



Let's do business

April 2011

I've been watching Jack Layton inching, then scooting up in the polls. I can't see the New Democrats winning a third of the seats in the House of Commons, but they'll surely cost Gilles Duceppe a sizeable chunk of his Quebec parking-lot vote.

Given Layton's status and the Town of Hudson's need to attract tourists and jump-start a morose local economy, why don't we erect a few tasteful signs featuring Jack, complete with trademark cane, at the main entry points to town?

Welcome to the childhood home of Jack Layton. Même chose en français. Hudson's allowed because it's officially bilingual. Erect a few signs pointing to the '50s Jetsons house on Birch Hill where Jack and his siblings grew up and another bunch pointing the way to the Hudson Yacht Club pool where Jack used to race. Veggie Jackburgers at Sauvés. Yum.

Old-timers will point out that Layton spent most of his adult life in Toronto. Never mind. In the minds of Canadians, he's the Hudson native who helped pass the pioneering pesticide bylaw. In Quebec, he's le p'tit gars d'Hudson who

broke the Bloc stranglehold on the nationalist vote. As we say in this trade, never let the truth stand in the way of a good story. If Hudson can make money with Jack, who cares?

Some Quebeckers see a vote for the Bloc, NDP, Liberal or Greens as equally wasted. "This region doesn't know how to vote," says Vaudreuil-Dorion mayor Guy Pilon. He was talking about the famous inland port concept that has dominated Vaudreuil-Soulanges economic, social and political discourse for a decade.

The concept is based on the simple fact that most of our consumer goods comes from Asia. It's faster to ship it to the West Coast, then load the containers onto trains to eastern Canadian intermodal terminals like the one Canadian Pacific plans to build in Les Cèdres.

Pilon's beef: Vancouver got \$4 billion to improve its port structure, Halifax \$2.5 billion, yet Vaudreuil-Soulanges can't even nail down the \$400 million it needs for exits off Highway 40 to serve the Vaudreuil-Dorion and Côteau du Lac industrial parks.

"Our dream of becoming an inland port? It won't happen as long as we're voting for a party that has no power, that never had any power and never will have any power. The MP is great for showing up at ribbon cuttings and claiming credit for getting things done, but you and I both know the Bloc can't get anything done."

I've known Guy Pilon long enough to know he's a Quebec nationalist. Maybe he votes Parti Québécois, maybe he votes Liberal or ADQ or maybe he's one of François Legault's followers. He's shrewd enough to keep that to himself. The Battle for Quebec, he says, will be fought in Quebec, not in Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary or Vancouver. Gilles Duceppe's Hail-Mary play, wheeling in the geriatric Jacques Parizeau to save the furniture, should be all the proof anyone needs that the Bloc's federal race is run.

Already, we see hints Vaudreuil-Soulanges may already have missed its window of opportunity. Canadian Pacific isn't hurrying to complete the environmental impact studies required by the Canadian Transport Safety Agency. Canadian Tire isn't in a rush to build a second mega-warehouse in Côteau du Lac. Maybe it's because Highway 30 isn't open, maybe it's because exports from China, Japan and South Korea are down, but the commerce corridor is starting to sound like last election's Soulanges Canal reopening.

Pilon's dead right. We're kidding ourselves if we think the New Democrats will make business any more of a priority than the Bloc. Their platforms are nearly identical, with the only daylight between the two parties on the question of Quebec's future within Canada. It's a pretty fair guess that if Layton, Mulcair

and company win enough seats, they'll figure out a way to do business with the Liberals and/or the Bloc to ensure Harper and the Conservatives can't get on with their agenda of remaking Canada into a more businesslike nation.

This has been one of the strangest federal election campaigns in the more than 40 years I've been watching them. I can't recall an election in which so many people were so unsure about which way to vote, yet so determined to make their votes count. If so, why did the Chambre de commerce et de l'industrie de Vaudreuil-Dorion have to cancel its breakfast debate between the five candidates because fewer than 30 people registered? Could it be that they feel there's no point because Meili Faille has it in the bag? In this election, even not voting is a vote for whoever is riding the wave on Monday, May 2.

Whatever happens, Hudson should officially appropriate Jack before someone else does. It may be the only business our region will get out of the NDP.