

Don't Underestimate Trump. He Will Win.

It is with great regret that I take public issue with my colleague John Robson, a columnist and editorial writer for the *National Post*, in this case over his comments on Donald Trump in this newspaper on Monday. John completely missed the point of the Trump candidacy. Donald Trump polled extensively last year and confirmed his suspicion that between 30 and 40 per cent of American adults, cutting across all ethnic, geographic, and demographic lines, were angry, fearful and ashamed at the ineptitude of their federal government.

Americans, Trump rightly concluded, could not abide a continuation in office of those in both parties who had given them decades of shabby and incompetent government: stagnant family incomes, the worst recession in 80 years, stupid wars that cost scores of thousands of casualties and trillions of dollars and generated a humanitarian disaster, serial foreign policy humiliations, and particularly the absence of a border to prevent the entry of unlimited numbers of unskilled migrants, and trade deals that seemed only to import unemployment with often defective goods. I was one of those who thought at the outset that Trump was giving it a shot, and that if it didn't fly it would at least be a good brand-building exercise.

Foreigners like Robson should remember that Americans, unlike most nationalities, are not accustomed to their government being incompetent and embarrassing. History could be ransacked without unearthing the slightest precedent or parallel for the rise of America in two long lifetimes (1783-1945) from two and a half million colonists to a place of power and influence and prestige greater than any nation has ever possessed – everywhere victorious and respected, with an atomic monopoly and half the economic product of the world. Forty-five years

later, their only rival had collapsed like a souffle without the two Superpowers exchanging a shot between them. International Communism and the Soviet Union disintegrated and America was alone, at the summit of the world.

And then it turned into a nation of idiots, incapable of doing anything except conduct military operations against primitive countries. The objective performance of the latter Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations, and the Gingrich, Reid-Pelosi, and Boehner-led congresses, and most of the courts, have for these 25 years been shameful and as unprecedented in American history as the swift rise of America was in the history of the world. The people turned out rascals and got worse rascals.

Donald Trump's research revealed that the people wanted someone who was not complicit in these failures and who had built and run something. Washington, Jackson, the Harrisons, Grant, Theodore Roosevelt, Eisenhower, and others had risen as military heroes, though some of them had had some political exposure. Jefferson and Wilson were known as intellectuals, Madison as chief author of the Constitution, and Monroe and John Quincy Adams as international statesmen. What is called for now is a clean and decisive break from the personalities and techniques of the recent past. Donald Trump doesn't remind anyone of the presidents just mentioned, but he elicited a surge of public support by a novel, almost Vaudeville, routine as an educated billionaire denouncing the political leadership of the country in Archie Bunker blue-collar terms.

Last (Super) Tuesday, he completed the preliminary takeover of the Republican Party. He demonstrated his hold on the angry, the fearful, and the ashamed by passing the double test: he had held no elective office, but he was a worldly man who knew how to make the system work and rebuild American strength and public contentment. All the other candidates in both parties were *vieux jeu, passe*. Only a few of the governors (Bush, Christie, and Kasich) had run anything successfully, none of

them had built anything, and all were up to their eyeballs in the sleazy American political system – long reduced to a garish and corrupt log-rolling game of spin-artists, lobbyists, and influence-peddlers. Bernie Sanders gets a pass, but he is an undischarged Marxist, and while many of his attacks on the incumbent system and personnel have merit, his policy prescriptions are unacceptable to 90 per cent of Americans.

It was clear on Tuesday night that Trump's insurrection had recruited the Republican centre and pushed his opponents to the fringes. The conservative intellectuals, including my friends and editors at *National Review*, as well as *Commentary*, the *Weekly Standard*, and some of the think tanks, attacked Trump as inadequately conservative. They are correct – he isn't particularly conservative, and favours universal medical care, as much as possible in private-sector plans, but a stronger safety net for those who can't afford health care, and retention of federal assistance to Planned Parenthood except in matters of abortion. Traditional, quasi-Bushian moderate Republican opponents and liberals were reduced to calling him an extremist – claiming he was a racist, a “neo-fascist” said Bob Woodward, America's greatest mythmaker and (albeit bloodless) Watergate assassin, and a “Caeserist” by the normally sane Ross Douthat in *The New York Times*. (He was confusing the triumphs of the early Caesars with the debauchery of the later Caligula and Nero and the earlier bread and circuses of the Gracchi, but it is all bunk.)

John Robson took his place in this queue on Monday, claiming Trump was squandering an inherited fortune (he has multiplied it), and concluding that Trump is “a loathsome idiot.” The sleaziest dirty tricks campaigner of modern American history, Ted Cruz, claimed Trump was in league with gangsters.

On Tuesday night, Cruz ran strongly in his home state of Texas but his support is now confined exclusively to Bible-thumping, M16-toting corn-cobbers and woolhats, and he has no traction

outside the southwest and perhaps Alaska. The orthodox Republican candidate, Marco Rubio, is now a Chiclet-smiled, motor-mouth loser, having first been exposed as such by Chris Christie (the New Jersey governor who could have won the nomination and election four years ago and is now running for the vice-presidential nomination with Trump). Rubio should bite the dust in Florida next week. On Super Tuesday evening Donald Trump made the turn from rabble-rouser to nominee-presumptive. The only early campaign excess he has to walk back is the nonsense that all the 11 million illegal migrants will be removed, and then many will be readmitted. Of course the selection process must occur before they are evicted, not after.

Even the formidable and adversarial journalist Megyn Kelly acknowledged that he looked and sounded like a president. He spoke fluently and in sentences and without bombast or excessive self-importance. He is placed exactly where he needs to be for the election, after Hillary Clinton finishes her escapade on the left to fend off the unfeasible candidacy of Bernie Sanders. (This is if she is not indicted for her misuse of official emails – Obama is nasty enough to have her charged, and almost all prosecutions of prominent people in the U.S. are political, but she is now all that stands between Donald Trump and the White House, but is almost a paper tigress.) Trump sharply raised the Republican vote totals and the fact that he carried 49 per cent of the Republican voters in Massachusetts, a state with almost no extremists in it, indicates how wide his appeal has become.

Hillary Clinton was, as Trump described her when she unwisely accused him of being a sexist, a facilitator of sexism; simultaneously the feminist in chief and First (Wronged) Lady, as spouse of America's premier sexist. She was elected in a rotten borough for the Democrats in New York State, and was a nondescript secretary of state. She has been caught in innumerable falsehoods and her conduct in the entire Benghazi

affair (the terrorist murder of a U.S. ambassador) was reprehensible. Her indictment for various breaches of national security and possible perjury is regularly demanded by former attorney general Michael Mukasey and other worthies.

She is often impressive, but all these and more failures, as well as unseemly activities with the Clinton Foundation, will be mercilessly pounded on in the campaign. Donald Trump will not simulate the languorous defeatism of the senior Bush or Mitt Romney, or the blunderbuss shortcomings of Bob Dole and John McCain. (Romney's savage attack on Trump on Thursday served to remind Republicans of how he squandered a winnable election in 2012 and faced in all four directions on every major issue.)

Eight years ago, it was time to break the colour barrier at the White House. Now it is time to clean the Augean Stable. Donald Trump has his infelicities, though not those that malicious opponents or people like John Robson, who simply haven't thought it through, allege. But he seems to have become the man whom the great office of president of the United States now seeks. He is far from a Lincolnian figure, but after his astonishing rise it would be a mistake to underestimate him.