



LEADING MAN

Thomas Mulcair has set his sights on becoming Canada's first NDP prime minister.

POLITICS

PRIME MINISTER IN WAITING

*Can Thomas Mulcair finish the project
Jack Layton started?*

BY CHARLOTTE GRAY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM GEORGESON

AS THE New Democratic Party float crawls down Yonge Street, Thomas Mulcair smiles and waves to the multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-gendered throng. Toronto's annual Pride Parade delivers some eye-popping sights, among them a contingent of a dozen guys from Foreskin Pride, which advocates for a man's right to choose circumcision or not.

Earlier, Mulcair, the fifty-nine-year-old Leader of the Official Opposition in Ottawa, had plunged into the crowd to introduce himself. Not long ago, a politician would run a mile rather than be photographed with a six-foot-six drag queen dressed as a nurse in white fishnet tights (torn, natch). It's 2013, however, and over a million people are celebrating this carnival of diversity; the leader hugs the scarlet-lipped nurse.

Indeed, for progressive politicians Pride is now a must-do occasion, an opportunity for backslapping, high-fiving, regular-guy "retail politics." Federal Liberal leader Justin Trudeau marches alongside Ontario Liberal Kathleen Wynne, the country's first openly gay premier. At one juncture, a *West Side Story* moment unfolds: red-shirted Liberals cross paths with orange-shirted New Democrats. This being Canada, they rumble with water guns, and the bystanders get in on the action. From time to time, someone in the crowd realizes that Mulcair is in water gun range and lets loose. Without missing a beat, Mulcair grabs a gun of his own and, with deadly accuracy and a gleam in his eye, retaliates. The man loves a fight.

It looks as if he's in for one. At Pride, Trudeau—not Mulcair, whose party holds three times as many seats—triggers the most rapturous applause. Trudeau, the leader for just over six months, has become a celebrity, bringing youth, energy, and hope to a party in a death spiral. His speeches are puffy with platitudes, but he sets audiences alight when he talks of "the values that unite this country."

In contrast, Mulcair, who has spent close to twenty years in politics, has failed to resonate—particularly in English Canada. He has successfully nudged the NDP into the centre of the political spectrum, widening its appeal but offending party traditionalists with his ruthless pursuit of power. His speeches, laden with partisan venom, elicit nods but no teary-eyed enthusiasm. The federal NDP has never had more institutional heft than now, yet its leader, after twenty months at the helm, has made

little impact nationally. His party lags in the polls.

The next election, scheduled for October 2015, will likely be a three-way fight between the autocratic Stephen Harper, the charismatic Trudeau, and the technocratic Mulcair: the ballot box version of rock, paper, scissors. Mulcair is hell bent on becoming the first NDP prime minister, but can this fiercely intelligent, ferociously belligerent former lawyer convince Canadians to trust him with the country's top job, when he is having such a hard time just persuading us to like him? Furthermore, can he win only at the expense of his party's historical allegiances?

"I'VE KNOWN since I was fourteen that I wanted to go into politics," Mulcair explains. We are sitting in a coffee shop near the parade's end, and his shirt is still soaked from the water fights. He takes a long swig of iced tea, and he betrays little fatigue, despite beginning the day at a gay church service and a Toronto Centre riding event, then spending nearly three hours in the thick of Pride euphoria. He gears up to embark on the personal narrative that every twenty-first-century politician is expected to offer.

A question about the decision to enter politics is a standard opening lob, and Mulcair has his patter ready. "I always had politics in my family. Everyone talked about it a great deal. I am the second oldest of ten kids, and my elder sister and I were given responsibilities quite young. My parents would always talk to us as adults." He leans back and gives me a guarded yet friendly smile.

He prefers to keep his private life in the shadows, but his team has told him that Canadians need to know him better. A few days earlier, I spoke to Anne McGrath, who served as NDP president and chief of staff to Jack Layton and Mulcair (she is now a consultant with ENsight Canada). She said that Mulcair has "a compelling personal story. There hasn't been enough focus on the complicated, interwoven roles he plays in his family."

