

Grits shift: Ignatieff moves Liberals toward the centre

By JASON LOFTUS
Epoch Times Staff

TORONTO—It's been less than three months since Michael Ignatieff took the reins of Canada's Official Opposition. The changes have been swift.

The former academic says he's trying to win back voters the Liberals lost under former leader Stéphane Dion in the last election in the fall. It was the party's worst showing since the country's first elections in 1867.

At a roundtable with media in Toronto on Monday, Mr. Ignatieff

"We win when people think we're a moderate, pragmatic, sensible party that connects to what Canadians are worried about."

answered questions from The Epoch Times on the new direction in which he's taking the party.

"Yes, I'm moving the party into the centre because I think we win from the centre. We win when people think we're a moderate, pragmatic, sensible party that connects to what Canadians are worried about," Mr. Ignatieff said.

"Canadians are worried about their jobs, their mortgages, their pensions, their savings."

Born in Canada, Mr. Ignatieff spent most of his adult life teaching overseas at prestigious universities, including Oxford and Harvard. He was also a television journalist with the BBC and is an accomplished author.

Mr. Ignatieff returned to Canada three years ago and is serving his second term as the member of parliament for the Toronto constituency of Etobicoke-Lakeshore.

He was installed as Liberal Leader in December after a failed bid by Mr. Dion to oust Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government and replace it with a coalition of left-leaning parties.

As Mr. Ignatieff sees it, the party's path to renewed credibility lies in the political middle. After taking power, he dropped Mr. Dion's

controversial carbon tax plan and has been instead touting his party's economic credentials. In an interview this week, he suggested he was considering the return of income trusts, which could help energy companies raise capital.

Mr. Ignatieff was also quick to cancel the coalition agreement with the other two opposition parties—the left-wing New Democratic Party and separatist Bloc Québécois.

"I could be sitting here as your prime minister, but I turned it down because I didn't think it was right for someone who believes in the national unity of my country to make a deal with people who want to split the country up," Mr. Ignatieff explained Monday.

It's actually an argument against the coalition made by Mr. Harper during the parliamentary crisis last fall. And it's not the only similarity commentators are finding between the two leaders. Some argue that as Mr. Ignatieff charges toward the middle, it's getting harder to tell the Liberals and the Conservatives apart.

Mr. Ignatieff himself offered that his party passed Mr. Harper's recent stimulus budget quicker than any other budget but one in Canadian history. But, he says, that's not because the two parties see eye to eye.

"We forced him to create a stimulus," Mr. Ignatieff said. He adds that there's still much that sets the two apart.

"The real stuff that matters to me is that I think the Liberal Party wins elections when we persuade Canadians that we can unite them. The real differentiation between me and Mr. Harper is I unite and he divides."

As an example, Mr. Ignatieff said his party would create a high-speed rail connection between Quebec City and the southwestern Ontario city of Windsor, a line that would cut through more than half of Canada's population. "That's the best project I can think of to pull Canadians together," he says. "It would pull Quebec and Ontario together like no other project I can imagine."

Mr. Ignatieff also said he would invest in creating childcare spaces, criticizing the Conservative policy of providing \$1200 per year for each child under six. "You can't buy childcare spaces for \$1200," he said.

"Yes, I want to be in the centre, but there's lots of clean, blue water between me and the Conservatives," he said.



Michael Ignatieff became Leader of Canada's Liberal Party in December. JASON LOFTUS/THE EPOCH TIMES

PMO contests Ignatieff's comments on the Bloc

By JASON LOFTUS
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The Prime Minister's Office contacted the Epoch Times following an article that appeared on the newspaper's website Monday about Liberal Leader Michael Ignatieff's efforts to move his party to the political centre.

The PMO sought to rebut a comment made by Mr. Ignatieff that appeared in the article. Mr. Ignatieff had said at a roundtable with media including The Epoch Times on Monday: "I could be sitting here as your prime minister, but I turned it down because I didn't think it was right for someone who believes in the national unity of my country to make a deal with people who want to split the country up."

In a telephone interview Wednesday afternoon, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's press secretary Dimitri Soudas challenged the opposition leader's claim.

"I guess that Mr. Ignatieff is trying to pretend that he himself never signed the document that basically formed the coalition between the Bloc Québécois, the Liberals and the NDP," Mr. Soudas said.

Mr. Ignatieff signed his name at the bottom of a Liberal Party petition presented to Governor-General Michaëlle Jean in December expressing non-confidence in the Conservative government and the intent to form a coalition government, which would have included Liberals, New Democrats and the separatist Bloc Québécois.

Stéphane Dion was Liberal Leader at the time. When the bid to immediately oust the Conservatives failed in December, Mr. Dion was replaced by Mr. Ignatieff who soon cancelled the coalition proposal.

Ms. Soudas also pointed to a French-language newspaper report from January in which Mr. Ignatieff is quoted as saying that Bloc MPs "are not the enemies of Canada."

These are examples, Mr. Soudas said, that Mr. Ignatieff "goes to different parts of the country and says totally the opposite thing."

For his part, Mr. Ignatieff on Monday portrayed Mr. Harper's stance on the Bloc as divisive and tried to strike a conciliatory tone.

