

## NEWS

# Mulcair says significant number of Bloc Québécois supporters will likely go to NDP in next federal election

By ABBAS RANA

Thomas Mulcair, the former Quebec Liberal Cabinet minister who in a sensational move recently joined the NDP and will run federally in the province, says the New Democrats will win "at least 12 seats" in the next federal election in Quebec, arguing the NDP will benefit from the Bloc Québécois's loss of support.

"I can tell you that the group that's the most nervous is the Bloc Québécois because they realize that the values that they try to put forward and represent are very often the values of the NDP, but separation—which more and more people are backing away from and ...the poor showing by the Parti Québécois has made the Bloc more and more nervous with regards to the NDP," he said in an interview with *The Hill Times* last week.

The NDP has never been able to win a seat in a general election in Quebec. The only exception was Phil Edmonston who was elected in a byelection in 1990 in the riding of Chambly, Que. He did not run again in the next federal election three years later.

Mr. Edmonston, in a recent interview with CanWest News, said that his victory was not because of his party affiliation but because of his name recognition as a consumer crusader on behalf of automobile owners. He added that in by-elections, individual qualifications can more readily trump party labels.

"You can actually do it, but you have to run your own campaign and show people you're your own person. It's harder in a general election when you have to run on a national theme."

In the last federal election, the NDP ended up with no seats and a total of 7.49 per cent of the vote in the province. The Bloc won 51 seats with 42 per cent, the Liberals won 13 seats with 20 per cent, the Conservatives won 10 seats with 24 per cent and independent candidates won one seat with .08 per cent of the vote in the province.

The most recent CROP poll indicated the Bloc has lost the support of seven per cent of Quebecers since February and 14 per cent since the last federal election.

Mr. Mulcair, who resigned from the Jean Charest Cabinet as environment minister before the last provincial election over the privatization of a park, said the last provincial election results in Quebec indicate the sovereignty movement is in decline and added that in such a situation, a significant number of Bloc supporters will likely go to the NDP.

Mr. Mulcair cited last month's SES Research poll on a hypothetical situation in which the Bloc had disappeared from



Let the games begin: Bloc MP Bernard Bigras, left, says it's highly unlikely the NDP will win any seats in Quebec in the next federal election. NDP Quebec candidate Thomas Mulcair, meanwhile pictured at a recent NDP caucus, said when it's a four-and-a-half way race the NDP can start winning ridings.

the federal political scene. In that poll, the Conservatives and the NDP were the principal beneficiaries of Bloc supporters. The poll showed that without the Bloc on the federal political map, the Conservative Party had 41 per cent support in Quebec, a gain of 13 per cent, the Liberal Party had 21 per cent support, a gain of only three per cent, and the NDP had the support of 23 per cent, a gain of 10 per cent.

Mr. Mulcair also cited last week's CROP poll that showed NDP support in Quebec was at around 15 per cent compared to Bloc Québécois support at 28 per cent. The Conservatives were at 26 per cent and the Liberals were at 22 per cent.

"When you start getting close to 20 per cent and that's where we are in Quebec—we're working hard to get to the 20 per cent mark—when you get there and you've got four-way races or four-and-a-half-way races, because you get into that 20 per cent range, you are going to start taking ridings. You have to put your structure in place, you have to put your volunteers in place, you've actually got to get your ground game together to win those ridings. Polls, as we all know, don't win ridings, volunteers and door knocking wins ridings as do party policies. That's our

objective to start provoking as many four way races as possible," said Mr. Mulcair.

But Bloc MP Bernard Bigras (Rosemont-La Petite-Patrise, Que.) disagreed and said it's highly unlikely that the NDP would be able to win any seats in Quebec in the next federal election.

"The reality is that the Montrealers support the Liberal Party and the Bloc. When you go outside of Montreal, the real debate is between the Tories and the Bloc Québécois. At this time, the NDP has no space, outside of [Montreal] in the rural region, the debate is between Bloc and Tories but inside Montreal, [the competition] is between Liberal and the Bloc," said Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Bigras, who was first elected in 1997, cited his own riding's example which is located in Montreal and said that the third-place NDP candidate won 11.5 per cent of the vote, Liberals won 15.7 per cent of the vote, but he won 55.9 per cent of the vote. Mr. Bigras argued that although the NDP won about 12 per cent of the vote it still lagged far behind the Bloc.

As for the low polling numbers in the CROP poll released on May 1, Mr. Bigras cited the Decima poll that came out the same day which indicated that the Bloc

Québécois was leading the other parties in Quebec with 34 per cent support, followed by the Liberals with 21 per cent support, the Conservatives with 18 per cent support, the Green Party with 13 per cent support and the NDP with 10 per cent support.

Meanwhile, Mr. Mulcair said that since joining the NDP last month, he has been attending national caucus meetings in Ottawa on the Hill as an informal member of the national caucus and also holds the role of Quebec lieutenant to Mr. Layton.

In this role, he's the principal spokesperson of the party and is also tasked to bring on board some star candidates for the party. He said that he himself has not decided which riding he would run in and said that he's looking at a number of ridings including Outremont, Que., and Laval, Que.

The riding of Outremont which is considered as a safe Liberal riding is currently vacant after the resignation of former Liberal MP Jean Lapierre and the Laval riding is currently represented by Bloc MP Nicole Demers and covers some part of the provincial riding of Chomedey that Mr. Mulcair represented as a Quebec MNA.

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