The leader comes from a typically hybrid Quebec background. Like Pierre Trudeau, he had one francophone and one anglophone parent; like Brian Mulroney, his father was an Irish Quebecer. The family spoke both languages at home, although Tom was largely educated in English. He has an impeccable political pedigree: his parents were staunch federalists and Liberals, and his maternal great-grandfather was Honoré Mercier, ninth premier of Quebec.

In a rare interview about his childhood with *Maclean's* writer John Geddes, Mulcair recalled how his family would often go to Mass before breakfast on weekdays. He no longer attends church regularly, but the Catholic social activism that shaped the collectivist outlook of Quebec politics remains a sturdy strand in his world view. He talks about the role of government in protecting such public goods as clean air, education, and health care. "People have to see in the NDP a team they can have confidence in to provide—and this is the world's most boring political slogan, but I'll say it anyway—good, competent public administration."

By twenty-three, he had graduated from McGill University in Montreal, with degrees in common and civil law, and was married to Catherine Pinhas, the daughter of Sephardic Jews from Turkey who escaped the Holocaust. In 1978, the couple moved to Quebec City, where Catherine pursued studies in psychology and Tom took a job in the Ministry of Justice.

It was a challenging time. René Lévesque had just formed the first Parti Québécois government, and the province pulsed with emotional debates. Mulcair, a federalist, belonged to an embattled minority within the government, but he never shrank from swimming against the tide. During the 1980 referendum, he says proudly, he was the PQ's "greatest adversary." He faced an additional challenge: language. Catherine helped him perfect his French, but "it was a huge effort to bring my French up to snuff," he told Geddes.

He went on to a senior role in the Conseil de la langue française, which oversaw implementation of Quebec's controversial language laws. In 1983, he served as the director of legal affairs for Alliance Québec, a privately funded English-language rights group. Two years later, he entered private practice, with an unusual major client, the Government of Manitoba. The Supreme Court of Canada had ruled that over a century's worth of English-only legislation in the province must be translated into French. For several months, Mulcair spent a week every month in Winnipeg, supervising the exercise. It was his first real encounter with "ROC," as he refers to the rest of Canada.

His story, as McGrath noted, is compelling: his ambition, and his romance with Catherine, with whom he demands couple time from his schedulers. (The Mulcairs have two sons, Matt, an officer in the Quebec police force, and Greg, who teaches physics and engineering at John Abbott College in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue.) Nevertheless, I don't hear much of that story in the Toronto coffee shop. Mulcair has another agenda. He wants to talk politics, and put his own spin on the controversial events in his career.

In 1994, he won a seat in the National Assembly as a Liberal, on his home turf in Laval. Jacques Parizeau's PQs romped to victory and immediately plunged the province into a second referendum. Mulcair became "a strong presence, thanks to sheer force of character," says Geoffrey Chambers, the founding executive director of Alliance Québec, then vice-president of the Liberal Party of Quebec. The Liberals defeated the PQ in 2003, and Mulcair was appointed to Premier Jean Charest's cabinet in what ought to have been a low-profile post, minister of sustainable development, environment, and parks.

Mulcair enforced environmental regulations ruthlessly, often irritating colleagues who wanted flexibility in their regions.

He expanded the scope of inspections while reducing the ministry's budget by 15 percent. Today he points proudly to Quebec's groundbreaking Sustainable Development Act, which added the right to live in a healthy environment to the provincial charter of human rights and freedoms.

Sometimes, his pugnacity was pure mischief. The American environmentalist Robert Kennedy once showed up to protest the construction of a dam, and devised a photo op for himself standing beside a river with a fishing rod. Mulcair was not amused to have an eco-celebrity trawling his waters, and he had Kennedy fined for fishing without a licence. On other occasions, his combativeness was raw politics. In discussions about a national climate change plan, he triggered a blazing row with

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federal environment minister Stéphane Dion over Ottawa's right to attach conditions to a transfer of federal funds. Mulcair insisted that Dion was trying to "dictate" terms to him.

