

Mr. Trudeau, if he can, should get serious about running this country

Forsake the selfies and 'victims.' It's not too late to produce some real and not pretended leadership in a desirable rather than merely trendy direction

by Conrad Black



It is too early to judge how profoundly Justin Trudeau and his government have been undermined by the debacle of the visit to India, which cannot be laid off by scapegoating Indian and Canadian officials. Coming on the heels of the “peoplekind” fiasco, it has created a worldwide credibility problem for this government, which was compounded by the prime minister’s

unintelligible babbling over the U.S. steel and aluminum tariff issue. (Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland, on the other hand, was admirably sensible and balanced in her response.) These embarrassments usually blow over, but sometimes, as with former president George W. Bush's inane frat-boy talk in New Orleans after the Hurricane Katrina disaster in 2005, a leader can be mortally discredited. Complaints had been audible for a long time that the prime minister specializes in selfies and pandering to identified victim groups, which include practically everyone except white, straight, ostensibly Christian able-bodied and sane adult males. Everyone else, as at a children's prize day, could claim an award-winning level of competition, in this case, for victimhood, real or imagined.

The resulting farrago of contrived federal government munificence toward complainant groups has essentially been a substitute for real policy these 29 months of this government. It has now caught up with them. The budget last week contained hundreds of invocations of the word "gender" as if it were a sex manual for pubescent youth and not the supposed fiscal blueprint for the federal government. The budget did not address the deficit, the over-taxed condition of almost every income-earner in the country, or the implications of moving determinedly from half the rate of U.S. economic growth this year to a third of it next year, while all income-tax brackets and corporations in Canada pay a higher rate of taxes than their American analogues.

The government has loaded all its political freight on the rickety wagon of political correctness

In Cromwellian terms, instead of "addressing the nation's grievances," the government is well along toward becoming "its greatest grievance." The government has loaded all its political freight on the rickety wagon of political correctness: demonstrably absurd propositions about the

environment, gender issues, and native people. It won't fly, but it's not too late to become serious and produce some real and not pretended leadership in a desirable rather than merely trendy direction. Rather than trying to lead us across an endless desert of needless deficits, HST should be raised on elective spending, especially luxury goods and optional financial transactions. It would then be a voluntary tax on the relatively well-to-do. All income taxes should be reduced. Thus would Canada stimulate economic growth while eliminating the federal deficit, if it were all calibrated properly. If we reinvigorated economic growth while reducing the deficit, we could lead the world back to hard currencies, that are backed by something, and not just measured against each other as all currencies lose value in unison. The gold standard would not be appropriate, but some combination of gold, energy units, and consumer essentials could become a yardstick for currency that would be emulated by other fiscally responsible countries.

The lunacy that oil and gas production should be discouraged must cease. The pipelines, to both the East and the West, are needed and should be built, even if that requires Ottawa to muscle the pantomime horse of the NDP-Green government of British Columbia and be firm with any native group along the way that raises unreasonable objections. We make a strategic laughingstock of ourselves importing 700,000 barrels of oil a day in eastern Canada while effectively discouraging its export from the West. At a time when the United States has increased oil production by five million barrels a day under the new administration, and has denounced the Paris Climate Agreement as the fatuous hypocrisy that it is, Ottawa is still tormenting Canada's oil industry as if it were a plodding army of (genderless) polluters and miscreants.

Meritocracy should reign again, over a system where all people have an assurance of equal treatment

Meritocracy should reign again, over a system where all people have an assurance of equal treatment. Native groups must be accountable in the management of government benefits they receive. They must no longer be incited to believe that there is a cloud over the white man's legitimate presence here, as if our ancestors seized their country as Germany and the Soviet Union seized Poland in 1939. The natives must see themselves as the premier citizens of the Realm of Canada.

There are far too many people employed by government in Canada, and a five-year plan should be worked out among all the levels of government to reduce duplicated work, and to avoid replacing retiring government employees until their number has achieved a sustainable and comparatively efficient level. A complete free market should come into force throughout the country; minor compensatory adjustments can be added to the equalization payment system, and the federal government should stop fearing the inevitable and desirable discussion of Quebec's formal adherence to the Constitution.

It is preposterous that private medicine continues to be outlawed in Canada, uniquely among democratic countries. That should cease, so that more of the state contribution to health-care costs can be devoted to those who need assistance paying for it. This government does have a sensible attitude to penal reform, and it should undo the draconian posturing of the former government's omnibus crime bill, and begin the non-carceral penalization of non-violent offenders. Very few countries have penal systems that are not, at least in lesser offences, inhumane, ineffectual, and hideously expensive. Canada could easily take the lead, and this government seems to have some disposition to do that; much of the world would follow.

There are new manifestations almost every week of the absurdity of the political correctness this government promotes. It is perfectly in order to honour Viola Desmond – an African-Canadian woman who was prosecuted for cheating the

treasury of one cent of tax by insisting on sitting in the white section of a segregated movie theatre in New Glasgow, N.S., in 1947. But to do so by bumping the founders of the country and builders of the Canadian Pacific Railway, one of the engineering wonders of the world, (John A. Macdonald and George-Etienne Cartier), as well as the first female Canadian Member of Parliament, Agnes Macphail, and the first native senator, James Gladstone, is not the way to do it. No nation's pantheon is a zero-sum game. You add deserving people as they arise or come to historic notice. The recognition of Ms. Desmond doesn't justify the dismissal of those she replaces on the \$10 bill, especially after the recent native defamations of Macdonald, who has been likened to the inevitable Adolf Hitler. Even in the era of Lincoln, Disraeli, Bismarck and Gladstone, Macdonald was a great statesman and was seen by his contemporaries to be one.

On an almost unrelated note, the Ontario Progressive Conservative leadership voting procedure has been impossibly complicated. The possibility of the Christine Elliott faction winning by excluding half the eligible voters would amount to a putsch. On the heels of the unjustified coup against Patrick Brown, it risked forfeiting a won election and re-elect a hopeless government for a fifth term. It is not too late for the Trudeau government to assemble a good record for its re-election, and it is time for better government in Toronto and Ottawa, whether by change of party or the grace of conversion.

First published in the