

# Canada/Quebec: The federal elections and the NDP - Poor Player, Poor Loser

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The result of the October 19 vote was as cruel for the NDP as the repeated polls of the previous few weeks. Tom Mulcair's incompetent spin doctors dishonestly attribute it to the 'niqab effect'. That's a big lie, as the decline had begun long before. In fact, neither the doubtful spin doctors nor Mulcair himself, still less his rather apologetic herd of followers, are capable of calling it like it is, or of stifling the cant even when they know they are talking nonsense.

This is not new. Since Mulcair became leader everything has been destroyed in this party, starting with political intelligence and the right to think. In reality, Mulcair campaigned as he has conducted his professional and political life all along, essentially on the right - from his role as counsel for Alliance Quebec, rolling back Law 101, to his role as a minister and pit-bull MNA on behalf of Jean Charest. But even then Mulcair has a particular personality: he is a shark prepared to eat anything, with the supreme conviction that he is always right.

## The Taming of a Party

However, it would be cheap psychology to blame everything on Mulcair. The main criticism one can make of the NDP is that it agreed to play his game. It was clear that Mulcair wanted to transform the party into his own machine. MPs and candidates who wanted to speak out (there were not many) were called to order, such as Nycole Turmel, Linda McQuaig, Libby Davies and a few others. Meanwhile, Mulcair expected the rest to peacefully go about their business as 'yes men' and 'yes women', mere cheerleaders. To be sure, most NDP MPs supported their constituents in their problems with the government administration, somewhat like social workers of a special kind. Occasionally, bold ones like Alexandre Boulerice or Yvon Godin were allowed to sound off against Harper's atrocities. But overall, this party of social-democratic origin, weakened by years of stagnation and equivocation, was unable to define its identity, build a solid base and propose an alternative.

## A Damning Record

This balance sheet is particularly evident on some key issues. On the Quebec national question, the NDP has failed to adopt a strategic line, notwithstanding some feeble and episodic attempts. This was most obvious in Mulcair's doubletalk. In Canada, he presented himself as the champion in the fight against "separatism," the man who, as he said during the election campaign, had crushed the Bloc Québécois behind the federal state in both referendums - without mentioning, of course, that the 1995 "victory" had been a huge fraud. But in Quebec, Mulcair promoted the "Sherbrooke Declaration" which said, in the end, that a vote of 50 per cent + 1 would constitute the "clear majority" demanded by the Supreme Court of Canada. Some naive people could wax enthusiastic, but in reality the straightforward question remained on the table: Do the Quebec people have the right to self-determination, yes or no? There are not 57 ways to say that, it is not a question of arithmetic. Now we learn that the "Orange wave" of 2011 in no way altered the NDP's credibility deficit in Quebec, it was simply the result of happenstance.

## **A Social Democracy that is less and less 'Social' and less and less 'Democratic'**

The second pitfall: The NDP failed to propose a program even worthy of the social-democratic ambitions of its founders. In the early 1970s that perspective was closed off by David Lewis, when the party leadership fought the coalition of trade unionists and intellectuals known as the Waffle. Subsequently, with some variance here and there, the NDP slid toward "good governance," particularly in the provincial governments it headed in British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario; in the latter Bob Rae, like Mulcair a Liberal disguised as NDP, ruined the party. More recently, the turn was sharper. As in England with the Labour party or in France with the Socialist party, the social democracy has become "social liberal." The "new" NDP could strut about as a "good administrator" according to the criteria of the big banks and hope to court the centrist vote traditionally captured by the Liberals. But almost everywhere this evolution led the NDP to severe defeats. In the October 19 election campaign the NDP, overtaken on its left by the Liberal party (it was there for the asking!), lost a large part of its attraction, with the result we now know.

### **What party, for what interests?**

Finally, the NDP failed to connect with the popular movements. Although the party's constitution gives some weight to the unions, the NDP remained fairly distant from the workers' demands to which it sometimes gave lip service. Nowadays the popular movements find that the NDP is at best a "non-enemy," rarely an ally, and never a partner. Under Mulcair, this gap has increased. The leader never went to the trouble to consult the many movements defending human rights. He had a completely episodic relationship with the First Nations. We never saw him in Quebec during the big popular demonstrations, for example, of the Carrés Rouges in the spring of 2012. Did he say a single word in support of the students' demands? That would probably have put him at odds with his friends in the Quebec Liberal party.

### **A totally wrong calculation**

For Mulcair, this is normal. The popular movement is not his world, it is not his environment, he does not believe in it. But for the NDP, the consequences of this attitude are of the utmost gravity. Without close links to the popular movement, the party is condemned to marginality. In Quebec, in any case, the popular layers simply said to themselves, if we're going to cast a "strategic" vote against Harper, we may as well vote for the one who has a chance of winning. From a completely superficial "orange wave" we went to a "red wave" that was equally superficial. In the end, we are left with a party in decline, without a soul, with very few members in Quebec, and without a perspective. As for Mulcair, it seems he will continue as before. It is 'his' party. He is effective in Parliament at raising hell and intimidating his adversaries, which gives the totally false impression that this venerable place is important in the political process (it is not). A few headlines, and then we go on to other things. Some call that "democracy."

### **While waiting to become an ambassador...**

I was not surprised to see Mulcair cling to his position after the debacle of October 19. He is a professional politician, I don't think he knows how to do anything else in his life. He might, as his predecessors have done, agree to be appointed ambassador, or why not "governor general," to boast about the "best country in the world" (Mulcair really thinks that). But Trudeau has so many friends whose debts and promises he must repay, so Tom may have to wait a while. Meanwhile, he will remain in his comfortable and well paid position. Unless a Canadian Jeremy Corbyn emerges, like a rabbit out of a hat. But as a rule the magicians are going to tell you that the rabbit does not exist.

As a final note, there is a positive "collateral effect" to the NDP's downfall in Quebec. For some

months Mulcair and the handful of persons who are involved in the Quebec NDP were concocting the launch of a provincial NDP. These clowns thought the “orange wave” would sweep all before it, and – as Mulcair hoped – eradicate the Quebec sovereigntist movement, on both the right (the PQ) and the left (Québec Solidaire). But now, at least in the short term, they will have no time to come and hassle us further.

Also, I hear some friends in Canada say they are going to campaign to get rid of Mulcair. I wish them the best of luck. Mulcair at least knows how to do something: to intimidate and threaten. He will be a formidable enemy for those who want to reform the NDP.

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\* Translation Richard Fidler.

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