

More Delusions of Canadian Grandeur Follow Trump Election

by Conrad Black

As the days have ticked past since the U.S. election, its implications, especially for the media, have been interpreted with agonizing slowness. The polls, so inaccurate, yet uniformly revealed public disrespect for the press. Ninety per cent of conventional media was hostile to Trump and 90 per cent of polling organizations predicted a comfortable Clinton victory. As there was no substantive argument for the re-election of the Democrats, their entire campaign was to slag off Trump. The servile media deluged Trump's followers with disparagements, and generally signed on to Clinton's dismissal of 30 million Trump supporters as a "basket of deplorables." Trump pointed to the press sections at his heavily attended meetings and drew down on them crescendos of brickbats and fist-shaking hostility.

Trump was running against the Bush-McCain-Romney traditional Republicans, the Cruz far-right Republicans, the Clinton-Obama long-term management of the Democrats and the quasi-Marxist Sanders left of the Democrats, and almost all the press and polling organizations. These were impossible odds against him, except that he won.

No one can deny that the people were there – his rallies were large and overflowing. Clinton had to recruit pop stars and others in her Hollywood clique of trendy-chic fundraisers and groupies to pull crowds. Trump had indicted the whole system: Wall Street, Hollywood and the log-rolling, back-scratching cadres of both parties were under siege together.

As has often been remarked, it was the first time a complete

outsider has been elected president of the U.S., and the first successful campaign against the entire entrenched political and media class since Gen. Andrew Jackson in 1828. Jackson was critical of the genteel elders of the Democratic Party, James Madison and James Monroe; had horrified the recently deceased Thomas Jefferson; and militated against the opposition leaders, President John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay.

Jackson was a frontiersman, a drummer boy in the Revolution and a tough general, and he instituted the Spoils System, by which he dismissed much of the senior civil service on entering office, and eventually perturbed economic conditions by revoking the charter of the Bank of the United States. (He also threatened to hang his vice-president, John C. Calhoun, and others, for proposing to give South Carolina the right to nullify federal laws. Asked if Jackson were not exaggerating, Sen. Thomas Hart Benton, an old comrade, replied: "I have known General Jackson a good many years and when he speaks of hanging it is time to look for rope.")

Trump's appeal was precisely that he was untainted by the horrible failings of the bipartisan political cartel of the last 20 years. Trump spoke forcefully enough about illegal or insidious immigration and trade deals that appeared to export unemployment to the United States that he corralled the anti-establishment vote, but he said nothing outside the mainstream in the rest of his pitch. He supports fiscal responsibility, universal health care and a re-energized western alliance. He attracted the militantly disaffected, but his program is well within the political midfield.

It is now generally understood that Trump ran against the authors of the first period of outright decline in American history. But the national political media, and to some extent the little pockets of foreign media who fancy themselves authorities on interpreting American politics to their national audiences, have barely changed their pitch since the election. As the only Clinton argument was to demonize Trump,

the media, exposed as impotent stooges of the decayed Clinton-Bush-Obama vieux jeu, instead of recognizing that Trump is not a racist, sexist madman have effectively implied that there are more sexists, racists, and madmen in the United States than they had thought.

The error, by this line of reasoning, was not theirs – other than that they had not realized the extent to which the rot of extremist bigotry had spread in the land where George Washington's cherry tree once grew. This response has been almost universal among Trump's more vociferous opponents. They are like a swarm of bugs that has just been blasted with insecticide. There is a brief St. Vitus' Dance of more frenzied activity and incoherent noise than ever, and then they all fall down, silent.

There was almost nothing to support the avalanche of defamation against Trump, apart from an 11-year-old tape of adolescent jock-talk and a few bombastic flourishes that did not greatly exceed low-brow political name-calling. From this thin gruel, the entire portrayal of Trump as lurid animal was extracted and propagated to the ends of the earth. It was not that the country admires the sort of ogre the media and Democratic propagandists (generally interchangeable groups) were selling, the reasoning goes, it was that the electorate itself had sunk to such a paleolithic level.

Van Jones, a pillar of comment on CNN, told the Broadbent Institute of thoughtful New Democrats at the Art Gallery of Ontario last week that Trump is ushering in an era of routine espousal of the virtues of Nazism. I was asked by a very pleasant interviewer at Global Television if it were not the case that current American conditions resembled Germany in the 1930s. I thought not, as unemployment is not at 30 per cent, the country has not recently experienced a crushing military defeat in which 25 per cent of the adult male population was killed or wounded and the U.S. has not been branded by the world as a criminal state for unleashing world war. The

majority of the population are not advocates of totalitarian theories of government, and individual ethnic groups are not being scapegoated as traitors ineligible for the benefits of citizenship. Nor are private armies of thousands of uniformed thugs roaming the streets of the entire country, beating up and murdering innocent people and destroying dozens of homes and houses of worship every month. These are trifling differences of course, but the vigilant contemporary Canadian journalist might notice them.

The reluctance of the media to recognize the extent to which they have been condemned by the public they serve is understandable. But Trump is a moderate, and apart from a few pyrotechnics about the lassitude of the previous regimes in allowing 12 million people into the country illegally and signing some disadvantageous trade pacts, he has spoken moderately, condemned racism, and promised to make an effort to unify the country around shared and unexceptionable goals. He has a mandate to revise some trade deals, assure that there is a southern border and not just a vast pedestrian walkway into the country, and to effect reform of health care, taxes, campaign financing, government spending, to be more fiscally responsible and to define the national interest in terms that spare the country the impetuosity of George W. Bush, and the naïve pursuit of friendship with sworn enemies pursued by Obama.

He won't be going after the Clintons, has made sensible noises about the environment, is fighting to keep jobs in the U.S., appointed Sikh-American Nikki Haley to the UN and Betsy DeVos as education secretary and is speaking cordially with outspoken critic Mitt Romney. His approval rating has risen nine points since the election. The stigmatization of Trump as a fugitive from Jurassic Park will not survive a month of his government, and then the media will have to come to grips with the bankruptcy of their status in America, and, at least in matters of reporting on the U.S. abroad, in the West

generally.

I found myself a few days ago listening with slack-jawed incredulity while two former Canadian ambassadors in the Middle East and a pompous Anglo-Canadian academic historian expressed the hope that Justin Trudeau would advise the incoming foreign policy team of the Trump administration that not all of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims consider themselves to be at war with America. It was the clearest confirmation of many I have had in recent years of just how vastly more stupid our media have become and how chronically misinformed the people are. I have not seen such delusions of Canadian grandeur since the days when Tommy Douglas and Paul Martin Sr. were debating which of them would negotiate the end to the Vietnam War.

Unless Canada's luck has deserted it, this debate about how to educate the Americans will have cooled before President Trump invoices Canada for its unpaid share of national defence costs, unless it chooses to do without the assurance of the American alliance for the first time since President Roosevelt proclaimed it at Queen's University in Kingston in 1938. Stephen Harper left us as a mouse that roared until no one paid heed. His successor, whatever the fantasies of the Canadian media, will soon have the choice of strutting the world stage as a peacemaker while continuing to freeload off U.S. protection, or leading a country no one listens to, informed by a media no sane person can believe. I dare to hope we can do better than that.

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