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Comment

Nobleman vs. Doberman

Less fodder for Tory attacks with Iggy at Liberal helm

National Report

Lawrence Martin

So much for the Liberal leadership race. For all intents and purposes it's over. The nightmare before Christmas — the political pandemonium of the last two weeks — has touched off a rush to anoint Michael Ignatieff as the new man.

Anointed he likely will be. The third candidate, Dominic LeBlanc, has exited the race and is throwing his support behind Iggy. A bandwagon effect is in course. The date of the convention, if there is one, will be moved to January, meaning that Bob Rae, who needed time to stage a fight, won't have it. Without it, he is finished. His funda-

mental problem was that his baggage from his days as Ontario premier, 16 years ago, would not go away. Sometimes we forgive. Sometimes we don't. In his case we didn't.

The installation of Mr. Ignatieff means that the luck of the Conservatives, who have feasted on Dion tenderloin for two years, is likely over.

Sir Michael has his own encumbrances. He is patrician, to the manor born, lacking in the common touch. He is inexperienced, having only been in politics for three years and he signed on, reluctantly, to the coalition deal. On the plus side, he is intellectually radiant and an effective communicator with a presence that is commanding. He knows that the most important thing in politics is messaging. Stephen Harper illustrated this last week when, in the space of a couple of days, he brilliantly changed the national discussion from his pathetic

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economic statement to national unity.

The Conservatives will berate Mr. Ignatieff as an egghead and beat him up for signing the coalition pact. But his being new to politics means the fire-breathing Harper will have less ammunition on which to base cheap attack ads. While Bob Rae has many of the Iggy qualities and is much more seasoned, the Harper team would have unlimited gunpowder with him as Liberal leader.

Mr. Ignatieff is also situated more in the centre of the political spectrum and will end, for better or for worse,

the leftward drift of the party. He will be in a strong position to rebuild the party in Quebec now that the prime minister has alienated so many in La Belle Province with his demonization of the Bloc Québécois.

With his impressive standing in the polls, Mr. Harper is probably tempted himself to push for an election. The public, caught up in politics to a degree seldom seen, might not be opposed to going to the polls again.

But with Mr. Dion stepping down, the chemistry changes. A new Liberal leader cannot probably help but move his party's numbers upward.

Mr. Ignatieff will move cautiously, easing off on any coalition commitment. A mighty chess match will ensue between him, a nobleman, and the prime minister, a Doberman.

Lawrence Martin is a Globe and Mail correspondent and author who writes about national affairs from Ottawa.

THE NEW LIBERAL LEADER :



MICHAEL DE ADOR

Letters

Boomers and economic bust leave echo jaded

RE: Blame the Boomers (Dec. 3)

I think we've taken a very generalized approach to this generational argument. Being a product of the baby boom generation, it's certainly hard not to be a little jaded. I have witnessed my parents work their lives away, push their stress and relationship levels to incredible limits, and pretend to be content with just five weeks vacation at the age of 50.

With the current economic downturn, and lifetime earnings being flushed down the gutter, it's hard to imagine myself following such an unrewarding and predictable path.

PETER REYNOLDS,
RICHMOND HILL, ONT

A hunger for politics

I am sure many of us did not know that there was a word called "prorogue" and we all learned something new with this coalition agreement.

While we were discussing the newly discov-

ered word "prorogue," somebody said this word sounds like "pierogi/perogie."

That was that, we got sudden craving for perogies, we decided to prorogue our session and go for perogie break. I thought that was funny.

ANANT NAGPUR, OTTAWA

Proroguing shouldn't give Parliament paid vacation

While I support the prorogation of the Conservative-lead government, I would like to see changes to the law governing the functioning of Parliament so that all members of the legislature will not collect pay while their functions are suspended.

It is incredible that the MPs will be having a paid extended vacation after not even two months of being elected and only days after returning to work.

This kind of special treatment, compared to the one that the average worker gets, is in itself an incentive for parties to behave irresponsibly and play this type of games.

BILL FLORES, OAKVILLE, ONT

Views

How the coalition helped propel Harper in polls



Ezra Levant

The proposed Liberal-NDP-Bloc coalition government is as good as dead — gone as quickly as it was formed.

Just days after it was announced, Liberal MPs started distancing themselves from it. Then Stéphane Dion — the coalition's proposed prime minister — bungled a videotaped speech made for national TV. And then the Governor General granted Stephen Harper a breather by cancelling Parliament for a month.

But the real nails in the coffin are polls showing that Canadians deeply oppose the coalition. The scheme

has backfired, and Harper has skyrocketed to his highest ever level of support. How could the opposition have miscalculated so badly?

Three reasons. Personal animosity towards Harper blinded the opposition. During the election, the opposition ran ads that were intensely personal, implying that Harper wasn't really Canadian. The election debate was even harsher. The other leaders, sitting just feet away from him, looked him in the eye and called him a liar and incompetent.

That's their first mistake: the opposition thought that Canadians shared their hate for Harper — so much so that they'd accept any trick to kick him out of office, including a deal with the Bloc Québécois.

The second mistake was that the opposition listened to the media. Reporters tend to be liberal. But the Parliamentary Press Gallery has had a running feud with Harper — even going on "strike" for a while, when they didn't like how Harper chose which reporters' questions to answer. The media's first reaction to the coalition was excitement and support. But that elite opinion was formed in part by their own hostility to Harper.

But the biggest reason why the opposition got this one wrong is the inclusion of the Bloc in the deal. Simply put, Canadians are scared of them, and don't want separatists choosing our prime minister or having a veto over our government. Canadians found it shocking

the opposition would do that.

When the Bloc was first formed in 1990, the Liberals and the media were just as appalled as everyone else. But over the past 18 years, as they've rubbed shoulders with Bloc MPs, they've become numb to their dangerous mission. To Ottawa, the Bloc is now normal. But to the rest of Canada, the whole thing is worse than bizarre — it is dangerous.

Signing a contract with Quebec separatists isn't normal in the eyes of Canadians — no matter what Harper-hating opposition MPs or their sympathetic media friends, say.

Ezra Levant is a lawyer, author and free speech activist who blogs at www.ezralevant.com. He volunteered in the Conservative war-room during the last election.

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