

## POLITICALLY SPEAKING

Martha Hall Findlay  
Former MP for Willowdale

### A CALL FOR NEW ELECTIONS

Normally, I try to write about politics in a relatively non-partisan way. Although I have opinions on certain policies, and I criticize the government from time to time, I also try to give credit when credit is due. I'm afraid, however, that when it comes to electoral fraud, when it comes to disrupting the very fundamentals of our democracy, I cannot sit idly by.

Unfortunately, the recent scandal is part of a long pattern of anti-democratic behaviour.

In the 2006 election, the Conservatives, at the highest levels, orchestrated the "In and Out" scheme. This allowed the Conservative Party to exceed the national campaign spending cap by shifting advertising expenses to individual candidates in 67 ridings. The Federal Court of Canada found against the Conservative Fund Canada and four high-ranking Conservatives – including Senators Doug Finley and Irving Gerstein. But the consequences? They ended up "settling", agreeing to pay fines of \$50,000 and \$2,000. They broke the rules, were able to overspend their campaign limit to improperly influence the election results – and the only consequence was a nominal "fee" of \$52,000. The message was clear – if it only costs you some money to engage in activities that could change an election, one you're already spending millions on to win, why wouldn't you?

In Willowdale, in the 2008 by-election, Liberal voters had their cars 'keyed' and their tires slashed. (They were clearly identifiable as Liberal supporters because they had Liberal signs on their lawns.) No NDP or Conservative voters suffered this. Again in the 2008 general election, Liberal supporters in Willowdale as well as several other ridings had cars keyed and tires slashed – in some cases brake lines were severed.

The intimidation worked. In 2011, quite a few people in Willowdale refused to take Liberal lawn signs (even though they were Liberal supporters), saying they didn't want their cars damaged.

The 2011 election took it to an entirely new level. Maybe it was because the consequences of the "In and Out" scandal were so minor. Maybe it was because the tone at the very top of the Conservative Party clearly condones rule-breaking – what we saw in the 2011 election with Conservative robo-calls illegally impersonating Elections Canada officials, advising voters that their polling station had been moved, or the many harassing and annoying calls made at all hours by people impersonating Liberal campaign workers (which is also illegal) to anger people away from voting Liberal—what we saw was electoral fraud on a scale never seen before in Canada.

This was not the work of someone acting alone, a single "Pierre Poutine" using a false name for a cell phone. In Willowdale alone the harassing calls were being made by "live" people. Dozens of other ridings suffered the same fate. No, this was not the work of some rogue staffer. From

what we could see, this was a massive, coordinated, orchestrated effort to suppress or falsely change votes, to obstruct the electoral process.

Did this behaviour affect the election results? So far, we only have the word of those people who took the time to complain – although many more have been coming forward. But the rule of thumb is that when some complain, there are always far, far more who were affected who didn't bother to let anyone know. In ridings like Etobicoke Centre or Nipissing-Timiskaming, where the Liberals lost by only 26 and 18 votes, respectively, and where both ridings were subject to these electoral fraud calls – how can one not believe that those results would have been different? Was this behaviour enough to change the result in Willowdale? Who knows? The difference was only 932 votes – out of 93,584 eligible voters.

The current Conservative denials have no credibility – not just because of the findings of guilt in the In and Out scandal. Only recently Conservatives admitted to engaging in an orchestrated robo-call phone campaign to discredit Irwin Cotler in Montreal – but only after initial denials. Once the evidence is all in, assuming it shows what we already believe -- that dozens of ridings suffered these attempts to obstruct the electoral process – what should happen?

More fines, which merely suggest that fixing elections simply requires more money? A few individuals taking the blame, but with the election result the same? No. This behaviour goes to the highest levels, and nothing short of new elections in the affected ridings will re-assert our faith in our democracy and in our government.