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LEANING LEFT: Harping

In "Unite the Left" (Sustainable City, January 19), Chris Benjamin's analysis of the profound dystopia of contemporary Harperland is spot on. The impact of the Harper ideology is, indeed, incalculably destructive. Benjamin's prescription, however - a merger of the opposition parties - is neither the only nor the best solution. Since 2008, Project Democracy has been advocating for a strategic alliance of progressive voters to turf the Harper Conservatives, introduce electoral reform leading to a system of proportional representation, and then embark upon a new chapter in Canadian democracy.

In the 2011 election over 405,000 Canadians participated, a large number but probably only a third of that required to achieve national electoral change. Currently, NDP leadership candidate Nathan Cullen has proposed a similar approach, whereby in ridings where there is a Conservative incumbent, progressive parties cooperate in fielding a single opposition candidate (after, say, a "primary" amongst contenders from all parties). This would doubtless also ruffle political feathers, but as Benjamin points out, these are profoundly desperate times for Canadian constitutional democracy.

The salient point is this: if the 61% of Canadians who oppose the Harper Conservatives strategically cooperate, Stephen Harper can readily be defeated. Actually merging NDP, Liberal, and Green parties would be fraught with phenomenal political difficulties, and the end result would be a two party state like the USA - hardy a desirable outcome reflecting the many political currents of Canadian society.

Benjamin is right: Harper will never scrap the antiquated first-past-the post electoral system, but there's more than one way to skin this cat.

– Christopher Majka, Project Democracy