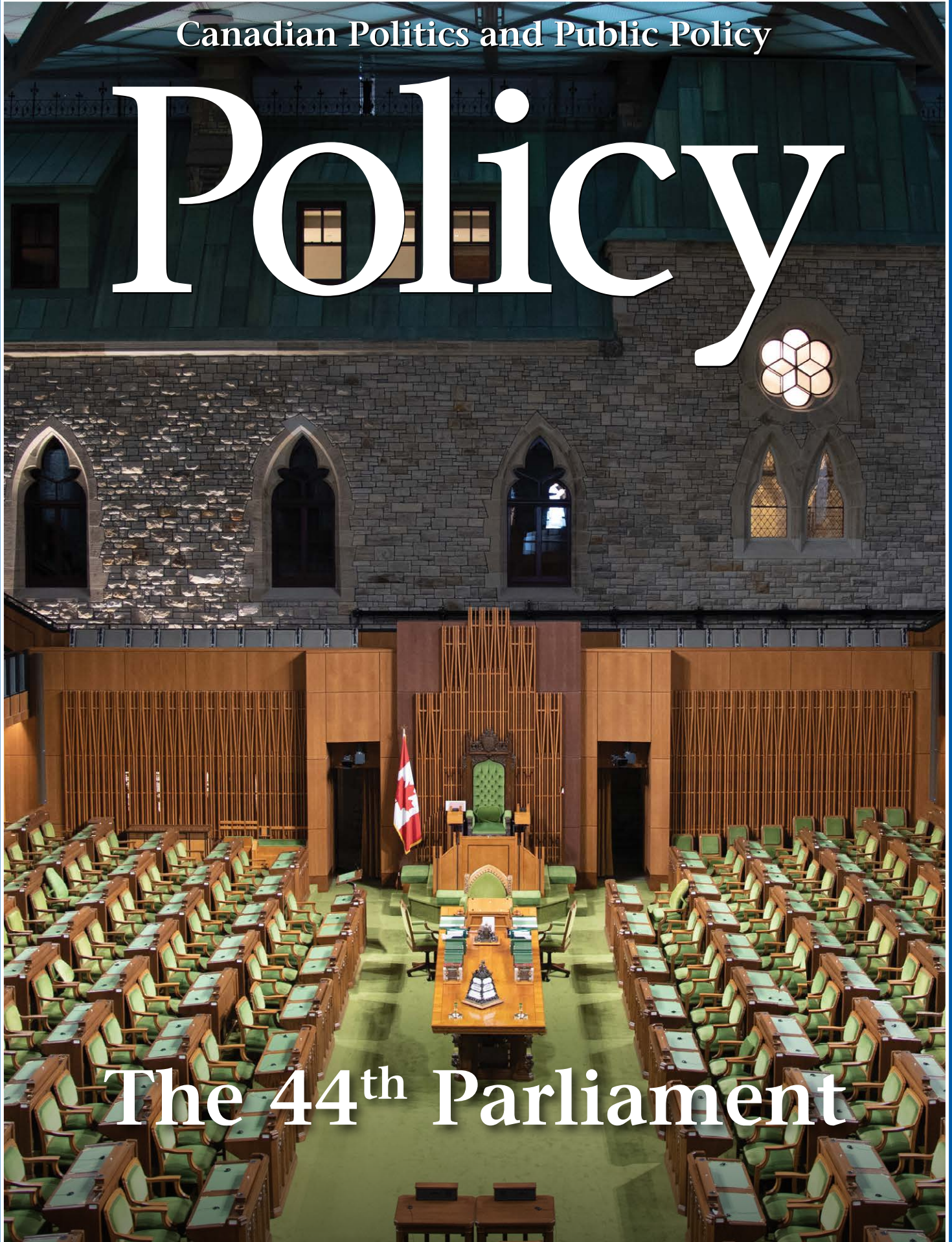


Canadian Politics and Public Policy

Policy



The 44th Parliament



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VISIONARY

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Thank you, Don. With you as our champion, we can reverse the damage of eye disease and restore vision.

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Cellulose nanocrystals create new revenue streams for Canada's forestry sector

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Policy

Canadian Politics and Public Policy

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From the Editor / L. Ian MacDonald

The 44th Parliament

Welcome to our issue on the new Parliament which, in terms of MPs by party affiliation, looks almost identical to the old one. So, what was *that* all about? It was about a campaign that cost \$600 million, and produced another minority government.

A prime minister who asked for a majority to “build back better” after the pandemic was told to go back to work with the opposition. A humbling experience for Justin Trudeau, except that at the end of the day, a win is a win, and he’s still in office.

An election the voters clearly didn’t want resulted in the fifth minority government in the last seven elections, beginning in 2004. Maybe that’s the new normal.

To look at all this, we’ve brought together an exceptional group of writers, whose expertise speaks to the high standards of discussion of politics and public policy in Canada.

We begin with Kevin Page, head of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD), and previously Canada’s first Parliamentary Budget Officer. With an assist from Jiayu Li and Xuan Liu, economics students at University of Ottawa, Page asks: “If building back better is the goal, how can political leaders and policy makers use the light from the cracks to take us to a more equitable, sustainable promised land?”

The dynamic duo of Kevin Lynch and Paul Deegan write that we need to move beyond “the fierce partisanship, centralized control, short-termism and inadequate committee resources that characterized the last few parliaments.”

Tom Axworthy sees the opportunity in this minority House, based on recent minority parliaments, and even

more from his own experience as a young aide during the Pearson years from 1963-68 “regarded as the Golden Age of minority governments.” Lester B. Pearson’s Liberals partnered with the NDP to give Canada universal health care, the Canada-Quebec Pension Plan, and the Canadian flag, among other enduring policy achievements.

Lori Turnbull looks at ways of making this House work and observes: “Whether they like it or not, the parties are stuck with each other in this minority Parliament for a while.” Columnist Don Newman looks at Canada’s foreign policy in the context of western allies responding to economic, intelligence and military challenges posed by the Communist regime in Beijing.

And then our cover package looks at “The Parties—Leadership and Issues” in the wake of the campaign. Former NDP president Brian Topp considers his party’s eternal dilemma. “Given the choice between two liberal parties,” he notes, “voters will choose the real one, as they did in 2015.” Yet Jagmeet Singh, despite gaining only one additional seat, “remains Canada’s best-liked and best-regarded federal leader, by far.”

Conservative strategists Geoff Norquay and Yaroslav Baran say “Tories must be governed by a clear-eyed analysis of what worked in the recent election, what didn’t, and what must be adjusted in the future.” Leader Erin O’Toole faces opposition to his leadership from social conservatives, with Maxime Bernier’s People’s Party of Canada bleeding Conservative votes on the right.

And John Delacourt, former head of Liberal research, writes that, instead of a “mandate as transformative as the New Deal,” Trudeau has been

reduced to a “recitation of platform commitments from a Pyrrhic victory.” Still, he sees progress on a progressive policy agenda.

In *Canada and the World*, Jeremy Kinsman offers his thoughts on the prospects for a revival of American leadership in a world facing the rise of China. And in a letter from the United Nations, Canadian Ambassador Bob Rae also sees China on an agenda of global challenges, including COVID and climate change.

Looking ahead to the holidays, we offer book reviews of interesting new Canadian titles.

Historica Canada’s Anthony Wilson-Smith looks at Peter Mansbridge’s *Off the Record*, his “often compassionate, always engaging” memoir of a life in broadcasting. James Baxter enjoyed Aislin’s *Favourite Covid Cartoons*, a collection from Terry Mosher of editorial cartoons from Canada and around the world. Wilson-Smith also looks at *Talking to Canadians: A Memoir* from comedian Rick Mercer. And Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard offers high praise for *A Matter of Equality: The Life’s Work of a Senator*, a memoir from Don Oliver, Canada’s first Black senator.

Finally, a note of tribute to Monica Thomas, our graphic designer since the beginning of *Policy* nine years ago. Monica is entirely responsible for the distinctive look of our magazine and website. The print edition is something you want to hold, while the online version stands out. This issue marks Monica stepping back to retirement, as she says, to a life of sailing, hiking and other pursuits outdoors with her husband, Pat Klasen. But she’s agreed to advise us occasionally as a design consultant, and she leaves with our enduring friendship and deep gratitude. **P**



Parliament Hill before the current construction project and before the pandemic. The renovation is scheduled to take a decade. No one knows the time needed for healing from the economic and social costs of COVID. *iStock photo*

The New Minority Parliament: NO 'BUILD BACK BETTER' WITHOUT CHANGE

**Kevin Page with
Jiayu Li and Xuan Liu**

“Build back better” has become a catchphrase for political leaders around the world since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy thinkers at international organizations like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) suggest it is about creating a socioeconomic environment in the wake of two global crises (2008 and 2020) that is more equitable, sustainable and resilient.

Building back better was a central theme of the 2021 Canadian federal election. No surprise. A public health crisis has a way of exposing the cracks in society.

Metrics of income and wealth inequality are expected to deteriorate. We can already see the divergences in high-wage versus low-wage employment rates in the pandemic recovery. De-carbonization is not easy. Notwithstanding the economic shutdowns to slow the spread of the virus, it looks like Canada will barely make a dent in its greenhouse gas emission trajectory in 2020. COVID-19 gave our health care and long-term care systems a serious beating. Healing will require more than just rest.

If building back better is the goal, how can political leaders and policy makers use the light from the cracks to take us to a more equitable, sustainable promised land?

Students of logic argue that it is essential to think of both necessary and sufficient conditions for an event to occur (i.e., building back better). Nec-

essary conditions must be present. Sufficient conditions are the conditions that will produce the event.

“ *If building back better is the goal, how can political leaders and policy makers use the light from the cracks to take us to a more equitable, sustainable promised land?* ”

We see two necessary conditions for a build-back success. Number one: political cooperation. Number two: a credible fiscal plan. The sufficient conditions include the combination of the right priorities and policies with

CHART 1: Domestic Policy Agenda: Opportunities for Support and Collaboration

PRIORITY	LIBERAL PLATFORM	PRIORITY & POLICY COMPLEMENTARITY	OPPOSITION PARTIES
Recovery	Extensions of hiring, wage and rents supports	High	All parties have recovery supports. NDP proposed targeted basic income programs and infrastructure spending. Conservatives proposed a job surge program.
Resilience	Significant increases in provincial transfers —CHT, mental health, addiction help, long term care, fire fighting	High	All parties support more resources for health care including long term care. A priority for the Bloc.
Sustainability	Modest increases in resources for clean technology, electric vehicles, retrofits, job training, national parks, reduce plastics	High	NDP and Greens will likely push Liberals for more investment and support Liberal increases in carbon prices
Inclusion	Signature initiative is a subsidized public child day care. Resources to close funding gap for First Nation Housing. More funding for seniors, arts, language, marginalized communities. EI improvements.	High	NDP and Greens support subsidized public child day care. Conservatives could promote refundable child care tax credit to complement public expansion and worker income tax benefit
Growth	Increased resources for research (creation of a new agency), training, Indigenous entrepreneurship, housing construction	High	All parties have similar priority areas for growth. Conservatives had the largest proposed increase for investment promotion
Fiscal Policy	Two fiscal rules—declining budgetary deficit and debt-to-GDP ratio. Modest tax revenue increases largely focused on reducing tax gap. Commitment to policy reviews	High	All parties have similar deficit trajectories. NDP and Greens would support higher taxes. Could involve Parliament in reviews.

enhanced public confidence and trust. Nobody should think that the goals of build back better are easily attainable.

Hard choices and limited pay-offs is how Paul Wells, in the post-election edition of *Maclean's*, describes the political calculus of the current policy environment. “The very best that can be said for election campaigns,” he writes, “is that they obliterate any hope of such conversations for only five weeks.” With the 2021 election results in the rearview mirror, the challenges of governing are real and present.

Since 1867, we have had 15 minority governments, five of which have emerged within the last 20 years. Typically, in life, practice makes things better.

Political analyst Robin Sears made the case in *Policy Options* in 2009

that two things separate the relatively weak legislative performance of recent minority parliaments from the stronger performances of minority governments in the 1960s and 70s. One, there are strong working relationships across party lines between senior figures in each party. Two, there is recognition that legislative victories are shared.

Political scientists who study the science of game theory would applaud those astute observations. Political bargaining situations can be examined through a number of common elements: players, interdependencies, differences of interests, rules of progress and methods of enforcement.

In the 44th Parliament, we have some of the conditions that would favour political cooperation.

Political leaders are well known. Interdependences are high with strong regional representation of different political parties. In this environment, we cannot make national progress without multi federal party support and cooperation with others levels of government and the First Nations' peoples. Minority governments can fall on votes of confidence. While all political parties wish to increase their electoral chances in the next election, the actual differences of policy interests are smaller than many might think.

Chart 1 highlights the priority and policy complementarities across the governing and opposition parties. This is true—not just among the Liberals, NDP, Greens and Bloc—but, between the Liberals and Conservatives as well. In theory, this should help, not hinder political cooperation. The

political risks of hard policy choices and limited pay-offs can be better managed with broad support and cooperation.

Do we have the leaders with the foresight to work across current political divides and put the long-term interests of the country first on the big policy issues such as improving our social safety net, addressing climate change and preparing our country for the next policy shock whether it be health, climate or financial?

Take notice of the latest efforts by former Liberal and Conservative cabinet ministers (Anne McClellan and Lisa Raitt) who have teamed up with an impressive group of advisors including former Bank of Canada deputy governor Carolyn Wilkins and created the Coalition for a Better Future. We need this renewed spirit of coalition to be contagious. The government's Budget 2021 commitment to launch a national infrastructure assessment is another opportunity to work across party lines.