Other aspects of his performance as a Member of the National Assembly left whiffs of cordite. A former PQ minister filed a defamation suit against Mulcair in 2005 because the latter had accused him of influence peddling, and had snarled (in French), "I'm looking forward to seeing you in prison, you old whore." Mulcair was ordered to pay \$95,000, plus legal costs.

Colleagues were wary of someone who, in the words of a former Charest staffer, "is not a team player; he's a Mulcair player." Relations with the premier deteriorated. This was partly a matter of style. Charest is an affable, charming pragmatist, while Mulcair is quick with sarcastic comments and moral fervour—but there was a more fundamental gulf. As Mulcair, eager to explain Quebec to an outsider, tells me, "The politics are different from those in the rest of Canada, because the dividing line is between the federalist tent, which accommodates left and right, and the sovereignist tent, which also accommodates left and right."

He stood firmly on the federalist side, but to the left of the premier on social and economic issues. Tensions came to a head over a proposed condominium development in Mont-Orford National Park. Without the approval of his minister responsible for parks, Charest gave developers the green light. In a subsequent cabinet shuffle, the premier offered Mulcair the position of minister of government services, but rather than accept the demotion he quit. In Chambers' opinion, "Tom would be premier of Quebec today if he hadn't walked."

Having burned his bridges in Quebec, he directed his attention toward Ottawa, looking for a job where he would have real power. He felt no loyalty to the federal Liberals—the Quebec party has always kept its distance from its Ottawa counterpart—and the federal party, then led by Dion, was not an option anyway; the leader still bore the scars of their previous encounter. He flirted with the Harper government (a judicial appointment and a new post as environment commissioner were floated), but he received no firm offers. Then Jack Layton, leader of the NDP, came calling.

In 2006, while Mulcair was still a backbencher in Quebec, he and Catherine went to dinner with Layton and his wife, Olivia Chow, at Mon Village Restaurant and Pub, an unpretentious eatery between Montreal and Ottawa. The two couples bonded, recalls Mulcair: "Catherine and I had a great evening, and we were both blown away." Layton pitched a vision for the NDP's future that was "really seductive," Mulcair says, one that offered a strong Quebecer an important role.

Mulcair announced that he would seek a federal seat as a member of the NDP. It seemed foolhardy; only one New Democrat had ever been elected in Quebec, back in 1990. Moreover, Mulcair decided to run in the hitherto rock-solid Liberal seat of Outremont. Against the odds, in a September 2007 by-election, he won a dramatic victory with a nearly 20 percent lead over Dion's hand-picked candidate, then repeated his triumph in the federal election the following year. He arrived in Ottawa ready to pursue "the project," as New Democrats now call, with missionary zeal, the game plan Layton developed.

HISTORIAN Desmond Morton opened *NDP: The Dream of Power*, his 1974 account of the party's birth, with the words "Conventional wisdom and academic political science have generally agreed that democratic socialism has no real future as a political option in North America." For the next three decades, nothing in federal politics challenged that assertion.

The NDP was formed in 1961 as a party of moderate socialism, out of a merger between two left-wing movements, the Canadian Labour Congress, and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, a socialist party founded in Calgary during the Depression. Early meetings were thronged with steelworkers, urban reformers, farmers, social gospel activists, Prairie populists, straitlaced Methodists, and radical intellectuals. At times, only the leadership of Tommy Douglas, the inspirational Saskatchewan premier, held together this motley crew of true believers. Up until 2008, the NDP's share of the vote rarely rose above 18 percent, and on occasion fell as low as 7 percent.

