This page was exported from - Caledon Citizen
Export date: Fri Mar 29 15:02:06 2024 / +0000 GMT

I Dream of Genies Back in the Bottle

BROCK'S BANTER

By Brock Weir

As a journalism student, I always had an affinity for covering protests.

Maybe it was a factor of growing up with two parents who, in turn, grew up in the 1960s and spared no memory of those turbulent times (although, by comparison to the times we're living in now, ?turbulent? seems like something of an understatement, and this seems like an unnecessary digression, so let's move on).

Maybe it was because I was always a student of history at heart, even before making it official, and the change that was borne out of that turbulence was already clear to me.

The bottom line is once I was in the nation's capital for school, if ever there was a protest happening, I was there with my camera, often walking along the route of whatever cause du jure brought people out with their placards.

A few in particular stick out in my mind.

The first one, oddly enough for a protest, was in the dark of night outside 24 Sussex Drive when then-Prime Minister Paul Martin welcomed the United State's then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to his residence for a dinner as tensions continued over the Afghan and Iraq conflicts.

About 20 people stood across the street from the stately and now-decaying manor with signs that were on point and chants that were loud enough to be heard inside but not quite loud enough to be deafening to us observers standing nearby.

Fast forward a few months and Paul Martin welcomed President George W. Bush to Parliament Hill.

Things here were decidedly different. The object of the protest was a person of considerably higher profile than Secretary Rice and, as such, the numbers swelled accordingly.

By the time the then-President arrived and was greeted by the then-Prime Minister, they waved to a crowd down below from behind the safety of bulletproof glass to a mix of the supportive, the curious and the outraged ? as those in the latter camp began forming a line of humanity that snaked almost shoulder to shoulder between some of Ottawa's most iconic streets and landmarks.

A few years later, there was a new Prime Minister in Town and when Stephen Harper faced his first election as an incumbent Prime Minister, the leaders naturally got out of town to pound the pavement across the country.

Back in my hometown of Newmarket, I was pleasantly surprised when the protest essentially came to me as one of the leaders arrived to campaign at a local recreation centre. Raising criticism over this particular party leader's environmental policy, the few but proud showed up to make their presence ? and their opposition ? known.

And although maybe a dozen or so people were on the traffic island on the opposite side of the parking lot, they got their point across, maintained a presence throughout the event and most likely got back in their cars with the satisfaction of knowing their point had been made.

Those scenes seem almost bucolic to what we have been seeing in the past couple of weeks of this particular Federal campaign and it is unfortunate that this old school kind of protest is likely fast becoming a thing of the past.

Over the last five, six, or seven years, I think it is pretty safe to say that we all watched with varying degrees of dismay as public discourse in the United States devolved to what it is today: seeing who can shout the loudest and, among the shouters, seeing just what they throw out there might stick ? without any rhyme, reason, and basis in fact.

That does not, of course, extend to all protests. Demonstrations on matters of social injustice, particularly over the last two years, did indeed elevate public discourse in many ways and have made people across the board sit up and pay attention to issues that have long been neglected.

But those are terribly sad and troubling exceptions to what seems to be a far newer rule.

The demonstrations we have seen in recent days, particularly in Caledon, I fear fall firmly into the latter category.

The bile speaks to the anger many of us are feeling these days living under what appears to be an endless parade of dark clouds with the occasional break for a bit of light to give us a reprieve or, at the very least, remind us of what awaits us when we're on the other side of this ghastly virus.

But we're all dealing with our frustration, sadness, and, yes, anger in different ways.

Letting this frustration, sadness, and yes, anger, manifest into the vitriol we're seeing goes beyond anything we have seen before ? and the level of vitriol does nothing to underscore whatever point was trying to be made.

It remains to be seen whether this strange turn of events within our country is a by-product of rhetoric that has firmly taken root in our neighbours' gardens, or whether it is a symptom of something that has been long-simmering in the background here and is just now emboldened to come forward, or whether this is another long-haul element of COVID ? but I'm afraid it's going to be hard to get the genie back in the bottle.

The freedom to protest things we disagree with is a wonderful facet of ? and, indeed, an honoured tradition in ? the country. Without protests, the rights we so cherish today, the rights that are still being fought for in many cases, would simply be a far-off goal.

But protests fuelled by vitriol and misinformation will do nothing to move the needle ? in any direction.