

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, so far

by Conrad Black

A pattern is emerging in the conduct of the Trudeau government. It straddles fairly stylishly between gestures to the trendy and fashionable cutting leftward edge of its support without grossly offending the solid centre of the country that provides the majority for any Canadian federal government.

That centre was fairly comfortable with the Harper government, with its fiscal solidity, purposeful foreign policy, and social conservatism in drugs and treatment of crime. But it became wary of inertia, authoritarianism, demagogy in raising the absurd spectre of 400,000 refugees and over-focusing on a couple of incidents involving Muslim women wearing face-covering niqabs. There were too many omnibus votes jammed through on abbreviated debate schedules, and gestures of silly stubbornness, such as simply not filling Senate vacancies (almost a quarter of the benches were empty – like leaving 85 constituencies unrepresented in the House of Commons). There was an argument not to get into constitutional reform, a difficult issue that excites passions and has no immediate payoff to people's wallets when successful. But there was no reason to throw a wobbly when the Supreme Court gave the obviously correct judgment that the Commons could not simply by itself abolish the Senate. Retired ministers tended not to be replaced by people of equal stature and after nine years, all governments have to perform hand-springs of renovation and originality to avoid the judgment that it's time for a change. Too much freight was placed by the former government on the wagon that Justin Trudeau was a well-born airhead and he had no difficulty exceeding the low expectations that had been conveniently set for him by the Conservatives and the New

Democratic Party.

In general, the Liberals have had a friendly, contemporary air of energy and openness that is pleasing to most. The day when the honeymoon has subsided and satirists begin deriding endless effusive paeans to inclusive dialogue and start to yearn for crisp executive decision-making must be lurking, but should be survivable when it comes. On the environment, Canada signed on to all the inconsequential platitudes at Paris, and gave an immense delegation a fine gourmet and vinous holiday in the ultimate five-star city. There have been no relapses to Kyotoism, but the prevalence in the prime minister's entourage of people steeped to their ears in the renewable energy suicide mission of Ontario's McGuinty-Wynne government, which squandered billions and raised Ontario's hydro-electric costs to stratospheric levels, warns us of the danger of complacency. Despite the proximity of Niagara Falls and the talented work force at Ontario Hydro, and immense potential for traditional forms of power generation, Ontario has been hobbled by the eco-dementia of the provincial government. (Readers who are paid an exorbitant amount to put out solar panels write to me almost every week complaining that it is a fraud on the taxpayers, though the writers themselves find it a useful income supplement.)

There remains no evidence that global warming is occurring and use of that scarecrow has almost ceased; we don't know much about climate change, and the controversy has been warped by the takeover of legitimate environmentalism by the regrouped survivors of the bone-crushing defeat of the old left in the Cold War and by Reaganomics and Thatcherism. The loopy left can at least be relied upon for a bit of reverence for the misguided elderly, as the Bernie Sanders campaign in the U.S. shows. The eco-extremists who have wrapped *Das Kapital* in the cover of Naomi Klein's latest book, should call themselves the Gwynne Dyer Brigade (as in Canada's Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion in the Spanish Civil War). Dyer deserves it as a

veteran of every mad leftist cause of the last 50 years, most recently in my observations when he came snorting out of the undergrowth a few years ago to announce an imminent armed invasion of Canada by the U.S. Marine Corps to seize our fresh water supply. (This would require the occupation of 2.5 million square miles, more than the United States took from Britain and the natives, stole after the Mexican War, and bought from Napoleon and Russia in the Louisiana and Alaska purchases, and it would add another couplet to the Marine Corps hymn about Montezuma and the Barbary pirates.) So far the new government has been all rhetoric and sumptuous freebee trips for the agitators, and the environment minister, Catherine McKenna, is very sensible and capable. But so much of the upper echelon of this regime have the cloven feet of the globally warmed in their sandals and hush puppies, vigilance is called for.

Native issues are also a concern. There is an almost unanimous consensus that a generous and original concentration of resources to make amends for treaty violations and collective mistreatment is called for, as a moral and a practical requirement. There is also now close to a majority of informed opinion that the victim and nativist veneration industries have been over-indulged and are holding the country to blackmail over what should be routine social and economic progress. Every western ski area seems to be a threat to the religious dignity of a few hundred native people; every pipeline is a desecration of unsuspected native traditions; and almost everything that it is proposed be built in the western provinces improvidently intrudes upon a long-invisible native burial ground. The constitutional guaranty of due consultation is now being claimed to be violated as insufficient even after 25 years of consultation in the Ktunaxa case.

The chief justice of Canada, Beverley McLachlin, is leading the chorus that we as a country attempted "cultural genocide"

against the native people (a false charge). Accompanied by the slightly hackneyed encouragement of the amiable duet of Adrienne Clarkson and John Ralston Saul, she is trying to encumber us with an open-ended guilt complex that is being exploited by the most disreputable charlatans among the intended beneficiaries. Idle No More burned a hanged effigy of John A. Macdonald at a ceremony honouring his birthday in January, and the automobile of the organizer of the official observation of the anniversary was vandalized and his wife was threatened. No organization that so demeans the founder of our country and one of the world's great statesmen of the 19th century should be treated as a legitimate representative of any group of Canadians by the federal government. Some of the native leaders have taken advantage of their positions and rifled and pilfered the largesse belatedly granted them. Trudeau has scaled back his initial, entirely favourable response to the preliminary report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (which is not the whole truth and is anything but conciliatory). In the Throne Speech, he spoke of implementing some of the recommendations. This is a terribly complex and heartfelt issue and it will require great sensitivity and statesmanship to effect real reform fairly and proportionately.

President Barack Obama spoke nothing but the truth in his repeated call for a larger NATO contribution by Canada when he was in Ottawa last week (ironically, as he has been the least committed U.S. president to NATO of the 12 since the alliance was founded). I will not repeat previous arguments I have made here that we are freeloading by spending only one per cent of gross domestic product on defence, and that doubling our defence effort is the best form of economic stimulus and would add some credibility to our foreign and humanitarian aid policies. We will have to wait for this government's defence review to see which way it will go.

Off to a more promising start is the question of arms sales to

countries that have unacceptable attitudes to civil rights. The litmus test is not how they measure up to us; it is the strategic interest of the West and whether regime change would produce an improvement. Of course, the government is correct to sell light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia. It is \$15 billion to the London, Ont., area, which would otherwise go to foreigners, to be used by a country that is the principal current bulwark against the dangerous aggression of the even more odious despotism of Iran. Not that any action of Canada's would influence the politics of Arabia, but any replacement of the House of Saud would be by an Islamic State of Iraq & the Levant-like extremist regime. It is disappointing to see the Globe and Mail harping so tiresomely and wrong-headedly on this issue. An arms boycott of Saudi Arabia by Canada, like anything Canada does with renewable energy, as our carbon footprint is only one per cent of the world's, would be insignificant.

These are bellwethers of how the new government will perform. But much of the debate on these matters, like any imputation to Canada of genocide, is, to take a phrase from the currently much-publicized Boris Johnson, "an inverted pyramid of piffle."

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