The NDP was never entirely marginal, however. It formed provincial and territorial governments, and its persistent tug to the left has ensured a key difference between Canadian and American political cultures. Particularly in the 1970s, under the leadership of David Lewis, it used its leverage with the minority Liberal government to introduce progressive legislation, including pension indexing and the creation of Petro-Canada. Later, under Ed Broadbent, the NDP developed an industrial strategy geared to a mixed economy that balanced productivity and social programs. In 1988, it reached a peak of forty-three seats in the House.

Still, it was stuck with the nickname "the conscience of Canada," subtly confirming both its utopianism and its lack of muscle. With Broadbent's departure in 1989, it drifted away from rigorous policy development and, as the twentieth century drew to a close, nosedived in the polls. Robin Sears, a public affairs consultant with Earncliffe Strategy Group and NDP national director during the Broadbent years, admits that the party had trouble with *gravitas*. "There were too many microphone-grabbing iconoclasts," he says, "like [MPs] Svend Robinson and Pat Martin."

Then Layton, a prominent Toronto city councillor, was elected leader in 2003. At first, the party continued to limp, competing

for national attention not only with a Liberal Party in decline and a newly resurgent Conservative Party, but also with the Bloc Québécois and a nascent Green movement. Its resources were spread thin, and its policy platform was indistinct and costly.

Behind the scenes, however, party insiders like Brad Lavigne and Brian Topp were already retooling. At Layton's dining-room table in Toronto, they drew up a plan to become a twenty-first-century government-in-waiting. They talked in advertising jargon: the leader would be "branded" and the party "rebranded," and they would implement extensive voter identification machinery, targeted messaging, and professional fundraising. They charted a strategy to make Layton the Leader of the Official Opposition, and then prime minister. For a party that had always verged on irrelevance, "the project" seemed either daringly ambitious or stupidly unrealistic.

The team aggressively recruited young members and staffers. Drew Anderson, appointed director of marketing and membership in 2005 while still in his twenties, recalls that Layton joked at meetings, "I used to be the youngest New Democrat by a generation. Now I'm the oldest." Anticipating the squeeze on corporate and union financing after strict political donation limits were introduced in 2004, the party raised sufficient funds from unions in 2003 to replace its cramped rented office in Ottawa, and to build a new headquarters that provided income from tenants and security for mid-election loans. The NDP still lagged far behind the Conservative fundraising behemoth, but it could now compete with the Liberals.

Nevertheless, progress was slow. In the 2006 election, the caucus grew from nineteen members to twenty-nine, but its share of the popular vote barely budged. While the Liberals, now in Opposition, watched their base shrink further, the New Democrats sharpened their focus, and the 2008 election saw their caucus increase to thirty-seven. The NDP continued to play its traditional minor party role, voting against the Harper government on such policies as military adventures and strict crime bills, but also using its leverage to strengthen Conservative legislation on political accountability, regulation of income trusts, and clean air.

"Jack got things done," Broadbent says. "Canadians saw that he could make things work and achieve social democratic goals in an acrimonious Parliament." Layton projected an optimistic image, and positioned the NDP as a reasonable, progressive alternative to both the scandal-plagued Liberals and the tough-on-crime, corporate tax-cutting Tories.

Every political strategist in Canada knows that to form a government, a party must win two out of three regions: Quebec, Ontario, and the West (in particular, populous BC). Quebec had been key to electoral victories for Trudeau, Mulroney, and Jean Chrétien, but the New Democrats had barely registered among the electorate there; in the 2000 election, for example, it received 1.8 percent of the votes. Its leaders struggled to speak French, and its candidates were lacklustre.

Layton had committed to changing this. Born in Quebec and bilingual, he sensed that the province could be courted, given its left-of-centre political culture and the flagging appeal of separatism, so the NDP ran focus groups there. As Lavigne described it in a *Policy Options* article, "Quebec voters told us they would consider voting for us only if we met two conditions: shed [our] reputation as *Les centralisateurs* [proponents of a strong federal government] and prove we could attract high-calibre candidates who could win."

