

Claire Hoy ? Somebody has to stop the cycle

There's an old truism about politics: if you can't win them over with your ideas, scare them into voting for you.

Or, as the late H.L. Mencken once wrote: "The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed -- and hence clamorous to be led to safety -- by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary."

Sound a bit too cynical for you? Perhaps. But more often than not, that's what politicians do when they're afraid they are losing the battle of ideas.

Which brings us, as you may have guessed, to the current provincial election campaign. And in particular, the panic-stricken reaction to Tory Leader Tim Hudak's hard-nosed plan to rescue the province from the Liberal-generated fiscal abyss.

Just as the federal Liberals consistently hoped to smear federal Tories with dire warnings of "hidden agendas" -- often with considerable electoral success -- Hudak's opponents are desperately painting scary pictures of thousands of beleaguered Ontarians wandering the streets aimlessly, alone, forgotten, unemployed and homeless. Toss in forlorn and any other negative description that comes to mind, and you get the picture.

And, of course, there's the ultimate smear -- at least as seen from the eyes of the anti-fiscal conservatives out there -- that Hudak -- dare we say it? -- will drag us back to the Mike Harris days.

Indeed, an opinion column in the Sunday Star -- written by two officials with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (a decidedly left-wing group, although the Star conveniently doesn't tell its readers that) -- with the headline: "Hudak's job demolition plan more extreme than Harris years."

Well that's it then. Can't vote for a guy who is more "extreme" than Harris, that's for sure.

According to the authors, Kaylie Tiessen and Kayle Hatt -- who are essentially mirroring the talking points of Premier Kathleen Wynne and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath -- Hudak's proposal to cut 100,000 public sector jobs would make Harris look like a piker. They write that Harris cut 7,000 public sector jobs between 1995 and 2002, "thrusting the province into a period of labor turmoil and eroding public services."

Well, not exactly. The "labor turmoil" they're so concerned about began the moment Harris was elected. Indeed, the day he was sworn in the usual suspects at the head of Ontario's public service unions -- not prepared to accept the election results as a message to ongoing wanton spending -- organized a giant anti-Harris rally on the front lawn of Queen's Park.

They continued with these rallies -- closing down several major cities in protest -- over Harris's entire first term. And what was the result of all this? Well, next time out, Harris won an even larger mandate, which only goes to show that the noise-creators among us often are completely out of step with the feelings of most of the populace.

Just as Harris was -- and still is -- often accused of being "extreme," so too is Hudak. But is he, really?

Well, his pledge to eliminate 100,000 public sector jobs -- that's over a four-year period, by the way, a point Hudak's critics routinely ignore -- still, according to the aforementioned Star writers, represent just 1.5 per cent of the total jobs in Ontario. That's 1.5 per cent. Hardly the end of the earth.

They might have also mentioned that, once fully implemented -- and a good chunk of it would be from retirements, etc. -- it would simply get Ontario's public sector back to what it was five years ago, before the current Liberal administration, cheered on by the NDP, decided to bloat the public sector in search of electoral heaven.

They also claim that the side effects of these cuts would also mean an additional 50,000 lost private sector jobs, a highly suspect claim which completely dismisses the legitimate notion that cutting back on spending -- combined with cutting taxes, the other major part of Hudak's plans -- will stimulate economic growth (as opposed to smothering it, as we've seen the past few years) and end up creating more jobs than are actually lost in the process.

Hudak's critics are only too well aware that the public understands that the Liberal-NDP debt-deficit machine simply can't be sustained. Somebody -- somehow -- has to stop the cycle and get Ontario working again. Continuing the unabated spending orgy -- using taxpayer's hard-earned money to do it -- clearly isn't the solution.

One can legitimately argue whether Hudak's "solution" will work or not. I think it would. Others can disagree.

But it's hard to argue we'll ever make our way out of our current fiscal mess by allowing the free-spending Liberals and their NDP cheerleaders to keep digging.

Been there. Done that. It doesn't work.

