

No shortage of Canadian political problems in 2009; The beginning and the end of the year found us wondering how Ottawa will go about ridding itself of a bulging federal deficit

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How will we remember the political year that was 2009?

During the past dozen months Canada's two main parties experienced see-saw swings in support, while offering few solutions to the country's most daunting policy dilemmas.

As at the beginning of 2009, Canadians were left wondering at the end of the year how Ottawa will go about ridding itself of a bulging federal deficit that has ensconced itself on the Canadian body politic.

Wondering, too, how the country will reconcile Alberta oil-sands expansion with the imperatives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

And what Ottawa will do as a NATO member to address the mayhem and murder in Afghanistan post-2011 as a deadline for the Canadian Forces' military withdrawal fast approaches. While these hot potatoes simmered, the political parties were on full boil with their own problems.

Liberals, last January, were raring to go with their new leader, Michael Ignatieff. Polls had them tied with the governing Conservatives by the time the tulips bloomed in Ottawa. Then — whoosh — all the petals fell off in the cool autumn air as Liberal support cratered.

The Conservatives, meanwhile, who were in the dumpster in early January following Stephen Harper's desperate appeal for a parliamentary recess last Christmas, spent 2009 climbing steadily in the polls.

The party's support reached majority territory by October when the PM dared to play the piano for voters at a National Arts Centre gala and, in doing so, looked—ye gods—human.

It was a year when New Democrats had some success, finding gut-punching issues to champion — the harmonized sales tax adoption in B.C. and Ontario, and the pensions plight. But the party remains no closer to convincing voters it's a realistic governing alternative at the federal level. The election everyone widely anticipated throughout the year never did materialize. But at least the notion has been put to bed for a while, given the Grits' faltering condition. Meanwhile, a Nanos poll announced in December that Canadians are in a better mood than a year ago, with 64 per cent thinking Canada is moving in the right direction, up from 53 per cent in 2008.

Some fun stuff happened in 2009 as well. Gov.-Gen. Michaëlle Jean got herself a new Afro hairdo. Defence Minister Peter MacKay finally got himself a would-be wife in Jana Juginovic. And U.S. President Barack Obama paid a visit to Ottawa, for a few hours.

Prince Charles and Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, also dropped in and stayed longer, but, in terms of excitement and crowds, there was no contest between the two visits.

Canada got nine new Conservative senators in 2009, to join 18 others appointed last December. The tally currently is 46 Conservative senators and 51 Liberals. Any guesses about which party will lay claim to the six additional seats in the Red Chamber that will need filling by the end of 2010?

This was a year when Canadians finally got the truth, or as near as they'll ever get, in two separate government inquiries: the Braidwood Inquiry into the 2007 Vancouver International Airport death of Robert Dziekanski after he was repeatedly Tasered by four Mounties and the Oliphant Inquiry into business dealings between Brian Mulroney and Karlheinz Schreiber. Testimony at both events was nauseating.

It was also a year for hand-wringing about climate change and how Canada's petro-powered economy is going to adapt to a new world order.

A year, too, for hand-washing as people got the willies about the H1N1 virus even if they didn't get the flu itself. Of course, the past dozen months were devoted to preparing for Vancouver's 2010 Olympic Games, a spectacle that lent the year end a delicious air of excited anticipation.

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