

Majority, minority, or coalition?

EDITORIAL

IT WILL BE INTERESTING to see what effect, if any, Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer's call for the electorate to give his party a majority of Commons seats will have.

The valid point he made was that only by electing a Conservative majority will voters wind up with a government that will be true to conservative values. By electing a minority Liberal government they would wind up with Justin Trudeau as its ?spokesman but the NDP calling the shots.?

Of course, that assumes that the Liberals could obtain a majority only by coming to some agreement with the NDP and leader Jagmeet Singh. There also is a possibility that the Grits could secure a majority through a pact with Elizabeth May's Greens.

Whatever the case, this is going to be an election like none other. Gone are the days when either the Liberals or Conservatives are going to have the roughly 40 per cent of the popular vote needed to produce a majority in our first-past-the-post races that can regularly see ridings won by candidates opposed by two-thirds of those voting.

In 2015, the Liberals secured a comfortable majority with fewer than 40 per cent of the votes cast and did so because many who normally voted for the New Democrats switched to the Liberals in hopes of preventing Stephen Harper's Tories from winning a third term.

This time, the normal inclination of voters to award a party ?two kicks at the can? ended with the SNC-Lavalin affair, which if nothing else demonstrated that Justin Trudeau and others close to him grossly underestimated the determination of their attorney-general to support the decision of her director of public prosecutions to put the engineering firm to trial for bribing Libyan government leaders to get contracts, rather than have a ?deferred prosecution? scenario that would see the firm merely admit to the bribes and face a modest fine instead of losing the right to bid on federal government contracts.

Now, with only three days of campaigning left, we have the unusual spectre of only one party, the Conservatives, calling for a majority government.

To us, the reason is pretty obvious. Apart from the apparent deadlock between them and the Liberals, the Conservatives are alone in promising tax cuts and a balanced budget in their first four-year term. The Liberals, New Democrats and Greens all seem to see it as more important to take action against man-made climate change, even if that means putting a price on pollution through imposition of carbon taxes.

In the circumstances, the main difference between the three parties is in how far they would go, with the NDP as usual wanting to go farther and faster than the Liberals and seeing no problem in paying the cost through higher taxes on the corporations and wealthy Canadians.

With the Tories and Grits each getting support from about one third of the decided voters, that means the NDP, Green, Bloc Québécois and People's Party will get the other third, with the NDP and Bloc the main apparent beneficiaries of last week's all candidates debate.

Since Conservative supporters tend to show up at the polls more than supporters of any other party, and particularly than the Liberal-inclined, we think the most likely scenario is a House of Commons with the Conservatives having the most seats but not enough for a majority. The Liberals will finish second, the NDP third and the Greens will do a lot better than in 2015 but still fall short of 10 seats in the 338-seat Commons.

Should that be the case, the Conservatives might well ask the Governor-General to declare them winners, giving them a chance to govern to the point of introducing non-controversial legislation. However, either a non-confidence vote in the Commons or an agreement between the Liberals and NDP could frustrate any such attempt.

A more likely course would be for the Liberals to continue in office based on the reality that there isn't much difference between their platform and those of the NDP and Greens.

Of course, the other option ? never tried before in Canada ? would be a coalition agreement that would result in some NDP MPs getting cabinet posts.

The main advantage in such a result would be the relative security it would produce, with party whips able to ensure passage of legislation. The principal disadvantage would come four years from now, when the two parties would presumably have to part ways in the next election.