

The Canadian election

A pre-Election Day assessment of the Harper era - The Globe & Mail's Jeffrey Simpson concluded his October 17th column as follows : "The Harper Party made many philosophical judgments that were aberrant to true conservative thinking. It forgot that the job of a conservative is to "conserve", which means (*or ought he have used "includes"?*) the physical heritage of the environment. It neglected to think of society as an organic whole and played wedge politics where politically useful. It forgot the conservative credo that power should be exercised with caution, and checked where necessary, and instead concentrated power in one man's hands as never before, seeing enemies everywhere, butting heads with the courts and officers of Parliament, and focusing on the party 'base' rather than on society as a whole."

A post-Election Day assessment of why the Harper era came to an end - "The Conservatives effectively targeted their base but were unable to deliver their message and explain their policies to the rest of the Canadian population" - Harper's Finance Minister Joe Oliver (*the Conservative Party's campaign brain trust chose to ignore the findings of a poll very early in the campaign that their party was almost nobody's second choice; this is borne out by recent comments by former Alberta Education-, Health-, & Finance-, Minister Ron Liepert, now a rookie Conservative MP who won his Calgary - Signal Hill seat with 60+% voter support that "The party didn't want to hear that Harper wasn't popular"; as he found, during his door knocking in his constituency during the campaign, even among those who were planning to vote Conservative (which he said "really surprised me because I'd thought in Calgary he was almost godlike."*)

The most encouraging aspect of this election - Voter turnout, at 68%, was the highest in over two decades, in part due to higher turnout among indigenous-, & younger- people. And the most astounding, & from a democratic perspective most positive, aspect is that of the new House of Commons now 338 members, over 200 (i.e. 60%) are newcomers (incl. fourteen former MPs who made comeback), most of them survivors of, sometimes hard-fought, 'primaries' at the constituency level - *a result never, ever even remotely imaginable under the excessively costly, heavily gerrymandered & vested interest-dominated US system, or under any self-perpetuating PR (Proportional Representation) system in which party hacks determine candidate lists.*

A leavening of 'old hands' among the rookies - While by definition, since the Liberals went from 36 to 188 seats, most of the neophyte MPs will be on the government benches, Prime Minister Trudeau will have the benefit of having at least a baker's dozen of, mostly sexagenarian, "old hands" in his caucus from every one of each of the four regions of Canada. They include former Finance Minister Ralph Goodale (age 66, Regina, with 27 years experience in the House), former Liberal Chief Whip Mauril Belanger (60, Ottawa-Vanier, 21), former Financial Times-, and Globe and Mail-, Deputy Editor Chrystia Freeland (47, Toronto University-Rosedale, 2), one-time RBC Chief Economist John McCallum (65, Markham-Thornhill, 14), former Liberal Party Leader Stéphane Dion (60, Montreal Saint Laurent-Cartierville, 19), former astronaut Mark Garneau (66, Westmount-Ville Marie, 7), farmer & former Solicitor-General Wayne Easter (66m PEI Malbeque, 22) and former Conservative MP Bill Casey (70, Nova Scotia Cumberland-Colchester, 24)¹.

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All of whose previous House experience between 1983 & 2007 had been as a Conservative MP. But in that year he was ejected from that party for voting, in a minority government setting, against its 2007 Budget since he objected to it proposing, contrary to the Atlantic Accord signed in 1985 between

Trudeau's dumbest campaign promise - That his Cabinet would have equal numbers of both sexes. For the Liberal caucus will have 138 men & 50 women (at 26.6% of his caucus ever so slightly above the average or the House as a whole). Over the years already the need for a 'fair' regional representation of Ministerial posts has led to the creation of many superfluous "junior" cabinet posts & a degree of 'dumbing down' the average quality of the Cabinet as merit was subjugated to regional balance. And his promise, if he were to stick with it, risks the country ending up with an unduly large, sub-optimal quality Cabinet [although the optimist in me hopes (against hope?) that he will either make this his first promise to break or, if he were to keep it, to use it, along with more practical political & operational reasons, as an excuse to have a smallish Cabinet².

Harper showed a lack of class in resigning on Election night & in the way of announcing it.

A few weeks ago I debated with a diehard Conservative Party supporter friend with first hand knowledge of him, as to what Prime Minister Harper might do if he were defeated. His view was that he would resign forthwith & mine that I hoped he would have more class & sense of fiduciary responsibility than to 'pull a Prentice'³, if only because even as a lame duck leader, he could have more say in who his successor might be. In the event, he was proven right & I wrong; for he quit on Election Night & rather than telling his followers so himself in his Election Night address, he left it to the Party Office to announce before he spoke.

