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OttawaWatch 190: What's in a name?

By Lloyd Mackey

Re-reading this piece in 2021 causes a sense of déjà vu. This morning, June 23, I read an account of current Conservative leader Erin O'Toole suggesting that the likely fall election will pit the Conservatives against "four left wing parties – the Liberals, Bloc, NDP and Greens."

By the time readers will have perused this week's *OttawaWatch*, I will have had opportunity to listen to a dozen or two Ottawa-based people think about politics beyond the October 14 election results.

The meeting will come out of a piece I wrote a couple of years ago, about the number of groups surrounding Parliament Hill who are involved in trying to bring biblical values to bear on public policy matters.

At that time, some 35 groups were identified as being so involved.

Subsequently, working with a small number of people representative of some of those groups – most of which could be identified as orienting to an evangelical kind of Christian perspective – a decision was taken to see if the leaders of these groups might want to get to know each other better.

The fact that the first of these exploratory meetings is taking place during the running of an election campaign will tell us, likely, whether that campaign creates a bubble that cuts us off from reality.

We will see.

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Prior to readying for that meeting, I was in a different kind of bubble.

For the past few days, I have been able to venture from the Parliament Hill cloister into the real world of Burlington, Ontario, where, for three days, at least, I could find out if the questions people of faith might be asking about federal politics.

One of the Burlington events had me as part of a panel on *Behind the Story*, Richard Landau's excellent Crossroads show that explores and ties in a whole range of stories which, for the duration, will focus on either the Canadian or American elections.

One of the stories we looked “behind” was a September 15 *National Post* piece by Theo Caldwell, president of Caldwell Asset Management, Inc.

The piece was entitled ‘*Conservative*’ in name only.

Now, the investment Caldwell family is fairly well known in the Canadian fiscal community, as well as in the world of Christian stewardship, for its blending of prudent economics and ethical decision-making.

And, in this particular piece, Caldwell was raising questions about just how ‘conservative’ is our present prime minister.

After talking about income trusts, fixed election dates and Tax Freedom Day, the writer advanced the following argument:

... the point of tax cuts is not to reduce government revenue. The idea is that giving folks the freedom to spend and invest their own money, rather than handing it over to the government, spurs economies and thereby leads to higher tax revenues. Myriad examples, from North America to Europe to Asia, bear this out, but do Canada’s Conservatives believe in the concept? How can we know?

Caldwell wrapped his arguments by noting:

On specific issues including income trusts and fixed election dates, Harper’s government has not been straight with the voters, and on bedrock conservative principles like meaningful tax cuts, it has been absent. These are not unforgivable transgressions but, if the Conservatives are returned to power, they should start living up to their name.

The columnist demonstrated a fairly well-developed wit, when he talked about some of the battles lurking beneath the surface in the current campaign. He said:

Harper is helped by having opponents who would dissolve the fabled wall between church and state by making the religion of environmental druidism the law of the land. Beyond the Liberal and Green parties, Harper is facing straight-forward separatists and unreconstructed socialists. Harper is probably the best leader on offer but, as comedian Dennis Miller might opine, that is like being the smartest kid in summer school.

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If the above was a well-aimed missile from the fiscal right, an e-mail I received early this week about a new e-book, targeted the Conservatives from the left.

No surprise, really. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), a left-wing think tank, is suggesting that the Conservatives have been altogether too fiscally right

wing. The CCPA has published a book for release in early October, but has taken the interesting step of making the tome available on line.

Edited by Canadian Labour Congress Researcher Teresa Healy, with contributions from 47 policy analysts and economists, *The Harper Record* “documents in exhaustive detail the Conservative government’s performance over the last two-and-a-half years,” according to a CCPA press release

“Contrary to the general perception that this has been a moderate government, this book reveals that it, in fact, has taken significant steps to transform Canada in a very short time. Harper's very conservative vision has been advanced across a broad range of policies. It is a deeply troubling prelude of things to come,” Healy is quoted as arguing.

Because this election campaign is shaping up as an argument over competing economic or fiscal visions, thoughtful faith-based voters might like to do a little comparing and contrasting.

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Meanwhile, on the way to the election, your humble scribe was transferred onto an interesting detour.

Plans, made months ago in collaboration with the publisher of my book on Stephen Harper, to spend some of the election campaign promoting the self-same book, have run into a figurative brick wall. Apparently, due to a change in distributors, those books are now safely behind high walls in a Chicago warehouse, from whence apparently it takes five or six weeks to extricate them. And guess what is in three weeks? Why, a federal election, of course.

I don't know the full reason for this situation, but the macro picture is that it might have something to do with Canadian book distribution and sales. Christian readers in Ontario will be well aware, by now, that long-established Mitchell Family Books has closed its eight bookstores and shut down its distribution system. This follows by only a few months, the restructuring of Blessings Christian Marketplace after its owners filed for bankruptcy protection. A fulsome analysis of this latest event, and how my little Harper book problem might or might not fit into it, will have to wait some time.

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