Given the complementarity of priorities and policies, would there ever be a better time to develop media and civil society oversight to incentivize cooperation and accountability? American author Ta-Nehisi Coates has said it's the job of activists to generate and apply enough pressure on the system to affect change. "Vision without implementation is illusion" to quote author Walter Isaacson. Without change, there is no build back better.

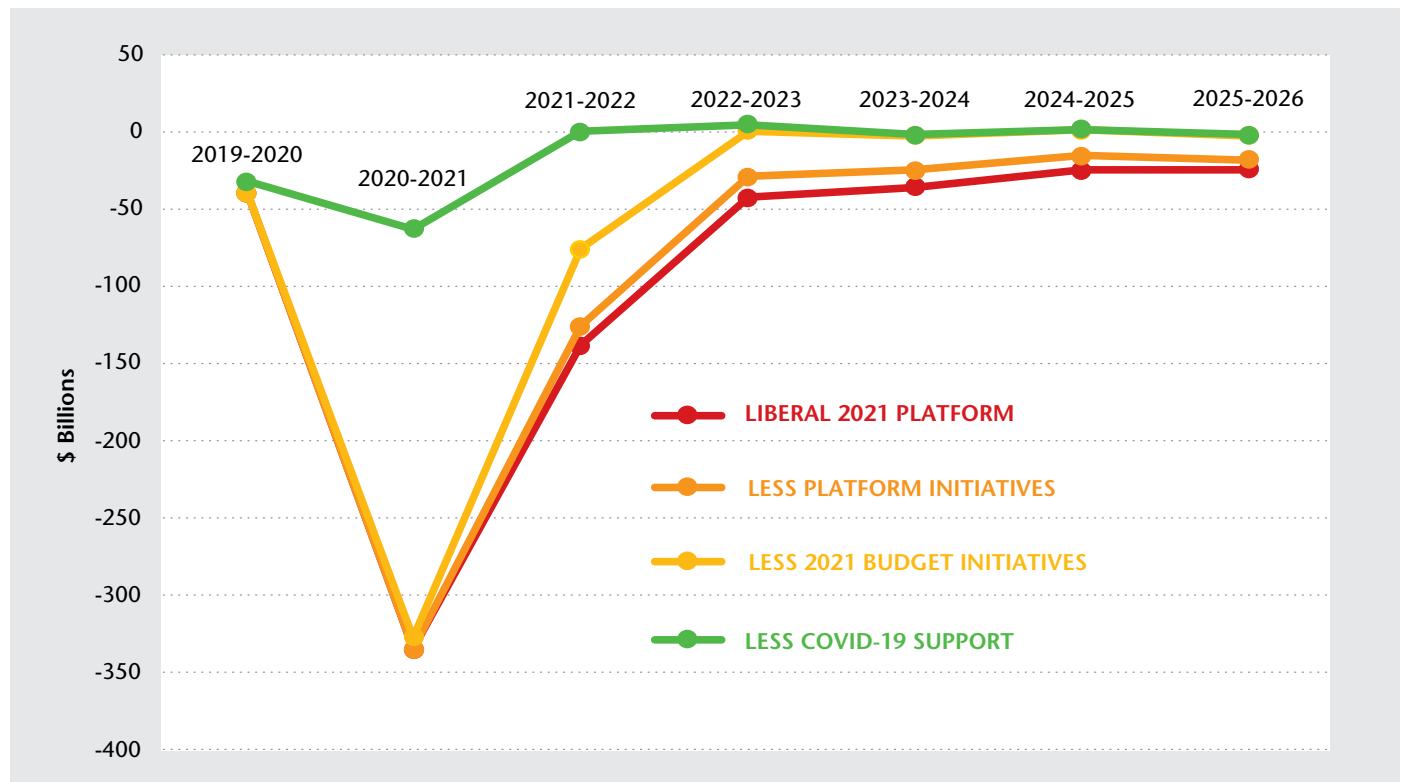
Governments of advanced economies around the world are shifting from fighting the pandemic to supporting the recovery and transforming their economies. While economic and fiscal outlooks are clouded with pandemic related uncertainty, the IMF and OECD latest analyses indicate that debt-to-GDP ratios appear to have stabilized and will remain persistently higher (some 20 percentage points on average) over the medium term.

The Canadian economic and fiscal experience has largely mirrored that of other advanced economies during the pandemic.

In Canada, the fiscal buffers (i.e., declines in debt-to-GDP and carrying cost of debt) largely created in modern times by prime ministers Chretien and Martin in the 1990s and early 2000s proved to be indispensable in saving livelihoods and lives in the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2020 pandemic. Unlike many advanced and developing economies, Canada does not face an immediate and sharp trade-off between helping people and businesses in the recovery versus rebuilding fiscal buffers for the next crisis. Prime ministers Harper and Trudeau also deserve credit in holding the line on the debt-to-GDP ratio in the period between the crises.

Chart 2 highlights the enormous swing in budgetary balances over the pandemic period and the projection to a more modest and sustainable budgetary deficit over the medium term. How does the deficit go from about \$40 billion in 2019-20 to about \$340 billion a year later and then return to about \$40 bil-

CHART 2: Unwinding the Liberal Government Deficit Projections



Note: Calculations do not include economic impacts of policy initiatives.

Sources: Liberal 2021 Platform (Forward for Everyone): Fiscal and Costing Plan; PBO 2021 Election Proposal Costing Baseline; IFSD calculations

TABLE 1: Liberal 2021 Platform: Illustrative Statement of Transactions

	PROJECTION						
	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
\$ BILLIONS							
Budgetary Revenues	334.1	302.6	368	398.7	421.0	440.8	460.3
Program Spending*	349.1	616.4	496.8	431.6	439.5	442.5	453.7
Public Debt Charges	24.4	20.9	21.8	23.8	28.0	33.2	38.6
Prudence Adjustment			6.0	6.0	3.0	0.0	0.0
Total Budgetary Expenditures	373.5	637.3	524.6	461.4	470.5	475.7	492.3
Total Budgetary Balance	-39.4	-334.7	-156.9	-62.7	-49.5	-34.9	-32.0
Federal Debt	721.4	1056.1	1213.0	1275.7	1325.2	1360.2	1392.2
% OF GDP							
Budgetary Revenues	14.5	13.7	14.7	14.9	15.1	15.3	15.4
Total Budgetary Expenditures	16.2	28.9	21.0	17.2	16.9	16.5	16.5
Total Budgetary Balance	-1.7	-15.2	-6.3	-2.3	-1.8	-1.2	-1.1
Federal Debt	31.2	47.9	48.5	47.7	47.7	47.2	46.5

*Includes net actuarial losses

Sources: Liberal 2021 Platform (Forward For Everyone): Fiscal and Costing Plan; PBO 2021 Election Proposal Costing Baseline; IFSD calculations

lion per year over the medium term? The answer can be traced largely through the historical COVID-19 fiscal supports and the downs and ups of revenues linked to the strength of the economy.

So, what is the strategy for financing the recovery and post-COVID structural reforms and maintaining or rebuilding our fiscal buffers for the next unexpected policy shock? How will we balance the downside risks related to the pandemic versus the upside risks related to structural reforms that will strengthen economic productivity and labour force participation? Like political cooperation, we see a strong fiscal plan as a necessary condition for a successful build back better outcome.

The IMF defines fiscal credibility in terms of public confidence in the capacity of the government to carry out its policy commitments while meeting its debt obligations at reasonable cost.

“ A strong fiscal planning framework should guide political cooperation. More spending will be needed in a true build back better plan. ”

Table 1 highlights the planned fiscal path of the government over the medium term assuming implementation of its 2021 election platform and the Parliamentary Budget Office election baseline economic and fiscal assumptions. Fiscal headline numbers are moving in the right direction—declining budgetary deficits and debt-to-GDP ratios; a normalization of spending and revenue shares; and low carrying costs of debt.

To enhance public and bond market confidence, we need to see these

headline numbers embedded in a fiscal strategy and plan. These numbers need to be set out as targets or anchors that get adjusted only by unexpected events like a public health crisis. A strong fiscal planning framework should guide political cooperation. More spending will be needed in a true build back better plan. In a stronger economic environment, we want the government and opposition parties to bargain over tax increases and spending reductions to finance additional public policy improvements so we can ensure appropriate fiscal space for the next generation. **P**

Contributing writer Kevin Page is President and CEO of the Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy at the University of Ottawa. He was previously Canada's first Parliamentary Budget Officer.

Jiayu Li and Xuan Liu are undergraduate economic students at the University of Ottawa.

Getting Parliament to Work Again

While the composition of the new Parliament will not shift political power beyond the status quo dynamic that existed before the September 20th election, there is now an opportunity to reform our democratic institutions, including Parliament, if the political will can be mobilized. Former Clerk of the Privy Council Kevin Lynch and former CN and BMO executive Paul Deegan offer a brief prescription for positive change.

Kevin Lynch and Paul Deegan

Thomas Jefferson is credited with saying, “The government you elect is government you deserve.” While the make-up of the 44th Parliament is all but a repeat of the 43rd, Canadians should hope that this Parliament works better.

Members of Parliament have been elected to tackle a whole host of very difficult challenges, and Canadians deserve real and meaningful progress. While hardly discussed during the election campaign, the government now has to improve our pandemic preparedness; build a more resilient health care system; shake the Canadian economy into a better long-term growth trajectory; reboot our relationships with a more protectionist United States and a more threatening China; shift significantly toward a low-carbon future; rein in Big Tech; and strengthen social cohesion with a focus on inequality and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

The American leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith famously coined the catchphrase, “What got you here won’t get you there.” And what won’t get us to real and meaningful progress is a continuation of the fierce partisanship, centralized control,

short-termism, rhetoric over results, and inadequate committee resources that characterized the past few parliaments. This approach to governing is not a recipe for success when dealing with daunting policy challenges, nor does it inspire public trust in our most important institutions.

Our institutions of governance can and must work better for Canadians. Here are five ways to make the 44th Parliament effective.

“**What won’t get us to real and meaningful progress is a continuation of the fierce partisanship, centralized control, short-termism, rhetoric over results, and inadequate committee resources that characterized the past few parliaments.**”

Lessening the control of the prime minister’s office. Leadership starts at the top. In Ottawa, that means the Prime Minister’s Office. Going back to the 1980s, there has been an increasing trend toward more centralization of power in government. As former longtime Liberal MP Wayne Easter

told the *Hill Times* recently, “I think there’s far, far, too much control in the Prime Minister’s Office.” This control in the PMO diminishes the authority and accountability of ministers.

In theory, a Canadian prime minister is a first among equals around the cabinet table, but they are much more than that. The prime minister sets the overall agenda of the government through the Speech From the Throne. The PM controls the appointment of ministers. The PMO controls each minister’s agenda through the ministerial mandate letters. It appoints ministerial chiefs of staff. It controls ministerial communications through centralized vetting, and it controls relations with the media, which can stymie reporters, slow the flow of information, and inhibit the public’s right to know.

The prime minister should ensure that ministers be ministers again, with clear responsibilities, and that PMO moves back to a coordination role from a controlling one. Mandate letters to ministers have become a mishmash of issues with no clear prioritization or accountability except to the PMO. Periodic renewal in the PMO of non-elected political advisers would help ensure that they don’t become too insulated from cabinet ministers and caucus.

Making cabinet more effective. The PMO is not the cabinet. Cabinet is a key element of our Westminster system of government, yet, over time, it has become a shadow of its former self. Cabinet, not the PMO, should be the main forum for debating and responding resolutely to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

To be effective, cabinet needs strong ministers with a diversity of experience, who know their portfolios and have the authority to develop policy initiatives and bring them to their col-

leagues at the cabinet table. Cabinet should be a collective decision-making body. If we want independent ministers, we should start with giving them the scope to appoint their own chief of staff and have meaningful input into their mandate letters. They should also have the scope to develop effective relations with the Parliamentary Press Gallery beyond PMO-approved talking points.

We should also consider the size of cabinet. Simply put, it's too big to be effective. In the corporate world, you rarely have 30 executives sitting around the senior decision-making table, and yet, there are far more in government.

Tapping the talents of the public service. At the start of this government's term in office, the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford ranked Canada's federal public service as the most effective in its comparison of 31 countries. It got strong marks for offering evidence-based policy advice to the government of the day, in designing programs, in delivering services to people, and in speaking non-partisan "truth to power".

After decades of centralization of power and control in the PMO, the public service feels the political pull to be more an administrative service than a public service providing independent policy advice. And yet, their expertise and experience should complement the political considerations that partisan strategists bring to the table. The prime minister is best served by a strong, independently minded clerk of the Privy Council. Equally, ministers should rely on their deputies for unvarnished advice. A diverse, independent, and excellence-driven public service is a key element of the Westminster system of governance.

Resourcing parliamentary committees to be effective. Parliamentary committees lie at the very heart of our Westminster system of government. They are intended to provide a serious bipartisan forum for both the study and scrutiny of issues, policies, and legislation. The role of the

“ The role of the opposition is to oppose not obstruct; the role of the government is to propose not dispose; it is the role of Parliament to decide.”

opposition is to oppose not obstruct; the role of the government is to propose not dispose; it is the role of Parliament to decide.

Today's parliamentary committees are too overtly partisan. Committee chairs are typically appointed by the PM, rather than being elected like the speaker of the House of Commons. Committees are not appropriately resourced, and this comes at the expense of analysis, informed discussion, and debate. In the United States, Congressional committees are equipped with expert staff with deep policy chops. There are also too many parliamentary committees, which spreads already scarce resources too thin and muddies accountability.

Why not establish a Canadian version of the Australian Productivity Commission? It has been instrumental in putting evidence-based policy issues and policy options in front of Australians—government, Parliament, public service and citizens—for years with much success.

