

Claire Hoy ? Don?t count him out

If the Toronto Star were a person instead of a corporate giant, surely it would be guilty of bullying and stalking Toronto Mayor Rob Ford.

Not that Ford hasn't made it easy for his haters. Of course he has, given some of the dumb and irresponsible things he's done. But this latest addition to the Star's obsessive abhorrence of Ford surely crosses the bounds of fair and legitimate journalism into what Conrad Black legitimately labeled an "ideological shakedown operation."

In case you missed it last weekend, the newspaper ran a huge double-page spread citing the responses ? and many non-responses ? to a letter it sent to 70 of Toronto "elites," demanding they comment publicly on Ford's suitability for office.

They weren't simply asked their views in the normal way journalists contact people. Instead, they were sent a letter earlier last month demanding their views and warning that even if they chose not to comment, the Star would report that.

This massive bully pulpit campaign began after the Star's top executive, John Honderich, wrote a column decrying the silence from the city's elites. Apparently it's not enough for the Star to be overcome with Ford-phobia, everybody who is anybody in Toronto must be forced to suffer the same malady.

Honderich, by the way, is the same man who as publisher some years ago told the editorial page editor to cancel the weekly freelance column being written by your humble correspondent. Why? Because, at the time, the Star had a similar hate on for Mike Harris and I, being the misguided conservative-minded fool that I remain, actually had the temerity to write that I thought Harris was doing some good things. Honderich was outraged, telling the editor (who told me in explaining her actions) that he won't have anybody writing anything positive about Harris in his newspaper. So much for his sense of balance and the kind of public responsibility he is demanding of everyone else.

And so, with the mighty Honderich lusting for more blood, the Star had their reporter Marco Chown Oved fire off what is really an unconscionable letter to 70 chosen "moral leaders" essentially daring them not to mess with the Star's view that Ford is not fit to govern Canada's largest city.

Mind you, the Star felt that way even before Ford got elected, but there you have it.

Indeed, most of the people who wholeheartedly agreed with the Star's view of Ford also felt that way before he was elected and, even had he not be caught in some of the scandalous behavior that has been widely reported, no doubt would still not be supportive of him.

Former mayor June Rowlands, for example, at least was honest enough to concede she has "always considered (him) a political fraud and I'm afraid that's what he's turned out to be?" Nor was it a huge surprise when long-time Liberal cabinet minister Greg Sorbara and veteran NDP cabinet minister Francis Lankin joined the chorus of Ford-bashers as requested by the mighty Star. Despite the Star's best efforts, however, only 12 of the 70 ? that's 12, about one out of every six who got the letter ? said he should resign, a feeble number which one assumes will have Honderich ramping up his computer once again to decry the lack of moral responsibility among the city's movers and shakers.

Peter Kent, the former television journalist and federal Tory environment minister, fired back that he refused to succumb to what ?I consider to be a crudely crafted, veiled threat that I (and others) endorse an editorial column written by ? Honderich ? or face consequences in your eventual story ? (something) far beyond the boundaries of acceptable journalistic practice.?

He's got that right.

Mind you, the arrogance of the Star's brass was matched by a response from Anglican Archbishop Colin Robert Johnson, who wrote that he had already offered his "prayers, concern and pastoral advice" to Ford, but Ford "has not responded to my advice and it is not apparent to me that he has fully taken the advice."

Imagine. Never mind everything else Ford has done and been accused of doing it ? and continuing to discount the good works he's done as mayor (and the list is long, by the way) ? how can he possibly continue in office if he rejects the advice of Honderich and Johnson?

If ever there was an illustration of why so many Torontonians still support Ford, the arrogance of the elites ? the attitude that if you don't agree with us you're a rube, or worse ? is Ford's strongest playing card.

That's why I wouldn't count him out come the election.

