

THE NDP CHOOSES A NEW LEADER

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story examines the rise of Thomas Mulcair to the leadership of the New Democratic Party (NDP) and how the NDP is changing under Mulcair. We also consider the possibility that the rise of the NDP might result in a new political dynamic in the ongoing competition between progressives and conservatives in Canada.

On March 24, 2012, the members of the federal New Democratic Party chose Thomas Mulcair as their new leader. Mulcair took control at an extraordinary time. It was less than one year since the NDP had celebrated its best-ever election results, winning 102 seats and assuming the role of Official Opposition. And it was only eight months after the death of Jack Layton, the NDP's beloved leader who had led the party to that historic election victory.

The leadership race was a contest between two factions within the NDP: representatives of the party's old guard, who saw themselves as defenders of traditional NDP values, and others who saw themselves as modernizers wanting to broaden the party's appeal to new groups of voters while moving the party closer to the centre of the political spectrum.

Mulcair was the leading candidate among the modernizers and was viewed with suspicion by some members of the party establishment, including former leader Ed Broadbent. He had more legislative experience than any other leadership candidate, but most of that had come when he was a Liberal member of the Quebec National Assembly. It was

only in 2007 that he joined the NDP, recruited specifically by Jack Layton to be his Quebec lieutenant.

Mulcair served Layton well, winning a seat in a 2007 by-election and becoming the architect of the NDP's 59-seat victory in Quebec in the 2011 federal election. In his campaign, Mulcair called for the party to modernize its language and approach to voters. His essential message was that the party could not win power without changing the way it campaigned. "We did get 4.5 million votes but we are still far from being able to form a government," he argued. "The only way we are going to be able to do that is to go beyond our traditional base, refresh our way of approaching these issues. We're not going to defeat Stephen Harper with a slogan" (*The Globe and Mail*, February 27, 2012).

Mulcair's message clearly resonated with much of the party rank and file. On the fourth ballot at the convention, Mulcair won with over 57 per cent of the vote. Two days later he was welcomed to the House of Commons as the Leader of the Official Opposition and prepared to do battle with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative government.

To Consider

1. How closely did you follow the NDP leadership race and its results?
2. What do you know about the new federal NDP leader, Thomas Mulcair?
3. Thomas Mulcair has spoken of his desire to change some of the language used by his party. He especially objected to the NDP calling itself the party of "ordinary Canadians." Why do you think he would find this descriptor objectionable? Can you think of other phrases some political parties regularly use in political speeches and presentations that might be viewed this way?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Discussion

As leader of the NDP, Jack Layton was extremely popular. He died of cancer at the height of his personal popularity and his party's electoral success. In the four elections held during his term of office, the NDP went from 19 MPs to 103 and became the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. The party had a special triumph in Quebec, electing 59 MPs out of 75.

If you were choosing a leader to replace Jack Layton, what characteristics—personal and political—would you especially look for in a candidate?

Viewing Questions

Answer the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Who became interim leader of the New Democratic Party following the death of Jack Layton?

2. How long was the period between Layton's death and the convention to select a new leader?

3. Who was the first member of the NDP to announce his candidacy for the leadership? Which famous member of the NDP immediately endorsed that candidate?

4. How many women ran for the NDP leadership?

5. What government experience did Thomas Mulcair have before he joined the federal NDP?

6. On the left-right spectrum, how did Thomas Mulcair hope to position the NDP? Why?

7. What was Nathan Cullen's plan for eventual victory against the federal Conservatives?

8. How many ballots did it take to secure Mulcair's victory at the convention?

9. What was the result shown by polls taken immediately following the NDP convention?

Post-viewing Discussion

1. After watching the video, revisit your responses to the question posed in the pre-viewing activity. Did watching the video help you to respond in greater depth? In what way?

2. If you had been voting for the new NDP leader, which candidate would you have chosen? Why?

3. Do you think the NDP made the right choice in electing Thomas Mulcair as its new federal leader? Why or why not?

4. Election polls have been in the news a lot lately, and their accuracy has become a matter of some discussion. How significant would you suggest a poll taken today is—three years before the next federal election? What lesson might the various parties each take from such a poll?

5. Some members of the NDP have argued that the party would be selling out on its core principles by moving toward the political centre. Many political pundits argue that this is a necessary first step if the party ever hopes to hold power in Canada. How important do you think a display of flexibility is for any party expecting to govern Canada? Is compromise really central to success in Canadian politics?