Where are the government Green Papers and White Papers of yesterday that framed important policy issues and allowed parliamentary committees to hold hearings and test the temperature for change? Why are committees not initiating more independent studies? Indeed, some of the best policy work in the past came from the committee process and commissions. Former Liberal Senator Michael Kirby's work on health care and taxation comes to mind. Committees should allocate more time to hearing from experts, including deputy ministers, chief executive officers, and academics. And they should exit the

Ottawa bubble more often and listen directly to the voices of Canadians.

Making partisanship less polarizing. Parliament should be partisan, but that doesn't mean divisive. Let's not emulate the political dysfunction and incivility of American politics. Sure, heckling is part of question period and always has been, but it shouldn't be petty and mean-spirited. Lack of respect for others turns Canadians off politics, drives cynicism about the political process, and dissuades too many Canadians from running for public office. Here, the speaker has an important role to play in setting the parliamentary tone, as do the party leaders.

“ Committees should allocate more time to hearing from experts, including deputy ministers, chief executive officers, and academics. And they should exit the Ottawa bubble more often and listen directly to the voices of Canadians ”

Canadians have spoken. The issues before us are complex but not insurmountable, provided we make this Parliament more effective and less acrimonious. It's time to restore public trust and confidence in government. It's time for our federal political parties to work together and advance policies and legislation that will make our people and our economy more resilient in these challenging times. **P**

Contributing Writer Kevin Lynch is a former Clerk of the Privy Council and a former vice chair of BMO Financial Group.

Contributing Writer Paul Deegan was deputy executive director of the National Economic Council in the Clinton White House and led government and public relations at BMO and CN.

Meet the New Minority Government, Just Like the Old Minority Government

Among the many messages from Canadian voters that could be discerned from the results of the September election is that we like minority governments—more than governing parties do, for obvious reasons. As Tom Axworthy, veteran Liberal strategist and close adviser to the late Pierre Elliott Trudeau, writes, the record of policy accomplishment of minority governments in Canada may explain that appreciation.

Thomas S. Axworthy

Since the election of John Diefenbaker's minority Conservative government in 1957, Canadians have elected minority governments more than 50 percent of the time. Of the 21 governments since 1957, 11 have been minorities. Recently, five of the seven governments since 2004 have been minorities. How to make minority governments work has not only been a practical and strategic issue for Justin Trudeau's Liberals since 2019, it is now one of the central governmental and political management issues in Canada.

At first glance, when the 44th Parliament begins its work, its composition will replicate almost exactly the party seat totals of the preceding House.

In the 2019-21 Parliament, Justin Trudeau had an informal alliance with the NDP that gave him a working majority and that alliance is almost certain to be recreated in the 44th House.

Yet, the political dynamics of the upcoming first session of the new Parliament have been greatly altered by

Trudeau losing his gamble to win a majority government of at least 170 seats.

In December 2019, I wrote an article in *Policy* magazine titled, *All Parliament, All the Time*, making the case that, in a minority parliament, skill in House management becomes the most prized commodity in Ottawa.

In dealing with the opposition in a minority parliament, the ultimate power of the prime minister is to threaten to go to the people if support from the other parties on legislation is not forthcoming. Prime Minister Harper, for example, had quite a narrow plurality of seats in his minority governments of 2006-08 and 2008-2011, but due to Liberal Party disarray, Harper's oft-used threat to call an election ensured begrudging Liberal support of Conservative legislation.

But in calling an election in August 2021 to end a minority parliament that was working well, Trudeau's decision became a persistent negative issue for the Liberals during the campaign. Trudeau will not be able to use the threat of a snap election to leverage legislative support, as Canadians

would be unforgiving about another election within so short a time. The onus on the party leaders, therefore, should be on genuine cooperation, as no party has an incentive for an early election.

What are the lessons and accomplishments of previous minority parliaments that can guide our leaders as they prepare for the 44th Parliament? In October 2019, Geoff Norquay, a veteran Conservative strategist, wrote a useful historical summary in *Policy* asking *How Effective Are Federal Minority Governments?* I will build on this theme.

With his surprise victory in 1957, John Diefenbaker had a narrow plurality of only seven seats over the Liberals (112-105), but his significance in the history of minority governments dwells in the primacy of political judgment, for better and worse. In 1958, Lester B. Pearson, the newly elected leader of the Liberal Party, demanded that the Conservative government voluntarily resign and hand power back to the Liberals. Diefenbaker used this stunning display of Liberal arrogance to call an immediate election and was rewarded with the largest seat majority in Canadian electoral history, 208 members in the then-265 seat House.

But Diefenbaker's judgment and management skills had eroded by 1962 when he won a minority of 116 seats to 99 the Liberals. Minority governments demand intense sensitivity in human relations. Every backbencher counts and cabinet consensus must be worked at every day. Diefenbaker's



Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson with his wife, Maryon, in 1966. The Pearson years are regarded as “the Golden Age” of minority governments.
Reg Innell photo, Courtesy of Toronto Public Library

cabinet, however, fell apart over the issue of whether Canada would accept nuclear warheads on the US-backed Bomarc missiles Diefenbaker had agreed to station on Canadian soil before it was clear they’d be nuclearized. In the subsequent turmoil, the opposition parties united on a non-confidence vote. In the ensuing 1963 election, the Conservatives and Liberals changed places but the NDP’s 17 seats gave Pearson a *de facto* working parliamentary majority.

Lester Pearson was not a very good politician on the hustings—he never won a majority government in four tries—but the Liberal Party was content to stick with him. And a good thing, too—his minority governments were transformational and the Pearson years from 1963-68 are regarded as the Golden Age of minority governments. What was so different then compared to today?

Two characteristics that defined the Pearson government’s creativity are now almost totally absent from Ottawa: the first was the wide latitude given individual ministers to launch initiatives and direct their own departments. The main reason that

the Pearson governments were so reformist was that every minister had the opportunity to reform. Today, in contrast, the centre rules all: Cabinet meetings have been described as a focus group for the prime minister, the PMO—not the minister—selects the minister’s staff, and communications are excessively controlled.

The second fundamental of the Pearson era was that policy and the party process really mattered. Party conventions were not just photo-ops for the leader. Three party events were seminal: the 1960 Kingston Thinkers Conference discussed fundamental changes in social policy, the 1961 National Liberal Rally of 1,800 Liberals in Ottawa put this new social policy agenda into the platform, and the 1966 Liberal policy convention entrenched it.

In just five years, Pearson minority governments created Medicare, the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, the Guaranteed Income Supplement for low-income seniors, and the Canada Student Loans Program. As a very junior researcher for Walter Gordon, president of the Privy Council, I was witness to this burst of social policy progress.

Medicare was the biggest idea of all the 1960s reforms and when the Department of Finance began a counter-attack to delay or shelve this transformation, progressives used the 1966 policy convention to insist that this fundamental change go forward. The party checkmated the department.

None of the great advances of the Pearson minority governments were choreographed by today’s political techniques of constant polling, deep analytics, micro-targeting or minute-by-minute communications. The Liberals did not even begin serious polling until well after the 1961 Rally. History, ideas and notions of the public interest set the framework.

The Pierre Trudeau minority government of 1972-74 had only a two-seat advantage—109-107—over the Conservatives and day-to-day management of the government’s future depended on David Lewis and the NDP. Allan MacEachen, the legendary Liberal House leader, never made the mistake of Joe Clark, who said he would manage his minority government in as if he had a majority, thereby ignor-



Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine in the House of Commons during the government's residential schools apology in June 2008. "A day when politics was put aside," Thomas Axworthy writes, proof that "minority Parliaments can rise above partisanship." *Jason Ransom photo, courtesy of the PMO*

ing the views of the six members of the Cr ditiste party who joined with the Liberals and NDP to defeat the government's budget, 139-133, in December 1979. The first rule of minority government management is to know how to count.

The Trudeau minority parliament had some enduring accomplishments, notably the 1974 Election Expenses Act, which introduced limits on campaign spending, partial public funding, and the introduction of tax credits for voluntary contributions. But given the controversy over Justin Trudeau's unilateral ending of Parliament in 2021, it is instructive to learn how his father's government maneuvered in 1974. James Travers, the late columnist for the *Toronto Star*, once wrote "the art of minority government is engineering defeat on the most favorable terms". By 1974, the Trudeau Liberals had regained popular support by increasing family allowances and creating Petro-Canada, but how to reap the

electoral rewards? Enter Finance Minister John Turner in May 1974 with one of the most politically astute budgets in Canadian history. The budget addressed the inflationary times by removing sales taxes on clothing and footwear and by introducing a Registered Home Ownership plan to assist young families with housing. But the government rejected the Conservative plan for wage and price controls and most crucially rejected the NDP demand for significant increases in corporate taxes. The budget was progressive enough to run on in an election but not so progressive as to ensure NDP support. The NDP joined with the Conservatives to defeat the government and Trudeau got the election he wanted. But it was the NDP that was blamed for pulling the plug. Re-elected, Trudeau then imposed wage and price controls in 1975.

Three minority governments in a row occurred in the mid-2000s. In 2004-2006 Paul Martin led a minority Lib-

eral government followed by Stephen Harper's two in 2006-2008 and 2008-2011. Martin had a very narrow minority: in 2005, the House voted evenly 152-152 on a budget amendment, leaving the speaker of the House to dramatically break the tie. The Martin minority government made advances—notably, same sex marriage was legalized. Yet public opinion was angered by the Liberal sponsorship scandal and the Martin government was defeated on a non-confidence vote in November 2005. The Conservatives won the subsequent election with 124 seats to the Liberals' 103 in the then-308-seat House.

Harper moved skillfully, in his two minority governments, to implement his vision of a much-reduced role for government while not moving so radically as to threaten his future electoral prospects. He reduced the GST from 7 to 5 percent, increased equalization grants to Quebec and stayed out of provincial jurisdictions. (In the January-February 2015 edition of *Policy*, Rana Shamoon and I discuss Harper's "Conservative Dominance").

“ Minority parliaments can rise above partisanship, as they did in 2008 on Truth and Reconciliation and as they did again 2020 when the COVID epidemic first hit. Politics does not always have to be negative. ”

The Harper era is generally regarded as a time of rising partisanship and increasing political divide. But one of the most moving days in recent parliamentary history occurred on June 11, 2008 when Harper rose in the Commons to make an eloquent apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools. Eleven extra chairs were placed on the floor of the House for

five Indigenous leaders and six residential school survivors as they listened to the party leaders apologize for this national tragedy. It was a day when politics was put aside. And the Harper government created and adequately funded the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2008-2015. Minority parliaments can rise above partisanship, as they did in 2008 on Truth and Reconciliation and as they did again 2020 when the COVID epidemic first hit. Politics does not always have to be negative.

The minority government that will now govern Canada already has some markers in the ground. The Liberals ran on \$10- a-day daycare, with most provinces already agreeing to the scheme and Ontario likely to follow before the next provincial election in June 2022. The NDP and the Bloc Québécois strongly support the initiative, so a national system of daycare support will almost certainly be a legacy of the next Parliament. Similarly, the Liberals are com-

mitted to greatly increasing the carbon tax and this, too, will move forward.

But what other measures could follow the precedents established since 1957? The first is that the next Parliament should provide more of a countervail to the growing power of the executive. Every party caucus should take advantage of the potential powers available to them through the 2014 Reform Act of electing their own caucus chair, deciding on who should be expelled from caucus, electing interim leaders and even initiating a leadership review if necessary. The Conservative caucus has recently agreed to opt in to these powers, the other party caucuses should do the same.

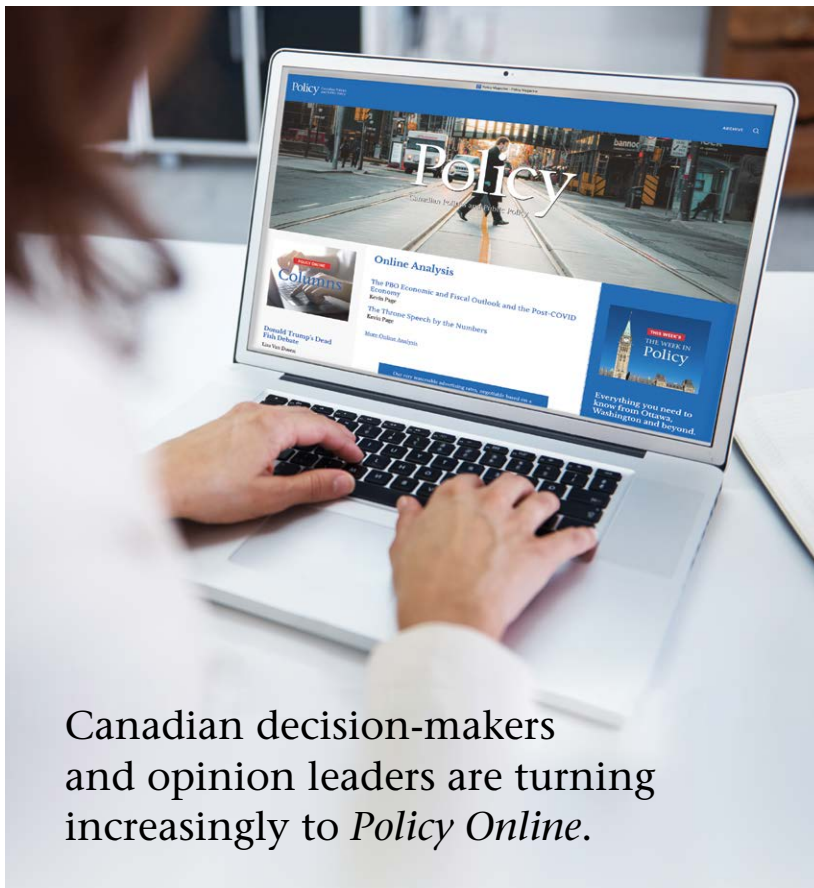
Second, in the past, minority parliaments have enacted legislation to make Canadian elections much fairer. Today there is almost universal criticism of the televised leaders' debates. A better plan would be for the parties to nominate a spokesperson for a debate each week of the campaign on a different topic, culminat-

ing in the leaders' debate towards the end of the campaign. This would ensure that a variety of issues would be covered in-depth and have the added benefit of showing the bench strength of the parties.

