

What happened to Patrick Brown was outrageous – but also an opportunity

Justin Trudeau is a fair-minded person. He knows better than to greet the destruction of a prominent political career with joy

by Conrad Black



The sudden departure of Patrick Brown as leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives (as they still call themselves) is a sadness, an outrage and an opportunity.

It is a sad departure of a man who had worked hard to build his party, recruited good candidates, and was regarded by most polls as a hot contender to win the next provincial election. He had earned a try to dislodge this abusive, incompetent

four-term apotheosis of the decay of incumbency that rules in Queen's Park. I don't know Patrick Brown well, but I wish him well, and urge him to remain as a member of the provincial legislature and stick to his position that the allegations against him of sexual improprieties are untrue, if that is his conviction. The future could yet reserve to him an important government position. His political career has taken the worst possible turn but sometimes political fortunes fluctuate upward.

Patrick Brown's fate is an outrage because there was no process, due or otherwise, merely two unsubstantiated and anonymous denunciations; and there was no sympathy for the accused, no concern for any sort of justice, only cowardly, hip-shooting congratulations from Justin Trudeau in Davos and from Premier Kathleen Wynne and provincial NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, lauding Brown's accusers for their "bravery." When asked by a journalist about due process (a subject that, unsurprisingly, arouses little interest in the media, which rarely practice it themselves), Horwath's reply was two words: "Jian Ghomeshi." The fact that Ghomeshi was acquitted in a meticulously conducted and argued trial, after being condemned in the media by everyone except Christie Blatchford, Barbara Amiel Black (my wife) and me, does not open in Horwath's thoughts, such as they are, the possibility that he might not have been guilty.

If a woman accuses a man of a sexual transgression, he's cooked

Never mind that the defence tore the testimony of his accusers to pieces, that some of them simply lied, and that Ghomeshi was exonerated. The New Democratic Party historically has an impressive record of defending the rights of the accused, but Andrea Horwath holds that the acquittal of Jian Ghomeshi legitimizes a regime of conclusive denunciation that is neither justiciable nor appealable. If a woman accuses a man

of a sexual transgr

ession, he's cooked – Horwath does the Red Queen one better: not just the verdict before the charge and the evidence; the charge is the verdict and there is no evidence. We just ruin the career of the leader of the opposition and destabilize his political party five months before an election because of anonymous claims of the suggestion of oral sex but with no follow-through when the aggrieved party demurred, and a stolen kiss and intimate embrace, which, when the subject of these attentions objected, ended with Brown driving her home.

Have we all, as a society, gone mad?

Have we all, as a society, gone mad? Are our elected leaders all invertebrate, vote-hunting panderers to belligerent, man-hating feminists? We are in a bloodless replication of the Prairial phase of the French Revolution. The Trudeau-Wynne-Horwath Committee of Public Safety makes or receives a denunciation, declares the subject of it to be “outside the law,” and that individual vanishes. (This was a wheeze of the leader of the French Terror, Robespierre, which was soon used by his intended victims to send him to a swift public execution.) A beastly mutation of bourgeois sentimentality such as an acquittal in a fair trial is irrelevant.

I know Justin Trudeau to be a fair-minded person, and I understand the allure of faddish concentrations of electoral strength, as these rabid feminists now are. But he is the leader of a G7 country with as enviable a record of humane and condign justice as any country. He knows better than to greet the instant destruction of a prominent political career on unsubstantiated claims of minor indiscretions with joy on behalf of the accusers. That is not how his father reacted to the indictment of his cabinet colleague Bryce Mackasey on financial charges (he was acquitted).

Of course, everyone has to be protected from assault and

unreasonable obstruction or harassment. Men must always be scrupulous and civil with all women, and suspected wrongdoers should be prosecuted, but fairly.

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I doubt that there are many male Canadians above the age of 40 who have never committed acts similar to those alleged against Patrick Brown, including Justin and me, though not involving women who were subordinate. Sex motivates most people at times – sometimes the response is positive and sometimes not, but they are not usually consequential, much less unlawful, acts. And these laudations of the courage of the accusers are getting a little tiresome; it doesn't take much courage to come out of the woodwork of the past and accuse a public person of minor improprieties years ago with no supportive evidence and with the cloak of total anonymity. Ultimately, the principal duty of every public official is to protect the rights of all the people. Patrick Brown vigorously denies that he did what is claimed, and this episode should be irrelevant to his ability to lead a political party now. Besmirching and deposing him in a putsch like this, given the absence of support from his caucus, may indicate that he is not Alexander the Great or Napoleon as a leader of men, but it is still an injustice.

The opportunity created by this incident is filling the vacancy. None of those judged less desirable than Patrick Brown three years ago should now replace him. New blood is available, particularly Doug Ford, Caroline Mulroney Lapham and Rod Phillips. Doug Ford is a friend and a good man. But he is indelibly identified with municipal controversies in Toronto, where he lost the mayoralty in 2014 by barely 60,000 votes out of 980,000 cast, to John Tory, who ran what was effectively a Liberal-Conservative coalition. (Ford ran over 100,000 votes ahead of NDP's preferred candidate Olivia Chow).

The Ford faction is strong and must be welcomed into the provincial party, but the distinct nature of that faction makes its elevation to leadership of a winning, province-wide coalition problematic.

Rod Phillips is an able man and he was not complicit in the management errors that afflicted the company that publishes the *National Post* when he was the chairman. But his is not a widely known name and he has chosen a challenging constituency (Ajax). I wish him every success and he should have a brilliant political future, but leadership for him, at this time, seems a stretch.

Caroline Mulroney should be the next leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives and of the province

Caroline Mulroney, in a slogan of Richard Nixon's from 1968, "is the one;" she should be the next leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives and of the province. She is an alumna of Harvard and New York University, a lawyer and an accomplished businesswoman, perfectly bilingual, elegant and glamorous without being any the less a determined woman: strong but not overbearing, beautiful but not, as the ghastly jargon goes, objectifiable. Her suave and highly intelligent husband Andrew Lapham, a financier, scion of a distinguished intellectual (though not conservative) family, would not only not be over-shadowed by his wife's success, he would be a star. In fact, he would be the greatest male consort of an elected leader since the great Sir Denis Thatcher, backbone of the British nation – cricket, gin and tonic, El Alamein, international businessman and Churchillian Tory.

Obviously, Ms. Mulroney-Lapham has learned the ropes politically from her father (disclosure: a dear and unwavering friend of 53 years). Going for the Ontario PC leadership now would not be as bold as her father's run for the federal party leadership in 1976, when he was a 36-year old lawyer who had

never sought public office – she is a nominated candidate in a promising district (York-Simcoe). The clinching argument is that she would win the election and clean house after the fiscal profligacy of Dalton McGuinty, the political sorcery of David Axelrod, and the McGuinty-Wynne economic miracle that has turned one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in the world into a debt-ridden candidate for equalization payments. Ford, Phillips, possibly Brown, and others would make it a strong team. The office seeks the woman and she should have it.

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