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Thomas Mulcair: A Political Profile

Further Research

Thomas Mulcair's website is www.thomasmulcair.ca. The New Democratic Party website is www.ndp.ca. At the time this *News in Review* story was written, the NDP website was under revision but was showing the first of a planned series of advertisements to introduce its new leader to Canadians. The Mulcair website includes a brief biography and links to several videos from different periods in his career.

Focus for Reading

What are the characteristics that best suit a leader of a Canadian political party? Like all politicians, Thomas Mulcair had qualities and experiences that helped his rise to prominence as well as others that might have helped deny him victory. As you read this section, identify those qualities you feel gave him the edge over the other candidates in the leadership campaign.

A "New" New Democrat

The new leader of the New Democratic Party has only been a member of the NDP since 2007. Thomas Mulcair made his political debut as a member of the Liberal Party in the Quebec National Assembly. First elected in 1994, Mulcair served in opposition in a variety of roles, including deputy house leader. When the Liberals under Jean Charest came to power in 2003, Mulcair joined the cabinet as Minister of Sustainable Development, Environment and Parks. He rapidly developed a reputation as an outstanding parliamentarian. His reputation of being tough in debate and somewhat abrasive led to him being given a nickname: "The Grizzly."

Mulcair remained a cabinet minister until 2006, when he resigned after a dispute with Charest over a plan to build condominiums in one of Quebec's provincial parks. He refused offers of alternative cabinet portfolios and did not stand for re-election in the 2007 provincial election.

However, Mulcair's talents as a politician had come to the attention of both the federal Conservatives and the New Democrats. The Conservatives courted him with job offers, either to become head of a federal agency or to serve as a senior advisor on environmental policy. Mulcair, a supporter of the Kyoto Accord, says he turned the Conservatives down when he was told that his role would be to adapt to government policy, not to work to

change government policy to his way of thinking.

In 2006 NDP leader Jack Layton invited Mulcair, as an expert on sustainable development, to address the delegates to the NDP convention in Quebec City. Repeated contact with Layton led to Mulcair's joining the NDP and his appointment as Layton's Quebec lieutenant. In 2007 he ran for the NDP in a by-election in the Montreal riding of Outremont, which had voted Liberal in every previous election but one. He became only the second member of the NDP to win a federal seat in Quebec. After his election victory, Mulcair continued as Quebec lieutenant, and Layton appointed him co-deputy leader of the NDP.

The Early Years

Mulcair was born in Ottawa on October 24, 1954, the second of 10 children. His mother was French Canadian and his father Irish Canadian. He grew up in Laval (just north of Montreal), and attended law school at McGill University. He holds two law degrees—in Civil Law and Common Law. He was married in 1976 and has two adult children.

Before running for office, Mulcair held a variety of legal positions in the Quebec government and in private organizations. Especially notable was his work with two organizations that focused on the place of language in Quebec. He was a member of the legal department of the

FYI

One of the new crop of Quebec NDP MPs, Ruth Ellen Brosseau, made headlines when it was revealed that she had spent part of the election campaign on holiday in Las Vegas instead of seeking support in her riding. After the election, some media sources raised questions about her lack of political background and inability to speak French while representing a riding that is overwhelmingly francophone. However, a year after her unexpected win, she has proved to be a fast learner and enjoys great popularity and respect from her constituents. Her Facebook page is entitled, "Supporters of Ruth Ellen Brosseau and other ordinary Canadians MPs."

Conseil supérieur de la langue française (Superior Council of the French Language), which advises the Quebec cabinet minister responsible for all matters dealing with the French language in Quebec. Later he became director of legal affairs at Alliance Quebec, which, until its demise in 2005, was an association representing the interests of a wide-ranging group of anglophone associations in the province.

In 1985 he began a private law practice and also taught law at Concordia and at the Université de Québec. From 1987 through 1993 he was president of the Quebec Professions Board, the organization that controls and regulates 46 different professional orders in Quebec. Mulcair is credited with introducing measures that greatly improved the transparency of the board's disciplinary hearings.

In 1994 the Quebec Liberals asked Mulcair to run in a provincial by-election in Chomedey, a suburb of Montreal. As he began his campaign, a general election was called for all of Quebec. On September 12, 1994, he was elected a member of the National Assembly (MNA), and his political career began.