Lastly, in the most fruitful era of minority governments, policy was uppermost. Today, parties largely spend their tax-supported resources on micro-targeting and negative advertising. A percentage of the public subsidy given parties should be mandated to go towards the creation of party policy foundations so that our parties are also focusing on policy innovation in addition to organizing, and fundraising.

Minority governments can be effective. Past governments have shown the way. **P**

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Justin Trudeau in a pensive moment during the campaign. He would do well to appear thoughtful and considerate of the opposition in the House, if he expects support from at least one party needed to put votes in majority territory. *Adam Scotti photo*

Will this Parliament Be Better than the Last? The Toxicity of Zero-Sum Politics

As much as politics in general these days is being degraded by social media propaganda and misinformation, narrative warfare stunts and tactical intractability, the precariousness of minority governments can make the political discourse that accompanies them especially toxic. Dalhousie University's Lori Turnbull explores the possibilities for a more civilized tone.

Lori Turnbull

Since In June of 2021, as Parliament was winding down for the summer, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau escalated the already-rampant election speculation by observing that the House of Commons had become a place of “obstructionism and toxicity.”

In other words, it could not continue. However, the general election of September 20th produced a minority Parliament that looks almost exactly like the one before it. Specifically, the size and strength of each

of the political parties remains largely the same. Given that very little has changed, ought we assume that the forthcoming Parliament will be as toxic as the last one? Where does this toxicity come from in the first place? And what can we do about it?

The toxicity in the House is really partisanship run wild. It is the tendency for politicians to prioritize partisan gain over their collective responsibility to govern in the public interest. Rather than working together to manage complex challenges that cannot be solved within a single electoral cycle or by a single government, parties and their leaders demonize one another in the hope of frightening voters away from opponents. Perhaps it is not surprising that politicians succumb to this language on the campaign trail, but it is loud and clear inside Parliament as well, where it has a corrosive effect on our governing institutions.

Committee meetings, for example, are overrun by partisan bickering and accusations of corruption, incompetence, and obstruction, and do not provide a meaningful venue for policymaking and/or government accountability.

The parties see politics through a zero-sum lens: a gain for “them” is a loss for “us”. This mindset prevents any meaningful collaboration or cooperation between parties, even on the issues and priorities that they agree on (this is particularly bizarre). Take, for example, the campaign platforms of the Liberals and the New Democrats in this year’s election. There is far more agreement than disagreement on key issues like child care, health care, and affordable housing—all matters that will require long-term attention and significant public investment to get right. There is so little light between the two parties that some question whether we really need the two at all (this is a fascinating question for another day).

But instead of signalling a willingness to partner on common goals,

“Neither Justin Trudeau, nor Erin O’Toole, nor Jagmeet Singh lived up to expectations in this election. They’ve all got something to prove, so we can expect them all to focus on scoring wins that they can deliver back to their bases.”

the leaders accuse one another of being ineffective and untrustworthy. They guard their bases and attempt to score points at the other’s expense. Admittedly, some will respond to this critique by saying: “No kidding, that’s politics. The parties are in it to win it.” Fair point, but this sets a very low bar for the level of discourse that we have come to accept in Canadian politics. No wonder so many people don’t vote.

We often hear praise for minority government periods on the grounds that parties will be “forced” to cooperate to get things done. The truth, however, is that minority Parliaments tend to be even more toxic than majorities. All parties are precarious due to the uncertainty of the situation. Governments itch to purge the place as soon as opinion polls suggest that a majority is within reach. Meanwhile, opposition parties are in reaction mode because the prime minister could trigger an election at any time and will likely do so when the opposition is least ready for it.

The minority Parliament that is about to meet is likely to be more toxic than the last one rather than less because, apart from Yves-François Blanchet, the leaders are all vulnerable. Neither Justin Trudeau, nor Erin O’Toole, nor Jagmeet Singh lived up to expectations in this election. They’ve all got something to prove, so we can expect them all to focus on scoring wins that they can deliver back to their bases. We’ve already heard from Singh that the NDP won’t hesitate to “withhold votes” when the Liberals push for-

ward with legislation that they do not agree with. So, in other words, they will disengage and preach rather than work on a compromise.

Even in the last Parliament, when the NDP provided support to get legislation passed, Singh would usually hold a press conference immediately after a vote to explain that he didn’t really have confidence in the government; he just didn’t want to be responsible for an election. It was as though he wanted to avoid any accusation of being cooperative.

Trudeau’s attitude toward the House is alarmingly dismissive. The new Parliament is not sitting until two months after election day. And when parliamentarians do come together on November 22nd, they will be immediately engulfed in a debate about the pandemic support programs that are set to expire. It is expected that the Liberals will continue their preference of holding fewer sitting days, thereby reducing opportunities for government accountability.

The one thing that makes the upcoming Parliament different from previous minority Parliaments is that triggering an early election is not an option, either for the government or the opposition. No one wants it. Voter resentment of the early election call this summer was palpable throughout the campaign. Whether they like it or not, the parties are stuck with each other in this minority Parliament for a while.

Politicians might choose to carry the toxicity of the last Parliament into this one. Alternatively, they could choose to accept the fact that parliaments are built to last.

Minority parliaments can, in fact, last four years. Sure, bills will take longer to pass and we might see more amendments in the process, but these are not bad things. In the current system, there are three national political parties, each with a solid enough base of support that it would be very difficult for any of them to win a majority of seats, no matter when an election is called, and of course impossible for the Bloc, as it only runs candidates in Quebec. The Green Party has been reduced to two seats in the House, and has bigger problems to worry about than procedural tactics.

Therefore, we need to normalize minority parliaments instead of treating them as temporary. This would likely involve a reconsideration of some of the norms that we have grown accustomed to. For example, it is not helpful to good governance that we tend to treat every piece of legislation as a confidence matter, which means that

parties looking to avoid elections end up voting for legislation that they don't really support.

It is reasonable for governments to lose a vote here and there but continue to govern, so long as there is no doubt about whether the prime minister holds the confidence of the House. It is reasonable and legitimate, also, for government to change hands without going to an election. This is exactly what Parliament is for: to choose a government and hold it to account.

If parties and politicians can accept these not-so-uncomfortable truths, we might be able to mitigate some of the toxicity that Prime Minister Trudeau referred to back in June. But this would require them to suppress the tendency toward the kind of zero-sum thinking that makes good governance impossible. They would need to resist the stunts and rhetoric that make for interesting television but prevent consensus and progress.

A shift like this would require good faith and strong leadership.

Prime Minister Trudeau is at a pivotal moment in his career. He has been in the role for six years and most of the last two of them have been swallowed up by a pandemic. If he wants to be a 10-year prime minister who has a meaningful legacy to stand on with respect to climate change, reconciliation, and growing the middle class, he should work with this Parliament in earnest to make progress on these goals.

In so doing, he would not only situate himself as one of the best prime ministers in history, he would bring integrity to an institution much in need of repair. **P**

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Column / Don Newman

AUKUS, China and Canada's Evolving Security Context

The atmosphere is deceptive although not surprising. An election deemed unnecessary by many produced a House of Commons barely distinguishable from the one that preceded it. That has left a feeling in Ottawa that when Parliament resumes on November 22nd there will just be more of the same. The danger is that it may be true. For it not to be correct members of all parties will have to stop their scandal mongering and start doing some serious thinking and work. There are serious problems facing the country and Parliament is going to have to deal with all of them in this minority model that Canadians have chosen to maintain.

The most important issues going forward were barely discussed in the election campaign. It was only when the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia announced that they had entered a new defence agreement to supply nuclear powered submarines to the Australian Navy to curb the expanding influence of China, that defence, security and intelligence issues briefly were pushed to the front of the campaign focus. Until then, all the political parties seemed to assume that Canada somehow exists in a vacuum, free from any encroachment from the outside, increasingly hostile world.

After the announcement of the AUKUS agreement, the immediate question was, "Why was Canada left out?" The answer, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said, was because it was about nuclear submarines, and Canada is not interested in acquiring any "any time soon." While that answer was not wrong, it was disingenuous. The navy is standing up a committee

to explore replacing the aging conventional submarines we bought from Britain 20 years ago, and Department of National Defence sources say that nuclear submarines are among the options being considered.

The overriding foreign policy issue that will overshadow almost everything else in the next decade and perhaps beyond is the US-led Western effort to counter China's illiberal expansionism. Canadians already know this. Two of our countrymen spent almost three years in Chinese prisons as collateral damage after being arbitrarily detained in retaliation for Canada arresting Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of Chinese telecom giant Huawei. The case was resolved after the election by a deferred prosecution agreement in Washington, and Meng and the Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, were allowed to return to their respective countries.

But that is not the last Canadians will hear about Huawei. The detention of the "two Michaels" for the past three years has paralyzed this country's dealings with China. Any wrong move, any strong condemnation to annoy the Chinese was avoided for fear of endangering the Canadians held captive. But now that they are free, Ottawa will have to decide whether to go along with the other allies in the Five Eyes intelligence group and ban Huawei from its 5G super-fast telephone networks. The US has led the exclusion on the rationale that Huawei could act as an agent of the Chinese government and implant spy software in the equipment it installs, or to set up the system so that Beijing could shut down crucial communica-

tions in the event of a confrontation. The other members of the Five Eyes—the UK, Australia, New Zealand—have excluded Huawei. If Canada does not now go along it will be partially, or almost totally, excluded from the intelligence-sharing group.

That would be a far bigger problem for this country than not being included in AUKUS, which is essentially a regional security agreement thousands of kilometres away, where a nuclear submarine deal with Australia makes eminent good sense. The Americans need greater support patrolling the Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea, where China has built a number of forward military bases.

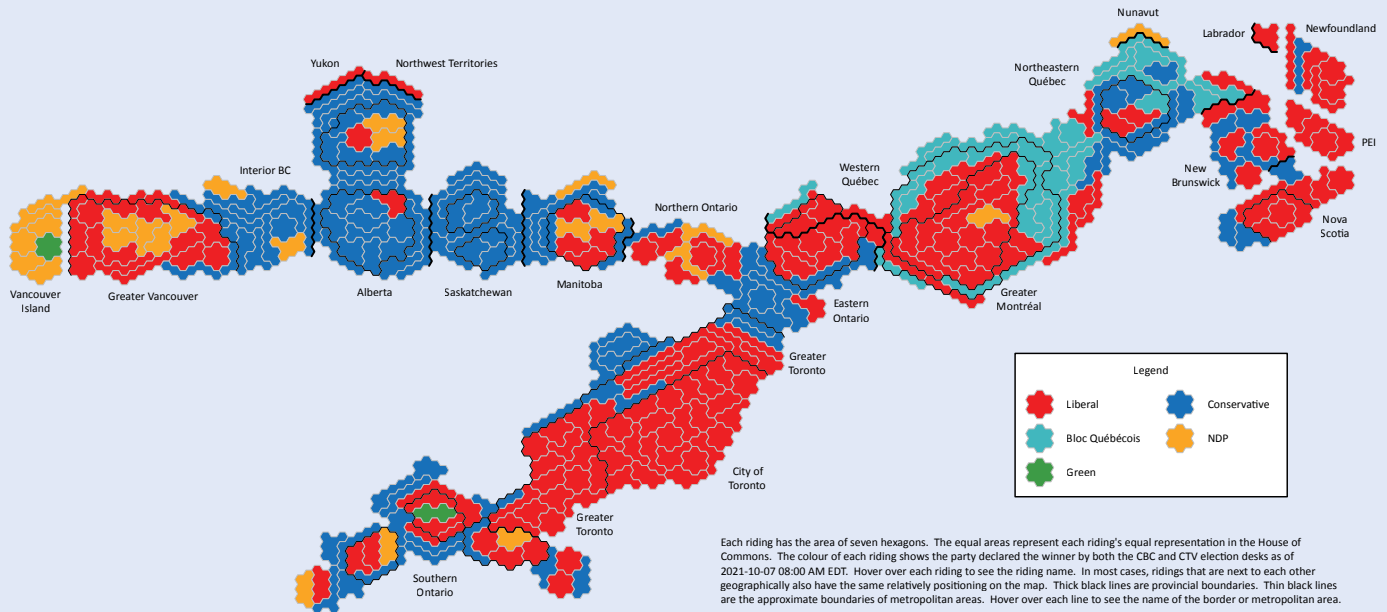
Canada is one of 30 members of NATO, which is the principal Western security bulwark against both Russia and China. And Canada already has a long-standing bilateral security arrangement with the US. The North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) was established in 1957 to detect and deter Soviet bombers from flying over the North Pole to attack Canada and the United States. Canada and the US are the only members of NORAD. Its mandate was expanded in 2006 to include maritime surveillance and now it is to be renewed and updated again.

That will be only the beginning of the military expenditures Canada will have to make if it wants to stay in a democratic alliance to stand up to Beijing. **P**

Contributing Writer and Columnist Don Newman is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a lifetime member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery. He is Executive Vice President of Rubicon Strategies, based in Ottawa.



2021 Canadian Federal Election Results (Cartogram of Equal-area Ridings)



Mark Gargul Wikipedia image

The Heart of the Matter for the NDP

“To be Irish is to know that in the end the world will break your heart,” the late Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said. It’s a sentiment that could easily apply to the federal NDP—the party of idealism over cynicism, of principle over power and other consoling clichés that make Jack Layton’s record-breaking, valedictory blow-out in 2011 all the more poignant. A decade later, Brian Topp, the party’s former national director, has a post-election plan to un-break the NDP’s heart.

