VOTERS TOOK OVER 'BORING' ELECTION

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Angelo Persichilli, Political Columnist, TheStar.com, 1 May 2011

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It was boring because all the leaders approached the campaign with the same attitude they brought to dysfunctional question period in the House of Commons. It was exciting because Canadians decided to take matters into their own hands and do what politicians didn't have the courage to do — be creative.
Tired of the negative ads and attitude of Liberals and Conservatives and fed up with the pompous entitlement of Gilles Duceppe, voters decided first to scuttle the Titanic Bloc Québécois, until a few weeks ago considered unsinkable, and to jump into the NDP lifeboat offered by Jack Layton. In the process, they've resized the ambitions of the rancorous Conservatives and Liberals, who were too busy sniping at each other to keep an eye on Layton.

Of course, tomorrow you'll find many of us in the media saying "I told you so!" But the fact of the matter is that none of us "told you so." On the contrary, for the past while it has been you telling us the real lay of the land. In particular, you told us that while mud is part of politics, it's not good politics. You also told us that "gotcha!" journalism might be entertaining and might help to gain viewers but, politically speaking, it's not fooling anybody.

Canadians read, watch and listen to us but, at the end of the day, they reach their own decisions. In fact, had people paid attention to us, Toronto Mayor Rob Ford wouldn't even have been elected president of the high-school cheerleaders' association.

Canadians want mud replaced with ideas, verbal riots with intelligent debates, and career politicians with inspiring statesmen who put Canada first — and their personal ambitions last.

This campaign, more than any other in recent history, has confirmed that the whole system is broken and the three elements of this exercise — politicians, media and voters — are adrift with different agendas.

While Canadians want solid leadership to cope with domestic insecurities and international

challenges, our political leaders are hurling mud at each other, the media are busy focusing on the muddiest spot to increase ratings, and voters are left alone trying to understand what's going on.

In this context we should not be surprised if voters are looking for new ideas. And, in this tumultuous scenario, Layton's cane became a magic wand.

It might be that, like Cinderella, Jack's magic will vanish tonight at midnight at the same time as Gilles' nightmare disappears. But then again, maybe not.

In any event, despite tomorrow's outcome, the fact remains that the electorate has decided to shock Canadian politicians by telling them that the status quo is not an option. They want to see a different approach based on ideas and government based on cooperation.

I believe Canada has done a good job in dealing with the global economic crises and the numbers show that. It's a credit to the government of Stephen Harper, but also to the cooperation of opposition parties. But this is no longer enough.

Now is not the time to just manage crises — it's time to prepare for the future with new bold ideas. Our public health-care system is in danger, pension funds are drying up, the energy sector is eating into our savings, we have problems competing with emerging powers in creating jobs at home and adapting our education system to the new reality. People getting a university degree without being able to connect with the job market means we will create the most educated unemployed people in the western world.

Canadians have heard nothing of this sort in this campaign from our politicians, while the media have been busy counting the number of questions they can ask the leaders instead of pondering the kind of questions to ask.

Whatever the results tomorrow, I believe the message from Canadians is already known. And no, unfortunately nobody can say I told you so.

Angelo Persichilli is the political editor of Corriere Canadese.