The Road to Leadership

Until the May 2011 general election, Mulcair was the only NDP MP from Quebec. Nevertheless, as a close associate of Jack Layton and as the deputy leader his influence in the party rapidly increased.

In the House of Commons, Mulcair was recognized as an exceptional debater, fluent in both official languages, and giving no quarter in an argument. Respected for his talent and experience in politics, he also developed a reputation for being domineering, irascible, and ambitious. Some members of his own party (including his co-deputy leader, Libby Davies) were known to be less

than fans. One of the terms most often used to describe Mulcair by the media in the lead-up to the leadership vote was the expression teachers sometimes use for difficult students: "does not play well with others."

But he certainly played well with the party in Quebec. When the NDP won 59 Quebec seats and became the Official Opposition, Layton gave a great deal of the credit to Mulcair's efforts. Most of the 58 new Quebec MPs were eager to acknowledge his assistance and looked to him for guidance, since their victory was totally unexpected.

When Layton died of cancer in August 2012 and the party began a leadership contest, Mulcair was faced with a dilemma. He came from the province with the largest number of NDP MPs but also the fewest party members. The NDP uses a one-member, one-vote formula to elect its leader. Mulcair, who was not very well known outside of Quebec, felt he was at a definite disadvantage compared with some of the other candidates.

The party establishment, including former federal leader Ed Broabent, was quick to endorse NDP president Brian Topp for the leadership, arguing that he had worked closely with Jack Layton and would carry on the traditional values of the party. They found Mulcair's NDP credentials highly suspect, even though Layton had recruited him and depended on him to conduct the party's hugely successful Quebec campaign.

Mulcair's critics had a number of accusations:

- Mulcair had strong views and a short fuse, and this would turn voters against him.
- He was a closet Liberal and political opportunist.
- He wanted to "renew" the party by abandoning its traditional social policies, and he was willing to do almost anything in order to gain power.

Did you know . . .

Even though Mulcair won the leadership race, many media commentators viewed both of the speeches he delivered before the delegates at the party convention in Toronto as mediocre and uninspiring.

As we now know, however, Mulcair's leadership campaign was nearly flawless. He convinced the party leadership to extend the length of the campaign, giving the Quebec wing more time to sign up new members to vote. He won the endorsement of more than 40 of the current MPs, and raised more money than any other leadership candidate. He showed no signs of the short fuse he was so often accused of having and he impressed viewers of every party debate with his measured response to criticism.

Mulcair did promise renewal. He defined this as a push beyond the party's traditional base, with Quebec as the example of a successful campaign to

appeal to new voters who had previously been immune to the party's message. His stated objective is to replicate the NDP's Quebec success by reaching out to new voters in the rest of the country. One way this can be done, Mulcair believes, is by abandoning some of the old "boilerplate" language the party uses to define itself.

When the leadership voting began, Mulcair led by a significant margin. By the third ballot it was clear that he was unbeatable, with only Brian Topp remaining in the race against him. By late afternoon, March 24, 2011, Thomas Mulcair became the seventh leader of the NDP, and the leader of Canada's Official Opposition.

Follow-up

1. With a partner, compare your responses to the question in the Focus for Reading concerning the qualities that helped Thomas Mulcair win the NDP leadership. Which qualities do you think proved most crucial to his victory?
2. Ian Capstick, an NDP staff member who worked with Thomas Mulcair, had this to say about the new leader's aggressiveness (*The Globe and Mail*, October 13, 2011): "At times, it is driven by politics and not policy, and that rubs New Democrats the wrong way. They are not used to power plays, they are not used to positioning, and they are not used to pugilism at all. He is impatient, which is the opposite of Jack Layton."

Do you think aggressiveness is a virtue or a vice in politics? Why? Do you think a leader who is "the opposite of Jack Layton" can win the same level of respect that Layton received from Canadians?

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A Party in Transition?

The selection of Thomas Mulcair as the new leader of the New Democrats leads many political observers to believe that the NDP is now a party in transition. Mulcair has indicated that he does intend to make changes in the way the party presents itself to Canadian voters. But how fundamental those changes will be remains to be seen.

In this section we look at the ways that two groups of observers believe the NDP has changed and will continue to change as well as at the changes Mulcair has stated during his leadership campaign that he would like to see made. As you read this section, use a chart like the one below to list each of these categories in your notebook. The information will support the discussion questions that conclude this part of the guide.

