

How can Dion build on his momentum?

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- Comments (74)
- >

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With Conservative stumbles having helped put the Liberals back in the race, how can Stephane Dion build on the momentum in the federal election campaign's final days?



Greg Lyle (*former adviser to premiers Mike Harris and Gary Filmon*): Stephane Dion and the Liberals have a simple task in front of them: rallying their base.

The Liberal party retains a strong brand in this country. Roughly 30 per cent of Canadians identify themselves as federal Liberals. They don't need Mr. Dion to convince them that Liberals are good; he needs to convince them that he is a good Liberal.

His challenge is a lot like the challenge facing the Maple Leafs near the end of another losing season. Last week it felt like there were 10 games left in the season and the Liberals had to win nine to make the playoffs. Now, it's a couple of games later and they are winning. Can they keep it up? The Leaf nation starts to dig for their car pennants. They start to wear their hats and shirts outside again. They dare to believe.

All Mr. Dion needs to do is blow on that ember of loyalty to the team. We saw it on Wednesday. He continued his attack on Stephen Harper's economic leadership and hauled out an old team captain - Paul Martin - to remind fans of past economic triumphs. On top of that, Mr. Martin added to the moment with his great line about how 'fiercely committed' Harper is to doing nothing.

A party that will do something versus a party will do nothing was Mr. Dion's best contrast in the debate. If he stays on that theme, he will be giving his hometown fans something to cheer about.



Scott Reid (*former communications director for Paul Martin*): Let's begin with what he should not do — because that may turn out to be even more instrumental to success.

He should not talk about the great rallying cause of returning a Liberal government. Canadians aren't stupid. They realize that defeating Stephen Harper means replacing him with the Liberal Leader. But to the degree to which there is a late-emerging consensus, it is that Mr. Harper deserves to be defeated — not that the Liberals should be given power. Mr. Dion should go to where the crowd is gathered. That's not under his own balcony cheering him to wave - it's under Mr. Harper's ledge, cheering the Prime Minister to leap.

Mr. Dion should not forget what's been working. His momentum arises in response to the economic crisis or, more to the point, Mr. Harper's belligerent insistence that any response is equivalent to panic. Mr. Dion should continue to focus on his five-point, 30-day action plan - taking care to further explain what that might mean to real families in real need.

He should not attack NDP voters. He should embrace them. It is true that Jack Layton's economic plan is ripped from the pages of 1972 socialist, job-killing dogma, and finding ways to highlight the superiority of the Liberal plan as compared to Layton's is desirable. But shrill attacks on the NDP will not tempt away those voters. It will risk insulting them. Honey, not vinegar, is the secret ingredient for the rest of the campaign.

Finally, Mr. Dion should not play it completely safe. If things continue along the existing trajectory, the election's outcome may be too close to predict by the weekend's start. But let's get real. Mr. Harper will not pass quietly into history. He will fight like hell to keep his job. To win this campaign, Mr. Dion will likely need to take a gamble some time in the next few days.

It's hard to say now exactly what that might be. But before the polls open on the Oct. 14, the Liberal Leader will inevitably find himself wondering whether to make a bold move of one sort or another. My advice: Do it. This campaign won't win itself.



Gerald Caplan (*former NDP campaign manager*): Under almost any predictable circumstances, the Liberals would be the automatic default retreat for all those Canadians who, only three weeks ago, fully intended to vote Conservative. Yet as Stephen Harper's support inexorably unravels, most polls show the Liberals still some ways behind.

If the Conservatives and Mr. Harper haven't been forgiven their transgressions as financial panic sweeps the world, neither has the Liberals' original responsibility for this huge mess been forgotten - as Jeffrey Simpson just reminded Globe readers. It was those three terms of Chretien-Martin unleashing neo-liberalism on the land, deregulating and slashing social and infrastructure programs, that has landed us, too, on the worldwide road to recession.

So instead of the 10 points that Mr. Harper has lost simply returning to the Liberal camp, most have been distributed to the three smaller parties while Mr. Dion can't even get back to the narrowest Liberal base.

What should be done?

Last week, Mr. Dion boldly called for a meeting. That meeting has been held without him. Eight-five economists have just released an open letter criticizing the federal government for its inaction in light of the deepening global financial crisis. They call on government to show leadership and play a more active role in dealing with the crisis. They call for strengthened employment insurance (one of Canada's greatest humanitarian scandals, brought to you by Chretien-Martin), major public infrastructure projects, and no significant cuts to public spending - even if a deficit is the temporary result.

A free Mr. Dion would embrace this package and promise to implement it immediately. But he's trapped. First, it's his own past government that he'd really be condemning. Second, he has pinned his entire credibility and integrity on an ironclad oath never to have a deficit whatever the economic realities. It was as dumb and panicky and opportunistic a ploy as any imaginable, and he must now bear the full cost. He threw away his integrity to prove his orthodoxy on the no-deficit

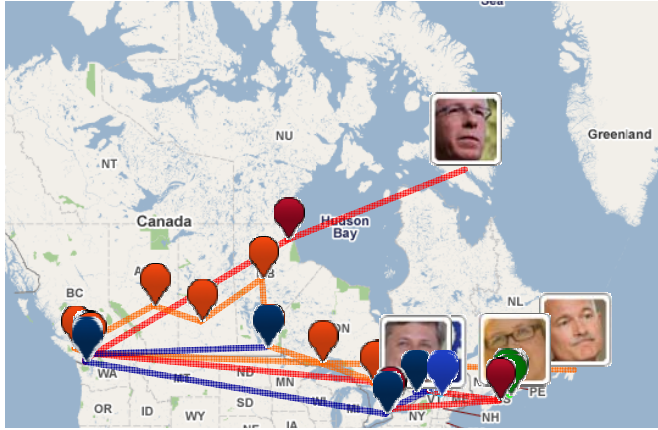
dogma, and he must pay the cost. The 85 economies showed him his yellow brick road. But his self-imposed pledge makes it a road he can't travel.

So what *can* be done?

For the Liberal Party of Canada, there is now only one choice: Bob Rae must take over the last few days of the campaign and be allowed to jet from coast to coast to coast promising to bestow upon the entire country the inspired economic leadership he once visited upon Ontario.

Trust me. It can't miss.

Week 5 of the campaign



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