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Stephen Taylor: Liberals reset the message  
Posted: September 03, 2009, 1:30 PM by NP Editor

[Full Comment](#), [Stephen Taylor](#)

*On Tuesday Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff announced his party will no longer support the Conservative government in the House of Commons, thereby ramping up speculation of what would seem to be an imminent election.*

But for Mr. Ignatieff, an election is his least-preferred outcome and I'd argue that the latest rhetoric isn't indicative of a future power play for the Liberal leader, but rather of move to reset the Liberal message.

Michael Ignatieff hasn't had a particularly uneventful summer. In fact, the highly respected Chantal Hebert has noted that the Liberal leader was this summer season's political loser as the man found it difficult to connect with average everyday Canadians on the hamburger circuit — despite liberal helpings of [Grey Poupon](#).

After backing down terribly from his ultimatum without conditions in the spring on the immediate changes to employment insurance, Mr. Ignatieff declared victory when a study group was unveiled to look into the issue. But as anyone who has observed Ottawa political cynically knows, a commitment to study, is rather a move to defer and to delay. The highly partisan panel included known agitators Pierre Poilievre and Marlene Jennings, Minister Diane Finley and Liberal MP Michael Savage seemed more of a summer cage-match to entertain reporters looking for a story rather than a sincere effort by either party to move in any direction on EI. In a move which must have been highly disappointing for Liberal supporters, within the last week Ignatieff telegraphed his move away from his *EI casus belli* [via Ralph Goodale](#).

This week's move seeks to remove the onus from the Liberals to "make Parliament work" — as the saying goes. Instead, that onus now rests upon the shoulders of the NDP and Michael Ignatieff surely expects that they will find a way to support the government. Indeed, much of the experience of being an opposition leader in a minority parliament is figuring out who is left holding the bag.

Michael Ignatieff — despite his academic credentials and reputation as a deep thinker — has underwhelmed on the policy front since he became leader of his party a few short months ago. Canadians — short of those in the *Lesser Evil* book club — aren't familiar with the man and what he stands for and have only had the benefit of introduction courtesy of the Conservative Party's *Just Visiting* ad spots. In politics, it is easy to differentiate oneself, well by differentiating. And for Mr. Ignatieff, that will mean by opposing this government he is not likely seeking election, but rather something to put into the window for one in the future.

Yesterday the NDP indicated that yes, they are willing to "make Parliament work" and submitted their list of demands. Predictably, the Conservatives responded with a firm "no" to a wholly incompatible agenda and threw the NDP lot back with that of the Liberals and the Bloc Quebecois.

Were Ignatieff's musings a game changer? Of course, that's unclear at this point. Pollster Nik Nanos stated that there are too many "moving parts" at this point to avoid an election. But, if there is any lesson to be learned from Canadian politics, there is no orthodoxy and a week — let alone a month — is a long time.

If the Liberal objective is to reset their message, we await for the coming weeks with interest to see what the modern Liberal Party of Canada is all

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**03/09/09:** In a lot of ways, Canada has a fair refugee system — basically, if you can get your feet on Canadian soil, your asylum claim will be heard. But it's also a system plagued by huge backlogs, unenforced deportation orders and, recently, diplomatic tensions between Ottawa and both Mexico the Czech Republic. On last week's podcast, James Bissett, a former head of Canada's Immigration Service and advocated a system under which Canada wouldn't allow asylum claims from citizens of democratic countries like the Czech Republic, and one that would direct far more resources towards people living in refugee camps abroad. This week, Janet Dench, Executive Director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, joins host Chris Selley to discuss her very different perspective on reform.



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about.

No eventuality can be solely manipulated by Michael Ignatieff however, and the Conservatives will take this opportunity to craft their message as well. As Ignatieff is now perceived to be the instigator of a future election, the Conservatives have and will continue to cite his arrogance (it's all about him). Further, if we do go to an election this fall it will be because all three opposition parties voted to defeat the government. This will only serve to underline the Conservative message that minority parliaments are the cause of political instability and that a majority government is the only solution. Conservatives will then ask Canadians to consider two options: a majority Conservative government versus a coalition of socialists, separatists and Ignatieffs.

National Post

*Stephen Taylor is a scientist, political analyst and a Fellow at the Manning Centre for Building Democracy, an institute founded by Preston Manning. Read more at his blog, [here](#).*

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9 Comments

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by Sassylassie

Sep 03 2009

1:42 PM

Modern Liberal policy number one, and only ONE policy, POWER for a lifetime and the gawd given right to rule us peasants as second class citizens.

by RogersJi

Sep 03 2009

1:56 PM

How do you "make Parliament work" if you vote against legislation that you agree with, such as the home renovation tax credits, just to prove that you're virile and can bring the government down?

The philosopher king seems to be having problems understanding the rest of the country. Maybe he will retreat to his castle and think about it. I wonder if he can play the violin?

by dmn451

Sep 03 2009

2:06 PM

Play the violin - As in Nero? - LMAO.

by Africon

Sep 03 2009

2:27 PM

Bloody hypocrites, why can't the Libs and Dippers all wait until the set date for an election that they were all whining about when Harper did not wait the last time around.

After Iggy and Jack go down to defeat will their parties throw them out while Gilles resigns. Could get interesting, I think I'll make some popcorn.

by Fred\_001

Sep 03 2009

3:43 PM

Maybe they've just discovered that election drama makes the donations roll in faster. Maybe this is all a publicity stunt to scare Liberal supporters into digging deeper.

by Straightup

Sep 03 2009

3:55 PM

The libs could put a monkey in the top seat and pretty well have...its how the media will give him a buy. The only difference between him and Dion is when a Duffy type reporter asks what does do better mean, Iggy can't hide behind deafness or comprehension excuses...

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