Changes Made	Changes to be Made	Changes Mulcair Wants Made
• • •	• • •	• • •

From the very beginning of the NDP leadership campaign, it was clear that the future direction of the NDP would be a fundamental question that needed to be answered.

The first person to declare his candidacy was Brian Topp, the party president and a close associate of Jack Layton, whose leadership had resulted in the party's best federal election finish ever. Topp pledged to continue Layton's policies and to uphold the party's social democratic values and close ties with labour unions. He received the immediate endorsement of the party establishment—including former leader Ed Broadbent, who had also supported Layton in his leadership bid in 2003.

As other candidates entered the race, only two of them seemed to advocate fundamentally different approaches to politics as usual for the NDP. One of them, MP Nathan Cullen from British Columbia, went so far as to recommend that the party seriously consider joining with the Liberals and/or the Green Party

in some ridings to run one progressive candidate. This would be done to avoid vote splitting and guarantee victory against the Conservatives. Cullen's impact on voters in the leadership race was significant; he finished third out of seven candidates.

Mulcair's Vision

The other advocate of a new approach was the eventual winner, Thomas Mulcair. Mulcair proposed changes in the way the NDP presents itself to voters—and the criticism from party insiders was fierce.

Declaring his candidacy, Mulcair said: "We have to grow the party. We have to become something we've never been in order to achieve the ambitious goals we have set for ourselves. We have to innovate to reach out to include Canadians beyond our traditional base" (*Toronto Star*, October 14, 2011).

From the beginning of his campaign, Mulcair indicated that he would like to see the party move closer to the political

centre. Mulcair cited the provincial Manitoba NDP as a party that found the way to electoral success partly by demonstrating that it could manage an economy as reasonably and as well as any Conservative or Liberal government and also sponsor and fund a variety of successful social programs.

Throughout the campaign, Mulcair insisted that he was only continuing the work begun under Layton's leadership. Fundamental to this was increasing the party's base beyond its traditional supporters, especially in areas such as Western Canada, where the NDP had failed to win many seats in 2011. In one debate he asked "Is there anything wrong about getting people who are extraordinary, to go beyond our traditional base and to look for people who are not unionized, to look for older people, to look for the natives? . . . "We have to move forward. A large part of our terminology is old. . . . People want a modern party that takes into account sustainable development" (*The Globe and Mail*, March 5, 2012).

The Establishment Responds

The NDP establishment, for the most part, interpreted Mulcair's vision as an attack on party fundamentals. Ed Broadbent spoke for many when he told the *Toronto Star* (March 16, 2012): "I want the party to remain a left-of-centre party. That is how it finally built up. It got support in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and British Columbia and Nova Scotia and Ontario and now a breakthrough in Quebec by remaining true to its core principles, not by becoming a Liberal party. I want to be fair to Tom. I'm not saying he said it's going to be a Liberal Party, but he did talk about moving to the middle. What he means by that I don't know, but I do know where Brian Topp stands, which is to keep the party left-of-centre with

relevant, innovative policy and that's what I think needs to be done."

Broadbent's comments reinforced the point that Topp had made in an early debate—that Mulcair was trying to turn the NDP into another Liberal Party. "I believe if there are two Liberal parties in front of the people of Canada at the next election, people will vote for the real one. So the strategy that he is offering will not work" (*The Globe and Mail*, February 15, 2012).

Outsiders Weigh In

The conflict between Mulcair, the clear front-runner in the leadership contest, and the NDP establishment fascinated political commentators. Most seemed to support Mulcair's assessment of the challenges facing the NDP and what it needed to do if it were to present itself to Canadian voters as a credible alternative to Stephen Harper's Conservatives.

Chantal Hébert, a columnist with the *Toronto Star*, pointed out that that party had already changed under Jack Layton's leadership (March 10, 2012): "The day after Jack Layton became NDP leader almost a decade ago, he set out to fundamentally alter the culture of the party.

"On his watch, the self-righteousness attendant to decades of so-called moral victories stopped being a virtue and a spirit of compromise was no longer considered a fatal flaw. The pragmatic model that allowed the New Democrats to form successful governments in the Prairie Provinces became a federal template rather than a source of quiet suspicion. In the spirit of giving the NDP a taste for government, Layton made deals with all comers and—sometimes—his bottom line was flexible to the point of being elusive."

