

Editorial ? A perfect time for run-offs?

All the recent polls show that the June 7 Ontario election will produce a Progressive Conservative government, and as we see it the only questions remaining are how big the Tory majority will be and which party will form the Official Opposition.

Assuming that support for the PCs and new leader Doug Ford will be maintained at more than 40 per cent of the electorate, there's good reason to believe that we'll witness a return to the situation in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Ontario Legislature had no effective opposition.

The classic example was in 1951, when the government of Tory premier Leslie Frost won 79 of the 90 seats in the House after garnering 48.5 per cent of the popular vote. At that time, the Liberals got 31.5 per cent of the popular vote but only eight seats and the CCF (not yet renamed the NDP) fared even more poorly, with 19.1 per cent of the popular vote but only two seats, one more than the (Communist) Labor Progressive party.

Last week, one opinion poll showed that the Tories currently have almost as much support as they had with Premier Frost in 1951, with 43 per cent of those polled saying they planned to vote Conservative, compared with 27 per cent who favoured the Liberals and 23 per cent who endorsed the New Democrats.

Of course, that was before NDP Leader Andrea Horwath effectively announced the party's platform, promising that as a government her party would not just bring in pharmacare but also universal dental care and measures that would somehow get patients out of hospital hallways, while providing affordable child care and improved care for seniors in nursing homes.

One difference between the current situation and that in 1951 is the existence of the Green Party, with support from about five per cent of the electorate.

As we see it, that and the roughly even support enjoyed by the Liberals and NDP, will mean that the three centre-left parties will tend to kill one another off, even more so than in 1951 when the CCF was well to the left of the Liberals and preached socialism. In the circumstances, a fairly safe prediction would be that the only opposition members who'll survive after the June 7 vote will be those so popular and well-known that they will get votes from those who otherwise would have supported another party.

Another safe prediction is that this time none of the three main parties will have credible platforms.

The PCs appear to have abandoned the platform worked out by former leader Patrick Brown, which included a tax on carbon that would provide revenue to pay for costly planks in the platform. The Ford promise of simply finding the needed revenue from program cuts that wouldn't require layoffs hasn't found much support among economists.

A similar situation exists with the NDP platform, details of which are to be released this week. We can't see how the promised pharmacare and dental programs and a return of Hydro One to government ownership could be accomplished by simply increasing taxation of wealthy individuals and corporations.

As for the Liberals, their promises in Monday's Throne Speech mean little or nothing, since everyone surely knows they will not be in government after June 7.

In the circumstances, this would be the perfect time for the Wynne government to come up with an electoral reform that should also be tried by the Trudeau Liberals in Ottawa.

With the PCs' victory virtually inevitable and the three other parties all being of the centre-left variety, this is the time for an experiment with run-offs in ridings where the 'first past the post' failed to get 50 per cent of the votes. The result would be a legislature in which every member had won the support of a majority of those voting.

While it would still result in a PC majority, the run-offs might mean more Liberal and NDP seats in the House.