

Time for a minority government?

UNLIKE THE UNITED STATES, Canada has a multiplicity of political parties, as evidenced locally by the fact there will be no fewer than seven names on the ballots next Thursday in Dufferin-Caledon riding.

Were we to have a two-party system of the sort found south of the border, voters would have a relatively easy decision to make at the polls, and with our parliamentary form of government one of the two parties would wind up fully in charge.

But with more than two parties, there is always the possibility that none of them will get a majority of seats and the result will be either a minority government or a coalition between two (or more) parties that collectively have a majority of seats.

In any election campaign, all parties invariably make promises based on an assumption that they will form a majority government.

However, in the current Ontario campaign the polls seem to show massive shifts in public support, with the Progressive Conservatives initially enjoying enough support to have a substantial majority and the New Democrats since then shooting past them to the point where they could garner more than half the 124 seats at stake.

However, in the wake of last Sunday's final televised leaders' debate, Ontarians ought to be shuddering at the thought of either the Tories or the NDP winning majorities.

The main problems we have with the Ontario PC campaign has been its lack to date of a fully costed platform and the populist tendencies of leader Doug Ford that make some suspect the party would be in better hands with Christine Elliot or even Patrick Brown as leader.

However, even without a costed platform, the PCs don't have a couple of problems that should make thoughtful Ontarians shudder at the prospect of an NDP majority.

One of those was seized upon by Premier Kathleen Wynne Sunday night when she asked NDP leader Andrea Horwath to explain or defend a commitment never to force a settlement of a public-sector labour dispute.

Noting that the NDP had already prevented quick passage of a government bill that would have ended the long strike by York University teachers, Ms. Wynne asserted that the NDP stance would give public sector unions overwhelming power that would not necessarily be in the public interest.

Ms. Horwath dodged the question, simply stressing the importance of free collective bargaining. Her answer seemed to confirm suspicions that her party has become beholden to the two giant unions, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU).

Another area where ideology seems to have trumped common sense has come in an apparent NDP pledge to shut down the Pickering Generating Station in August and replace the power it produces with imports from Quebec. Both the PCs and Liberals favour having the nuclear plant run until at least 2024, noting that it currently produces 15 per cent of the province's electrical energy at a fraction of the potential cost of imports from Quebec, and would mean laying off 4,500 workers.

One matter that doesn't seem to have been dealt with by any of the three parties is the possibility that Donald Trump will simply scrap the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and proceed with his America First tariffs against Canadian steel and aluminum and who knows what else.

In the circumstances, this seems to be one of the few occasions when Ontario might actually benefit from not having a majority government.

If nothing else, it would mean the governing party, be it the PCs or NDP, would have to seek outside support for any policies that seem to be based more on ideology than practicalities or common sense.

Perhaps this is one time when voters should tend to vote for the best local candidates rather than the party.