

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Mulcair being given a free pass

Two things you learn as you age are a)- how little you really know and b)- how much of what you did know you've forgotten. Yet some things do stand out among the millions of memories and one of them, for me, is the (in)famous mid-1980s Maclean's Magazine cover featuring a picture of then federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent with the headline: 'Canada's Next Prime Minister'? Obviously, it didn't happen. Broadbent never brought his party higher than third. But the overwrought NDP prognostications then ? and now ? were based on public opinion polls showing that Broadbent was more popular than both prime minister Brian Mulroney and Liberal leader John Turner.

In fact, if you were to believe the polls, Mulroney was widely hated and had little, if any, chance of repeating his 1984 sweep in the upcoming 1988 election, much the same attitude which prevails among the chattering classes today when it comes to Prime Minister Stephen Harper's outlook for the election this fall.

For his part, Broadbent was recently quoted saying that current NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair's surge in the polls ? and the resulting softening of apparent support for Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau ? is nothing like the situation in 1987 and 1988. No siree, says Broadbent, this is the real deal.

?If I were a Liberal, which I am not, I would be concerned about this group of people who are opposed to Harper, and going back and forth between ourselves and the Liberals, (and who) are now increasingly saying Tom and the NDP are the people that can and should form the government.?

Naturally you'd expect Broadbent to say that. After all, he's been on that side of the political fence his entire life, so he's not about to offer any non-partisan tidbits for the media to feed on.

But it is interesting that ? based on polls, despite the fact they've shown an amazing lack of accuracy the last few years ? much of the media have turned away from their previous love-in with Trudeau and began to tout the fortunes of Mulcair as the man most likely to unseat Harper, something most journalists desperately want to see, just as they did during Mulroney's era (me included, by the way.)

So if the media is going to believe that Mulcair could in fact be Canada's next prime minister, then in addition to making the claim surely they have a responsibility to actually study just what, in fact, Mulcair would do should he capture the top prize.

The NDP has long benefitted from the widespread notion that because they're unlikely to win, it really doesn't matter how much their proposals would cost. I remember Broadbent standing at a navy base in British Columbia during one campaign promising to make Canada the leading merchant marine nation in the world ? a title it used to own ? by promising to buy a fleet of ships. Each ship at the time would have cost taxpayers hundreds of millions, but nobody bothered with that because, after all, what were the chances of Broadbent having to deliver?

Well, if journalists ? and other political players ? really think Mulcair could become prime minister then isn't it time for some tough questions directed toward the NDP leader?

How much would his zany plan to restore full home mail delivery cost, for example? And why is it needed since, obviously only older farts like me still actually mail things the old-fashioned way.

Let me cite just one paragraph in a lengthy piece on the subject by National Post writer Michael Den Tandt as exhibit A.

'Since last year, Mulcair has rolled out one policy after another, the better to highlight his pledge to provide 'competent, responsible, public administration.' As prime minister, he would restore funding to the CBC, raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour, cut small business taxes to nine per cent from the current 11 per cent, have health transfers to the provinces grow six per cent annually in perpetuity, and establish \$15-a-day daycare nationwide. And that's just a smattering.?

Indeed, Ben Tandt goes on to cite many other examples of Mulcair's political promises, all the while noting 'there is no balance sheet yet in evidence.?

If journalists really believe Mulcair can win in the fall ? and even if they don't ? it's time to stop giving him the free pass that the NDP has become accustomed to.

They're not doing it (as much) for Trudeau. And certainly not for Harper. If Mulcair is a real player here then his statistics matter. After all, Utopia doesn't come cheaply. But talk does.