Brian Topp

Everything that’s red on this map, make it orange.

That’s what the federal NDP needs to do if it wants to govern, and that’s what it should be aiming for in the next federal election and in every election.

And now, a few words on the details. Let’s begin by praising Montreal software developer Mark Gargul, who designed this map and uploaded it to the Wikimedia commons. Mark’s map reminds us of two things:

First, we still live in a sideways Chile that is in good part built along a couple of railroads. Thank God for Edmonton! How often have you said

that? The people lucky enough to live there say it all the time. So do Alberta New Democrats.

Second, parties that sweep Greater Montreal, Greater Toronto and the Lower Mainland of BC get to govern Canada, and parties that don't—well, don't.

That is what Canadians handed the Conservatives and the New Democrats in the 2021 federal election. Both have difficult election post-mortems to undertake.

New Democrats can be rueful about what looks like a missed opportunity. In the first week of the 2021 election the NDP was polling at 25 percent and was in contention in over 60 seats. Canadians then listened to the campaigns and their closing arguments, and the NDP's vote dropped by a third and its potential seat haul dropped by more than half (the NDP earned 17.83 percent of the vote, up 1.8 percent; and 25 seats, up one). Some of the seats the NDP lost were eye-wateringly close, which means they were winnable.

On the other hand, Jagmeet Singh remains Canada's best-liked and best-regarded federal leader, by far. He is unchallenged in his party. And he emerged from the election holding the same partial-balance-of-power parliamentary cards that Tommy Douglas held in his day. For the federal NDP, alas, that's pretty good. Now what?

Well, there's always the merger option, at least as a hypothetical talking point. Should the NDP now give up, and merge with the Liberals? Our editors here at *Policy Magazine* asked me for a status report on this matter, so here you go:

That's a tough sell inside the NDP. In most jurisdictions where the NDP has become a party of government, competing provincial Liberal parties have mostly disappeared—an easier formula for getting along than trying to co-habitate in a new party. You can look this up under British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan.



Jagmeet Singh at the outset of the 2021 campaign. Though the NDP gained only one seat, Brian Topp notes that Singh “remains Canada’s best-liked and best-regarded leader, by far.” *NDP photo*

Ending the risk of conservative rule through a single, powerful, merged progressive party is a tough sell inside the Liberal party, too. I asked a friend on the red team to comment and he said this: Liberal party members might not leave “a combined party that would be defined by extremists on the left, but voters would, as they have in all the English speaking democracies, leaving the right to form government most of the time and the left, when it does form government, unable to erect the kinds of lasting reforms the Liberal Party of Canada exists to enact.”

Now, Medicare seems fairly lasting. That was launched in Saskatchewan under a party defined by the left, under Premier Tommy Douglas. And then brought to the rest of Canada when Douglas and Lester Pearson teamed up during a minority Liberal government to get it done. But in any event, as you can see, proponents of this idea have nothing to work with.

Then there's the “be BOLD” option. In contrast, should the NDP embrace “bold”, “strong” and “courageous” policies, become much more militantly socialist, green, and *dirigiste*—and finally give a winning plurality of Canadian voters that hard-left federal government they've

been waiting impatiently for, if only the NDP could figure it out?

I will spare you a discussion of the party's burdens with Trotskyite groupuscules and lefter-than-thou media showboats. Instead, let's just say this. In addition to these people, there are also thoughtful activists (many of them young members of the “Layton legacy”) on the left of the NDP who argue cogently that “professionalization”, a focus on good public administration and contesting the centre will never elect the NDP at the federal level.

If voters want a liberal party, there's already a pretty good one on offer in Canada. Given a choice between two liberal parties, voters will choose the real one, as they did in 2015. The NDP is therefore condemned to be itself, and that means finding an inspiring social democratic/democratic socialist vision that a plurality of Canadians can see themselves in.

Which is not about chanting Trotskyite slogans; and it's not about shouting a laundry list of BOLD yet somehow boring and impractical proposals. It's about offering working people a real alternative to a status quo under our current ruling parties that harms the many and coddles the few. And a real alternative to the hateful divisiveness of right-wing populism. In think-

ing about the future, the NDP needs to listen to its heart on this, and stay in touch with its own values.

Which leaves going for gold, each and every election. Just plain pursuing victory in federal elections with unblinking determination until victory is won, exactly like a post-election tweet by the current national campaign director and federal leader's chief of staff, Jennifer Howard, who wrote: "We plan to win." Excellent!

What would going for gold look like for the NDP?

First, determination is required. Political parties that challenge Canada's since-pre-Confederation ruling tradition have their work cut out for them. The B.C. CCF/NDP ran in 12 elections under various leaders before winning office under Dave Barrett in 1972. It took 20 tries for the Alberta CCF/NDP until Rachel Notley in 2015; only two for the Saskatchewan NDP until Douglas in 1944; 14 campaigns in Manitoba until Ed Schreyer in 1969; 15 in Ontario until Bob Rae (always an asterisk on that one—that government's real record merits a re-examination); and 24 efforts in Nova Scotia until Darrell Dexter. In other words, don't give up.

Second, victory for the federal NDP runs through Quebec. Progressive English Canadians, especially in Ontario, will not elect a government that is not a national party. And English Canada's progressive majority won't risk Tory rule by voting for the NDP until they believe it can win. Look at Mark Gargul's map. What portion of that ocean of red in Canada's urban majority is going to switch to orange and get the dominoes falling? More than likely, Montreal would be first. Quebecers have already demonstrated their willingness to switch to orange, as they did under Jack Layton, giving him 43 percent of the Quebec votes and 59 seats in 2011. *Le bon Jack* took to the NDP to Official Opposition. In the right circumstances they might do so again. And then that tantalizing 25 percent at the start of a campaign becomes 30 percent af-

“Conservatives of all stripes can see that progressive parties like the NDP are at risk of losing touch with their base—and that the blue team might find their winning margin there.”

ter the leader's debates and a winning 35-40 percent after a successful cross-Canada closing argument (absent in almost all NDP campaigns).

How to make that happen? The federal leader is going to need to do what Jean Charest, Lucien Bouchard and many other aspiring Quebec leaders did—go talk to Quebecers, franco-phone Quebecers, in dozens of events, often to small audiences, in cities and towns all across Quebec. Also, be present in the French-language media—every week. Then, focus on issues that French-speaking Quebecers and English-speaking progressives can agree on and would want to work together on—equality and climate change, for example—and not on the symbolic issues the populist right uses to divide people. And recruit candidates early and get them and their campaigns up and running a year or two before the election, and not a week or two after the writ drops.

Third, then do the same things across Canada, beginning in the GTA, the Lower Mainland, the prairies, and among new Canadian communities.

Fourth, campaign better. A coming post-mortem will look at the 2021 campaign—and, hopefully, at the federal party's organizationally comatose state between elections. There's a lot to talk about at the national, provincial and riding level.

Fifth, victory for the NDP requires it to re-connect with working people. It's not a coincidence that Erin O'Toole and his team explicitly targeted working people with proposals the NDP would do well to consider. Conservatives of all stripes can see that progressive parties like the NDP are at risk of losing touch with their base—and that the blue team might find their winning margin there. Re-

sponsible Conservatives, like the latest version of O'Toole, are pitching for those votes with sensible proposals. Vicious populists like Trump and the world's micro-Trumps appeal to ethnic hatred, climate change denial, anti-vax madness, and the rest.

In every democratic country in the world, parties on the left are wrestling with these same political risks. German Social Democratic Party leader Olaf Scholz recently came out on top in the German election by persuading a plurality of voters that he was the most competent candidate for chancellor, a formula that should work well for Rachel Notley fairly soon in Alberta. He also won by reframing his party's appeal to its working family base by saying that it is time for working people to be respected again. Respected in meaningful ways—in their income, in their treatment on the job, in access to housing. That was smart because it was an emotional appeal, not a laundry list of uninspiring spending proposals. And it was an effort by a leftist party to put working people at the heart of its campaign instead of threatening their jobs, insulting their values, and implicitly inviting them to look for advocates elsewhere.

That is the heart of the matter for the federal NDP in Canada. The NDP needs to listen to its heart and remember who it is. And it needs to appeal to the hearts as well as the heads of a winning plurality of Canadians, beginning with its own base. **P**

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Lessons Learned from Election 2021, for Both Erin O'Toole and the Conservative Party

The post-loss post mortem has become an integral part of campaign culture. In the case of the Conservative Party's performance in the 2021 federal election, there is no shortage of takeaways for both Erin O'Toole and the party he led first to mid-campaign surge, then to an election-day disappointment. Two of the wisest strategists in Canadian politics, Earnscliffe's Geoff Norquay and Yaroslav Baran, offer their post-election diagnostics and a prescription for a path forward.

Geoff Norquay and Yaroslav Baran

September's federal election provided disappointments for all the leaders and their parties:

- Justin Trudeau suffered the largest setback: by the third week of the campaign, it was apparent Canadians were not prepared to grant him a majority, which was his sole purpose in calling the election in the first place. He also returned with the lowest popular vote of any federal government in history, losing the popular vote to the Tories for the second straight election.
- Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet appeared to catch fire after the Bill 21 controversy of the English-language debate but faltered and ended up with the same number of seats as before the election.
- NDP leader Jagmeet Singh conducted a policy-light campaign that made him the darling of social

media, but his party's anticipated breakthrough among young voters never materialized. He didn't move the dial in convincing progressive voters the NDP is the "real deal" while the Liberals under Trudeau are just temporarily parked on the NDP's political turf.

- Despite her acclaimed personal communication style and her competent command of policy discussions in the debate, Annamie Paul's Green Party fell apart, with internal infighting boiling over into the public and contributing to a collapse of voter support for the party.
- Despite performing better than expected and denying the Liberals a majority many Liberals assumed was theirs for the taking, Erin O'Toole's Conservatives returned with two fewer seats than Andrew Scheer won in 2019. O'Toole's party also didn't breach the walls of Canada's largest metropolises and win central urban seats in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal.

Among the major parties, only Conservatives started to air any leadership misgivings publicly post-election, with some members immediately beating the drum for a leadership review.

By and large, success in politics tends to be determined not by final outcomes, but by the degree to which those outcomes miss, meet or exceed expectations. And here, O'Toole did well in the campaign. Written off by many pundits pre-campaign as an unknown running against a charismatic incumbent who had spent a year liberally using the public purse to build support, O'Toole turned heads by immediately reframing the election call, blunting many of the expected attacks against his party, and running a "steady-as-she-goes" competent campaign in contrast to the Liberals' foundering out of the gates. But he also made some mistakes along the way. For the Conservatives to conduct a thorough reckoning and decide who should lead the party into the next race, both the shortcomings and the successes need to be evaluated soberly, dispassionately, maturely, and politically.

Having campaigned for the party leadership as a "true blue" Conservative, the platform he launched on the second day of the election campaign contained numerous progressive policy initiatives designed to move the party to the centre and broaden its base. Or, evaluated through the traditional lens of Canadian politics, it was a classically and unapologetically "Red Tory" platform—a non-ideological package

crafted to respond to the pressing issues of the day, and without an allergy to using both the Canadian state and its purse to tackle some of the problems facing the country.

With the federal party having been led largely by so-called “Alberta School” adherents for the past two decades, this new course, or as some would characterize it, this return to traditional Canadian Toryism, rankled some party members. Clearly, they would have preferred a platform harder right and more libertarian in orientation. In addition, social conservatives felt O’Toole had used them to win the leadership and then abandoned them.

O’Toole’s focus on practical, relevant issues was smart. He not only said he represented a new generation of Conservative leadership; he demonstrated it by discussing such issues as the need for child care, the need to build domestic biomanufacturing capacity, labour rights, and even animal protection. It was a relevant, made-for-2021 campaign that demonstrated he “got it”.

Moreover, the steady messaging and performance of the Conservative leader in the first two weeks seemed to have an impact on the polls. Canadians *were* looking at the Conservatives “again for the first time” and seemingly liking what they saw in a comparative sense.

While mistakes were few, a notable one stands apart. When the party was confronted with the platform’s commitment to roll back the Liberal prohibition on “assault-style” weapons, O’Toole and his candidates faced an angry backlash from urban and women voters—precisely the groups the whole election strategy was designed to reach. He struggled for three days to escape the issue before repudiating his platform and saying that the Liberal ban would remain in place pending an independent “classification review” of the firearms in question. Having already missed the mark with his target de-

“ *This return to traditional Canadian Toryism, rankled some party members. Clearly, they would have preferred a platform harder right and more libertarian in orientation. In addition, social conservatives felt O’Toole had used them to win the leadership and then abandoned them.* ”

mographics, his platform plank repudiation now angered dissident Conservatives already in the tent.

In its “scripting”, there were two evident misfires. First, the pivot at the start of week four which saw a more combative, attacking Erin O’Toole taking a notably more negative and critical tone on Trudeau’s performance. The positive and uplifting message that appeared to have worked in the first three weeks of the campaign was seemingly switched off, with the leader himself acting as the so-called “attack dog”. Make no mistake, most successful campaigns do have *someone* of significance playing this role. But the pivot, and decision for the party leader to play this role himself, removed the positive stylistic contrast O’Toole enjoyed relative to a Trudeau, who had been slinging mud from the start.

Despite its strong start, the Conservative campaign also didn’t appear to have a close. The best campaigns open with a framing statement, deliver supporting policy along the way, and then conclude with a closing argument that reinforces the overall frame or “ballot question” the party is presenting. That last component seemed missing. Following the attack pivot, the Conservatives’ campaign messaging appeared to have run out of script and seemed to just coast to the end. A relatively low-profile closing week-end—with few public events compared to an active PM who looked like he was fighting for the job—sent an unconscious message that either O’Toole didn’t think he could win or wasn’t sure he wanted to.

