

What about having a coalition?

EDITORIAL

IF RECENT POLLING is any indication, the October 21 election will result in, for the first time since 1867, no one party having a majority in either the House of Commons or the Senate.

The polling has both the governing Liberals and the Conservatives in a virtual tie, enjoying the support of roughly three in 10 eligible voters. The New Democratic and Green parties are running neck and neck for third place, with Bloc Québécois and Maxine Bernier's new People's Party of Canada (PPC) well behind.

With a little more than two months remaining before election day, it's anyone's guess as to the outcome, but for some reason all the pundits seem to be portraying the issue as simply whether we'll wind up with a minority government.

However, there should be some thought given to the alternative of our being governed by a coalition of at least two of the current six parties.

Although virtually unknown anywhere in North America, coalitions are almost routine in Israel and some European countries with a multiplicity of political parties.

As matters stand, three of our six parties (Liberal, NDP and Green) are currently seen as centre/left on the political spectrum, with the Conservative and People's parties well to the right and Bloc Québécois only in Quebec.

If the Conservatives wind up with the most Commons seats they might well look at bringing Mr. Bernier back into the Tory fold if that produced a majority.

On the other hand, a Liberal minority government would be assured a much longer life if it garnered a majority by forming a coalition with the NDP and/or Greens.

One thing that seems fairly obvious is that the Conservatives need a majority more than the Liberals, if only because their platform will likely be markedly different from all the other parties save for the PPC.

Although none of the parties has disclosed its election platform, we suspect the Liberal, NDP and Green ones will all promise tougher gun controls and tough action to combat climate change.

The Conservatives will likely be alone in promising an end to carbon pricing, portraying the carbon tax as anti-business and harmful to families in provinces where the tax is being imposed.

We wouldn't be surprised to see all six parties commit themselves to reducing or eliminating the federal deficits, although it's unlikely any of them would wipe them out in a single term in office.

It will be interesting to see whether any of the parties commits to electoral reform, the Liberals having failed to take actions that might well have benefited them.

Certainly, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau must see irony in the other parties reminding him of the broken promise when some observers have noted the Liberals' likelihood of benefitting from an end to the 'first past the post' system.

Although a pure proportional representation system would merely guarantee that no party would ever get a majority of seats, the alternative of a preferential ballot would seemingly benefit a middle-of-the-road party.

That would be because both conservative and left-wing voters would tend to list the local Liberal candidate as their second choice.

Whatever the case, there would clearly be benefits in coalitions beyond the prospect of greater longevity.

Any coalition would obviously involve the top people in all the parties being in the federal cabinet, which might well have gender parity and more easily feature more visible minorities and indigenous members.

Another possible benefit would be the insistence of the smaller party in the coalition demanding a reduced role for the Prime Minister's Office, which has turned out to be a challenge for both the current government and the one that preceded it.

And related to that demand would be one for a greater role for individual MPs and more free votes on controversial measures.

It would be interesting to see whether, in the event a minority government loses a vote of confidence, the Governor-General refuses to permit an election being called before an attempt is made to form a coalition.