

Grits offer up a straitjacket

Intent is to bamboozle voters

By [PAUL JACKSON](#)

A federal Liberal mouthpiece was on television bleating that while Stephen Harper had campaigned on fixed election dates with four-year terms, and while Opposition parties in the House of Commons have been prepared to and pass such legislation, the prime minister thwarted their offer.

This, proclaimed the mouthpiece, a typical Liberal non-entity, but one cunning enough to try and bamboozle viewers and voters, demonstrated once again the Conservative government has broken its promise to be accountable.

Actually, it was the Liberal-dominated Senate that stalled the legislation by insisting on rewriting it.

They wanted to write in a technicality that would have caused chaos.

Let's look at this, and other Opposition gambits, more closely.

In the Jan. 23, 2006, federal election, the Conservatives won 125 seats, the Liberals 100, Bloc Quebec 51, New Democrats 29 and there was one independent elected to the 308-seat House of Commons.

Since the election, there has been one defection from the Conservative caucus and one ousted from the Liberal caucus.

This means the three Opposition parties can torpedo the Conservative agenda at any given time, and bring it down on a vote of confidence at any given time.

They can emasculate government legislation whenever they want, as they did with the Clean Air Act , now called "Canada's Carbon Budget, Climate Change Action and Quality Act."

The Opposition controlled the committee and more or less rewrote the entire act.

This is their idea of democracy?

The Conservatives won the 2006 election -- but the minority parties are quite ready to gang up on them and sabotage the program on which voters elected Harper's team to govern.

One can now see the deviousness in the Opposition parties' "offer" to accept fixed election dates immediately.

It would mean for the next three or four years, they, not the elected government, would control the House, amend legislation whenever they wanted, and sandbag Harper and his MPs.

Even if the Grit charge about Harper is correct, why would he and his cabinet put themselves in such a straitjacket?

It just wouldn't make sense.

The Opposition parties -- particularly Stephane Dion's Liberals -- keep charging that rather than try and work with them, the Conservatives want to engineer their own defeat in the Commons and go to the people as soon as they can figure out how to do so.

This, they say, is underhanded politics.

Yet is not trying to thwart the Conservative government's legislative program underhanded politics?

Recent opinion polls give us another reason why the Opposition parties would prefer to lock Harper's government into fixed election dates now -- and thus voiding another campaign for several years.

An SES poll this month showed that when asked about leadership qualities and who would perform best as prime minister, Harper won hands down at a staggering 42% support from those surveyed.

That's compared to a dismal 17% for Dion and 16% for the New Democrats' Jack Layton.

It's true, other polls show the Conservatives in the mid- 30% range, only three to six points ahead of the Liberals, and not yet reaching the magical 40% in popular support that would indicate a majority win.

Yet recall Pierre Trudeau, as unpopular as he was at times, thumped Robert Stanfield and Joe Clark solely on the 'leadership' issue.

The overwhelming public perception that Harper is the best person to lead Canada is the Conservatives' winning hand.