

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Mulcair can't have it both ways

We now take you back a couple of decades to the time that Bob Rae ? then the NDP premier, later to become a Liberal ? decided that the best way to deal with Ontario's then fiscal crisis was to begin writing government cheques as rapidly as possible. Spend. Spend. Spend. That was the mantra for Rae's largely unlamented term in office and, rather than help the situation, every economic measure on the planet showed it made things worse.

Indeed, the great panacea of government spending has been tried time and again, on economies both big and small ? think the U.S. in the 1960s, the U.K. a decade later, along with France, Japan and numerous other countries.

There is one thing they all have in common: it doesn't work.

We now come rushing up to the current federal election campaign where Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau, apparently weary of being overlooked by the media and the public, has reached out to this failed ?solution? for what he says ails Canada.

Mind you, politicians don't admit they are actually ?spending? your tax dollars. No, no. Nothing so crass as that. They're ?investing?, don't you know?

Problem is, people invest money in hopes of getting a return on their dollars. The sort of ?investing? Trudeau has in mind will only result in governments turning to you for even more tax dollars to sustain whatever programs they decide to foist upon the general public.

It is true, as Trudeau says, that Canada lags far behind in what is called ?structural? spending, i.e. bridges, highways, etc. But that's not because money hasn't been forthcoming from Ottawa. It's because both provincial and municipal governments have been historically reluctant to spend money on such things, preferring instead to pour money into things that people can actually see.

Nobody drives around the city in awe of the great new sewer system that has been installed. After all, they can't see it. But put up a new stadium or a new theatre and it's all the rage.

Trudeau, no doubt, took at least some of his inspiration for this surprise political tactic from his cheerleader-in-chief, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, whose blatant partisanship on behalf of the Liberals may not work out for Ontario's benefit if ? as is likely ? Trudeau the Younger does not become prime minister.

In any event, we all know how well massive Ontario Liberal spending on wild-eyed, unproven and inefficient energy projects has worked out. If you don't, just check your latest energy bills and ask yourself if you really want even more of wasteful government spending at the federal level. Perhaps you do, and if so, well God bless you. But I'm thinking most people really aren't that anxious to have government dipping into their purses and wallets even more than they already do.

Trudeau's entire argument, it seems, is based on the premise that Canada's economy under Stephen Harper is in the soup. Problem is, it isn't.

To be sure, there are fiscal problems (when aren't there?) particularly in the oil industry, which has seen a precipitous collapse in value over the past few months. But that's the way these industries go. Up and down. It'll be back. Regardless of what the environmental zealots tell you, we're still going to need lots of oil for the foreseeable future.

The fact is, there are economic uncertainties around the globe right now, but Canada is doing better than any of its industrialized partners.

And while the low cost of our dollar is certainly annoying for those who want to travel to the U.S. or order goods online, it is also true that the benefits of a low dollar will soon begin revealing themselves in the form of increased manufacturing activity, particularly in Ontario, making it an even worse idea to siphon money from the taxpayers to sink into huge government-inspired make-work projects.

That all being said, however, one has to hand it to Trudeau. At least he has offered voters a real option from the other two guys.

That's more than can be said for NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair who seems busy trying to convince Canadians that he's at heart more of a fiscal conservative than Harper. (Mind you, Mulcair too has offered high-priced national programs while, at the same time, promising he would not run a deficit. Can't have it both ways, Tom. At least Trudeau, to his credit, admits that if government is going to dump an avalanche of cash into its pet projects, there's no way they're going to balance the books.)

As for Harper, no doubt his happiest moment last week was the adjournment of the Mike Duffy trial until after the election. Now he can actually start to campaign.