Overall, the Conservatives’ election results could be characterized as either fully respectable or as underwhelming—depending on the beholder. In fairness to O’Toole, he can’t be blamed for the surprise showing of the Peoples’ Party of Canada (PPC)—their 800,000-plus votes in the election likely reduced the Conservatives’ chances of winning in numerous ridings. A simpler accounting is that there were 25 seats where the Conservative Party’s votes plus the PPC’s vote totals were more than the winning party’s share. As an important asterisk, however, we cannot assume that PPC support all came as a bleed from the Conservatives. Earncliffe polling suggests the PPC galvanized a cross-spectrum anti-establishment sentiment, with only about 40 percent of their strength coming from previous Conservative voters. The other 60 percent came from other parties or individuals who previously said they did not vote.

Equally, O’Toole was not responsible for—and could not have foreseen—the backlash in Alberta against the provincial United Conservative Party government led by Jason Kenney. Chances are that by the next election, when pandemic management may be a memory, these brakes on federal Conservative support will have passed.

Deciding where the party goes from here must be governed by a clear-eyed analysis of what worked in the recent election, what didn’t and what must be adjusted for the future.

This assessment starts with how close O’Toole and the party came to upsetting the Liberals in the election. In

both 2019 and 2021, the Liberals received fewer votes than in the previous election—33.1 per cent and 32.6 per cent. On September 20, the Liberals' superior vote efficiency enabled them to continue in government with the fewest proportion of votes ever. These are trends on which the Conservatives can build.

In response to internal critics like MP Shannon Stubbs who are repudiating O'Toole's moderate repositioning, we offer the following counterargument: the trendlines suggest the O'Toole strategy worked. It just didn't work *enough*. The broader tent approach did sacrifice some support in regions where the Tories had surplus, and in exchange, it did build support in swing-riding regions held by other parties. The whole play just didn't quite hit its tipping point. But it almost did: in much of Ontario, the Tories were one single percentage point from dozens of close ridings going blue. So where to find that additional one percent?

During the Harper era, the party invested heavily in ongoing outreach to ethnic cultural communities and voters but much of that activity appears to have stopped post 2015. Clearly, an aggressive outreach program needs to be restarted urgently by the leader and caucus, because if the party is going to be successful in urban and suburban Canada, it needs to improve its appeal to ethnic voters.

The party also needs to be very careful with communities prone to external interference. Several Conservative Chinese Canadian candidates felt this acutely at the doorstep. They knew disinformation was being spread about them throughout their communities on foreign-based social media platforms, and there was little they could do about it. In future, mitigation plans need to be developed for such scenarios, in concert with both Elections Canada and CSIS. The more principled any party's foreign policy, the more we should expect to see this kind of external manipulation.



Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole during the first week of the campaign in Quebec City. His campaign got off to a fast start, but he later suffered from Liberal attacks on gun control and some Tory candidates not being vaccinated. *Deb Ransom, CPC photo*

O'Toole has the political skill and creativity to be a very successful leader, given time, and if he successfully manages the dissidents in his caucus who now number five parliamentarians and one member of the party's national council. He has anticipated this criticism and has stayed a step ahead of it. He encouraged his party to adopt the so-called "Chong Reforms" from MP Michael Chong, author of the 2014 Reform Act, that give caucus final say over his fate. He appointed a Western MP who lost his seat (and not even an O'Toole loyalist) to conduct the formal campaign review. And he is steadfastly remaining committed to a moderate policy path.

Reviews of political performance must be thorough and they must be balanced. And for party members watching from the sidelines, they

would be well-served to take stock not only of the missteps, but also of the many successes that thus far characterize O'Toole's tenure.

The 2021 election saw many Conservatives coming out of the woodwork and re-engaging for the first time in two decades. It also saw many Canadian voters looking at the party afresh, and seeing a political home in it. These are real achievements and a foundation for growth. **P**

Geoff Norquay, a Principal of Earncliffe Strategy Group, is a veteran Conservative strategist who was senior social policy adviser to Prime Minister Mulroney, and later advised Stephen Harper as opposition leader.

Yarsolav Baran, Managing Principal of Earncliffe Strategy Group, is a former chief of staff to the Government House Leader under Prime Minister Harper.

Reading the Room: Challenges for the Next Trudeau Mandate

Just when it seemed that Canada's post-pandemic politics might be calmer than the health, economic and political rollercoaster of the past two years, turns out the new Parliament will be almost precisely as querulous as the last one, and between COVID, climate change, China and cyber, suddenly all politics is global. Longtime Liberal strategist and Hill + Knowlton VP John Delacourt surveys the horizon.

John Delacourt

The first session of Canada's 44th Parliament is set to open on November 22nd, just one day short of five months since MPs in the 43rd Parliament last took their seats in the House of Commons on June 23rd. If you were a member of the last Liberal caucus, this period will no doubt be remembered as the most grinding route from minority government to virtually identical minority government, like two Trans-Siberian Railway stops along our strange, second COVID summer, across the economic permafrost of the fourth wave.

Governor General Mary May Simon will read a Speech from the Throne that will, presumably, be reflective of the "clear mandate" Canadians have given Justin Trudeau's minority government. Small mercies, it is unlikely there will once again be any passing mention of the space-time continuum or the interplanetary spaceship we're all traveling on. That soaring rhetoric was favoured by the previous governor general, who seemed to have some difficulties treating the terrestrial life forms she worked with as human beings. And we're

all acutely aware of who's been dabbling in space travel; sundry billionaires and CEOs who've kept their gaze and their share values firmly in the stratosphere while our economy is stumbling out of the gutter of debt through this never-endemic. So, this time around, it is likely that the new GG will make a better effort to read the room, virtual or not.

But reading the national room is clearly harder than it would appear. If all had gone as planned for Trudeau's Liberals, November's speech would have been expected to herald a majority mandate as transformative as the New Deal, not a be-humbled recitation of platform commitments from a Pyrrhic victory.

If the realpolitik imperative behind any minority government is to position the team for a majority triumph the next time around, that challenge has never looked quite as daunting for the Prime Minister and his closest advisors. How does a government put a bright shine on transformation, when most Canadians are intuiting that a deeper transformation is occurring, fomenting a sense of loss and uncertainty that perhaps no

government is capable of addressing on its own?

Indeed, as this pandemic's variant strains and another summer of firestorms and liquefying glaciers only confirms, global—not national—commitments have never seemed so urgent, while any local impact MPs can make has never seemed so elusive and intangible. Can't afford a house? That's happening in every major city, not just Vancouver and Toronto. (Try Hamilton, ranked in one survey as the third most expensive city in North America.) Understocked shelves in the grocery and retail stores? That's indicative of snarls in the supply chains throughout most of the world, too.

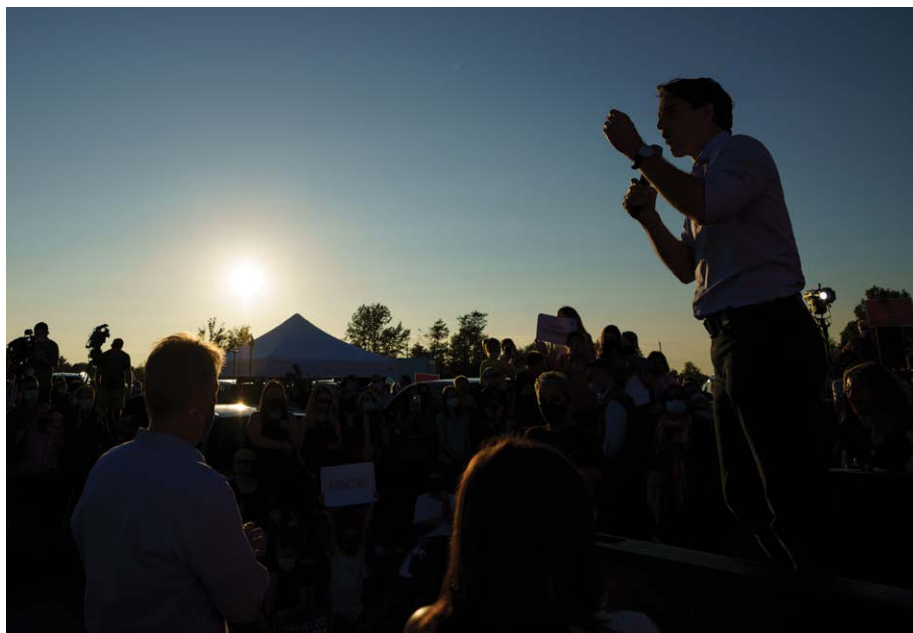
Those who crafted the Liberal platform are acutely aware of how largely global problem solving now looms for Canadian voters. And of course, it is a truism now that the pandemic lifted a veil on systemic inequities, be it the "she-cession," the colour bar on infection rates or the steady drip of grim reportage about what's happening in our long-term care homes. The message discipline throughout the Liberal campaign was trained on how this filtered down to affordability issues—child care, home ownership, greater support for health care on the front line—but the big-picture commitments, like the reduction of carbon emission levels by 40 to 45 percent by 2030, or the recapitalization of the National Trade Corridors Fund with \$1.9 billion over four years, they were "platformed" too, and they're inevitably going to be foregrounded over the next 18 to 24 months. It is likely we'll also see some forward movement on pharmaceutical, though the language in the

last federal budget would suggest the scale and scope of what is announced won't be quite as ambitious as Jagmeet Singh would support.

Still, if past platforms are any indication, it will be the transformative, rather than simply transactional commitments that will be prioritized by Trudeau's team, and their record over the last six years in fulfilling these, as one Université Laval study determined, is the best of any government over the last 35 years.

Yet those who have reacted positively to what the Liberals have committed to are largely urban voters, and those who have not are in predominantly rural ridings—and steadfastly resistant to conversion. One hundred sixteen of Canada's 338 ridings are in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and the Liberals won 86 of them. It may be the starkest divide that emerges over the next Parliament, one that even Erin O'Toole's Conservatives, who won a strong majority of rural ridings, may find hard to address, as they bleed rural votes to Maxime Bernier's People's Party of Canada and struggle to make gains in more than the paltry eight ridings in those major cities that they did win. How do you thread together a narrative for the post-pandemic era that goes from recovery in the first act to growth and prosperity at some point in the second, when growth is almost assuredly going to be uneven, as any credible policy analysis of the challenges of, say, rural broadband will confirm?

The short answer to such a difficult question, at least within the rooms where campaigns are first considered, is that it is always about the leader. A charismatic presence that can emanate hope and possibility suddenly changes everything within the course of a campaign, and silences those naysayers who fret over such larger, long-tail concerns of voter intention and regional divisions, or the coarsening of partisan tribalism. To live through the shift in Liberal fortunes that occurred



Justin Trudeau on the campaign trail in the summer of 2021. The sun did not set on his government. *Adam Scotti photo*

during the 2015 Trudeau campaign was a convincing enough conversion experience for many who were in the trenches. Yet despite all parties running the most leader-centric campaigns in recent memory, the good news for Liberals is that no leader on the opposition benches seems yet capable of catching fire; the bad news is that no Liberal leader may be capable the next time either. And if this campaign confirms one thing for the Liberals it is this: the best data science/digital strategy people in the room can assure the vote shows up, but they can't create the conversion moment, the sudden surge in momentum that can bring you into majority numbers. The short answer about the leader obtains, like a bad cliché, because it's true in the starkest, most uncomplicated way, and this is what Trudeau can't help but reflect upon over the course of the coming months in Parliament.

However, the longer answer that, undoubtedly, he and his team are still focused on relates to crafting a vision for sustainable economic growth that can bring some light back into the darkening spirits of the electorate. Speculation about whether Trudeau or perhaps Chrystia Freeland will be the one to speak to it as

leader is almost beside the point at this stage. Almost.

As more than a few pundits have put it, who would want the damned job anyway, though? Soon after the campaign, I got a chance to view, from one reporter's iPhone, the B-roll of scenes from the road on the Liberal bus. To hear protest crowds ventriloquize the paranoid fever dreams from the darker corners of Facebook about the perils of vaccination, and the prime minister's evil intentions to take away civic freedoms, is to feel a strong twinge of nostalgia for the pre-pandemic Before Times.

This form of populism, like the COVID variants, is morphing quickly with localized features, and it is an open question as to what it might do to the political landscape before the next federal campaign. That will be a problem for all the leaders to contend with—even Bernier—who might once again have cause to reflect about whom he has brought to the dance. **P**

Contributing Writer John Delacourt, Vice President and Group Leader of Hill and Knowlton Public Affairs in Ottawa, is a former director of the Liberal research bureau. He is also the author three novels.



Economic recovery relies on Canadians filing their taxes

With the federal election now behind us, our minds start to turn back to Canada's continuing battle against COVID-19 and economic recovery. Tax filing probably isn't top of mind for most Canadians in this regard. However, getting Canadians to file their taxes is the single most effective way of ensuring they receive the benefits they are entitled to, at a time when such efforts can play a significant role in economic growth. CRA statistics indicate that nearly 30 million tax returns were filed between February and mid-August of this year alone. During that same period, over \$34 billion in tax refunds were issued averaging nearly \$1,900 per refund.

The financial benefits from filing taxes are key to helping many Canadians recover from the economic effects of COVID-19. With this in mind, here's a few ideas for newly elected and re-elected Members of Parliament on how to further incent Canadians to file:

Electronic Signature

Banks have been able to offer electronic signature to Canadians for years when signing for mortgages, loans and other financial products and services. *Budget 2021* promised to implement electronic signature use for taxes and related products which will make it easier than ever before for Canadians that would like to file with the help of a virtual tax preparer. Enabling legislation will need to be passed first to enact the changes into law. H&R Block Canada urges soon-to-be lawmakers to get this done by the end of the year in time for the 2022 tax season. Canadians rightly don't want to wait any longer for the option to use virtual tax products and services.