This required a subtle reshaping of priorities. Hence the decision in 2005 to reject the federal rules laid down in the 2000 Clarity Act, which specified that a future referendum on independence would require a “clear majority” to trigger negotiations on Quebec secession (the NDP said 50 percent plus one vote would suffice). Hence the decision, ratified by the party convention this past April, to drop wording from the preamble to its constitution that put social programs before profit. And hence the crucial dinner in 2006, with Layton, Chow, and the Mulcairs. Layton saw Mulcair as key to establishing an NDP beachhead in Quebec.

Together, Mulcair and Layton crossed and recrossed Quebec, wooing voters, and they worked hard to enlist credible candidates. “It took us four years to get Romeo Saganash,” says Mulcair. “People in the rest of Canada didn’t know who he was, but as one of the lead negotiators for the James Bay Cree, he is one of the most respected people in Quebec.” (He is now an NDP MP.)

Meanwhile, Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff discovered that he was held in even lower regard in Quebec than in the rest of the country, and the Bloc Québécois looked old and tired. When the federal election was called in 2011, Quebecers started paying attention to the NDP. Layton made a particularly good impression on the popular TV show *Tout le monde en parle*. He was recovering from prostate cancer treatments and hip replacement surgery, and he gamely waved his cane as he limped onto the set. The echo of Lucien Bouchard, the much-loved provincial politician of the 1990s who lost a leg to flesh-eating disease, was unmistakable. Quebecers warmed to “*le bon Jack*.”

On election night, many NDP insiders thought Mulcair was being bombastic when, in an office pool on how many Quebec seats they would capture, he made the highest prediction: thirty-four. The final tally was fifty-nine. “I knew we were heading for a wave,” he says, “but I never dared hope.” No matter that many new MPs were rookies with a startling lack of qualifications. No matter that the party had only won eight more seats outside of Quebec. It had achieved two of the project’s objectives, leap-frogging into the Official Opposition with a caucus of 103 members, and establishing a solid presence in the province. Suddenly, Brixton’s Pub on Sparks Street, the New Democrat hangout in Ottawa, was filled with a youthful army of parliamentarians swigging Alexander Keith’s India Pale Ale.

One hundred twelve days later, Layton died of cancer. In a goodbye letter to Canada, the happy warrior wrote, “Love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear.” It was a message tailor made for an electorate growing tired of a hardline Conservative regime and an emotionally remote prime minister. The wave of grief that surged across the country hinted that the party had successfully established its new brand. However, the position of Leader of the Official Opposition—and flag-bearer for the new NDP—was now vacant.

WHEN MULCAIR first arrived in Ottawa in 2007, Layton immediately appointed him Quebec lieutenant, finance critic, and a deputy leader. With his Liberal antecedents and his abrasive style, Mulcair made a mixed impression on his new colleagues.

Ontario New Democrats confided to Robin Sears stories of “tantrums in and boycotts of caucus,” and “explosive, spittle-flecked rages.” When fellow deputy party leader Libby Davies

criticized Israel, Mulcair stomped out of caucus, threatening not to return until she was ejected. (He shunned caucus meetings for weeks, but eventually returned with the issue unresolved.) Others, though, welcomed his intellectual rigour and energy. “He gets things done,” says Anne McGrath. “And sometimes he’s right to be impatient.” Layton tolerated the fireworks because he knew Mulcair was too valuable to lose.

Mulcair’s input into the Quebec strategy was significant. He insisted, for instance, that campaign literature be rewritten from badly translated English propaganda to recognize that Quebec already had programs like publicly funded daycare. But it’s unclear how much credit should be awarded to him for the 2011 victory. Quebec has a history of moving as a block in federal elections, and the affection for “*le bon Jack*” should not be underestimated. As Jean-Marc Léger, dean of Quebec pollsters, told the *Globe and Mail* in 2012, “It was a vote by elimination. People, in a campaign, want to love someone. And this time, it was Jack Layton.”

