

2013 MHF Comment – Government, Democracy and Civic Engagement –
“No” to Merger with the NDP

Liberals should stand up strong and proud – as Liberals. Not in some combination with the NDP. Not as some combination where we sacrifice our economic credibility. The Liberal Party must pull its tail out from between its legs. Liberals have been instrumental in making the country we're so proud of. Decades of big, bold, often controversial but courageous ideas that have made Canada and Canadians who we are. We have no need, all of a sudden, to sacrifice our key values and principles simply because we have a tough opponent. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Proponents of a merger or other cooperation between the NDP and the Liberals rely on a flawed assumption that, somehow, all the people who voted for one or the other would simply join forces and vote for a single merged party or one candidate.

Instead, it's quite possible that a merged New Democratic-Liberal party could encourage even more people to vote Conservative next time. There is an assumption – I've heard this language used a lot – that we need to “unite the progressive left”. I believe that I have ‘progressive’ views (although the definitions are so varied it's not clear), but I'm certainly not of the “left”. I know a large number of people who vote Green who would most certainly not refer to themselves as “left”. Indeed, a large number of people who now vote Liberal who would not feel that way either – if forced, many would ultimately make a choice based on economics, and vote Conservative.

Many Canadians are looking for a political party – indeed, a government – that does four things: 1) achieves economic prosperity; 2) uses that prosperity to ensure equality of opportunity and enhance quality of life for all Canadians; 3) holds progressive social values and encourages social justice; and 4) defines Canada's role in the world as tough when necessary, but balanced and focused on promoting peace and prosperity whenever possible.

This all sounds straightforward (none of these words are new). But if you get beyond the rhetoric, it's clear that neither Stephen Harper nor Thomas Mulcair represents or even propounds this key combination. Bits here and there, maybe, but not the whole.

The good news is that this challenge also creates a huge opportunity. If one political party were able to capture all of these qualities – with deeds,

not just words – it would gain tremendous support. One thing is sure, though: Such a party will not result from a merger of the New Democrats and the Liberals. The party that can do all that is the Liberal Party – a strong, proud, smart, confident, and courageous Liberal Party.

Ask “M. Smith”, a hypothetical voter who does not represent everyone’s views, but who, based on what I have seen and heard over the years, does represent the views of a very large number of Canadians. Smith is neither “left” nor “right.” At the same time, Smith is not a “centrist”, because s/he does not view him/herself as being in the middle of anything. In 2011, such concepts no longer apply. Voter Smith is simply looking *forward*.

Say that voter Smith runs a small business. S/he understands the benefits of the market, and of competition. S/he also wants Canada to embrace global opportunities, not hide away. Smith is not a protectionist: S/he supports free trade and lower taxes that encourage businesses to succeed in our global environment.

A merged New Democratic-Liberal party would reflect the opposite of these values. And because economic prosperity is the No. 1 issue for most Canadians, that party would not get Smith's vote.

M. Smith wants a government that is smart and efficient and just. And s/he most certainly wants us to be bold when we need to be.

Martha Hall Findlay

(Similar to an op Ed first published in The Mark News,

<http://www.themarknews.com/articles/6713-come-together-not-right-now>)