

Canada: Another Liberal win a depressing election result

by Conrad Black



This was the most depressingly predictable and redundant federal election within the memory of any living (or dead) Canadian. It was supposed to capitalize upon the government's professedly brilliant COVID record and enable it to restore its parliamentary majority and then take the country on a further lurch to the left. All indications were that this would consist of further collective self abasement and auto-condemnation over Canada's history on native issues, of more exaggerated posturing about climate change and self-important fictions over how much Canada, with its minuscule carbon footprint and generally high ecological standards, can affect the world's climate. To this end the Trudeau government has unmercifully persecuted Canada's greatest industry (oil and gas) and has made outright separation attractive to a great many Western Canadians. The Trudeau government has been a faddish and superficial regime, unleavened by the slightest spark of vision of what Canada could be or of originality in any public policy field.

Trudeau's claim to have admirably managed the pandemic was bunk. He encouraged an excessively severe and prolonged shutdown, did nothing to address the errors of previous governments in driving out Canada's pharmaceutical industry, embarked on a vaccine campaign based on cooperation with China, which was a ludicrous fiasco, and up until two months ago Canada was not in the first 50 most fully vaccinated countries in the world. Everything about this election call was misconceived and the Conservatives should have won. The liberals had a mediocre record, were fiscally completely

irresponsible, and their tenure has been littered with blunders, (the WE scandal, \$4 billion wasted on a pipeline that was stopped, etc., etc.) Most Canadians consider that the amiable prime minister's principal qualifications for high office are that he survived childbirth and has a famous name. Polls indicated early in the campaign that the Conservatives had a solid chance to win. This was an illusion; these are Canadian federal Conservatives and they rarely win, even though, for the fifth time in the last six elections, they led in the popular vote.

There was no need for the election, as the NDP, Bloc Québécois, and Greens, hold essentially the same views as the Liberals, and would have continued to prop up the government, as they will now do again. The NDP can be relied upon to embrace any respectable policy that imputes guilt to its opponents and hobbles and degrades capitalism; the Bloc will do almost anything to hamper the effective functioning of Canadian Confederation, and the Greens are ecological zealots who decline to be confused either with facts or the absence of facts. There is an unbroken history of the Liberals easily outbidding the Conservatives for the support of the third parties in minority parliaments where the Liberals are the largest party, going back to MacKenzie King's swindling of the western parties in the 1920's and Pierre Trudeau picking the electoral pockets of NDP leader David Lewis in 1972-1974. Justly legendary forty-year senior Liberal strategist Jack Pickersgill told me in 1963 that the Liberals would retain the support of Quebec's Creditistes "By building the largest post offices in the world in Chicoutimi, Megantic, and Abitibi."

All five parties that elected MP's on Monday are left-of-centre, and all ended up close to where they had been after the last election. The Liberals have governed for 84 of the last 125 years, 22 full-term election victories to eight from the Conservatives, largely because they opposed the imposition of conscription on French Québec in 1917 and the only

conservative leader since then who had any notion of how to deal with Québec was Brian Mulroney (prime minister 1984-1993). In addition to this Québec advantage, the Liberals traditionally denigrate the Conservatives as misogynistic and heartless Neanderthals who will persecute the disadvantaged, the minorities, and all who are pro-choice. Conservative leaders, even the astute Mulroney, have had great difficulty retaining the support of ideological conservatives while trying to contend with the Liberals for the support of an appreciable number of centrists.

The greatest federal political problem is that there isn't really a perceptible choice; instead of the Liberals and Conservatives offering distinguishable programs and arguing issues in an adult exchange between the moderate left and right, they adhere to the tired pieties of the Liberals pretending to be winners and the Conservatives playing a brilliant role as congenital losers, and both major parties live down to their caricatures. The only way to give Canadians a useful choice, is to transform the Conservatives into a party that has a chance to win elections more often than once every 15 or 20 years.

Instead, the Liberals have managed to look somewhat professional even with an insubstantial leader and a blunderbuss record, and the Conservatives effectively solicit support because they will do as the Liberals do but will do it better. Voters who want a Liberal government, naturally think Liberals are better Liberals than Conservatives are, and those who want a conservative government sense that a Conservative Party that apes the Liberals will not give it to them. The most impressive party leaders were the separatist Yves-Francois Blanchet, and the former Conservative minister Maxime Bernier, who was shabbily treated by his former party, won enough votes as leader of the People's Party to help tank the Conservatives but couldn't elect an MP, including himself. What is needed is a Conservative leader who can espouse

responsible and sensible and preferably original conservative concepts in major policy areas and defend them successfully against the inevitable sand-bag job from the other parties with the collusion of most of the tedious chorus from the generally soft-left media.

Erin O'Toole, is the supreme personification of the Conservative leader sure to lose: he ran for the leadership four years ago as almost a red Tory, was successful two years ago running as the candidate of the right, and started putting the social conservatives over the side at once, and leadership rival, Peter MacKay, who would have won some Nova Scotia constituencies for him, soon after. He glibly announced in one sentence in his Conservative Party conference speech in February that he was in favour of the Quebec government's proposed restrictions on the English language in Quebec. This is a disgraceful position that gained him nothing (he got ten Quebec MPs out of 78), and denied him a lot of support he could have won in English-speaking Canada. He never attacked Trudeau for his incompetent COVID performance or for proclaiming we were a nation of aspirant genocidists. The only comfort he gave the core of his party were indications in the fine print of the platform that a Conservative government would be more sober about climate and Indigenous issues.

Election night was nauseating: Trudeau who called an election to get a majority and failed, claimed a triumphant victory. O'Toole was more thoroughly beaten than his predecessor Andrew Scheer two years ago, but effectively claimed victory anyway. He was a blowhard affecting courage and strength after a month parroting Liberal humbug and platitudes but in a louder voice. He pleaded for retention of his office because Trudeau might call another election in 18 months. O'Toole ignored plenty of good advice and should be pushed out the door and replaced by someone who can sell sensible conservative ideas instead of cowering in fear of the perennial Liberal smear campaign. With real competition the Liberals would raise their game.

Canadians are waiting for it, but Monday night confirmed that we are on an accelerating treadmill to oblivion. Democracies get the government they deserve, a sobering thought for Canada.

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