Following are some media observations - By the National Post's Andrew Coyne (1), & Britain's Guardian newspaper (2) :

the Mulroney-, & Newfoundland-, governments, and to a written pledge by Harper himself prior to the 2006 election, a new formula for calculating equalization payments entitlements that would include natural resource revenues in provincial revenues that would costs Newfoundland billions of dollars (in Atlantic Canada, equalization payments are **the** "third rail" political issue.)

² Following is an example of the problem Trudeau has created for himself : his 'breakthrough' in Alberta yielded him four (4) rookie MPs, two in each of Calgary & Edmonton. Since Alberta accounts for about 10% of Canada's population, it would be reasonable to expect two Alberta Ministers in a 20-25 member Cabinet (one from each city?). Unfortunately for him all four are male so, if he were to keep his promise, he would have to balance out their appointment by including two female Mps from elsewhere in the country to his Cabinet. To complicate matters even more, two of Alberta's new MPs are Indo-Canadians (the one in Calgary a turbaned Sikh), the "old stock" MP from Calgary is wheelchair-bound & his counterpart from Edmonton of French descent and a former Rhodes scholar with a track record in both business-, & charitable-, undertakings

³ Last May former Alberta Premier Jim Prentice resigned on Election Night from both the Premiership & his seat in the Legislature before the final vote count was even in

- The Liberals' 20% increase in the popular vote (from the 2011 election) is the greatest political comeback in Canadian history (1);
- While the Liberals carried three of the four regions of the country (the Atlantic Provinces, Québec & Ontario), they failed to carry the West for the 21st election in a row over 66 years (1) - *although they did make a 'breakthrough' in Alberta; for after winning no seats in that province for 14 years, this time they got four of its 34 seats (up from 28 in the 2011 election), two each in Calgary & Edmonton;*
- The Liberals not only won 184 seats (*no fewer than 150 by newcomers*) & came second in 118 others, giving them a *Top Two* 'footprint' in 302 out of the 338 constituencies, vs. the Conservatives' 256 in the 2011 election (on the 2015 constituency basis (1);
- While some Conservatives consoled themselves with the idea that their party's total vote was down 'only' 230,000 from 2011, they are deluding themselves; for this ignores the fact the voter turnout this time around was 2.8MM greater than it had been in 2011 (1);
- The election was an unmitigated disaster for the NDP; for its 'footprint' shrank by half, with it being competitive in little more than one-third of the country's 338 constituencies (1);
- Eighty percent of the votes cast in Québec were cast for federalist parties (1);
- The number of ridings in which the winning candidate won by less than 5% was 68 (20.1%), up from 51 (16.5%) in 2011 & 42 (13.6%) in 2008 (1).
- Canada's new Parliament will be the most diverse ever, with more female (88)-, Muslim (10)-, & First Nation (10)-, members⁴. The number of females is an all-time record that broke the previous (2011) record of 76 (2) - *but this 15.7% increase is partially offset by the fact that since 2011 the number of seats in the House has been increased by 9.7%;*
- Women will account for 26% of the membership of the next House of Commons, better than the 15.7% of the US House of Representatives' membership, but not quite as good as the 29.4% in its British counterpart (2); and
- While the ten indigenous members of the House will be an improvement over the seven in the last one, this will still only account for 3% of its total membership (2) - *this is not as bad as it is made to sound since the First Nations account for 4% of the total population, a disproportionate number of whom are too young to vote.*

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As well as 17 Indo-Canadians (incl. 5 turbaned Sikhs) & a number of other hyphenated Canadians

Interesting Liberal newcomers include (according to the CBC's John Paul Tasker) :

