

The Trudeau Liberals' record: four years of nothing solid

This is the government's record: pandering, posturing, bungling, faddishness and extravagance, and four more years of it is promised

by Conrad Black



The signal facts of this federal election campaign are that the government is not running on its record, and cannot, and it is not promising to do anything beyond the retention of a faddish attitude and professed altruism. In the past four years, as I mentioned hastily last week, the entire focus has been on native, environmental and gender issues, as well as the legalization of marijuana.

In native matters, the government has prostrated itself before the hundreds of separate tribes and bands, purporting to deal

with each one on a "nation-to-nation" basis, which, in so far as it implies that it is analogous to dealing with the governments of France or Japan or any sovereign country, is nonsense. Canada's jurisdiction is everything that is within Canada and that includes all these native groups and organizations. The tedious practice of beginning every official public comment with a dutiful expression of consciousness that the speaker is on territory that once supposedly belonged to some native group known only to the most recondite is indicative of an intangible respect for the natives. But it achieves nothing in the material areas where native issues are urgent, and it incites the inference that all non-natives in this country are invaders or descendants of invaders who came here and seized the natives' country, in a manner morally indistinguishable from what Hitler and Stalin did to Poland in 1939. The natives did not number more than 200,000 people in what is now Canada when the French and British began settling in this country in the 17th century. They did not, wholly or in groups, govern or purport to govern the territory that is now Canada.

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There were many moral and practical failings in the treatment of them by the colonial powers and then by Canada itself. But the Europeans arrived in a substantially unoccupied territory, and never at any time had any systematic official thoughts of committing genocide, culturally or otherwise. It is generally agreed that we, Canadians and our ascendants, have failed in the whole area of native policy, but intentions, at least for the past century, have been benign if often condescending. The question in everyone's mind, including many natives, is how Canada has spent tens of billions of dollars in this field without much improving the lives of the natives. This government has done little, at least that is perceptible to the public, to improve this record. Of course, natives must,

as a group and like all individuals, be treated respectfully, but non-natives are not interlopers and trespassers in this country and what is needed is substantive practical assistance to those natives who wish to integrate in Canadian society. And for those who wish to preserve their cultural identity as impermeably as practical, native population centres will have to be of adequate size, with a variety of services and activities, to be an escape from poverty and the sort of freakish twilight zone that afflicts a distressing amount of native life. This federal government has showered deferences on the concept of native life and on their leaders, and has immunized native leaders from normal and reasonable assurances of the probity of their administrations. And it has compromised symbolic concessions by pretending the natives live in a zero-sum box where they are virtuous and the rest of us are illegitimate, if not racists. This government's policies in this area, like those of most preceding governments, have been a costly and embarrassing failure.

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Environmental policy has been a greater and costlier failure, though less afflicted by human tragedy than native policy. Everyone favours a clean environment, but there are points where economic sense is preferable in application to the pursuit of a perfectly undisturbed environment. Comfort and convenience, including most forms of transport and heating and air conditioning homes and workplaces, do compromise a pristine environment. The environment has become the ultimate good cause and political free lunch: everyone likes it. But renewable resources are completely uneconomic, and because storing electricity remains costly or impossible and the sun is not always shining nor the wind blowing, traditional power supplies have to be retained as reserves anyway. What happened was that the traditional ecological movement, which was quite admirable at bird-watching and providing milkweed for monarch

butterflies and so forth (even if Greenpeace's harassments of American aircraft carriers was tiresome), was invaded and taken over by the defeated Marxists sent packing at the end of the Cold War, who saw this commendable if somewhat naive movement as a splendid way to attack capitalism.

Capitalism is the only economic system that works because it is the only one that is aligned with the almost universal human ambition for more, but it must be fine-tuned to avoid financial disasters at the end of the aspirational trail. The attack on capitalism in the name of saving the planet is bunk. Climate change seems to be occurring but we don't know how, don't know if it is part of the natural cycle, and don't know if human action has anything to do with it. The climate alarmists, Marxists and purists, are desperate, as the calamity express has stalled, and are now, in their fright that the jig is up, sending the brainwashed children of the world, who don't know anything about meteorology or other relevant sciences, to shame and scold us. This government has fallen in with the alarmists and claims to seek the end of the oil industry. It is an insane policy, a brutal and anti-Canadian assault on Alberta in particular, and a partial re-enactment of the energy-choice catastrophes of and by the authors of the McGuinty-Wynne economic miracle that almost impoverished Ontario. It is a disaster.

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Justin Trudeau's father, when as justice minister he proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, famously said that "There is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." Nor is there any place for the discussion of infinite variations of sexuality in the nation's public square. There are two sexes and no more and every competent adult has the perfect freedom, which must always be protected and respected, to sort out their own sexuality as they wish, as long as they don't impose

upon the freedom of others or affront reasonable standards of public decency. The rest is just a contemptible effort to chase after the votes of numerically ever-smaller minorities. As long as no one's liberties or rightful sensibilities are threatened, sex is no business of the government, and this entire issue, as public policy, is a fraud, a bore, and in some respects, an outrage.

Sex is no business of the government

This government's legalization of marijuana did not take adequate account of the risks, and was so hemmed about by supplementary requirements (many of them reasonable), that legal producers are unable to compete with illegal ones. The industry is dependent on the anticipated American market, but the United States, if it wishes more marijuana, will cultivate it domestically. This may have been a vote-winner, though that is not clear, but in all other respects, it's a fiasco.

That is the government's record: pandering, posturing, bungling, faddishness and extravagance, and four more years of it is promised: atmospherics, optics, but nothing solid, like a jolly costume party. I defy any reader except the real political devotees to name more than five government ministers. I will deal with the alternative and make an electoral suggestion next week.

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