

The Resilience of the Liberal Ideal

Notes from two open-microphone sessions at the National Convention, Liberal Party of Canada, Ottawa, January 13, 2012

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Background

There were two sessions. About 500 delegates attended the morning session and about 100 attended the session immediately after lunch.

Delegates were invited to identify themselves and where they are from and then to answer the following question: *Why did you travel at your own expense all the way to Ottawa in the dead of winter to attend the convention of the party that finished third in the last federal election?*

Delegates had come from across Canada. Notably, this was the first political convention for over half the participants in both sessions. They were invited to speak in either French or English but all comments are summarized in English here.

These notes reflect what was said by the delegates in their own words as closely as possible. The summary is the facilitator's own effort to capture in a concise way the values that were expressed.

Summary

Liberals have clear and widely shared values. Liberals are socially progressive, fiscally conservative, and are concerned about the environment. They believe in social justice, intergenerational equity and respect individual freedoms. They believe in bilingualism and multiculturalism in Canada and they want to be a positive force in the world. They want public policy to be based on a thoughtful consideration of facts. They are concerned that the Conservatives are driving the country away from these values. Liberals want to stand- up and fight more assertively for the values they believe in. They are proud of the Canada that the Liberal Party has built but also want to move on to face 21st century challenges rather than dwell in the past.

More detail

The following provides more detail on the full richness of what was said. Liberals:

Are concerned that the middle class is being squeezed and want it restored,

Are concerned that their children and grandchildren will be unfairly burdened by public debt and environmental problems such as climate change because of the current government's policies,

Want the country to reflect a sense of community rather than everyone for himself. One delegate said "Liberals are the party of "we"; the Conservatives are the party of "me",

Recognize that society needs to generate wealth and reward individual effort and want to emphasize that as well as talking about social justice,

Believe that our system should enable people to get rich but in a socially fair context where no-one else gets hurt,

Are concerned about the growing disparities in the distribution of wealth around the world,

See themselves as pragmatic idealists, not as socialists, and disagree with neo- conservative values,

Prefer to focus on reducing criminal behavior rather than building jails,

Prefer a foreign policy that seeks peace rather than war,

Want policies that focus on how to make our country and the world a better place, rather than on how to protect ourselves from bad things,

Feel that they must now get involved in the political process or else they fear the country they love but have taken for granted will be radically changed in ways they don't like,

Want the party to stand for inclusiveness, rather than divisiveness,

Believe that bilingualism is an essential and desirable aspect of Canada,

Are Liberals because they were allowed to immigrate to Canada and make a home here in a multi-cultural and welcoming society,

Want to include the West and rural people in the party,

Believe that small and medium farms are important to maintain for reasons that transcend economics,

Believe that people who are religious can be included in the party as they share Liberal values such as care for creation and love for your neighbor,

Want an open party that includes young people and fresh ideas,

Have no interest in the perpetuation of old internal rivalries and would rather focus on the future and on forming government,

Were motivated to come to this Convention as result of the recent serious electoral defeat: one delegate said "the Party needs me now",

Want to maintain the Liberal party's unique position on the political spectrum but want it to mean more than just being in the middle and "nit- picking",

Feel that Liberals have been too meek recently and that Liberals should take principled stands and fight for what they think is right,

Do not want to take foolish risks,

Want to express ideas in simple language that reflects Liberal values and that makes policies clear and easy to understand,

Want to remember that Canada was built by Liberal values and policies that were bold and change-oriented in their day and want to take similar principled stands now on policies that would create a better future.

Note: The session was set up to be values-oriented rather than policy-oriented so any specific policy proposals expressed are not reflected in these notes