

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? The one we have beats all others

In an early instalment of a week-long love-in between Toronto Star scribbler Paul Wells and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau ? during which we learn, as if there were ever any doubt, just how truly wonderful our new wunderkind ruler is ? the topic naturally came around to Trudeau's promise to erase our first-past-the-post electoral system.

Never mind that the system has been with us since Confederation and has produced stable government all that time ? as opposed to the chaos from other systems being recommended by various special interest groups.

Trudeau, who would never deny he's the smartest guy in the room, has decreed that the system has failed us, although not enough, apparently, for him to conclude that his recent election majority victory ? garnered with almost exactly the same percentage of the vote as Stephen Harper's last majority win ? is so deeply flawed that Canadians should have another go at deciding if they really, truly want him as the current resident of 24 Sussex Ave.

Wells was so thoroughly enamored of Trudeau that, in a paragraph which would have made a paid partisan hack blush, he wrote that Trudeau was eight minutes late for the sit-down, but when he finally showed up ?he was so thoroughly prepared on so many files he was like an inflated balloon. Answers came out in a rush. He had a lot to say. It was an easy decision to run his answers over several days.?

Wells, an experienced journalist, apparently was so overwhelmed by Trudeau's brilliance that he couldn't bring himself to question any of the suppositions Trudeau was tossing out there as truth to power.

For example, on the question of whether Canadians deserve a referendum if their historical system of elections is about to be changed ? and polls show most Canadians think they should have a say, this being a democracy and all ? Wells allowed Trudeau to dismiss the idea of a partisan notion being promoted only by the Conservatives.

?They're (Tories) the only ones pushing for a referendum,? he said. ?The other opposition parties think we should have much broader, more open consultations and a more open-ended engagement with Canadians than the specific up-or-down of a referendum.?

Really? This man talks about more consultation after engineering a committee to look into the electoral system that gave the Liberals an absolute veto. He only expanded it when forced to do so ? not just by Conservatives, by the way, but by a groundswell of public opinion both outside and inside the political world of Ottawa.

And, Wells might have asked, if Trudeau really wants a widespread, open consultation with Canadians, what better way is there of achieving that than by actually asking Canadians what they think and then acting accordingly? Three provinces have done exactly that and in all three cases, including here in Ontario, the public has said no thanks, we'll stick with the current system. But then, what do they know, eh?

Trudeau, as you would expect, has the answer to that question. It seems he believes the general public doesn't know very much, certainly not as much as he knows about the advantages ? to the Liberals in particular ? of tailoring the system to meet his partisan hopes and dreams.

?You know, referendum campaigns are tremendously exciting in terms of selling newspapers. But do they directly lead to better outcomes for Canadians in their electoral system? I think there's a strong argument to be made that, not necessarily. . .?

?The black-and-whiteness of a referendum ? and the political campaigning around self-interest that happens anytime you have the starkness of a referendum ? impedes the very free and grounded conversation about what kind of values underpin our electoral system.?

?We want to get to the substance of the conversation . . .?

And so it goes. What he's saying, of course, is that he knows darn well his preferred system of jiggling votes would not pass the smell test with most Canadians, so actually asking for their views would mean he wouldn't get what he wants.

It is to laugh that he actually says, apparently with a straight face, that a referendum involves ?self-interest,? the idea being that he, our glorious leader, and much unlike the great unwashed, is motivated purely by the drive to turn Canada into heaven on earth.

And what exactly does he mean by saying a referendum may not lead to a ?better outcome?? Clearly he means his pet project may lose and Canadians would tell him they're happy with the status quo.

No electoral system is perfect, of course. But the one we have beats anything else out there.

If Trudeau thought we really wanted change, he'd ask. But since he doesn't want to ask, that pretty well answers the question.

