

Trudeau's hollow victory leaves the real issues facing this country unresolved

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by Conrad Black



It would have been difficult to produce a more miserable election result. Congratulations to the prime minister on his re-election, certainly. He was spiritedly attacked, and he persevered to victory despite some serious recent reversals. No part of my disappointment in the late election is based on lack of a cordial regard for Justin Trudeau.

But his victory is hollow, his mandate ambiguous, and his performance on election night was far from reassuring. He won on momentum, a fading illusion of fashion, faddish platitudes and style, and no first-term accomplishments at all. He

benefited from a divided opposition that had no panache among the traditional parties. Trudeau's Liberals received 240,000 fewer votes than the official opposition, ran barely ahead of the separatists in Quebec, and what the prime minister professes to believe is the principal issue in this country is a fiction, which if it did exist, Canada could not influence – climate change. On election night, the NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, spoke at inexcusable length, and Trudeau butted into Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer's remarks with unprecedented rudeness as soon as he started. We had all three at the same time on our screens.



NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh and his wife, Gurkiran Kaur Sidhu, wave to supporters at an election night party in Burnaby, B.C., on Oct. 21 2019. Gerry Kahrmann/Postmedia News

Scheer correctly made the point that only one elected majority government in Canadian history was evicted in the following election (that was R.B. Bennett in 1935, after failing to alleviate the Great Depression). Scheer's point was that he had practically no chance of doing better than he did. This may be correct, but if he had been as forceful an opposition leader as John Diefenbaker or Brian Mulroney, he would have won. Trudeau has proved a better opposition leader than prime minister; Scheer clearly intends to hang on to the Conservative leadership though his performance was unexciting, and hopes to be a better prime minister than opposition leader, quite possible if he can get there. But for now, we have an unaccomplished prime minister dependent on a socialist party that has been substantially rejected (the NDP), facing a worthy but ungalvanizing Conservative leader. Trudeau has a slender mandate, proclaims that the great cause of the day is the nonsense of climate change, and two regions of the county, Quebec and Alberta-Saskatchewan, with some reason, are hearing the secessionist murmurs.

Climate change, to use a phrase of Napoleon's, has entered the realm of "lies agreed upon." There may be changes in climate,

and if there are, they may be part of a normal cycle or not. If they really are happening abnormally, we are not certain of the cause(s), direction or extent of them, nor is there any certainty that human action has meaningful bearing on them. All the dire and hysterical predictions that unleashed

this worldwide alarm about the climate have been proved inaccurate. Debates between authentic meteorological specialists swiftly descend into incomprehensible arguments about the depth and shape of ocean thermometers and so forth.



Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer speaks to supporters at an election night event in Regina on Oct. 21, 2019. Alex Ramadan/Bloomberg

Anyone who claims certainty on this subject is a charlatan. Historians of the future will wonder how Western Europe and Canada became so preoccupied with this issue. Of course everyone wants a clean environment, but not at an exorbitant cost in unemployment and reduction of human comfort. The international left, defeated in the Cold War and domestically by such leaders as Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, seized upon the environment as a fruitful vantage point from which to continue their assault on capitalism while masquerading as conscientious earth people.

Canada has less than two per cent of the world's carbon footprint, the ecologists' universal bugbear, the Emmanuel Goldstein of Orwell's 1984, always good for "five minutes of hate." But Canada has one of the world's cleanest environments and no real influence whatever on the world environment. It's like the corporate governance movement 20 years ago, that for a time distracted the entire commercial community from the objective performance of corporations. It's a fad that is being ignored by China and India, the chief polluters, and by the United States and Japan, great industrial powers that have addressed their environmental problems adequately, and Australia, which is the most similar country to Canada in

size, resources and history, and which has maintained a rational concern for the environment but has rejected fetishistic economic primitivism. It is distressing that Canadians are so naïve as to buy into this idiocy.

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In fact, Canada's greatest problems are capital flows and national unity. There is a torrid drain of investment capital in Canada, as the world stays away and Canadians invest capital elsewhere. Under-appreciation of Canadian federalism will not take long to emerge in Quebec and Alberta. By far the strongest performance by a party leader on election night was from the Bloc Québécois' Yves-François Blanchet. He had the same stature, mannerisms, haircut, glasses and witty but crisp and direct way of formulating the complexities of Quebec's status as premier Daniel Johnson (1966-1968), whose slogan was "equality or independence." Blanchet came from nowhere and almost won more votes than the Trudeau Liberals. (Only twice before has the Bloc won more Quebec votes than the Liberals.) Blanchet expressed his reverence for René Lévesque, Quebec's first separatist premier (1976-1985), but he is not advocating Lévesque's "sovereignty-association;" he is advocating sovereignty.

Canada will pay a heavy price for the refusal of Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau to do anything to gain Quebec's adherence to the Canadian Constitution, a condition Mulroney tried to correct with the Meech Lake agreement and the Charlottetown Accord, and which the federalist former Quebec government of Philippe Couillard tried to address. Harper abandoned constitutional reform when he was unable to abolish the Senate; he and Justin just ducked a difficult issue, but leaders aren't elected to deal only with easy problems. On Monday night Blanchet left viewers in no doubt that Quebec sought sovereignty, preferably but not necessarily on friendly

terms with Canada. He made conciliatory references to the native people and purported to speak for French-Canadians outside Quebec, and demanded Canadian support for Spain's Catalonian separatists (an outrageous request – it's no business of Canada's, including Quebec). Blanchet did not refer to Anglo-Quebec and was unambiguous in his opposition to federalism.

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As the Montreal (and Terrebonne) economic analyst DeWolf Shaw has forcefully pointed out, economically Quebec has completely outperformed Canada in the past decade; six straight budget surpluses, substantial debt reduction, and a brilliant Hydro-Quebec worth \$500 billion (compared with the shambling, quasi-bankrupt Ontario Hydro). The Quebec Caisse de Dépôts et de Placements has net assets of \$326 billion for 8.5 million Quebecers, and the Canada Pension Plan has assets of \$404 billion for 29 million non-Quebec Canadians. Quebec unemployment is the lowest in the country and the economic argument in Quebec will favour the separatists in the next Quebec referendum, for the first time. Maurice Duplessis and Daniel Johnson were correct that the only way to achieve autonomy (or independence) for Quebec is to unite the nationalists with the conservatives (and not the socialists as Lévesque and Lucien Bouchard attempted), and that is what Blanchet and Premier François Legault appear to be doing.

The only viable counter argument to Quebec's independence is the vision of the great bicultural world nation of Canada. I don't believe the current federal leaders can sell that vision, especially when Alberta has been so mistreated it would be economically justified to contemplate secession also. The Quebec Liberal party, a Liberal-Conservative coalition that is the only unambiguously federalist party in Quebec, which had never received less than 31 per cent of the vote,

and only three times in its history less than 35 per cent, came in with 24 per cent in last year's Quebec election (and less than 10 per cent of Quebec's francophones).

This is where exalting the unifying Big Lie of anthropogenic climate change and ignoring real issues has got us. Yes, congratulations to the prime minister, but he will find out soon enough that he is sitting on a knife-edge, and we are all there with him.

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