

Claire Hoy ? ?Loyalists? turn on their leader

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath can be forgiven for wondering just who her friends are these days.

Horwath, as you likely know, was ambushed late last week by a published letter written by a group of 34 veteran NDP stalwarts ? all of whom have been around the party since its' early days ? and all of whom are in a snit because they think the party has slipped away from their traditional socialist values in a craven pursuit of votes.

Imagine, a party leader interested in getting votes. Whoever heard of such a thing?

To be sure, there's a line which can reasonably be drawn during an election. If, for example, a Tory leader suddenly announced a plan to triple welfare rates and quadruple business taxes, party supporters could be forgiven for protesting.

But Horwath, although decidedly trying to shift to the right ? at least what passes for the right in NDP terms ? hasn't exactly ripped up the socialist playbook in her hopes of winning more seats than she won the last time out.

But this is what happens when you're dealing with absolutists. And the likes of Judy Rebick ? my old CBC sparring partner on Face Off ? and Cathy Crowe, Winnie Ng, and Gerry Caplan, et al ? are nothing if they're not hardcore.

Still, all these people have spent good chunks of their adult lifetimes working to get the NDP elected at all levels of government, so it is no wonder Horwath didn't see it coming.

She has tried to respond as best she can, saying that the reason she decided not to prop up the Liberal government any more ? despite a proposed budget which any NDP government would have been proud to write ? is that she just couldn't abide the ongoing Liberal corruption.

And that, dear hearts, is not a bad thing. Pity she didn't find that fiscally responsible religion a couple of years sooner rather than allowing Premier Kathleen Wynne and her fiscally profligate Liberals to carry on from Dalton McGuinty as if nothing bad had happened.

News stories of this public rebuff described the letter writes as ?long-time party loyalists.? And in one sense, that is accurate. They certainly have been loyal to the NDP and its aspirations for decades.

But do real ?loyalists? turn on their own leader in a stealth-like fashion in the middle of a hard-fought campaign? I think not.

To be sure, anybody is entitled to be ticked if they don't like the direction their leader is taking. But Horwath's plan a)- is not really that far afield from traditional NDP values and b)-is vague enough that even if she won, as unlikely as that is, it would be difficult to hold her to anything specific.

The truth is that what is really at play here is that these so-called party ?loyalists? are less concerned about the direction of the NDP and considerably more concerned over the prospects of Tory Leader Tim Hudak winning the election and going after some of their most deeply-held and cherished special privileges.

They're not exactly going to the wall over philosophical principles here. Instead, they're willing to sacrifice their own leader's chances in the hopes of harming the Tories and helping the Liberals, despite the fact they've all spent decades fighting against both Liberals and Tories in the hopes of enhancing their own party.

The veteran socialists ? most of whom were upset when Horwath wouldn't support the last Liberal budget ? these champions of democracy, as they have often described themselves, apparently have no concern whatsoever that the Ontario electorate has, until this current campaign, never been given the opportunity to say whether or not they want Wynne as premier.

They were quite happy to allow her to continue governing after it became clear that as premier she was prepared to write a cheque for every pie-in-the-sky program they've ever dreamed of, regardless of the havoc her irresponsible spending was wreaking on the economy of a province which used to be known as the engine that made Canada run.

Give us what we want, they shouted, and we're happy to set our ?beliefs? aside. And if the NDP won't do it well, let's see if we can help the Liberals.

Fact is, they'd rather harm their own party in order to help the Liberals rather than see the Tories win.

It tells us two things: first, the Tories are doing well; and second, their egotistical self-importance aside, these people are the kind of friends who, as they old song goes, come knocking on your door when you've got lots of money, but are nowhere to be seen when you're in trouble.

