

Claire Hoy ? Trudeau surpassed Mulcair



It should be instructive to students of politics that two federal political parties hosted major internal events on the weekend. The NDP, under newish leader Thomas Mulcair, spent the weekend in Montreal trying to retreat from ? dare we say it? ? promoting the idea that they are ?socialists.?

The Liberals, on the other hand, finished voting for their new leader and, as everyone expected, Trudeau the Younger, or Justin to the unwashed, overwhelmingly defeated five other candidates.

Here's what is instructive about these two events.

Since the NDP, as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, controls 100 seats in the Commons (64 behind the ruling Tories), and the once-mighty Liberals are in a distant third place with just 35 seats, you would think the bulk of the coverage from the weekend would have highlighted the NDP.

But, as you likely know, the NDP machinations were given short shrift by the media, while the ascension of Justin Trudeau was heralded ? overhyped, actually ? as, to cite the adoring Toronto Star, the launch of a new ?dynasty.?

The lesson to be learned from this is that Trudeau, who certainly acquitted himself well during the long leadership campaign, has become a legitimate political threat to be considered by his two main rivals, but more so for the NDP than the Tories.

The mere fact of his long-expected leadership victory was given far more political significance than the policy conference of the party that, as things currently stand, holds the informal position of government-in-waiting.

In most situations, the reverse would be true, but it seems that Trudeau, for all his youthful vigour and attractiveness, has already had a profound impact upon our future political realities.

No doubt Harper and the Tories are watching this development with keen interest as well as the NDP.

But it says here that the Tories have less to fear from the return of Trudeauism than from the NDP.

Why? Well, for starters, 57 of the NDP seats ? more than half of them ? are in Quebec, not because of a philosophical revolution in Quebec, but because the late NDP leader Jack Layton touched a chord with Quebecers in the last election.

For decades, during the years where the Liberals were seen by many ? especially by themselves ? as Canada's ?natural governing party,? the Liberals used to win almost every seat in Quebec. There were exceptions ? Brian Mulroney for one ? but for the most part they would sweep Quebec, sometimes winning every single seat there.

Layton changed that, but it's unlikely that Mulcair, a bit of a cold fish ? to be kind ? can maintain that affection the voters held for Layton.

Enter Trudeau. In the last election, the Liberals won just eight ? count 'em, eight ? of Quebec's 75 seats, a horrible showing for their brand. (The Tories won five and will do well just to hang onto them next time.)

What that means in real time is that Quebec will turn into a battle between Trudeau and Mulcair, with Trudeau almost guaranteed to regain a ton of the traditional Liberal seats in that province.

That won't hurt Harper's chances, since he has little to lose in Quebec, anyway. But it sure won't help the NDP maintain second place, let alone win an election.

Another major factor in the next election is that there will be an additional 30 seats up for grabs, the vast majority of them in areas of Tory strength, a reality which has to help the Tories maintain their governing position.

(Twelve of those seats are in Alberta and B.C., where both Liberal and Trudeau are still four-letter words for the most part.)

What's more, Trudeau is bound to appeal to younger upwardly mobile urban voters in the downtown areas of both Toronto and Vancouver, both traditionally areas where the NDP is strong and the Tories aren't. So here again, Trudeau's candidacy will hurt the NDP more than it will the Tories.

No doubt Trudeau can recapture some of the current Tory seats in Ontario, but with the addition of 15 new Ontario seats ? mostly in strong Tory areas ? they'll no doubt survive it.

All of which is to say that it is not surprising that a guy picked to head a distant third party has already outshone the guy leading a party with almost three times as many seats and hoping to be the next prime minister.