

Claire Hoy ? Nothing ?hidden? about Hudak agenda

Despite the best ? or worst ? efforts of the Ontario Liberals, NDP and most of the mainstream media, the much-ballyhooed Tory ?revolt? at the party's weekend convention turned out to be what people really knew it was: much ado about a handful of local malcontents.

It seems that Tory Leader Tim Hudak ? after four years and one election loss in the job ? remains very popular with his own party's rank and file.

Whether he can transfer this popularity to the public at large ? something he's had difficulty managing ? remains to be seen. But at least the conceit about his party being unhappy was overwhelmingly put to rest at the London convention.

Not that the Tories have nothing to complain about under Hudak's leadership.

He is one of those people who is much more comfortable ? or at least appears to be ? when you're one-on-one with him than he is in a crowd. This is not a happy attribute for a politician who, after all, hasn't got the time to greet every voter personally, so must make his impressions in crowds, often via the mass media.

In the last election, when polls and pundits were predicting he'd win ? and by the way, the record of both pollsters and pundits these days isn't exactly great ? many Ontarians who were sick to death of Dalton McGuinty must have been disappointed at Hudak's performance. Or, to be more precise, his lack of performance.

He spent a good part of the campaign dealing with self-inflicted wounds, getting sidetracked on minor issues, much as previous Tory leader John Tory did when he began a campaign by suggesting taxpayers should foot the bill for all private schools, an idea which went over like the proverbial lead balloon and should never, ever, have been trotted out disguised as useful campaign policy.

But we digress. Back to Hudak.

If he is to beat the Liberals under Kathleen Wynne next time out ? and given that party's ongoing problems with energy prices, debt and the gas plant debacle, it shouldn't be impossible ? Hudak says he'll have to do it with policy.

People may scoff at that, but it's worked before and can work again if Hudak sticks to his message.

We need only go back to Mike Harris to see how successful a political leader can be when he adopts a clear-cut message and doesn't wander off in all directions at once trying to be all things to all people.

Yes, yes, I know. The mere mention of Mike Harris sends many Ontarians into uncontrollable fits of pique. And while he certainly made lots of enemies ? although, as the old saying goes, none of them were new enemies ? he also won two consecutive majority governments, the second being even larger than the first, even after four years of daily attacks from the unions and most of the media (the same type of concerted attacks which will likely help Rob Ford get back in as mayor of Toronto, But again, we digress.)

Hudak showed in London that he plans to come out swinging from the right, leaving the NDP and the Liberals to fight over the left. It's a good plan, but only if he holds to it.

He spent much of his convention speech attacking union bosses ? none of whom would vote Tory on a bet in any event ? and underlining the fiscal mess that profligate Liberal spending (being dutifully carried on by Wynne) has gotten us into.

You can tell he's making an impact because Vaughan's Liberal MPP Steve Del Duca was quoted in the Toronto Star ? which has never met a Tory it couldn't attack ? accusing Hudak of ? wait for it ? ?a hidden agenda ... I think that's troubling.?

So is that old, tired canard. There's nothing ?hidden? about Hudak's small ?c? conservative agenda. You can like it or not, but it's there for all to see. And of all people to talk about ?hidden agendas,? the Ontario Liberals are the last ones who should talk, given their mid-campaign secret decision to save a few seats by scrapping gas plants at enormous public expense.

Hudak says he's trying to be more personable ? he even took unscripted questions from the delegates ? and no doubt he is. But he shouldn't hope for miracles. Just stick with the program.

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Those of us who regularly comment on current events are often accused of rewriting history to make a point. Often, the accusations are accurate. But that doesn't mean they were intentional.

In last week's column, for example, I mixed up the timing of U.S. nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, getting them in the wrong order. It did not alter my point that singer Neil Young's comparison of the oil sands to Hiroshima was odious, but it was wrong nonetheless, and for that I apologize.