No one doubted that Mulcair would run for the leadership, although he faced off against popular party veterans, such as Ottawa MP Paul Dewar and Brian Topp. Michael Byers, a political scientist and environmentalist who was close to Layton, chose to chair Mulcair’s BC campaign because, as he explained to me, “Tom is totally on top of all the files, particularly the economic and environmental ones. He’s the most disciplined person I’ve ever met.” That self-discipline extended, Byers says, to Mulcair controlling his temper during the campaign. “For five months, Tom maintained a smile and a twinkle in his eye.”

Although Mulcair started the campaign with little support from party heavyweights, he won the leadership on the fifth ballot. Afterwards, Catherine Pinhas Mulcair told Byers that Tom “quite enjoyed being the nice guy,” and this success allayed some of the doubts about him. Besides, he held a key card: he was the candidate with the best chance of hanging on to Quebec.

BACK IN THE Toronto café, Mulcair is still in top gear, although his media assistant, George Smith, and I are starting to droop. Mulcair is an agreeable (if intense) man to interview, as long as he can control the topic. Before the parade, I was struck by his chivalry. He asked me if I had eaten, and he sprayed suntan lotion on my arms. I recalled a long-ago interview with Stephen Harper, then a Reform Party backbencher, who ignored me, would only speak into my tape recorder, and abruptly terminated the interview when I ran out of tape. Mulcair, meanwhile, is no robot.

He has now switched to coffee, pausing to stir milk into his cup when I ask, “What have you accomplished so far?” He likes the question, because he feels he has done well. He insists that his party has consolidated its hold in Quebec because his eager young MPs there have worked hard. His second achievement is showcasing the party as a “tough, structured, determined Opposition.” He revels in question period combat, frequently elbowing aside front-benchers to dominate his party’s allocation of questions. He is particularly proud of his Gatling gun interrogation of Harper on the Mike Duffy Senate scandal. Without wordy preambles, and with the biting precision of a courtroom prosecutor, he drilled away at the timing of when the prime minister heard that his chief of staff had cut a cheque to pay off Duffy’s debt.

“Unlike Dion, who was turned into mincemeat, or Ignatieff, who was steamrollered, we’ve held [the government’s] feet to the fire,” Mulcair says. Harper, he admits, is “one of the smartest politicians I’ve ever had to grapple with. When you ask him a very specific six-second question and he bobs and weaves, Canadians see the disdain. It’s not just me he’s refusing to answer.”

Within Ottawa’s tight political world, however, Mulcair has generated little warmth. Layton always had a cheery word for fellow MPs and spoke often to other Opposition party leaders. Mulcair has no time for lobby chit-chat, and he rarely meets with the other Opposition leaders. As for the famous temper, when I ask him if he has a short fuse he snaps back, “No, I don’t. I’m a very determined person, and I know I have tough decisions to make.” Stories about tantrums, he says, are promoted by his opponents, but there are enough of them—a run-in with the Mounties on Parliament Hill, a spat with a fellow guest on a TV news show—to suggest that the new-found self-control is tenuous.

Nevertheless, Mulcair has successfully put his own stamp on the federal caucus. Sears says that “over the past year, Tom has had the party and the caucus behave with more restraint and discipline than Tommy Douglas or Broadbent ever managed. I’m still in awe of how he has reined in the crazies and professionalized those totally green young Quebecers.” Perhaps this is because Mulcair has made it clear that he is watching for potential cabinet material; perhaps his staff’s careful stroking of individual egos has suppressed any revolt. However he has done it, he has short-circuited the kind of challenges that he himself posed to party leaders in the past.

The New Democrats remain popular in his home province, where he has forged ahead with Layton’s commitment to Quebecers’ status as a real nation within a united Canada. If Ottawa wants to use federal spending to establish a new national program, Mulcair says, “the NDP will allow Quebec to withdraw, full compensation, no conditions.” Every program and policy is filtered through a sensibility attuned to Quebec’s interests. He blamed the Harper Conservatives for the Lac-Mégantic rail tragedy, for instance, by condemning weak regulation of railroad safety.

