Vote the Platform, Not the Man(ner)

Recently, I've been corresponding with a friend on the ever-contentious subject of Donald Trump, a man whom my interlocutor finds objectionable on both political and personal grounds. Political positions can be discussed and debated even if they do not produce agreement or compromise, but a personal animadversion cannot be met with argument. My correspondent considers Trump an unreconstructed vulgarian, loud, ill-mannered and abrasive, all of which apparently render him unfit for office. He simply cannot vote for a man he dislikes.

Personal liking is one of the least reliable criteria for voting. The election of Barack Obama to the presidency is surely proof positive that affection for a political figure—the love affair with Obama was a national phenomenon—can result in unmitigated disaster. The same is true of personal dislike, which may often lead to the rejection of the best, or least worst, candidates for political office.

In Canada's recent federal election, former PM Stephen Harper was vilified in the press and held in contempt by the majority of the electorate as a dangerous and unsavory character. He was rumoured to harbor a "secret agenda," though nobody could say what it was. He was denounced as a brooding egotist and a control freak. He was viewed as unsympathetic to the marginalized and disadvantaged, stingy with entitlements, unimpressed by the claims of the arts community for ever greater government largesse, and generally hostile to Canada's growing and increasingly clamorous Islamic community.

The fact that he steered the country safely through the market crash of 2008, signed lucrative international trade deals,

kept taxes down, reduced the GST (Goods and Services Tax) and provided the country with a balanced budget plainly counted for nothing. His emendation of citizenship protocols in an effort to check the spread of culturally barbaric practices, chiefly associated with Islam, counted against him. At the end of the day, he was simply unlikeable, he was "Harperman," and he had to go.

Instead, Canadians fell in love with Justin Trudeau, easily the most unqualified prime ministerial candidate since Confederation (there have been many duds, eccentrics and charlatans, but Trudeau is in a category of his own). He was young, personable, wavy-haired, utterly innocuous and adroit at spouting platitudes. Women found him attractive, millennials recognized one of their own, and he embraced all the feel-good big-spending fads and sophistries of welfare socialism. In short, people found him immensely likeable, the polar opposite of the straitlaced, parsimonious Harper.

The consequences were not long in coming. Trudeau has been in office for half a year, more than enough time to engineer the rapid deterioration of a once-prosperous and relatively secure nation. He has brought in [25,000 "Syrians"](#) and is aiming for many thousands more, all living off the public dole and no doubted salted with aspiring jihadists. He intends to build mosques (which he calls "religious centers") on military bases and is re-accrediting Muslim terror-affiliated organizations that Harper defunded. He inherited Harper's balanced budget and in just a few short months was busy at work racking up a $29.4 billion deficit. Not to worry, since Trudeau is on record saying that budgets balance themselves. Magic is afoot. All one need do is continue believing in the [Ministry of Silly Walks](#) and the nation will stride ever forward.

According to a March 18, 2016 [Ipsos poll](#), 66 per cent of Canadians approve of his performance. A boilerplate article by Jake Horowitz for [Policy.Mic](#) represents the general attitude of appreciation. In his meeting with Barack Obama, Horowitz

writes, "it was Trudeau's tone of optimism, and his embrace of a style of politics marked by positivity, inclusion and equality, that truly shined [sic] through. Practically everything about his values comes in stark contrast to what we've heard from Republican front-runner Donald Trump, who has dominated the 2016 election cycle with divisiveness, anger and fear-mongering."

Often commentators will seek to buttress their personal liking or disliking on the basis of presumed intellectual substance. Despite his success in business, his knowledge of practical economics and international finance, and his instinctive recognition of what is needed in a country beset by astronomical deficits, trade imbalances and catastrophic immigration problems, Trump is frequently dismissed as an ignoramus. "Trump doesn't read," [says](#) David Goldman. "He brags about his own ignorance. Journalist Michael d'Antonio interviewed Trump at his New York home and told a [German newspaper](#): 'What I noticed immediately in my first visit was that there were no books… huge palace and not a single book.'"

On the other hand, we are told that Justin Trudeau reads. [According to](#) Jonathan Kay, formerly letters editor at *The National Post* and currently editor of *The Walrus*, who assisted Trudeau in writing the Canadian Prime Minister's memoir *[Common Ground](#)*, "I can report that Trudeau is very much an un-boob. Several of our interviews took place in his home study, which is lined with thousands of books…We spoke at length about the Greek classics his father had foisted upon him as a child…and the policy-oriented fare he now reads as part of his life in politics…Trudeau probably reads more than any other politician I know."