Assisting Non-Filers

H&R Block Canada plays a key role in helping Canadians get caught up on their taxes. There are lots of reasons why some Canadians choose not to file, ranging from a fear of owing money to much more complex socioeconomic issues. For lower income Canadians that choose to file years of their missing returns, the results are often overwhelmingly positive and life changing. In this last tax season, a couple visited an H&R Block office in Alberta to file what they thought were a few years' worth of missing tax returns. Once we had a chance to look more closely into their tax situation, they actually had 10 years of unfiled returns. Once we got them caught up, they left our office with tax refunds totaling \$64,000. Stories like these may not happen every day, but they are certainly not uncommon either. Our company takes great pride in celebrating these moments that we call our "Best Stories Ever". Raising broad awareness amongst non-filers of the benefits they may receive through filing taxes is a great start, and one initiative of many that our industry can do in partnership with the Government of Canada to get benefits into the hands of Canadians that need them most.

Disability Benefits

The Government of Canada recently announced plans to create the *Canada Disability Benefit*. As currently proposed, the *Canada Disability Benefit* would be a refundable credit, which means disabled Canadians that qualify would stand to benefit more financially when filing their taxes. This is undoubtedly a very positive step to assist Canada's most vulnerable. Yet, more must be done to ensure disabled Canadians are aware of the benefits they may be eligible for, and that the pathway to applying for and receiving these benefits is straightforward, timely, and compassionate.

H&R Block Canada's message to all Members of Parliament is that we should encourage the federal government and our industry to continue working together in partnership to make tax filing more accessible and more innovative to ensure that benefits flow to Canadians, particularly those in need. If we hope to truly "build back better," let's not underestimate the role of filing taxes as a fundamental component for a fiscally sound economic recovery. -- **Peter Bruno, President, H&R Block Canada**



Prime Minister Justin with Joe Biden at the Centre Block on Parliament Hill in December 2016 just weeks before the then-US vice president left office. Now as President Biden, he has an opportunity to lead the Western allies, including Canada, in an important multilateral moment.
Adam Scotti photo

How Building a Multilateral System Fairer for All Could Revive American Leadership

What Western allies have described as the systemic challenges posed by China's rise represent the most serious disturbance to the postwar international order since the Cold War. America's efforts to address those challenges have met resistance from within its own borders, including from the most un-democratic president in history, Donald Trump. Longtime senior Canadian diplomat Jeremy Kinsman reflects on how the United States can, under Joe Biden, recalibrate its international role.

Jeremy Kinsman

Friends and foes look with varying degrees of baffled concern or *schadenfreude* at what is going on in and with America, asking themselves and each other what the uncertainties mean going forward, including for international cooperation on crucial global issues.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland spoke for Canada early in her tenure as foreign minister in a speech to Parliament in 2017: "That our friend and ally has come to question the very worth of its mantle of

global leadership puts into sharper focus the need for the rest of us to set our own clear and sovereign course. For Canada, that course must be the renewal, indeed the strengthening, of the postwar multilateral order."

As competitive economic and political nationalism continues to weaken the multilateral system, the renewal project remains imperative.

Unlike his destructive predecessor, President Joe Biden unfailingly offers to lead global action on the world's existential multilateral challenges, especially global warming and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, mindful of how America's better instincts led the world out of the Second World War into a more co-operative multilateral order.

But potential US leadership is hobbled by American political issues. Donald Trump's refusal to respect democracy's defining obligation to defer to decisive electoral defeat clamps a perverse hold on his political party, plunging the nation into a schism of culture and purpose more vivid than any since the Civil War. Some, like writer Robert Kagan, fear that American democracy hangs in the balance.

Preoccupied with such domestic pressures and American voters, the US has resorted internationally to unilateral moves that has had allies wondering if the Biden administration's allegedly globalist world view is in effect not just a nicer mask for Trump's "America First" mantra, which has support in Congress, where globalization is still blamed for the loss of American jobs.

"Buy America" provisions affecting Canada, and protectionist tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from the EU, remain from the Trump era. The chaotic American exit from Afghanistan blindsided loyal NATO allies. For the sake of a surprise deal meant to rattle China and provide, in 19 years, submarines to Australia, the US trashed France. Closer to home, the US declines to respect a 1977 Can-

“ In bilateral relations, Canada tries to mobilize support in US public and political arenas, and show empathy with Biden’s administration that perhaps encouraged resolution of the Canada-China hostage crisis. ”

ada-US Treaty on Transit Pipelines to block interruption by the state of Michigan of a pipeline for Canadian oil vital to Quebec and Ontario.

In bilateral relations, Canada tries to mobilize support in US public and political arenas, and show empathy with Biden's administration that perhaps encouraged resolution of the Canada-China hostage crisis.

But more broadly, Canadians and others hope that the US will lean in to lead the positive reform of the world's multilateral system, whose creation the US spearheaded after emerging victorious from the ruins of the Second World War.

That idealistic and pragmatic sense of mission, related to America's original sense of exceptionalist promise, became more defensive and self-interested as the Cold War re-cast the challenges. The American public's sense of exceptionalism became in the process increasingly invested in the necessity of maintaining unrivalled power, and of remaining "number one" among the world's nations. All this forms the eternal puzzle of America itself, its sense of mission, self-absorption, and often ambivalent relationship to others, the subject of mountains of commentary and analysis.

We might look to literature for insight. Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" from "Leaves of Grass." (1855) asks: "Do I contradict myself? very well then, I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

Today, with the loudest political voices split into warring, distrustful halves, the competition between de-

fining myths and objective reality is stark. Scott Fitzgerald made the sense of national greatness and exceptionalism, the "American Dream," the allegorical subject of "The Great Gatsby" (1926). He cites America's sense of its unique promise, felt by its first white settlers who came to occupy the "fresh, green breast of the new world," against the ensuant contradictions of "the savage violence of the frontier brothel and saloon." He depicts Jay Gatsby's "extraordinary gift for hope" as America's affirmation of the belief that all is possible, but vests it in his murky past as a swindler.

The ambivalence recalls Graham Greene's "The Quiet American" set 30 years later in Vietnam where American interventionist idealism would crash and burn. CIA operative "Pyle" is there as "a soldier of democracy," "absorbed in...the responsibilities of the West, determined to do good...to a country, a continent, the world," Fowler, Greene's cynical Brit narrator, asserts he "never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused."

Gatsby's relentless attention to the "drums of his (own) destiny" was more self-centered than Pyle's but also caused a world of trouble. He clawed and possibly killed on his route to what he perceived as the American grail: the rewards of being rich. His obsessive but elusive prize would be Daisy Buchanan—whose voice was "full of money."

Fitzgerald began a short story written around then by describing very rich people as "different from you and me." He defined that difference in *Gatsby* through his portrayal of right-wing white supremacist Tom Buchanan and his feckless wife



A September 1921 photographic portrait of writer F. Scott Fitzgerald and wife Zelda, taken at Dellwood, approximately a month before the birth of their daughter Scottie. *Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society*

Daisy as “careless” people. “They smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made.”

In *The Moveable Feast*, Ernest Hemingway recalled the line about how the rich are different from you and me by sneering, “Yes, they have more money.”

Substitute “military power” for “money,” and Fitzgerald’s description of the dominating Buchanans might stand for the impression America makes today in a world

faced with the mess they made and left in Iraq and Afghanistan. Canadians who have spent lives working on international security issues with US colleagues know vividly how the customary assumption of unrivalled US military power on the part of American officials, military operators, and national security pronouncers has indeed made them “different from you and me.”

Frankly, they don’t get other people’s motives very well. Of course, millions of Americans have gone abroad as diplomats, scholars, humanitarians, teachers, and business people and do understand others, but they rarely inhabit the political-security milieu that frame the

US political-military-technology narrative. Instead of figuring out what makes other people tick, the national security “blob” counts on US military dominance. To obtain influence in foreign countries, they rely on the CIA to identify local varieties of “our guy”—corrupt but compliant politicians, venal warlords, self-promoting fraud artists, whoever seems like an authoritative proxy to deliver the people, once overwhelming power has blown away armed opposition. Historian Andrew Bacevich in *After the Apocalypse*, blames this division of labour and such blind confidence in the technology of weaponry for America’s lost wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan to military inferiors.

Identification with vast differentiating power “from you and me” is a syndrome that dies hard for superpowers. Soviet-born writer Gary Shteyngart tells of a return visit to post-Soviet Russia. His agitated cab driver wanted to get out to America, but couldn’t get a visa. Shteyngart suggested he try Canada instead. “Canada???” the disheveled cabbie snorted as he spat out the window. “Impossible! I could only live in a superpower!”

After the USSR collapsed, the US enjoyed being the lone “hyperpower.” As Madeleine Albright put it in a 1998 interview, “If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future.” In her speech accepting the Democratic nomination in 2016, Hillary Clinton also reached back to the exceptionalist sense of self: “America is great because America is good.”

But polarized by inequity and grievances of all kinds, the nation succumbed to a nativist “America First” dissembler. As division persists and as China and others rise, America’s “number one” status now seems to many abroad more of a defiant and nostalgic boast than a safe bet.

But is it? America's allies want to believe the best of America can come through. Though routinely humble on most matters, Joe Biden advises "don't bet against America." There is no need for him to preside over American retreat.

Different routes exist to renewing US leadership in a changing world.

According to the version now dominant with the national security "blob", long-term strategic competition with China should be the prime organizing principle. The Atlantic Council anticipates "new alliance frameworks that connect transatlantic and transpacific partners ... under a common umbrella to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific."

Much of the rhetoric, including Biden's, frames this competition in terms of democracies versus authoritarians. The President indeed hopes to convene democracies at a summit to mobilize solidarity. US power remains a security comfort for countries in the Indo-Pacific region keen for constraints to China's coercive behaviour. But while no-one would want a world led by China as a unipolar superpower, there is no keenness for a new ideological Cold War, a division of the world in two, especially for the sake of shoring up US primacy and maximum global influence.

Another non-divisive route for American global leadership is to help the world re-create in today's terms the cooperative, effective, and inclusive rules-based multilateral system US leadership anticipated in 1945. In a recent closed conference sponsored by the Canadian International Council and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 20 Canadian and German scholars, experts, and practitioners acknowledged that our new era's changes in the distribution of global influence and power call for transformative thinking.

Louise Frechette, former Deputy Secretary General of the UN, advised

that it must pay heed also to the generally neglected 150 most vulnerable members of the "silent majority" of the global community. They will support a more effective rules-based international order because it represents their best protection from coercion from greater powers.

But they wish a fairer, more equitable order, seeing systemic unfairness such as the current inequitable distribution of COVID vaccines as toxic to global confidence. Democracies will support human rights unconditionally and contest challenges from China and Russia to democratic principles (while working on getting our own houses in order) but should cease assuming the "rule of law" in international activity is synonymous with a need of domestic democratic governance. For many in the world, the West's reflexive expectation that world order should be "liberal" evokes fears of domination of the system by Western states acting in their own interests, not necessarily a dismissal of the liberal democracy values of transparency and human rights.

“ If the US could re-direct its diplomatic power to such a drive for transformative change in the interests of all, it could be a global strategic game-changer more decisive than spending money and talent in races to stuff our oceans with more nuclear submarines. ”

Strategic competition between China and the US is a forefront reality of our era. The world hopes for mutual accommodation on rules of the road. Most countries are allergic to the notion of rival "teams," fearing

the hardening of ideological and adversarial strategy will foreclose essential cooperative outcomes, and aggravate multiple dangers including an accelerated and proliferating arms race.

During the CIC-Adenauer conference, German and Canadian panelists urged a resolution to the wider global competition between countries that privilege multilateral cooperation within a rules-based world order, and those that favour pursuing their interests in the international arena via national competition, that notably includes China, Russia and often the US.

Progress will be supported by a more variable geometry of alliances, coalitions and informal solidarity groups to mobilize cooperative solutions to overcome the gridlock in the formal system, such as the Ottawa Group for World Trade Organization reform, or the Human Security Network that Canada and Germany supported with like-minded partners and civil society to advance an essential multilateral paradigm shift a quarter-century ago.

If the US could re-direct its diplomatic power to such a drive for transformative change in the interests of all, it could be a global strategic game-changer more decisive than spending money and talent in races to stuff our oceans with more nuclear submarines.

Ultimately, in an increasingly interdependent world, only multilateral tools of international cooperation can deliver vital transnational outcomes, with demonstrable benefit to our own societies. This could be America's leadership opportunity, offering fulfillment of its sense of exceptionalist promise from ages past. **P**

Contributing Writer Jeremy Kinsman is a former High Commissioner to London, and former Ambassador to Moscow, Italy and the EU.

Letter from the United Nations: Isolationism vs. Collective Action

As the world faces the complex problems of COVID, climate change and the increasingly apparent costs of the cyber revolution, the fourth “C” on the list—China—is acting as not just a geopolitical challenge on its own but as an obstacle to resolving other challenges. Ground zero of that dynamic is the United Nations, where, as Ambassador Bob Rae writes, all the tensions play out.

Bob Rae

After a year and half of the loss, fear and isolation of COVID-19, New York has made great efforts to return to its normal, manic pace. At the United Nations, September always marks the beginning of a new session—taking place both in person and now virtually on a wide range of media platforms. As in all New Year celebrations; a chance to reflect on what has gone before and what will emerge as dominant themes. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) calendar is so relentless, and so full of meetings, that it is often a challenge to distinguish between what is just noise, and what are, in fact, signals of trends whose impact will stay with us for a long time.

