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## The Toronto mayor's race

# Time for tea?

## A rough right-winger takes charge of the country's largest city

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"THE party with taxpayers' money is over. We will stop the gravy train once and for all." Tea-partiers in the United States will recognise the sentiment. But the words come from the victory speech of Rob Ford, a blunt, beefy city councillor who on October 25th became mayor of Toronto, Canada's largest city. In a campaign that pitted him against George Smitherman, an urbane, gay politician who had given up a cabinet post in the centre-left Liberal provincial government to run, Mr Ford won votes by promising both to cut taxes and improve services for Toronto's 2.5m residents. "He found the voice of the city," said one eager young supporter.

Is it also the new voice of Canada, which has traditionally leaned to the left? Probably not. The Conservatives who govern Canada have struggled for almost five years to marshal enough popular support to turn their minority into a majority. And other recent mayoral races point in a different direction. Ottawa, which four years ago elected a mayor who promised to freeze taxes and stop an expensive light-rail project, has just tossed him out in favour of Jim Watson, another former cabinet minister from the provincial Liberal government. A week earlier, Calgary, the centre of the Alberta oil industry, a place not previously known for its embrace of multiculturalism, elected Naheed Nenshi, a 38-year-old business consultant and Harvard graduate. Mr Nenshi ran on a centrist platform that included affordable housing and better public transport, but also promised to cut red tape for business.

More probably Mr Ford's victory can be attributed to the post-recession reality of Toronto, where the gap between rich and poor has widened into a gulf. In some ways the city has recovered well from the recession. The economy of greater Toronto which accounts for one in eight jobs in Canada, is expected to grow by 5% this year. The country's five largest banks all have their headquarters there; they were barely hurt by the global financial crisis.

But other parts of the city's economy have not fared as well. Manufacturers who export to the weak American market continue to suffer, and their woes have kept the city's unemployment rate above the national average. Immigrants, who make up roughly 50% of the city's population, have been hit particularly hard.

Mr Ford's call to stop the gravy train makes sense to people who have seen their personal circumstances deteriorate even as their taxes have increased. He is promising to cut the expense accounts of municipal politicians and end abuses, such as the C\$12,000 (\$12,000) retirement party that one councillor threw for himself recently at taxpayers' expense. Though the new mayor looks somewhat rough, and has a conviction for drink-driving, voters seemed to forgive him because he feels their anger. (They may have been less tolerant of his opponent's homosexuality.)

The path ahead is steep, however. Mr Ford repeated on election night his promise to cut a new C\$60 car tax and abolish a land-transfer tax, both brought in by the previous mayor, while at the same time adding 100 new police officers. The tax cuts will leave him C\$250m short, at a time when the city is forecasting a budget deficit of C\$500m and when both the national and provincial governments, on which the city depends for funds, are poised to cut spending to reduce their own budget deficits. "Four years from now you'll look back and say Rob Ford did exactly what he said he was going to do," the new mayor told his supporters. They can only hope.

The Americas

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