

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Premature to speculate on outcome

Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau is very firm: asked recently if he would consider a coalition government with the NDP to unseat the dreaded Tories, he said that he might be open to the idea but only if Thomas Mulcair was not the leader of the NDP.

He told Canadian Press he is not comfortable with Mulcair's 'old-style' way of doing politics. But given time to think more about it ? since current polls (which mean next to nothing six months ahead of an actual election) show there is a possibility of a minority government emerging ? and perhaps realizing that Mulcair actually is the NDP leader and will be come the election ? Trudeau backed off his earlier waffle and said there is 'absolutely no chance, not even when pigs fly.'

So, as in many cases with Trudeau the Younger, we're left not really knowing what his position is. But the prospects of a minority cause journalists and other political watchers to salivate over the endless possibilities. After all, what else is there to write about until the actual election?

There is a basic theme in all that in order to unseat those dastardly Tories ? and even more dastardly Stephen Harper ? the combined forces of the Liberals and NDP could restore Canada to whatever it is the Harper haters think we've lost since the Liberals were in power. The major thaw in the thinking is that a)- Tories are on the 'right' and b)- Liberals and New Democrats are on the 'left'. So what's wrong with that logic, you ask? Well, it's generally true that the Tories appeal to the right-of-centre crowd and the NDP appeal to the left-of-centre crowd. Not exclusively, but enough to be a useful comparison point.

What isn't accurate, however, is to conclude that Liberals are left of centre. Some are. But many aren't. There is a large mass of Liberals who, if they thought the NDP was in a position to run the country, would rather vote Tory than risk the socialists.

Likewise, there are many left-leaning Liberals who, if they think the NDP is the only choice to stop Harper, would not hesitate to go that route.

But the real point of this is that speculation about post-election positioning, while fun, is total nonsense.

Nobody knows until the votes are counted, particularly this far ahead of an election. The Tories won 166 seats last time out. The NDP, under the late Jack Layton, won an all-time high for them of 103 seats. The Liberals had an all-time low for them of 34 seats. The Bloc Quebecois was reduced to four seats and the Green party ? which gets favored media coverage as if it were a real force to be reckoned with ? won a single seat. One.

In the next election, there will be an additional 30 seats, many of them in areas of the countries where the Tories are traditionally strong. Again, given that they are new seats with no direct electoral history, it's anybody's guess for the most part.

It is fair to assume that Trudeau's Liberals will do much better this time than they did in the last election. They can hardly do worse. But at whose expense will they increase their seats?

In Quebec, they're going head-to-head against the NDP in seats where the Tories aren't a factor anyway. Indeed, despite being written off by most of the media as a hopeless case in Quebec, the Tories are showing signs of picking up a few seats there. Not many, but given the closeness of the polls every seat could be important. In Ontario, where the Liberals bombed last time out, they should do much better. But again, at whose expense?

Well, it depends which part of Ontario you look at. In many of the big urban areas they're duking it out with the NDP. In other areas the Tories are the ones they have to beat. And so it goes.

All three national leaders have their strengths and weaknesses. All three enjoy pockets of unquestioning support and unquestioning opposition. But as the party in power ? as the Liberals knew well in the decades when they ruled the roost ? the government has numerous advantages when it comes to elections, and given Harper's proven experience as a campaigner ? as opposed to both Trudeau and Mulcair, neither of whom has conducted a national campaign ? it's absurdly premature to speculate about the ultimate results.

But then, it's still a fun exercise, even if it's totally meaningless.