- BC's **Jody Wilson-Raybould** (*age 44, a lawyer by training, a former Crown Prosecutor & a former regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, a post she was forced to give up after she became a Liberal candidate*);
- Toronto's **Bill Morneau** [*53, BA (Hons.) from Western & M.Sc. from LSE, both in Economics, and MBA from Insead, he headed a 4,000 employee human resources firm*];
- Toronto's **Marco Mendicino** (*42, a lawyer, former public prosecutor & adjunct professor at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School, who beat Finance Minister Joe Oliver*);
- Newfoundland's **Seamus O'Reagan** [*44, born in Newfoundland, at age 10 became a radio personality there, studied at St. Francis Xavier (Nova Scotia), University College, Dublin & INSEAD (France) & has a Master's degree in the Philosophy of Politics from Cambridge, worked for Mulroney's Minister of the Environment (& subsequently Liberal Premier of Québec) Jean Charet & later for Newfoundland Premier Brian Tobin, before becoming, for a decade, a CBC-, & then CTV-, personality*];
- Québec's **Peter Schiefke** (*a late GEN X/early Millennial?, a life-long environmentalist with an MSc. in Renewable Resources & former National Director of Climate Reality Canada, part of an organization founded by Al Gore to educate people on environmental issues*);
- Ottawa's **Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Andrew Leslie** (*57 a onetime Head of the Canadian Army, who in 2010, was passed up by Prime Minister Harper (then still heading a minority government) for the Chief of Defense Staff job & instead named the Armed Forces' Chief of Transformation, in which capacity he gored many defense establishment vested interests by recommending headquarters' budgets be cut to augment those of the front line units*);
- Vancouver's **Lt-Col. (Ret.) Harjit Sajjan**, [*for 11 years a Vancouver police constable & the first Sikh ever to command a Canadian Army (reserve) regiment*] who made the headlines last fall for, after having been ordered to attend a Remembrance Day ceremony at a Surrey Sikh temple, warning his colleagues not to be seen-, or photographed-, near the posters of "martyrs" who had died for the cause of creating an independent Sikh state called Khalistan (an order for which the Harper government was said to have later "quietly" apologized to the Indian government);
- Ottawa's **Lt.-Col. (Ret.) Karen McCrimmon** [*mid-50s (?) who during her 26-year Air Force career was the first women in Canada to qualify as an air navigator & the first to command a (transport) air force squadron, & who was one of five individuals (four of them women) who ran against Justin Trudeau in the 2013 Liberal leadership race*]; and
- Brampton's **Kamal Khara**⁵, a 26 year-old RN in the oncology unit of Toronto's St. Joseph's Health Centre who will be the youngest member of the Liberal caucus & the second youngest in the House (*after Sherbrooke NDP MP Pierre-Luc Dusseault, first elected to Parliament in 2011 at the tender of 19 in that year's NDP tidal wave in that province*).

The Alberta Budget

⁵ The five constituency Brampton region was a Liberal cum Indo-Canadian 'sweep' with three of the successful Liberals being female. This is also the region from which stemmed the former Liberal MP Ruby Dhalla who was defeated in the 2011 election, despite having tabled, a few months' earlier, a private member's bill that would have made elderly new Canadians eligible for receiving OAS after just three-, rather than the customary 10-, years' residence in Canada.

One knew where it was headed when the accompanying news release commenced by quoting the Finance Minister saying that “Albertans told us they **want** (*rather than need*⁶) a plan that supports good jobs and a strong economy. They told us they **want** their families’ health care and education to be protected ...” (bolding added for emphasis). While there is much talk about controlling healthcare-, & education-, spending in future years there is zero evidence of that in the current one (which has the inevitable effect of augmenting the ‘baseline’ on which those future, supposedly more modest increases would be based. Although the Province’s debt-to-GDP-, & deficit-to-GDP-, ratios will remain modest compared to that of other provinces, the Budget’s bottom line is that, for the first time in over two decades, the Province will borrow to fund current expenditures (akin to an individual paying for groceries with a credit card) and that over the three years ending March 31st, 2018, the Province’s Net Financial Assets’ position will swing from +\$13BN to -\$13BN, and its overall Net Asset position will shrink by 28.8% to \$39.351BN - *rather coincidentally, on Budget Day Shell Canada announced it was shuttering, & was taking a \$2BN ‘hit’ on, its \$3BN, 80,000 bbl/d Carmon Creek project (in Northwestern Alberta rather than the Northeastern Fort McMurray region) that it had first announced in October 2013 (when the WTI price had been in the US\$95 range, whereas to day it is less than half that). The reason the Company cited for this decision, after having announced just last May that it would just be ‘slowed down’ & completion deferred by two years, related to the uncertainty about adequate access to world markets for Alberta oil in the years to come due to the obstacles being placed to the expansion of existing-, or the building of new-, pipelines South-, West-, or East to get the product to those markets).*

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The Leit Motiv of the now increasingly out-of-tune-with-reality ‘instant gratification’ generation; for while people’s needs are limited, their wants by definite are infinite.