

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Brown making Tories Liberal-lites?

What is it with the Ontario Tories?

Every time the dreadful Liberal government offers them another chance at electoral victory, they find a way to fall collectively on their own swords.

If there is any government that doesn't deserve to be in office, it's the Liberals of Kathleen Wynne ? and before her Dalton McGuinty. Yet despite their worst efforts at governing, Liberals continue to benefit from Tory stupidity.

Remember when then Tory leader ? now Toronto mayor ? John Tory appeared on his way to victory and then, inexplicably, and without consulting his own party, announced that if elected his government would immediately finance every faith-based school in the province? Bingo. Bye, bye birdie.

Then there was Tim Hudak, also primed for victory, until he suddenly surprised everyone ? particularly his own party ? by announcing he would fire 100,000 public servants. That single act completely turned the focus of the campaign from Liberal malfeasance to Tory stupidity. So instead of Wynne being on the defensive ? trying to explain the unexplainable ? Hudak spent the rest of the campaign under attack. Once again, bingo.

(Those of us of a certain age also remember the end of the 42-year Tory dynasty in Ontario after Bill Davis left office shortly after shocking his own cabinet, and betraying an earlier campaign stance, by announcing full funding for Catholic schools, the result of a clandestine deal he'd made years earlier with the late Cardinal Emmett Carter.)

Enter current leader Patrick Brown.

A lawyer, Brown became the youngest Barrie alderman ever, winning a seat at age 22, before becoming Barrie's MP from 2006-2015. He then spent \$2 million to defeat sentimental favorite Christine Elliott (who has since been rewarded by Wynne with a \$220,000 annual sinecure as Ontario's patient ombudsman) to become provincial party leader last May.

One thing Brown said he would not do ? learning from the aforementioned mistakes of Tory and Hudak ? is impose party policy on the faithful. Instead, he would mobilized grassroots Tories to develop policy.

Indeed, at their recent three-day convention in Ottawa, Brown's policy chief Katie Richmond outlined a wide-ranging policy development process leading up to a March 2017 policy convention which she says will involve party members, and all Ontarians, offering their ideas.

?We are going to listen relentlessly,? she said, promising the most grassroots-driven election platform in party history. ?The way we have strayed from the wisdom of our grassroots has been painful, and it ends now.?

In his keynote convention speech, Brown pledged, ?Never again will our candidates and volunteers have to defend faith-based funding or 100,000 job cuts at the front door of Ontario's voters.?

Maybe not. But they will have to defend Brown's surprising ? and appalling ? announcement that he favors a carbon tax, an extraordinary policy he cavalierly announced despite dissing Wynne's recent cap-and-trade plan as a ?\$1.9-billion revenue grab,? and, as far as we know, with little, if any, grassroots input.

Rather than distinguishing his party from Liberals, Brown seems determined to remake Tories into Liberal-lites, raising the obvious question that if people want Liberals, aren't they're more likely to vote for the real thing rather than a pretend clone?

The whole notion of taxing carbon has been popularized by politicians and the media, supposedly as a way to cut back on carbon emissions and save the planet, which, supposedly, is on the verge of sinking into the abyss.

There is precious little evidence ? and that's being generous ? that adding 4.3 cents per litre of gasoline and making us pay more for heating fuel will have any impact on carbon emissions.

But even if it did ? which it won't, since Ontario produces less than one-half of one per cent of the world's carbon emissions ? who would notice? Certainly not the earth.

If Brown believes this is smart policy, why didn't he at least go through the motions of a grassroots review before imposing such a radical change? What he has done, alas, is exactly what both Tory and Hudak (and Davis) did before him. He let the Liberals slither off the hook.

Now, instead of having to defend their corrupt, incompetent governance and their wanton spending an unconscionable taxation, Liberals can point to Brown and ? even though his carbon plan differs slightly from Wynne's ? say, ?ha, we told you so.?

Don't take my word for it though. If there is one sure way to demonstrate a Tory leader is on the wrong track, it is to win editorial applause from the rabidly pro-Liberal Toronto Star, which headlined a recent editorial in praise of Brown's carbon move as ?Seeing the light.?

For Liberals, yes. But for Tories, not so much. Or, to cite Pogo, the old comic strip character, Brown has announced, ?We have seen

the enemy and it is us.?

