

Loyalty dilemma in NDP

The popular word on Parliament Hill Wednesday was "respect." Ed Broadbent "respected why, in good conscience," four of his MPs had chosen to part from his leadership and the Trudeau constitutional resolution. As for the four, they "highly respected" their leader.

All this respect was spooned out, of course, to help fill the yaw between Broadbent's consistent, strident approval of the resolution, and the internal despair within almost half his caucus and much of the party membership in the West, at the contents and process of the Trudeau plan.

One doesn't need to be anti-resolution to deplore Broadbent's intitial judgment. Clearly Trudeau conned him in private talks. Broadbent swallowed the popular line last fall that Trudeau, the Liberals, and quick constitutional reform had a huge popular following. To appreciate this one can go back to early October to columns by pundits like Christopher Young and Richard Gwyn which pitied Joe Clark for so quickly opposing the resolution and praised Broadbent for so quickly and accurately catching the public mood.

Should have checked

Trudeau's quid pro quo to Broadbent was the undertaking he'd let the NDP move an amendment to assert provincial control of resources. And Broadbent thought this would delight Blakeney of Saskatchewan. Unfortunately for him he didn't check with Blakeney and he seemed to have forgotten the strong position Blakeney had taken at the first ministers conference in September against entrenching a charter of rights.

There were two follies in Broadbent's abruptness in my opinion. One can hardly be excused; the other is more understandable since it's a misjudgment several previous NDP leaders have made before him.

The first folly was simply committing himself, and so the NDP across Canada, so absolutely at the beginning of the process. He needn't have gone so far; he could have stated tentative or provisional support. One guesses that Trudeau had been tough. Be with me hard and fast from the start and you'll have your resource item kudo; otherwise no deal.

The second, older folly needs some history. I call it the CCF-NDP's Stanley Knowles syndrome. Knowles has a belief, inherited I suppose from the CCF saint, Woodsworth, that you use your parliamentary persuasion and leverage to get the government to do good things for the people. Witness Woodsworth and the first old age pensions. This is admirable as idealism, often folly as partisan strategy. The governing party will give you crumbs so long as they need your votes or your public constituency. Of course, the classic example was David Lewis and the NDP after Trudeau came back with minority backing in 1972. Was there ever a clearer lesson than the Turner budget of '74 and the subsequent massacre of the NDP in the election, to show how all the puffery of "Look people, look what we got for you" has no

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carry-over to the ballot box. It was excusable in the days of the CCF. Unlike its NDP successor it aimed as much or more for influence and popularizing needed programs as it did for power.

When you're No. 3 you try harder. But who are you to replace in the top two spots? For the NDP is it the Grits or the Tories? Because Broadbent and Lewis before him have a contempt for the Tories as primitives and because the Grits always have some left-wing or pseudo-leftwingers like Mackasey, Munro, MacEachen and Trudeau, the affinity is with the Grits. The Tories are the main enemy, ideologically. The problem is that it is the Liberal Party which is the main enemy politically. Play footsy with the Grits and voters wonder: why not for the left-wing party which will have a better chance of implementing left-wing policies?

Understanding why and how Broadbent got into his box helps us understand why four of his MPs bolted and why another ten or so of the 34 member caucus are queasy about being "ready, aye, ready" with their leader and Mr. Trudeau.

Caucus doubts

Broadbent was aware of the caucus doubts about his decision. During the early weeks of the committee hearings the Liberals kept running to him with complaints that Lorne Nystron, the NDP lead spokesman there, was too cool and ambivalent. Broadbent tried to get Bob Rae, his most enthusiastic backer in the caucus, on the committee. When he discovered that wouldn't wash with his caucus he had an appreciation that he faced a caucus split. Then he and Chretien tried their best to trade Blakeney on side, and when that failed he knew his Saskatchewan MPs were almost certain to bolt. He then called in the old heavyweights of the federal party, men like Lewis and Douglas, to give Nystron and friends the catechism of loyalty to the leader, plus warnings of promising party careers ruined by disloyalty.

The pressures succeeded with a few in the caucus, and failed with the four. Skeptics will say that they have read their riding sentiments and acted accordingly. But their independence on the issue is more than that, more than trying to get along with the premier. It is also reacting to the simple fault in the resolution and its process: that one order in a dual-order, federal system should change the system unilaterally.

For all New Democrats, despite all the blarney about "respect" and "agonized consciences", there's now a dilemma for their loyalty. How do I choose for best judgment on the Constitution: Broadbent and Trudeau or Blakeney?