

Claire Hoy ? Former PM not ?saviour?

During his short, unremarkable time as prime minister, even the usually non-judgmental Economist Magazine dubbed Paul Martin ?Mr. Dithers.?

Canadians obviously agreed, because less than two years after he won a minority government, they elected Stephen Harper who, as you know, has been prime minister ever since.

It is this same Paul Martin who, according to Ontario's Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne, has been summoned to put a sheen on her current attempt to curry favor with voters by introducing a made-in-Ontario pension plan.

Martin, naturally, was heralded by the Toronto Star as the man who ?saved? the Canada Pension Plan, a specious claim given the facts of the matter, and doubly absurd in that if he did in fact ?save? the plan then why is Wynne claiming that the CPP is broken and since Ottawa won't pour billions more into it then, by golly, she's going to have to go it alone?

It is true that both Martin and his predecessor, Jean Chrétien, managed to get Ottawa out of the fiscal hole which had begun in earnest under the regime of ? wait for it ? Pierre Trudeau. But they did so by off-loading programs onto the backs of the provinces. Fact is, under Martin and Chrétien, Ontario taxpayers suffered more than any others, since, at the time ? and now ? Ontarians pay the biggest share of total taxation.

I'm not sure when this notion took hold that government pensions are designed to keep seniors living in the style they did when they were working. It was never meant to do that. Nor should it. It's a supplement.

But big spenders such as Wynne, argue ? and I assume, actually believe ? that since many Ontarians aren't saving enough for their retirement, it's up to the government to do it. Personal responsibility is not a concept that either Liberals or New Democrats are familiar with.

In his brilliant book, ?Full Circle,? author Bob Plamondon figured out how Chrétien and Martin (his finance minister) got rid of the deficit, concluding it ?had little to do with a judicious review of spending and much to do with raising taxes and diminishing the living standard of every Canadian.?

An analysis by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants ? which Plamondon was active in ? shows that from 1993 to 2000, 70 per cent of the fiscal turnaround in Ottawa (\$47.5 billion) came directly from higher taxes. In fact, during this period ? which Martin supposedly conquered Ottawa's spending sickness ? spending on government operations actually went up \$3 billion.

What Martin did ? and what Liberals and New Democrats love to do ? is tax, tax, tax. Then they claim fiscal responsibility. Responding to Wynne's stated plan to introduce an Ontario pension plan ? something we all know is little more than a pre-election boast ? Kevin Sorenson, the federal minister of state for finance, says, ?Premier Wynne will disadvantage Ontario's businesses with higher payroll taxes, killing jobs and deterring investment.?

The facts are on his side. And at a time when barely a week passes when some other Ontario company packs it in ? and given Ontario's already enormous debt ? this is hardly a suitable time to introduce a massive new government spending program. Both Wynne and Martin have pooh-poohed the notion that an Ontario pension plan would be another huge burden on taxpayers. Really? Do they actually believe that adding payroll taxes on business doesn't come back to haunt people in terms of increased prices for products and, even worse, lead to even more unemployment?

Sure, offering seniors more pension money ? and that would certainly include your humble correspondent ? is attractive at first blush. Who doesn't want more money flowing in?

But it's a fool's game they're playing. While seniors could find a few bucks more in their bank accounts, they'll also find prices going up and taxes increasing to pay for the fallout that these monster government programs inevitably generate.

Why doesn't Wynne ? or any politician, for that matter ? spend some time encouraging people to pay more heed to their retirement years. Rather than buying that 86-inch color television, why not make do with something more modest and invest the savings for their future?

It's not government's job to bail people out who have spent too freely and with little foresight during their working years.

But then, politicians who run governments which themselves spend, spend, spend, with little foresight, can't really be expected to ask Mr. and Mrs. Beleaguered Taxpayer to think ahead.

If people ? and governments ? would just stop living beyond their means, we'd all be better off.

That philosophy may not be as electorally attractive as the promise of yet another government boondoggle, but it will pay more dividends in the long haul. It really will.