

Canada: There is only one rational choice in this election

by Conrad Black



As Canada drags itself to the end of one of the most boring and superfluous federal election campaigns in its history, it is time to evaluate the merits of the different parties.

The Greens are so extreme in their proposed remedies to imprecise environmental problems that a vote for that party is not rational. The Bloc Québécois is a Quebec separatist party and the independence of Quebec is an arguable political option for that province, but as the separatists would be the first to tell us, it is an issue to be decided by voters in a Quebec election and not a federal one. The *raison d'être* of this party is to be disruptive and well-publicized. A vote for it, even by a Quebec separatist, is not rational.

The People's Party of Canada was founded by Maxime Bernier when he felt he was shabbily treated in the Conservative leadership selection process in 2017 and in the shadow cabinet in the subsequent year. His grievances were probably legitimate but his remedy, to set up a new party, was not. He thought that he could have a miraculous rise from obscurity as French President Emmanuel Macron had just had, but France does not have stable and durable political parties: its parties fragment, reformulate themselves and change their names with astounding frequency, and usually over minor questions. The Radical and Radical Socialist parties (both of which were in fact conservative) were divided for 80 years on the issue of whether to exchange embassies with the Holy See. This is not the sort of hairsplitting that we want in Canada; France did

not have a single-party parliamentary majority in its first four republics from 1793 to 1958, but Canadians generally prefer a majority government. Having setup his own libertarian party, Maxime Bernier has principally damaged the Conservatives who were the authors of his grievances. Polls give him twice as many votes as the Greens and as many as the Bloc. If the Conservatives do not win this election, next to their leader, Erin O'Toole, Bernier will be chiefly responsible. He would be an adornment to Parliament, but apart from in his constituency of Beauce, a vote for the People's party is not rational.

For anyone who does not wish higher taxes and more authoritarian government, a vote for the New Democratic Party (which was founded in 1961 and is no longer new), despite its frequently admirable goals, is not rational either.

The foregoing political parties appear likely to receive approximately 35 per cent of the votes on Monday, though none of them has any chance of forming a government. The Conservatives, once again, have effectively campaigned as another Liberal party, claiming they would effect the Liberal agenda better than the Liberals themselves. This is rarely a persuasive argument, which is why the Conservatives rarely win: if you want a Liberal government, the Liberals can generally provide it with greater authenticity than the Conservatives. Historically, Conservatives have generally not been given majority governments until the Liberals have governed for at least four terms. Since the death of the chief founder of Canada and of the Conservative party, John A. Macdonald, in 1891, the only Conservative prime minister who won a second consecutive majority term was Brian Mulroney in 1988. He had a successful first term and conducted his re-election campaign on the issue of free trade, which both the Liberals and New Democrats opposed; half the country favoured it and, in addition to being good policy, it was a tactical masterstroke by the prime minister.

Prime Minister Robert Borden was re-elected in 1917 as head of a coalition government and his imposition of conscription was judged anti-French-Canadian in Quebec, as French-Canadians understandably felt no feeling of filial attachment to either the French or the British. The Liberal leader, Wilfrid Laurier, opposed conscription in firm but responsible terms and, as a result, the Liberals dominated Quebec for 40 years. Pierre Trudeau regained this position for the Liberals in Quebec, running against effectively unilingual Conservative leaders (Robert Stanfield and Joe Clark), as the supreme champion of federalism against the separatists. Brian Mulroney was the first bilingual Quebec leader in the history of the federal Conservatives; he knew Quebec politics as well as any federal politician in Canadian history and he again shattered the Liberal stranglehold on Quebec. It was the fragmentation of his party amongst the continuing Progressive Conservatives, the Reform party in the West and the Bloc Québécois, which enabled Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin to win four consecutive elections. Stephen Harper won two minority elections in four-party parliaments, emerging as the leading party by a wide margin, and won a majority when NDP Leader Jack Layton freakishly swept Quebec from the Liberals and the Bloc in 2011. Justin Trudeau defeated Harper and regained a Liberal majority in Quebec, but with heavy Bloc competition, and recent federal elections have effectively been decided in the Greater Toronto Area.

Erin O'Toole has run as good an election campaign as a Conservative leader effectively promising to be a better Liberal than the Liberals can. He gave Trudeau a free ride on the massively bungled response to the COVID crisis and especially our shockingly poor performance in doubly vaccinating the population. He has focused on trying to parry the inevitable, hackneyed Liberal claims that the Conservatives are radical reactionaries who will tax the rubber tips on the walkers and canes of the elderly and bring back the death penalty for abortion-seekers. Although he

hasn't particularly emphasized it, he has implied in the Conservative platform that he will, if elected, take a more nuanced and historically accurate view of Canada's relations with First Nations people, and promised that illegal interruptions of national infrastructure projects such as pipelines will not be tolerated, and promised to resuscitate our strangled Armed Forces with the modernization of NORAD and the end of the country's shameful freeloading in NATO. Canada's exclusion from the new alliance between the United States, United Kingdom and Australia is an unflattering reflection on what our three closest allies think of Trudeau's foreign and defence policies; it could help the Conservatives on the last weekend of the campaign. O'Toole has attempted, more or less commendably, to profess to take climate change seriously while demurring from the outrageous assault on the petroleum industry. He has conducted an energetic and articulate campaign and has made a skilful effort at sending a lifeline to the genuine conservatives without enabling the Liberals to pillory him successfully as a cave-dwelling troglodyte, which was essentially their spurious campaign against Andrew Scheer two years ago.

Justin Trudeau has wasted six years of the country's history virtue signalling on Indigenous issues while accomplishing little for Indigenous people and has tried to terrorize the country with satanic fables of climate change. He called this election two years early to reap imagined kudos for his response to the coronavirus and to get a strong mandate for another sharp turn to the left. He obviously is not going to get it. There is no pretense by this government even to the ambition to get the fiscal house in order, as inflation rises, capital flees and economic storm clouds gather. Given all this, a vote for the Liberals is not rational.

Erin O'Toole isn't exciting, but Canadian Conservative leaders rarely are. In this election, he and the Conservatives are the best we have. A vote for them won't make the heart beat

faster, but it is rational.

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