

Editorial ? A campaign without precedent

Whatever else might be said, the election campaign just ended was surely like none before it.

At both the federal and provincial levels, voters for more than 80 years have been able to choose from among parties on the right, left and middle of the road, as it were. The earlier choice, between Conservative and Liberal, became blurred with the brief life of the Progressive party and was broadened with the advent in 1932 of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), formed by a number of socialist, agrarian, co-operative and labour groups, since renamed the New Democratic Party (NDP).

In 1942, the Conservative party symbolized its movement toward the centre of the political spectrum by adding 'Progressive' to its title. Since then, the merger of the federal PCs and Canadian Alliance led to the symbolic dropping of 'Progressive,' and there are those who see the party as having moved well to the right of where it stood with John Diefenbaker, Joe Clark and Brian Mulroney as its leaders.

In Ontario, meanwhile, the party is still 'Progressive,' if in name only. Its platform is so resembling that of the Tea Party wing of the Republicans south of the border that a more appropriate title would substitute the prefix 'neo.'

(Just where that leaves former PC leaders like Bill Davis and John Tory we don't know. But we certainly cannot recall them ever suggesting that what the province needed was a lot fewer public servants or that slashing corporate tax rates would somehow lead to creation of a million jobs.)

As if to further complicate matters, the campaign just ended has seen a strange absence of policy on the part of the one party that used to embrace democratic socialism and trade unionism. Instead, NDP leader Andrea Horwath has been preaching populism and concentrating her attack on Liberal 'corruption' seemingly exemplified by money-wasting scandals involving eHealth, the Ornge air ambulance service and cancellation of two gas-fired power plants.

There's little doubt that because of those scandals many who have traditionally voted Liberal will be having second thoughts, or that the main reason they will stick with the party will be either because it has a good local candidate, they like leader Kathleen Wynne's style or they see a vote for the NDP as helping elect the Hudak Conservatives.

One thing for sure is that voters won't get much guidance from the Globe and Mail's editorial board, which last Saturday promoted the election of a Conservative minority government.

The reason, it seems, is that they would like to see a change in government but don't relish the prospect of Hudak being able to carry out his promises.

Leaving aside for a moment the obvious fact that no one can vote for a minority government, it's difficult to see how a Hudak minority regime would function, unless it abandoned its election platform and opted to try occupying the middle of the road with policies acceptable to either the Liberals or the NDP.

Another point the editorial writers seem to have glossed over is the similarity between the other parties, particularly in view of the lack of NDP policies.

Even if the Tories wound up with the most seats in the Legislature, it might be argued that another Liberal minority regime would have more staying power than a Tory minority.

And if their party did as poorly as recent polls have suggested it might, the surviving NDP members might even look favourably on a coalition with the Grits.

We wonder what the Globe's thinkers would have to say about that.