



EDITORIAL

“FAIR PLAY AND DAYLIGHT”

The electoral aftershocks will continue

BY WALTER ROBINSON

Historic and tectonic best describe Monday's election results.

The victors and vanquished are self-evident: Conservatives and the NDP win, Liberals and the Bloc Québécois lose, while Greens break even.

When the 41st Parliament opens around May 30 with the election of a Conservative speaker, followed by a Throne Speech and budget, the aftershocks of “#elxn41” will reverberate much longer.

Stephen Harper joins Sir John A. Macdonald and John Diefenbaker as one of just three Conservative leaders to earn three successive governments. With 39.62 per cent of the popular vote and 167 seats in the House of Commons, Harper has silenced critics who said he could never surpass the coveted 155-seat majority threshold.

The NDP surge from Quebec did indeed spill over into Ontario, but three-way vote splits, especially in the GTA, favoured Conservative candidates.

Looking ahead, Harper must fill some cabinet holes left by losses in Quebec, potentially reward a few high-profile newcomers, and adjust cabinet's composition to account for his government's new majority, with particular attention to Ontario.

Look for a moderate number of faces to change around the cabinet table, perhaps as early as next week.

In keeping with Monday's remarks about being the government for all Canadians, expect a calmer, more measured and patient tonality in terms of the prime minister's own demeanour and selection of key government and caucus leaders. And this is the real “hidden agenda” that will stem from this majority government: a patient confidence and approach that will be a welcome change from the uber-partisanship (from all parties) that has characterized the last three minority parliaments.

However, the broader national unity tensions of electing a majority government with just six Conservative MPs from Quebec are unknown and will play themselves out in the months and years ahead on Parli-

ment Hill and in Quebec City.

Speaking of *la belle province*, Jack Layton and the NDP deserve full credit for their shift from a traditional NDP-issues campaign to a more positive, leader-centric and policy-light narrative right after the debates. Left-of-centre voters opted for Layton in spades (102 seats on 30.6 national support) to oppose the Conservatives.

The biggest challenge for Layton is also found in Quebec. He has to manage a caucus with basically 60 per cent of its MPs from one province coupled with his campaign musings about reopening the Constitution. Most of his Quebec MPs have no political experience or comprehension of federal politics and, let's be charitable, bring varied life experiences to their new roles. Moreover, his orange surge across Quebec could easily disappear in four years — remember the ADQ blip in 2007 — just as quickly as it materialized in the last month.

More fundamentally, the realignment of Canada's left has begun in earnest. With the Liberals humbled to 34 seats and just 18.9 per cent na-

tional support, this situation is akin to the decimation of the PC Party in 1993 and the decade-long rebuilding and reunification of the political right that followed. The party of Laurier, King, Pearson and Chrétien struggled to save the proverbial furniture while the house burned down.

Ironically if not cruelly, Michael Ignatieff exceeded expectations and ran a good tour, delivered well on the stump and connected with the Canadians he met. Nonetheless, the party's failure was two-fold: first, messaging was erratic, vacillating almost daily from policy planks to the latest inside-baseball political process story and second, they ran the same campaign that they've run for three consecutive elections: We're the default option because Conservatives can't be trusted and the NDP will never get anywhere close to power, so don't waste your vote on them.

It's tired, trite, false and ineffective.

With Ignatieff losing his own seat and resigning, it's a triple-whammy of bad news for Liberals. They will be hobbled by campaign debt, mired in a leadership fight — as only Liberals know how to do with nasty aplomb — and will likely en-

ter #elxn42 with limited funds, thus perpetuating their debt woes.

To round out of this trifecta, the Conservatives are poised to thankfully phase-out the per-vote public subsidy to political parties over four years.

As for the Bloc Québécois, humiliated to four seats, they are a protest party with a divisive future behind them. However, the Quebec sovereignty movement is a two-headed hydra. The Parti Québécois is poised to win the next provincial election if present public sentiment endures so writing the obituary for the national unity file would be premature.

Green party leader Elizabeth May made history and won a seat, but with no party status and future taxpayer subsidies set to evaporate slowly, her victory might be pyrrhic in the extreme.

In summary, as a partisan former Conservative candidate, I'm ecstatic. As a democrat, not so much. Voter turnout was an abysmal 61.4 per cent. With almost 40 per cent of voters deciding to pass on choosing who will govern them, there is much work to do.

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