

Donald Trump will be popular, and Canada will adapt

by Conrad Black



Not since the most tumultuous days of Vietnam and Watergate have American political people and events been so prevalent in the Canadian media. The election, formation, and entry into office of the Trump administration have provided much substantive news. But there has also been a good deal of the usual Canadian media's condescensions to conservative American politicians and obsequious whitewashing of American liberal office-holders and seekers. The world fears strong American leaders, except when it needs them for their own protection.

Trump has capitalized brilliantly, before and since the election, on the fact that about two thirds of Americans don't trust the media, and he has used social media and his powerful supporters in the talk-radio industry to counter, confront and overwhelm the sniggering, gibbering clique of the leftist

Washington-New York-Los Angeles media and entertainment communities. The American media were part of the problem in not seriously highlighting the passive acceptance of the invasion of the country by 12 million unskilled alien foreigners and the toleration of decades of incompetence in public debt and the international balance of payments.

Canadian governments have not committed errors on this scale and the Canadian media have not been as sleepy and partisan as the Americans; as in most things, we have pursued a middle course. But the foreign media generally take their feed from their American analogues, and don't realize that they are part of the opposition in the U.S., and have suffered a more severe defeat than the Democrats and the traditional Republicans.

The Canadian media have joined quite wholeheartedly in the pre-electoral chorus of abuse of Donald Trump, and as late as last week the CBC National News hauled in the 20 years-retired Pauline Neville-Jones, once of the British Foreign Office, to attest to the likely credibility of the source of the obscenely frivolous Golden Shower allegations (that Donald Trump had once commandeered a group-urination by prostitutes on a bed once slept in by the Obamas in a Moscow hotel). This scatological canard had drifted for months around the American media, and not even that rutting mink-farm of never-Trumpery would touch it until the scurrilous left-wing blog BuzzFeed picked it up and CNN then claimed it as a scoop that was the fruit of their immense journalistic enterprise. The CBC should have known better than to touch such rubbish, since all sources and supposed Russian contacts of the-then president-elect were anonymous. It was aberrant for the Canadian media to be so risqué, and so irresponsible.

More interesting than continuing lapses into Trump-alarmism on what used to be the character issue – all the bunk and hype about Trump being a sexist and racist and possibly a madman – which has evaporated as he forms his administration and starts to govern, is the awakening recognition of the impact of his

presidency on Canada. First is the contrast between the energy with which he is moving to enact his rather radical program and the laid-back pace of the Trudeau government throughout its honeymoon of about a year.

The process of installing Trump's cabinet members, which requires approval by the Senate, is being dragged out, but cannot be stopped in the teeth of the Republican majority, as he has named an Environment Protection Agency director who wants to dismantle the agency, apart from combatting pollution and promoting painless conservation; an Education secretary who wants to dispense with teachers' unions, a Labor secretary who wants to protect the workers but decertify the unions, and an Energy secretary who wants to maximize oil and gas production and end the balance of payments deficit. Trump stormed to his narrow victory on a populist pitch focused on dealing with illegal immigration and disadvantageous trade agreements. In his first week he announced that the U.S would not join the Trans-Pacific Partnership and wished to reopen the North American Free Trade Agreement, and ordered the beginning of the construction of a wall to assure the impermeability of the southwestern border, something that his numerous critics claimed was impossible. (It was never clear why they thought this – the Chinese Great Wall is 4,000 miles long and was built between the 3rd Century BC and the 17th Century. The concept is not challenging.)

At the same time, he has pitched straight to the traditional conservative and independent middle of the country by announcing the beginnings of health-care reform and nominating department heads who will so radically move to reverse the decline in public education, eliminate the importation of energy, something every president since Dwight D. Eisenhower has advocated unsuccessfully, reduce taxes for middle and small income-earners and corporations, end the fiscal free lunch for Wall Street, and reform the manure-heap of campaign financing (as the only candidate in modern times who paid for

his own campaign for his party's nomination). He has a mandate to do all this and has the congressional majorities to put it through and has come out of the gate like a fire-engine. While it was greeted with hilarity or indifference at first, this whole plan of using a populist message to win the Republican primaries, mixing it with a conservative message to win the election, and moving to implement both pieces of his program at once at maximum speed, has been thought out carefully and is being executed with consummate skill.

The circumstances in which the Justin Trudeau government was elected and took office are as different as Canadian politics and sociology are from American. (It is a little-recognized fact that there isn't much in common between the two countries except about half of their geography and the fact that the majority in both countries speak English.) At the start of the last Canadian election, Liberals were the third party for the first time in history. The polls had a post-dissolution flirtation with the NDP, but that party lost ground to the unambiguous federalists and separatists in Quebec, where it had tried to straddle, and took a nose-dive on side-issues of commendable principle. The nine-year Harper government took the lead in the polls, but as fatigue with the incumbents grew, the failure to portray Trudeau as a pretty-faced air-head with a famous name but no capacity to lead floundered. The government was reduced to demagoguery about preventing the arrival of "400,000 refugees from Syria" and Muslim female headgear at a couple of citizenship ceremonies, and the torch was fumbled on to the Liberals.

The great achievement of the incoming government was to prove that Justin Trudeau is a plausible prime minister, and he is. But there hasn't been a very well-defined program. The Liberals have played a fairly artful game of making placatory noises to the environmental and First Nations militants without doing anything completely foolhardy where the militants would lead us into insane measures. But now the

Prime Minister is reduced to saying that he was misunderstood when he spoke of “phasing out the oil sands,” and is being sand-bagged in the press when questioned about the unspeakable mismanagement of the energy sector, especially electricity, in Ontario by the provincial Liberals, the more astute of whom have made the life-saving jump to Ottawa.

Justin Trudeau is only the third Liberal leader after John Turner and Paul Martin not to enjoy a stacked deck of massive Liberal support in Quebec, since Edward Blake (who handed over to Wilfrid Laurier in 1887). The Liberals can’t win four out of five elections, as they did from 1921 to 2006 (18 out of 25 in fact, but 15 full terms to four for the Conservatives), all based on a strangle-hold on Quebec that Brian Mulroney ended, or a fragmented opposition that Stephen Harper ended. Trudeau’s re-election is not assured, though he should have an edge if the Conservatives revert to a unilingual leader whom 20 to 25 per cent of the people of the other official language group have to listen to through an interpreter. There will be plenty of time to assess the Conservative leadership race, but we now have the NDP Alberta premier Rachel Notley cheering President Trump’s revival of the Keystone pipeline, and a good deal of overdue Liberal back-pedaling and lane-changing on carbon use and trade.

There is nothing insane about the Trump program and it will be popular, and the administration is not a bit anti-Canadian; presumably, the customary adjustments to sea changes in Washington will be made. Where Trudeau had a honeymoon and didn’t use it, Donald emerged from so acrimonious and revolutionary a campaign that there is no honeymoon – it will come and the skirmishing will end when his program is enacted and seems to work.

Meanwhile, Bryan Cranston (“Breaking Bad”), Samuel L. Jackson, Lena Dunham (“Girls”), Neve Campbell (“House of Cards”), Natasha Lyonne (“Orange is the New Black”), Cher, Miley Cyrus, Barbra Streisand, Chelsea Handler, Jon Stewart, Whoopi

Goldberg, Keegan-Michael Key, George Lopez, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and the reprobate posturer Al Sharpton, are among those Americans who promised to emigrate if Trump were elected, and most promised to come to Canada. Apart from Sharpton, it would be a more up-market intake than the anti-Vietnam War fugitives of 50 years ago, and they would add to our talent pool, but they seem not to be moving.

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