

BROCK'S BANTER: Orange Crushed

I was expecting big things on Sunday afternoon as I tuned into CPAC to listen to the do-or-die speech expected to be delivered by NDP leader Tom Mulcair.

Off-schedule by nearly 30 minutes, the half-hour delay only served to build anticipation.

Then, he took to the stage.

Over his time at the helm of the New Democratic Party, I always found Tom Mulcair to be an interesting anomaly as far as the Orange party went. He has been, in my opinion, a very effective communicator within the House of Commons and, although a steady hand, not quite the memorable firebrand as most of his predecessors.

The traits, however, seemed to elude him at crunch time when it came to contesting his first Federal Election as party leader, squandering what started off as a significant NDP lead that rapidly lost steam to Justin Trudeau's Red Wave.

At the time, it seemed Mr. Mulcair was trying to be all things to all people.

He worked hard to cultivate left-leaning Canadians which have traditionally been the bread and butter of the party but, at the same time, diluting those efforts by also playing to the centre in an attempt to capitalize on the momentum with which they entered the race.

Dilution was the overall theme of the campaign and the results reflected that.

While the Conservatives failed with their excessively repeated tagline that Justin Trudeau was 'just not ready,' the same could be said for Tom Mulcair and the NDP.

In many cases, they were simply not ready ? and one only has to look to Aurora's two new Federal ridings for concrete examples. New Democrats in the newly reconfigured riding of Newmarket-Aurora were relatively blessed.

They had a very strong candidate in Yvonne Kelly, a woman who, although not a resident of the riding, had very deep roots in the community.

They had a visible campaign office, an expansive and tireless team of volunteers, who had the passion and the determination to get the word out, and did not sidestep the tough questions on the true needs of our northern community.

With Ms. Kelly in the race, along with her outstanding campaign staff and volunteers, the NDP platform ? along with Ms. Kelly's own record ? were communicated effectively, efficiently, and this was reflected in the campaign discourse and dialogue whenever the Newmarket-Aurora candidates shared the same stage.

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, on the other hand, was a different story all together.

Left without a candidate for a good portion of the Federal Election campaign ? and it is not as though this was a snap election nobody saw coming ? Toronto resident Brenda Power was drafted in to fill the void.

Ms. Power, in my observation, is a passionate fighter for fairness and equality, and unsuccessfully sought the NDP nomination in a riding closer to home. When it became clear nobody was stepping forward to represent the party in Aurora's southern riding, she was approached by the Party to see if she would be able to step up to the plate ? and she took the opportunity.

Ms. Power was an interesting candidate not only in the sense of how she arrived in Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill, but also in the fact she did not hesitate to speak her mind, even if it didn't always jive with Party policy ? a fact she embraced.

She worked hard to get the Party noticed in the riding but the resources were not provided to her. Campaign materials were not sorted or approved by the Party until the last minute, volunteer feet on the ground were at a bare minimum as, when Aurora was divided at Wellington Street, most of the volunteers gravitated towards what was still Newmarket-Aurora.

Ms. Power was not alone. The same shortcomings could be found in many ridings across Canada and, naturally, the electoral results were indicative of this.

So, what about Mr. Mulcair?

As he finally approached the podium for what everyone agreed was his do-or-die moment as leader of Canada's now-third-place Party, I expected some oratory about his accomplishments as leader of the party (and there are indeed some accomplishments!) and why Party faithful should let his leadership live for another day.

He spoke of the late Jack Layton and his remarkable Orange Crush in the previous Federal Election which landed the NDP in the role of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition for the very first time, his achievements in addressing affordable housing, First Nations and public transportation.

He spoke of NDP MP Margaret Mitchell and her fight to raise awareness and combat the issue of domestic violence, and Party founder Tommy Douglas and his legacy of public healthcare.

Mr. Mulcair was prescient and passionate in his declaration of believing survivors, making a difference in Indigenous communities

where schools are underfunded, boil water advisories are a regular fact of life, and suicides are epidemic.

‘Millions of Canadians are looking to us,’ he said. ‘They are counting on us to fight for them and stand up to well-connected and powerful interests. We can't let them down. We can't get distracted. If you keep standing with me, then together we will never stop fighting.’

The missing piece was why the NDP should stand with him. By invoking Douglas, Mitchell and Layton, his legacy paled by comparison and, unless a leadership convention was a potential ‘distraction’ in the fight ‘millions of Canadians are looking’ to them to carry out, any compelling reasons seemed to be left at the door.

As always, I always want hear your opinions on the subject ‘whichever colour you bleed’ so, have at it!

OF GLASS CEILINGS AND KETCHUP BOTTLES

I was interested to receive the letter to the editor from former mayor and councillor Evelyn Buck over the weekend (see left) regarding my column last week which, in small part, made reference to the U.S. Presidential Election and the five candidates among to parties still left in the race. It is always interesting to me to see how words can be interpreted.

I am not in a position to argue about a glass ceiling with a person like Ms. Buck, who has shattered many a glass ceiling into smithereens in public life on many levels of government, including breaking straight through to become Aurora's first female mayor. In fact, I agree with many points in her letter, particularly her view that Hillary Clinton's background certainly makes her the most qualified candidate for the Presidency.

Where I disagree is the characterization my few paragraphs amounted to a ‘total dismissal of Hillary Clinton's entire campaign.’

I have kept my ears open, and I am hearing just as much as the average person, and what I am hearing is considerable discourse and argument over the personal merits and achievements of each candidate rather than how they want to further and shape the Democrat brand.

Of course, in a column based around a Heinz ketchup bottle, there is room for at least 57 different interpretations.