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National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Not a pledge, just politics

You may recall that during the last federal election, at a time when anti-Harper voters were still deciding to cast their lot with either the Liberals or the NDP, Justin Trudeau made a bodacious grab for left-leaning voters by promising it would be the last election under our age-old first-past-the-post electoral system.

It didn't appear at the time to be one of those casual throwaway lines politicians are prone to offer during campaigns, since he kept repeating it over and over again. Once elected, he set up a committee to study it and his government sent out a questionnaire to millions of Canadians seeking their views.

Indeed, during his so-called town hall tour of the country, Trudeau kept promising to reform the system and just before Christmas he told the Toronto Star editorial board he was committed to having a new electoral system in place by 2019.

?I make promises because I believe in them . . .? he said. ?Canadians don't expect us to throw up our hands when things get difficult.?

It is fair to say that most reasonable people ? and even unreasonable people like me, who believe our current system is far superior to all the suggested ?reforms? ? believed that Trudeau had made a rather specific pledge to change things.

Apparently not. At least not in the Alice In Wonderland world of politics.

Just last week, after Trudeau announced that the electoral system won't be changed after all, Calgary Skyview Liberal MP Darshan Kang declared that the Liberals were ?not breaking the pledge. We spoke to thousands of Canadians, and there is no clear consensus on which way we should go.?

In the Commons ? when the Opposition had the temerity to suggest Trudeau was breaking a pledge (can you imagine?) ? Trudeau huffed that since there is ?no consensus . . . I am not going to do something that is wrong for Canadians just to tick off a box on an electoral platform. That is not the kind of prime minister I will be.?

Yes, Justin, we know.

It might be unkind to point out that when Trudeau made this pledge in the hopes of enhancing his own party's electoral chances, there was ?no clear consensus? on electoral changes either. Indeed, three provinces, including Ontario, had held referenda to test the waters and all three found the majority of their constituents did not want to change the current system.

So to the extent there was any consensus at all, the only available evidence showed that most Canadians are not unhappy with the current system, a reality which did not stop Trudeau from boldly declaring that he was about to change it.

Make no mistake here, I'm thrilled that he has thrown up his hands and decided to move on to other things.

Fact is, the strongest supporters of electoral changes come from the smaller parties on the left who understand that all the other existing systems virtually guarantee minority governments, which gives them far more clout than the electors want them to have.

Despite claims to the contrary, the other systems do not necessarily result in higher voter turnouts at all, but they do give splinter parties more cause to cheer when their small groups can wield immense influence by virtue of the fact they can decide whether a minority government stays in office or has to dissolve itself.

But that's a debate on the merits of the system.

We hear much these days ? indeed, sometimes I think that's all we're hearing ? about U.S. President Donald Trump's distant relationship with truth. We didn't hear as much about Hillary Clinton's equal inability to be honest, but there you are.

And just last week, we discover that Premier Kathleen Wynne had promised Toronto Mayor John Tory, in a face-to-face meeting, that she would support his plan to impose tolls on the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway, only to learn she reneged on her pledge when her 905-area caucus mates objected.

Tory, of course, was outraged, apparently forgetting that as a candidate for mayor, he openly campaigned against tolls, claiming that among other woes they would seriously harm the downtown because people wouldn't drive in at night to go to shows, sporting events, dinner, etc.

All of which is to say that politicians, by definition, tend to be liars, which is the only logical way that Liberal Darshan Kang is correct in claiming Trudeau was ?not breaking the pledge . . .?

It never was a pledge. It was just the usual political canard.

Believe them at your peril.