Hébert continued to note that the two leadership candidates pushing for further change—Mulcair and Cullen—were

FYI

For a full list of the members of the NDP shadow cabinet, go to www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/04/19/pol-ndp-shadow-cabinet.html.

the candidates showing the greatest momentum as the vote approached. The party establishment might resist change, but the membership seemed to be enthusiastically seeking it.

Lawrence Martin of *The Globe and Mail* (April 10, 2012) referenced the work of David McGrane of the University of Saskatchewan to argue that Layton's moving the NDP toward the political centre was a large reason for the party's 2011 election success: "Writing in *The Canadian Election of 2011*, Saskatchewan academic David McGrane notes that 'Under Layton's leadership, more traditional social democratic positions, such as increased taxation of wealthy individuals (i.e., an inheritance tax), the acceptance of deficit spending, the rapid creation of new universal social programs, and references to expanding public ownership were gradually eliminated from the party's discourse.' Mr. McGrane notes that in the campaign, the differences between the NDP and the Liberals were slight on such issues as cap-and-trade, health care, budget-balancing, child care, education, criminal justice, limiting prime ministerial power, and a range of other platform proposals."

Thomas Walkom of the *Toronto Star* is another writer who cited Layton as a change maker. While noting Layton's success in winning more seats than ever before for the NDP, he observed: "But under Layton's leadership, the party also became less clearly defined. A consummate politician, Layton was always ready to turn any situation to his party's advantage. Too often, however, the practical effect was a slew of half-formed or contradictory policies" (*Toronto Star*, September 17, 2011).

Crucial for Walkom was a redefinition of the NDP: "To put it bluntly, the NDP has to reinsert ideology into its politics, not as a series of rote slogans like 'Make the rich pay' or through appeals

to 'working families,' but as a way of approaching the world that is both consistent and sensible."

Others described the changing demographics of the NDP, particularly the decline in influence of the labour unions. "The modern, broadly based NDP is not automatically or instinctively the party of working people, even as its leadership candidates have continued to chase union endorsements and the ready-made organizing abilities that come with them. Electability in a country that has growing reservations about the power of unions often means playing down labour's special place and influence" (John Allemang, *The Globe and Mail*, March 24, 2012).

What does Tom want?

According to at least one commentator, Mulcair's election as NDP leader shakes the party to its foundation. "Make no mistake about the importance of what happened in Toronto on the weekend: Tens of thousands of New Democrats rebelled against the party establishment—a cabal of union leaders, academics, journalists, and party apparatchiks—to elect an outsider. They did it, in the words of one NDP supporter at the convention, because they no longer wanted to be led by 'a comfy sweater'" (John Ibbitson, *The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2012).

For the moment, however, the party is eager to project a spirit of unity. In announcing his shadow cabinet, Mulcair gave most of his leadership opponents prominent positions and retained Libby Davies (who supported Brian Topp) as deputy leader.

It's far too early to predict how the NDP will change under Mulcair, but we can identify some of his priorities (quotations from the *Toronto Star*, March 26, 2012):

- Updating the language of the party

and the NDP constitution, specifically, removing the phrase “democratic socialism” from the preamble to the constitution (“We must refresh our way of speaking, modernize our approach, and use a language that speaks not only to the initiated and the people who already agree with us, but that can please and attract [other] people who share our vision.”)

- Projecting confidence and competence as public administrators to voters (“That’s sometimes what’s missing. They’ve always liked our ideas, but sometimes they’ve hesitated.”)
- Adapting its policies to various regions of the country, especially Western Canada (“We must listen to the voice of each place . . . understand the priorities, understand and adapt.”)

Follow-up

1. With a partner, review the points in your summary chart on the changes made to the NDP, the changes still to be made, and the changes its new leader, Thomas Mulcair, wants to see made. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. Mulcair has described his vision as moving the centre to the party, rather than the party to the centre. What does he mean by that? How would his announced priorities help do this?
3. Speaking to the Economic Club of Canada on April 5, 2012, Mulcair said: “You see, the NDP is resolutely in favour of development, as long as it’s sustainable development. The NDP is resolutely in favour of trade, as long as it’s fair trade. And the NDP is going to do everything it can to create a Canada that is more prosperous, as long as it is more prosperous for everybody” (*The Globe and Mail*, April 5, 2012). What voter group(s) might respond most positively to this statement?
4. John Ibbitson wrote (*The Globe and Mail*, March 26, 2012): “Canada is a consensual society. Government operates within that consensus. Grown-up parties know this. NDP members chose Mr. Mulcair because they believe he knows it too.” What does this statement tell us about the way Ibbitson believes Mulcair will lead his party?