Kay never mentions that this intellectual giant failed to complete the two university degrees for which he had enrolled, earned his chops as a [substitute instructor](#) at the high school level, and inherited a formidable financial estate from his famous father, former Canadian PM Pierre Trudeau. He has done

nothing with his life except preen and posture for the public—a "shiny pony," as journalist Ezra Levant has dubbed him. Trump on the other hand received an inheritance and turned it into one of the world's major fortunes. As *New English Review* editor Rebecca Bynum [points out](), "the businessman from Queens understands the American working people better than the Harvard man from Texas or the mailman's son from Ohio. He speaks in plain English to describe the incompetence, and yes, the stupidity of those currently in power, who could not have harmed our country any more if they had had outright malicious intent."

The Harper case was anomalous. He was an evidently accomplished man, trained in economics (unlike Trudeau, he completed his university program), a stalwart Canadian who wrote a book on our national sport, *[A Great Game: The Forgotten Leafs & the Rise of Professional Hockey]()*, (unlike Trudeau's memoir, there was no Kay-like ectoplasm to assist in its composition) and was deeply interested in the Franklin Expedition and the lore of the Canadian North. And he was a reader. Nevertheless, Canadian novelist Yann Martel mocked Harper in a series of letters collected into a book, *[101 Letters to a Prime Minister]()*, condescendingly lecturing Harper on what he should read, with the implication (sometimes explicit) that Harper saw nothing but the financial bottom line and was a man without imagination, heart or a vision for the country larger than trade deals and tax policy. (Martel is evidently a prehensile reader, having discovered an obscure novella by the Argentine writer Moacyr Scliar, *[Max and the Cats]()*, which arguably formed the plagiarized occasion for his own *[Life of Pi]()*. Not the man to instruct the PM.) In any event, under a relentless media barrage the public came to see Harper as a rigid martinet. In the 2015 election, he never had a chance.

Harper was regarded by the press and a plurality of Canadians pretty much as Trump is currently viewed by establishment

Republicans, sanctimonious conservatives and a partisan media, for whom The Donald has become politically *non grata*, a "[reptile](#)" in Andrew Klavan's distemperate rhetoric. Trump's dilemma is that he has refused to be housebroken. He is certainly a flawed human being, but I have never known one who wasn't.

So let us now compare. Trump has pledged to set the U.S. on a sound economic footing, prevent the flow of illegal migrants across the southwestern border, limit Islamic immigration into the country, and restore America's diminished prestige and might on the international stage. But he is, we are told, a boor, a plebeian, a crass opportunist, a know-nothing who doesn't read. "Donald Trump may not be perfect," Bynum agrees, "but at least he will clean house." All the more reason, it appears, for the virulence and disparagement with which he has been met. The *bien pensants* dislike him with a vehemence that does them little honor.

On the other hand, Trudeau, as we've seen, has plunged his country into deficit, has imported thousands of Muslims who will swell the welfare rolls and generate social unrest, as is inevitable wherever Muslims begin to multiply, withdrawn Canadian forces from the campaign against ISIS, and filled his cabinet with highly questionable personnel—women simply because they are women, such as the lamentably dense Chrystia Freeland, Minister of International Trade (who disgraced herself on the [Bill Maher show](#)), and doddering retreads like Immigration Minister John McCallum. But Trudeau is suave, telegenic, blandly inoffensive—and he reads. People like him with a passion that also does them little honor.

Would any sane person choose a Trudeau-type figure over a Harper or a Trump to lead their country into a problematic future? The larger issue is whether any reasonable person should predicate his voting preference on personal liking or disliking. Trudeau is intellectually vapid, has the wrong instincts, and is unlearnable. But he is liked. As for Trump,

I am not suggesting that he would be a better choice than Cruz may be or Rubio may have been, though I suspect he might. He still has much to learn about the intricacies and priorities of governing and about looking "presidential." What matters is that a candidate for political office is smart, has the right instincts, and is willing to learn. I believe Trump qualifies in these respects. Disliking him is beside the point.

Writing for *[The Federalist](#)*, Timm Amundson acknowledges that Trump can be rude, arrogant and reckless, and asks: "How can a principled, pragmatic, deliberate conservative be drawn to such a candidate?" And answers: "It is because I believe conservatism doesn't stand a chance in this country without first delivering a very heavy dose of populism," that is, "a platform built largely on the principle of economic nationalism…focus[ing] on three primary policy areas: trade, defense, and immigration." This is Trump's bailiwick.

To approve or disapprove of a candidate on the basis of his or her social and economic platform is wholly legitimate, is at least theoretically open to debate and constitutes a sensible basis for choice. If you believe, as Amundson does, that the core populist platform is the surest way "for America to begin rebuilding her neglected middle class and restoring her sovereignty," then cast your ballot appropriately. The [Overton Window](#) is closing fast.

First published in