In the rest of the country, the leader has yet to give left-leaning Canadians a reason to vote for him instead of the feel-good Trudeau. Ontario will be “a killing ground in the next election,” says Liberal organizer Dan Gagnier, who is working on Trudeau’s campaign. When Mulcair is asked about issues of interest to the province’s middle class, though, he offers boilerplate rhetoric about urban infrastructure and protection of social programs. In Saskatchewan, birthplace of the NDP, he has little traction. David McGrane, professor of political science at the University of Saskatchewan, says, “He has struggled to define a vision for western Canada. People here think he’s obsessed with Quebec.”

Mulcair’s commitment to soft nationalism arouses discomfort elsewhere, especially since he consistently avoids the challenge of balancing competing regional priorities. Moreover, he has ducked important issues. Last winter, he did not meet with First Nations leaders of the Idle No More movement until months after it first came together. He talks of restoring Canada’s international reputation without explaining how he would accomplish this; and other than a promise to provide good management of the public purse, he has offered no clear commitments on tax

changes or initiatives to promote employment; nor has he articulated how he will tackle the growing gap between rich and poor.


Conventional wisdom says he has moved into the space the Liberals once occupied, by compromising his party's historical policies. In fact, the two parties drifted onto the same turf long before Mulcair transformed from a Quebec Liberal into a federal New Democrat. He has made only minor adjustments: a new openness to international trade deals, and a more forthright recognition of the importance of Canada's energy sector. If a perception of change has developed, it is as much because he has departed from classic NDP discourse about social justice and democratic socialism, and has reverted to Liberal terminology, such as "balancing economic growth against environmental sustainability."


According to Sears, "Tom has been very clever at positioning himself as a centrist leader without making any firm statements, while making palliative noises on traditional NDP issues." At present, the clearest distinction in English Canada between the two parties is that the Liberals favour decriminalization of marijuana, and the New Democrats want to abolish the Senate. Neither is a major ballot box issue.

Mulcair and Trudeau are playing a waiting game, hesitating to outline serious policy proposals that could become targets for attack. Trudeau marks time by travelling across the country, brimming with positive energy and burnishing two well-established brands, the Liberal Party and the Trudeau name. Mulcair continues his relentless assault on the Conservatives: for the excessive costs of the new F-35 fighter jets; for the hiring and subsequent firing of thousands of public servants; for the apparent disappearance

(according to the Auditor General's report) of \$3.1 billion in public funds. "That's \$3.1 *billion*," he says. "I didn't make that up."

In 2015, Canadians may decide that Mulcair's mean, steely style is the only way to defeat Harper, but this depends on several unknowns: the current Conservative slide in popularity would have to continue; the Liberals would have to prove irrevocably damaged; those NDP supporters in Quebec would have to remain loyal; and the party would have to recruit first-time voters everywhere else.

Perhaps these conditions will be met. After nearly eight years of Harper—cuts to social and environmental programs, the withdrawal from our traditional role of helpful global fixer, and the rewriting of Canadian history—the possibility of a return to a centre-left government continues to simmer. Mulcair has already made the parliamentary party his own, and has perfected his bare-knuckle political tactics, but winning the next election will require more than this. He must demonstrate that he's in this fight not just because of his own raw ambition, but because he loves the country and reflects the values of a majority of its citizens. In the meantime, it wouldn't hurt for him to display more of the human qualities I glimpsed at Pride. As Layton proved, sophisticated political strategies and a sunny personality make for a winning combination. By 2015, however, Layton will have been mythologized into irrelevance. If the New Democrats do form the country's next government, then the credit for the final victory will belong to Thomas Mulcair. 

 **ONLINE** Reflections on the 2012 NDP leadership convention, at thewalrus.ca/what-would-tommy-douglas-think.