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A New Political Dynamic?

FYI

For information on the robocalls scandal and how it has impacted the Conservative government, consult the story entitled "Election 2011 and the Robocall Scandal," in the April 2012 issue of *News in Review*.

Focus for Reading

As you read this section make two lists: one stating indicators that the NDP is on track to achieve status as the leading progressive party and the second identifying potential roadblocks to the NDP's ultimate success in forming a Canadian government. Use a chart like the one below to organize your information.

Indicators of potential success	Potential roadblocks
• • •	• • •

Contemplating the rising fortunes of the federal New Democratic Party and the decline in those of the federal Liberals, political commentators are speculating that Canadians may be witnessing the beginnings of a new political dynamic. In this scenario the federal NDP replaces the Liberals as the only real progressive alternative to the Conservative Party and eventually moves from the opposition to forming the government. The Liberals become a largely irrelevant third party. In this section we present some of the evidence that may or may not indicate that such a fundamental change is taking place.

On April 27, 2012, the first Nanos Research opinion poll conducted after the election of Thomas Mulcair as NDP leader showed the federal NDP in a statistical tie with the ruling Conservatives (www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/04/26/pol-ndp-tories-statistically-tied-nanos.html). Decided voters supported the various parties as follows:

- Conservatives: 34.7 per cent
- New Democrats: 32.4 per cent
- Liberals: 23.3 per cent
- Greens: 4.2 per cent
- Bloc Québécois: 3.9 per cent

Nineteen per cent of voters declared themselves undecided.

The poll also showed that support for Prime Minister Stephen Harper was declining as support for the NDP and its new leader was rising. In February 2012, 31.7 per cent of those polled saw Harper as the most trustworthy leader; the new poll saw this figure decline to 20 per cent. Those who called him most competent leader slipped from 38.1 per cent to 24.2 per cent. The voters who felt he had the best vision of Canada's future decreased from 32.6 per cent to 21.6 per cent.

Clearly, the NDP received a bump in the polls from their convention and choice of Mulcair as new leader. At the same time, the Conservatives and their leader have lost some public support because of recent controversies over fraudulent election "robocalls" and the planned purchase of F-35 fighter jets. The fundamental question, however, is whether the NDP can continue to consolidate its place as the progressive alternative to a Conservative government. Does the poll reflect a real rise in public opinion of the NDP or does it only mean that the Conservatives are temporarily doing worse?

Good and Bad Signs for the NDP

The Nanos poll is one sign that the NDP is on the right track toward electoral

success in 2015—and it is not the only one. The recent by-election in Jack Layton’s riding of Toronto-Danforth saw Craig Scott, the NDP candidate, defeat his high-profile Liberal opponent by a wide margin, with the Conservative candidate coming a distant third.

The election of Mulcair as leader is also viewed by most commentators as the best choice the NDP could have made if it wishes to reinforce its position as the real alternative to the Conservatives. As Lawrence Martin wrote in *The Globe and Mail* (March 20, 2012), Mulcair is the one person both the Conservatives and the Bloc hated to see lead the NDP. Martin describes Mulcair as “seasoned, erudite, trenchantly articulate, and, with machine-gun thrusts, potent on the attack.” He is, along with Bob Rae, one of the House of Commons’s two best debaters—and fully able to stand up to Stephen Harper. Martin also believes that Mulcair’s victory deals a significant blow to any attempts at resurgence by the Bloc. On the other hand, the choice of a leader from outside Quebec might have erased the gains the party has made in that province.

The new official opposition has had its problems, however. During the long period between the death of Jack Layton and the election of Thomas Mulcair the NDP’s future seemed very unsteady. Some Liberals and New Democrats called for the two parties to explore ways of running one progressive candidate representing both parties in some ridings. Opinion polls showed the Liberals making gains against the NDP. One NDP MP, Lise St-Denis, left the party to join the Liberals (on April 23, 2012 a second MP, Bruce Hyer, left the party to sit as an independent member over a dispute on the long-gun registry). The recent surge in public opinion polling may yet prove to be ephemeral.

