

Six months of the Trudeau government – so far, so good

A report card on the federal government as it approaches six months in office would have to be reasonably positive. There have been no horrifying blunders such as in the Pearson-Gordon “60 Days of Decision” in 1963, which led to an interesting budget that was quickly withdrawn. (It is a testimony to Canada’s fundamental solidity that the soft-spoken, natty, and rather shy Walter Gordon was considered a virtual revolutionary in this country for proposing some restraints to foreign ownership.) While there have been no great tests of the imagination, the government has done a competent job of keeping its more avant garde followers tranquil in the delicate soft-left issues of climate change and native affairs while not crossing the Rubicon anywhere.

Following the rout of the international left at the hands of conservative leaders, Reagan, Thatcher, John Paul II, Kohl, and Brian Mulroney, and the disintegration of international communism and end of the Cold War, the entire left, from soft to Stalinist, crowded aboard the environment bandwagon. Up to this point, this was a conservationist movement decrying pollution and grumbling about goodwill visits of nuclear aircraft carriers to Vancouver. Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, and others had given form and mass to disparate groups of birdwatchers, butterfly collectors, big game enthusiasts, and aggrieved complainants about inadequate drinking water and the depredations of industrial smoke and waste. By their sheer numbers and militancy, the newcomers shouldered aside the relatively benign pioneers, and hyped the hockey stick graph charting the predicted rise in global temperature (a flatline of a horizontal hockey stick, angling sharply upward 45 degrees like the stick’s blade, now exposed as exaggerated, at best).

The political requirement was to cast a net before the credulous on the subject, without actually enacting the disemployment-based bucolic suicide mission advocated by the trendies and the new militants. Capitalism having seen off the Marxists, the Marxists came back dressed as campers and scientists and sounding like Naomi Klein, shrieking that capitalism must be shut down to save the planet, having failed to sell the public ownership of the "commanding heights" of industry. As I have remarked elsewhere, they have followed Lenin's famous dictum: "If you can't get in the door, try the window."

The Liberal Party of Canada, the most successful political party in the history of the advanced democracies, having held office for 80 years between 1896 and 2006, and after enjoying last year the greatest comeback from apparent death since Lazarus, did not embark altogether in the wind-powered, native-constructed, birch-bark canoe of the Idle No More apostles of the renewable energy and native entitlement industries. But it gave enough encouragement to them to incite expectations of a serious policy payoff. The environment conference in Paris came and went, attended by an unconscionable number of official Canadians, careering (intentional double entendre) through the magnificent tourist-fleecing centres of that incomparable city, but with the new regime in Ottawa elegantly joining in the alarmist lip-service common at such righteousness fests, but staying well shy of commitments to absurd acts of economic self-immolation.

The democratic world is still sufficiently cowed by the Marxist-infiltrated ranks of the global warming terrorizers that it does not dare to make the point that the whole argument is bunk; that there is no appreciable warming of the globe nor any real evidence that human actions affect global temperatures. Whichever of the democratic national leaders is the first to take that stance will reap the rewards for it, but we may have to await the election of a Republican

president of the U.S. for that. Canada has a sensible environment minister in Catherine McKenna, and Justin Trudeau has been careful, but there are a number of influential advisers steeped to their eyeballs in the inanities of the McGuinty-Wynne government of Ontario in favour of renewable energy. Canada provides one per cent of the world's so-called carbon footprint, and the Liberal Party is not entirely free of the trauma of Stéphane Dion's vacuous "green shift." I will not press my claim that, worthy though he is and commendable though his federalist record is, M. Dion should have been convicted, with a suspended sentence, for cruelty to animals for naming his dog Kyoto when he was environment minister.

There is nothing wrong with the government's budget committing nearly \$3 billion to native education and infrastructure, and it constitutes a step away from acquiescence in the annoying mythos that all Europeans were usurpers and despoilers of a fully populated North America which had developed a pristine Arcadia of beaux sauvages justifying the delusions of Chateaubriand and James Fenimore Cooper. Drums Along The Mohawk has become Idle No More burning John A. Macdonald in effigy. The idolators of the natives have been egged on by Canada's leading legislator, Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin. The pell-mell charge to apologize for a European presence among the sparse population of 16th-century natives who had not discovered the wheel, iron, knitted fabrics, agriculture, or durable structures, and were chiefly busied making war upon each other and torturing captured women and children to death, was only partially and unspecifically endorsed by the federal government's reaction to the preliminary report of the commission on truth and reconciliation on the native schools question.

There are of course real native grievances, and of course we must meet them. The government's massive funding of legitimate native needs is admirable. But so is this government's abstention from the orgiastic St. Vitus dance of self-torment

advocated by the chief justice and her clique of officious aboriginophiles. The government has done well to monetize in projected spending much of what we have shortchanged from the native people, without prostrating ourselves in abject moral submission to a people that was several thousand years behind the European civilization of Shakespeare, Descartes, Leonardo, and Michelangelo that landed a few hundred people in this howling, nomadically underpopulated continent 400 years ago. Reparations yes, but continual self-flagellation for what Kafka called "nameless crimes," no.

Bill Morneau's budget was adequate for a start. There is nothing wrong with stimulative deficits that hold the federal debt share of gross domestic to a very respectable 32 per cent. Next year, let us pray, ecumenically, and if need be secularly, for more imagination from the finance minister. Eight years of the Harper straitjacket to protect a low harmonized sales tax and cap public-sector share of GDP was useful but bone-crackingly rigid. It is time to vary the HST according to whether it is elective spending or not, and direct the resulting increased revenue to tax reductions and defence procurement that has been promised for decades and has not occurred. Canada has become the mouthy 97-pound weakling who has sand (snow, in fact) kicked in our face by the well-armed and indifferent, i.e., Vladimir Putin. As I have written in this space ad nauseam, defence spending is the best economic stimulus, as it goes to direct reduction of unemployment, to high-tech, maximum-multiplier industries, and to the most effective form of adult education that has ever been devised.

Completing the legalization of most drugs with compulsory treatment for hard-drug addicts will further garnish the treasury. Public-sector extravagance will get us there anyway, so Bill Morneau and Justin Trudeau might as well get ahead of the wave. Readers will remember when our elected officials unctuously warned us of the evils of gambling, until they got

a good look at the revenues casinos could generate. The pattern doesn't change much. Except in a case of unlimited national emergency, the government has no right to take more than 33 per cent of the income of anyone – it is rightfully their money, not the tax collector's. Canada has an opportunity the world envies to approach taxation in a more original way. It should seize it and not muddy the waters with nostrums like carbon taxes.

Note: In referring last week to the Ghomeshi decision, I omitted my wife Barbara Amiel Black's brilliant piece on the subject in Maclean's magazine, published on Nov. 21, 2014. I confused it with another piece she wrote on a related subject that ultimately was not published. She did not make much of it, but I find it quite shaming and wish to apologize publicly to Barbara for my error. (As usual, she wrote a better column on the subject than I did.)

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