains to be seen. And with all due respect to Thomas Mulcair, the fact is he's no Jack Layton.

New Democrats do, and always will, have a place in our political system. It's not the place they would like, but that place is secure.