Nevertheless, the party believes that

the future is bright. With the Liberals in disarray Mulcair and his supporters see the likelihood of many more Canadians turning to them in the next election as the alternative to the Conservatives.

The Long Road to Victory

NDP planners have already indicated their strategy for winning the necessary seats to form a government: holding Quebec and gaining more support in Ontario and the West.

The West—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba—is the Conservative heartland. Conservatives currently hold 72 seats to the NDP’s 15 and the Liberals’ four. In the next election the number of Western seats will increase to 104 as a result of redistribution. The NDP believes that it can make some inroads in this part of the country, partly because it has previously held power provincially in three of the four provinces and has deep political roots there.

Many insiders, however, believe that the next real breakthrough could come in Ontario—traditionally the Liberal heartland—where the Conservatives won 73 seats in 2011 to the NDP’s 22 and Liberals’ 11. Henry Jacek, a political science professor at McMaster University, explains how the NDP can capitalize on the political vacuum created by the decline of the Liberal Party: “If it seeps into the Liberal base in Ontario that the Liberals are not coming back, the lion’s share of that will go over to the NDP. They’ve got to work on those federal Liberals and convince them they can’t stay with a party that is now the third party” (*The Globe and Mail*, March 24, 2012).

Just prior to the NDP leadership convention, Gloria Galloway and John Ibbitson described the real job awaiting the new leader of the NDP (*The Globe and Mail*, March 23, 2012): “Whoever

emerges as the new leader of the New Democrats on Saturday has one task: to tell a story. It must be the story of a party that is ready to govern Canada, to replace the Conservative narrative of sound management and tough—even harsh—choices with something both responsible and caring. If enough Canadians embrace

that story, the next leader of the Official Opposition will become prime minister in 2015. But if that story rings false, then the NDP will sink back into its historic role of conscience without command.”

The first chapter of that story is now being written, but the ending is still unclear.

Follow-up

1. With a partner compare the information in your summary charts. Help each other complete any missing points. Discuss with your partner which list you think is bigger: the indicators of potential success or the potential roadblocks for the NDP.
2. The *Toronto Star* (March 29, 2012) reported that a recent poll indicated that 50 per cent of supporters of the Liberals and the NDP back a proposal that joint nomination meetings be held to select one candidate to run against the Conservatives in a riding. Should the NDP under Thomas Mulcair reconsider this proposal? Why or why not?
3. Consider the following quote from Margaret Wente: “Some NDPers are under the illusion that after the miracle of 2011, they actually have a shot at power. This is a fantasy. They stumbled into Official Opposition because Quebeckers loved Jack Layton and the Liberals fell apart. This confluence of circumstances will never be repeated. Today’s progressives are in the same position conservatives were in 1993, only worse. It took only a few years for warring members of the right to overcome their distaste for each other and start talking about uniting again. The Liberals and New Democrats are far more tribal. Until they get over it, they don’t have a chance. Otherwise, as the NDP’s Pat Martin told *The Hill Times* last week, ‘Stephen Harper will be Prime Minister until he gets bored’” (*The Globe and Mail*, March 22, 2012). What is Wente saying about the future of both the Liberals and the NDP? Do you agree with her assessment?

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Activity: Advice to Mulcair and the NDP

What advice would you give the new leader of the NDP to appeal to Canadians and let them know that the New Democratic Party is a “government in waiting”?

Thomas Mulcair has said that he would like the party to innovate and reach out beyond its traditional base. He would like to modernize both the party’s language and its approach to politics.

In small groups, brainstorm ideas that you believe would raise the party’s public opinion rating. These might include:

- Policies the NDP would endorse and promote
- Ways in which the NDP could publicize itself and its new leader
- An image makeover to expand the party’s reach to new groups and individuals
- Ways in which it can position itself as a clear alternative to the governing Conservatives
- Policies that will increase its support in regions where it needs to win more seats (e.g., Western Canada)

Mulcair has also said that it is important for the party to adapt its message to different constituencies and regions of Canada. What specific advice would you give him in appealing to young voters and to the region of Canada in which you live?

Compare your suggestions with those of the other groups in your class. You may then wish to express them directly to Thomas Mulcair, whose contact information can be found at www.parl.gc.ca/MembersOfParliament/ProfileMP.aspx?Key=170208&Language=E.