

Claire Hoy ? A dumb idea that wouldn't work

The famous American psychologist Abraham Maslow once quipped that, "It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail."

This is the sort of thinking people do all the time, particularly in politics, when it comes to devising ways to make your own political party fare better in elections.

Now that Justin Trudeau is firmly ensconced as the Liberal Party leader, it's worth looking back at the main plank in the failed campaign of his major adversary, Liberal MP Joyce Murray, of Vancouver Quadra, who apparently believed that the sure way to defeat Stephen Harper's Tories is for the other parties - the "progressives," as they like to call themselves - unite for what she said would be a "one-time cooperation."

Her plan was that the NDP, Liberals and Greens would all combine to run a joint candidate against the dreaded Tories. She proposed run-off elections between those parties in all Tory ridings where the Tory won by less than 50 per cent of the vote in the last election (she said 57 ridings are involved). And then, having captured the nation's capitol, booted the Tories from office - and brought in proportional representation - the coalition of the convenient would call an election and, presumably, live happily ever after.

The big assumption, of course, was that all those voters who did not vote Tory last time out would automatically join in this exercise and, presto, that would be the end of Harper.

It's an assumption which simply doesn't stand up to serious scrutiny although, heaven knows, Murray wasn't the first to propose it and she won't be the last. Indeed, in the last NDP leadership race, NDP House Leader Nathan Cullen, another B.C. politician (maybe there's something in the water out there) also proposed that the NDP, Liberals and Greens run joint nominations in strategically selected Tory-held ridings in the next election and then, if the coalition won, introduce electoral reforms before the subsequent elections. He finished third, so a fair number of New Democrats clearly bought his argument.

Those who don't like our current system, where governments can - and usually do - win a "majority" with less than half the popular vote - like to say that the majority of voters voted "against" the winning party and therefore it is not democratic.

This, alas, is not necessarily true at all. Given the choices offered, a voter picks the one he or she likes the most - or loathes the least - and when it's all added up, we get the results. But if the formula changed in the way that Cullen and Murray and others are talking, then the choices facing the electorate would be quite different and it's fair to speculate that so, too, would be the results.

Let's say you're a right-wing Liberal voter - and there are many of them. Would you be more likely to vote Tory the next time or vote for a coalition which includes the NDP and the Greens? It's one thing if your party choice is on the ballot, but if it's not, then all bets are off and we can't assume the same outcome at all.

Quite apart from the fact that NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair has emphatically ruled out any coalition of convenience - as have Trudeau and many Liberals - it's simply a dumb idea that wouldn't work for the above-stated reasons.

Would a hardline, leftist NDP voter actually vote for a Liberal, particularly if it were a right-wing Liberal, in such a configuration, or would he or she just stay home? Your guess is as good as mine. But again, the assumption that the voters would vote the same way they did when all the options were on the table is totally naive.

Here's another pet bugaboo of mine in these discussions. People who should know better constantly argue that our system is "undemocratic" because the winners often don't garner a majority vote and therefore they do not really represent their ridings. Yes they do. The winners don't just represent those who subscribe to their party, they represent everybody in the riding, those who voted for them, those who voted against them and those (lazy louts) who didn't bother to vote at all.

And for those who carp on about proportional representation, well, they should look around the world and they'll discover that, unlike our current system, it leads to perpetual deadlocks and endless minorities.

We're far better off with what we have, whether you voted for the winners or the losers

