

“POLITICALLY SPEAKING”

Martha Hall Findlay, former MP for Willowdale

Hi-Rise, June 2011

For the first time in 7 years, Canada has a majority government. Of the 308 ridings in Canada, 166 were won by the Conservatives, 103 by the NDP, 34 by Liberals, 4 by Bloc Quebecois and 1, for the first time ever, by the Green Party. (As you know, Willowdale was one of those seats that changed parties. I appreciated very much the privilege of serving as the Liberal MP here for the past 3 years, but that responsibility has now moved to the shoulders of Conservative Chungsen Leung.)

Unfortunately, voter turnout was still very low. Nationally, it went up from an historical low of about 59% in 2008, but barely, to only a bit more than 61%. Canadians are clearly still not engaged in the voting process. Stephen Harper's Conservatives won only 39% of the popular vote. Due to Canada's riding structure and the "first-past-the-post" system, even with only 39% of the vote, the Conservatives were still able to win 54 % of the ridings. But because only 39% of 61% of Canadians actually voted for Stephen Harper and the Conservatives, it means that barely 23% - less than one quarter of Canadians - actually voted Conservative. This proves in stark terms that, by not voting, you get the government that other people choose for you. And in this case, a small minority of Canadians did the choosing.

Not only did Canadians elect a majority for the first time in 7 years, but the make-up of the political landscape is also very different. The Official Opposition is formed by the Party with the second-largest number of seats – now for the first time it is the NDP, led by Jack Layton. The Liberals under Michael Ignatieff went

down to their worst defeat ever, winning a mere 34 seats, and being relegated for the first time to third-party status. The Bloc Quebecois has all but disappeared, creating big questions about the separatist movement in Quebec: Will it be stronger or weaker as a result? Also interesting will be the dynamics between the NDP and the Conservatives: the NDP represents policies that, being significantly government-interventionist, protectionist and socialistic, are very different from those of the Conservative government – indeed, significantly further from the Conservatives than many Liberals. The Liberal Party has traditionally been viewed as the party of the centre, a moderating influence between the “left” as represented by the NDP and the “right” as represented by Harper’s Conservatives – but they now have little influence. (Although watch for a future column in this space on how the terminology of “left” and “right” no longer applies in the politics of the 21st century.)

Of course, also for the first time in 7 years, these differences won’t much matter. Now that the Conservatives have a majority of the votes in the House of Commons and, with recent appointments, a majority of the votes in the Senate, the Conservatives can enact whatever legislation they wish—regardless of what the NDP, the Liberals, the remaining few Bloc Quebecois and even Elizabeth May, either want, think or care. The Conservatives now have at least four years to shape Canada the way they see fit.

Many people said that they welcomed a majority government. Mind you, they said the same with Mike Harris in Ontario, and we know what happened there. Not all majority governments are alike, and just because you have the power to pass any legislation, you have to be mindful of ALL Canadians. Mr. Harper, you must keep the best interests of Canada at heart, not just those of the Conservative Party. We will watch and comment in future columns.

I encourage you to join in, to participate in the discussion, to ask questions.
Please write to me at info@marthahallfindlay.ca, or by mail to PO Box 69522,
5845 Yonge St., Willowdale, ON, M2M 4K3.

All best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MHF', with a small flourish at the end.

Martha Hall Findlay