"I have a respectful but fundamental disagreement with my Bloc colleagues," he said. "Many of them are friends; I get on with them. And I didn't like the way Harper called them traitors to the country. I thought he stirred up antagonism between east and west, between Francophones and Anglophones in the crisis in December. I disagreed with that."

Tibetans and supporters rally for justice

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On the Hill, protestors waved Tibetan flags while speakers denounced China's mistreatment of Tibet and its people. Parts of the Dalai Lama's speech were read in Tibetan, English and French, and a minute's silence was observed for those who died in the protests of March 2008.

David Kilgour, former MP and former Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific, talked about the events that occurred around the time of the 1959

uprising and the treacherous actions by the Chinese, including a threat by Chairman Mao to kidnap the young Dalai Lama.

He said that in the years since Chinese forces entered Tibet, "tens of thousands have been killed, hundreds of thousands imprisoned, over 6,000 monasteries, temples and nunneries pillaged and destroyed, thousands more Tibetans disappeared last year or were imprisoned, and more destruction directed toward

thousands of monasteries and religious objects."

Kilgour said the Dalai Lama advocates Tibetan autonomy under Chinese rule, strongly disavows violence and does not favour secession, yet the Chinese regime "has always unfairly accused him of fomenting violence in Tibet."

"The Dalai Lama is Beijing's best chance for a peaceful resolution of the Tibet issue," he said.

Liberal MP and noted human

rights lawyer Irwin Cotler said the time has come to "put an end to what the Dalai Lama called today this 'hell on Earth'; to put an end to this persistent and pervasive state-sanctioned policy of persecution and prosecution of the innocent Tibetans."

He called on China to restore full autonomy to Tibet and Tibetans, to protect and preserve the rights of Tibetans to their heritage, to their history, and to their secure future, to honour the treaties between China and Tibet and to allow the Dalai Lama to return from exile.

Dermot Travis, executive director of the Canada Tibet Committee, read from an email that had been sent to him by a Chinese-Canadian who wanted to send a "message of peace and reconciliation that has nothing to do with politics or religion."

Travis read: "Friends, do not feel that your voices are unheard for I too share your anger, pain and suffering at the current situation that is happening ... Tragedy such as this brings people of all ethnicities together to condemn the senseless violence. Friends, you have every right to fight for self-determination in Lhasa, for that is your capital city and Tibet is your home land, it belongs to you. I encourage all of you to stand firm and to spread the message of peace and compassion. I stand in solidarity with you and you have my full support for a free Tibet."

Green Party leader Elizabeth May said that not only are the Tibetan people being oppressed but the environment is also being damaged. She said the Chinese regime's development on the Tibetan Plateau, which feeds many major rivers in the region, could jeopardize the drinking water for more than a bil-

lion people.

She praised the Dalai Lama's pursuit of non-violent solutions, and called on China to allow more autonomy for the Tibetan people.

"I think they (the Chinese leadership) have been taking advantage of his holiness' peaceful nonviolence and his holiness' good heart. I think they have been fooling the rest of the world in saying that they have been talking."

"We call on the Chinese government that 50 years is enough. It's time to find a way to live together and to allow the people of Tibet their ability to express their religion, their culture, to be people in a land that includes China but is not oppressed by China."

Conservative Senator Consiglio Di Nino said he is "tremendously frustrated" at the lack of movement in talks with the Dalai Lama and the Chinese regime's failure to meet the Dalai Lama's modest demands. He said China's response to the Dalai Lama has been "an insult."

"I think they (the Chinese leadership) have been taking advantage of his holiness' peaceful nonviolence and his holiness' good heart. I think they have been fooling the rest of the world in saying that they have been talking. The frustration is even much greater because what his holiness is asking for is really the least that could take place after a country

was invaded illegally and has been oppressed for 50 years."

Di Nino observed that there were young people in attendance who were not even born in 1959, yet they came to make a stand for human rights.

"They're here because of the fundamental human element which believes in freedoms, which believes in rights, which believes that every man and woman, every child should be free to practice, to believe in what they rightfully believe is their destiny and their culture."


Lindsay Mosman, campaigner with Amnesty International Canada, spoke about the situation in Tibet since the 2008 protests, saying more than 1,000 of the 4,000 detained during the protests remain unaccounted for.

"Amnesty International fears that many of the detainees have faced unfair trials including charges related to the peaceful expression of their beliefs. Detainees may also face torture and ill treatment including beatings, refusal of medical treatment, inadequate food and overcrowded conditions in prisons."

On this 50th anniversary, said Mosman, Amnesty International is calling on the Chinese authorities to end its "strike hard" campaign initiated in January and to allow human rights monitors, the media, and independent observers access to Tibet.

"The Chinese authorities must respect the right of Tibetans to their culture, language and religion," she said.

Others speakers include MP Wayne Marston, NDP critic on human rights; Liberal MP Gerard Kennedy; former Team Canada rower David Kay; Bloc Québécois MP Eve-Mary Thériault; Terry Lama, national director of Students for a Free Tibet; and Roman Mukerjee of the Canada Tibet Committee.



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