This year, the ongoing and persistent consequences of both the current pandemic and climate change stood out. COVID-19 has wrongly been described as a great leveller. It is much more a revealer and a magnifier. Well over five million people have lost their lives, and if new variants continue to emerge, it won't be disappearing any time soon. It is a truly global event, but one that has

been addressed locally and nationally, and therein lies the central problem. The virus has not made us more global in our collective outlook, it has turned each of us inward, isolated our reactions, and led to pressure on local and national governments to respond as quickly and effectively as they can to our personal needs and demands.

Governments with the means to do so have stopped at nothing to get the vaccine into waiting arms, and to enforce measures they deem essential to getting the virus under control. This, in turn, has created deep resentment in those parts of the world where governments do not have the same access to reliable vaccines, or the means to borrow the money to deal with both the health and economic fallout from the pandemic. The gap between rich and poor countries has been a constant feature of modern life, and it has been magnified by the current crisis. The speechifying that marks “high-level week”, where each country's leader addresses the General Assembly, was dominated by this sense of anger and frustration from those who have felt deeply that their country's plight has been ignored.

The reports and reviews of the global response to the pandemic are understandably full of the same messages, and to say that what happens next is a test of global solidarity is an understatement. The central difficulty is that most governments, and their populations, are more preoccupied with themselves than they are with the fate of the world. This isolationism, which is reflected on television screens day and night, makes the necessary and deeper commitments more difficult.

“*In the last decade, China has emerged as a major creditor able to leverage its economic power toward political outcomes, while insisting that it is still a developing country. We don't yet have the global financial architecture to deal with the breadth of that problem.*”

A major factor that differentiates this moment from global crises as recent as the 2008 financial meltdown—in response to which the G20 formulated a coherent, effective plan—are the growing roles of Russia and China, particularly the latter. In the last decade, China has emerged as a major creditor able to leverage its economic power toward political outcomes, while insisting that it is still a developing country. We don't yet have the glob-

al financial architecture to deal with the breadth of that problem. This tension will play out over the coming months and years.

Climate change reflects a similar tension. The impacts grow with each passing day—severe weather events, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, droughts, floods—the signs are unmistakable and documented in scientific and other reports that point to the inexorable impacts: movement of populations, aggravating conflicts, deepening economic divides, all proceeding apace with alarming consequences for human health and even survival. As always at the UN, there is yet another conference, at Glasgow in November, known as COP26, that will deplore the reality that targets have not been met, that things are getting worse, and that we are far from bending the curve (a phrase borrowed from the struggles with COVID-19). We know for sure there will be two weeks of rhetoric. Whether this will produce a credible and effective agenda for change is less certain.

What the COVID pandemic and climate change have in common is that they are both, without any doubt, global in nature. While national and local actions are essential to combating them, they are, by themselves, clearly insufficient to address these issues and their consequences. What is equally true is that they are chronic as well as catastrophic, and the economic and social fallout is having effects that are both long-lasting and deep-seated. The debates at the UN, in both the General Assembly and the committees and side meetings where more detailed discussions are taking place, make this very clear. These discussions are happening at the G7, the G20, all regional and other organizations, in both Geneva and New York, and at all points in between. We do not yet have credible plans to address either the immediate or long-term consequences.

For example, while various announcements were made by a number of countries—the US, the EU, the UK, Russia, China, and India, to name just a few—about sharing vaccines, none of

this amounts to a plan. Targets are set, but no clear decisions about how they will be met. This leads to deeper gaps in trust and confidence, and a collective sense of frustration among countries that do not have the means to deal with the health and economic crises that threaten to engulf them. Discussions in Geneva involving both the World Health and World Trade organizations on patent waivers and sharing production capacity have been so slow as to lead the newly chosen head of the WTO to muse about resignation.

“Neville Chamberlain coined the unfortunate phrase ‘little countries that are far away of which we know nothing’. There are no such places today, and that is a reality which we must continue to embrace.”

Climate change and COVID are far from being the sole focus of discussions at the UN: deepening political conflicts with profound consequences for human life are not diminishing. No part of the world is immune to the dangers: Venezuela/Colombia, Haiti, the Sahel in Africa, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Myanmar: each is the scene of great suffering, and debates that reveal deep-seated antagonisms between warring parties and the states that support different sides in the conflict. Saving future generations from the scourge of war was the original purpose of the United Nations, and it remains at its heart today. Canadian policy has to embrace one central thought: disengagement and indifference to these conflicts come with a clear consequence—malign forces will fill any vacuum. Extremism is fueled by poverty and powerlessness, and can turn to terrorism unless successfully confronted.

While military intervention has no great record of success, neither does neglect. Neville Chamberlain coined the unfortunate phrase “little countries that are far away of which we know nothing”. There are no such places today, and that is a reality which we must continue to embrace. What form engagement takes will be a matter of debate. But that we must engage cannot be in doubt.

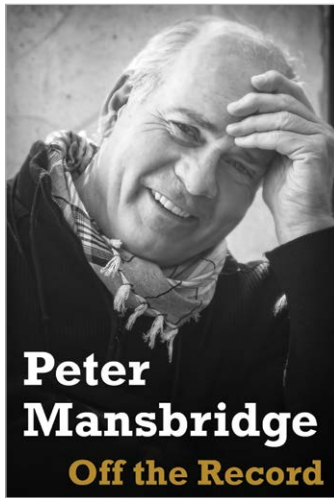
Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Marc Garneau’s September 27th speech to the General Assembly, “In Our Hands”, made the important point that autocracy and authoritarianism are on open display, and have to be exposed and opposed if we are to hold true to our commitments in the UN Charter whose 75th anniversary we celebrated last year.

The United Nations is a place where these conflicts play out in debates on resolutions, appointments to senior positions in the organization, the work and decisions of all the agencies, boards, councils, and commissions of the UN itself around the world. This, again, is what makes the principle of engagement so important. If Canada and others are disinterested in these critical decisions, we shall end up with organizations whose purpose and direction will not serve the interests of human dignity, civil liberties, and the rule of law, and whose public servants are reporting to home capitals and not to the UN itself. These battles are fought outside the glare of publicity, and with not everyone understanding their importance and consequences.

We ignore these challenges at our peril. This is what makes understanding the bigger picture so important. We cannot sit on the sidelines, wringing our hands, shouting “woe is me” to the heavens. We have to roll up our sleeves and get to work. We join the world’s struggles with the clear sense that what we wish for ourselves we wish for others. This requires actions, and decisions, and not just words. **P**

Bob Rae is Canada’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

HOLIDAY BOOK REVIEWS



Mansbridge: The Man Behind the Voice

Off the Record

By Peter Mansbridge

Simon & Schuster/October, 2021

Review by
Anthony Wilson-Smith

In 1971, Shortly after stepping away from his 30-year role as anchor of CBC's *The National* in 2017, Peter Mansbridge grew a beard. He also began dressing more often in some of his favourite away-from-work clothes, including sweatshirts and jeans topped off by a ball cap. It was a welcome respite from the "uniform" of the clean-shaven face, dark suit and tie that were a daily fact of life through his broadcast career.

And it brought him something he hadn't had in a long time: relative anonymity. Visiting Toronto from his family home in Stratford, he discovered that he could go most places unrecognized—until, as he told a friend ruefully, "I open my mouth—and right away, it's pretty much all over."

The Voice—calm, friendly, authoritative and reassuring—has been part of Canada's soundtrack for more than half a century now. In the four years since he left the anchor's chair, Mans-

bridge's voice has remained present, but in different forms and venues. There are speeches, documentaries for the CBC and other networks around the world, his high-ranked daily podcast, *The Bridge*, on satellite radio—and now, *Off the Record*, his second book in less than two years.

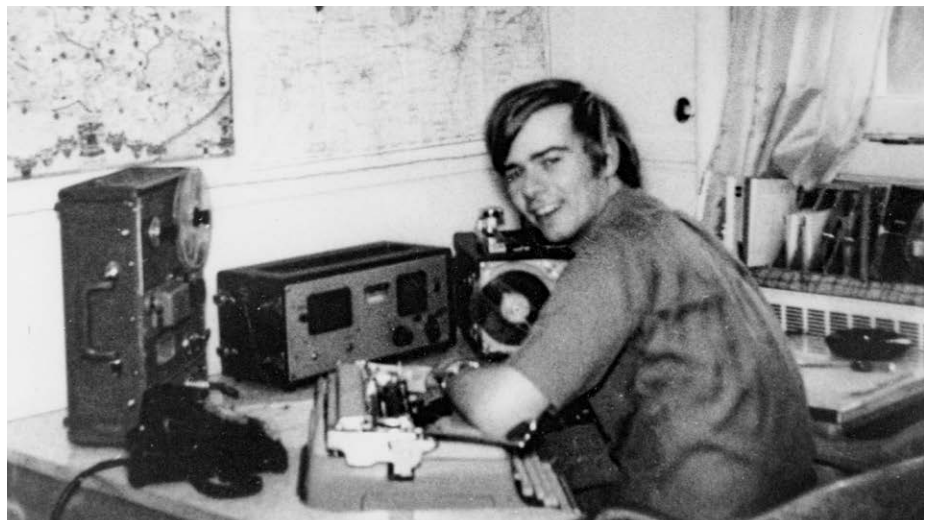
The new offering seems likely to eclipse even the best-selling status of his previous book, *Extraordinary Canadians*—for different reasons. In the first book, Mansbridge and co-author Mark Bulgutch (longtime friend and CBC producer) submerged their own voices, choosing a series of accomplished (though in many cases unknown) Canadians to profile and letting them tell their stories directly. This book—written solely by Mansbridge—is very much in his own voice.

More than anything, Mansbridge loves a good story—not just the outcome of one, but also the context, people and circumstances that make it stand out. That's the guiding force behind *Off The Record*, which is less a chronological memoir than a greatest-hits package of behind-the-scenes anecdotes about exceptional people he has met, and times he has lived through. Some of those people include Margaret Thatcher (in a testy mood); Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, and Ringo Starr (rubbing elbows quite literally). His range of travel and experiences includes paying direct

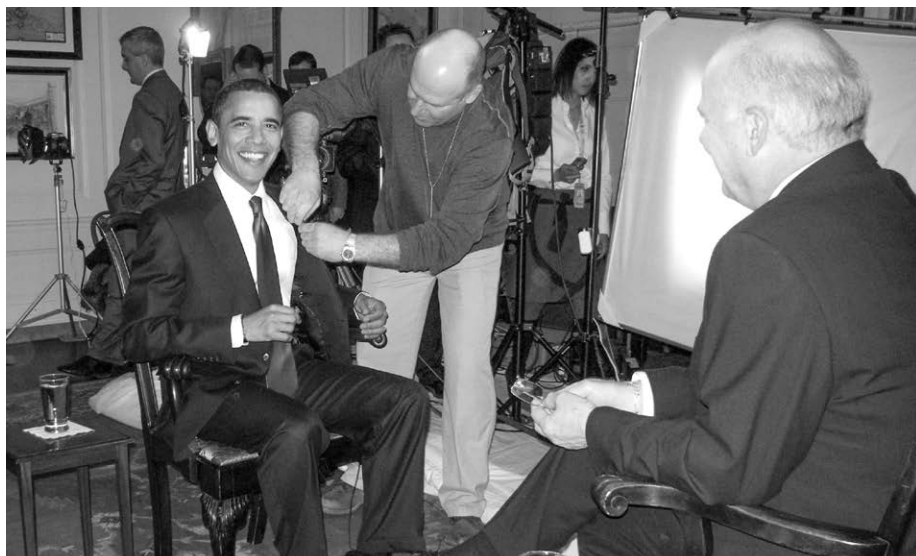
homage to the just-passed Pope John Paul II at the Vatican (and then being mistaken for the President of Poland); exploring our country's Far North on foot and by sea; landing in the middle of combat zones in Afghanistan and Iraq; reporting from Jerusalem in the aftermath of a close-by bombing minutes earlier, and from Sri Lanka in the immediate aftermath of its disastrous 2003 tsunami.

On the domestic front, there are finely-drawn stories about each of our country's recent political leaders: Mansbridge has known all recent prime ministers, from Pierre Trudeau on through to his son, the current prime minister—with early and then later-life exposure to John Diefenbaker thrown into the mix. He fondly recalls the private John Turner, a rum-drink exchange with Jean Chrétien at 10 a.m. one day, a self-described "almost dead" Brian Mulroney immediately after his 1983 leadership win, and describes a rare expression of strong emotion from the famously reserved Stephen Harper, whose first thought after the 2014 attack on Parliament Hill by a gunman was to worry about his mother worrying about him.

Those stories are interspersed with carefully-chosen details of his own life. They include Peter's childhood growing up first in England, then Malaysia, then Ottawa (his father was a



Early days—Mansbridge's first CBC job in local radio in Churchill, Manitoba. Photo courtesy of the University of Toronto Archives



A major exclusive with Barack Obama at the White House at the beginning of his presidency, in February 2009. *Leslie Stojic photo*



Mansbridge's last night hosting in studio after 30 years as anchor and chief correspondent of *The National*, June 30, 2017. *CBC photo*

Second World War Royal Air Force veteran and then British public servant.) The lovingly limned portraits of his parents are among the most touching sections. There is also the famous story of his “discovery”. Keen after a short stint in the navy for more adventure than Ottawa had to offer, the still teen-aged Mansbridge settled in Churchill, Manitoba in a job with a small airline that required a little bit of everything. He was announcing flight arrivals and departures one day when the local CBC radio manager happened to be in the airport, heard him, and immediately—without asking for further credentials—offered an on-air job on the late shift. So, it all began.

Mansbridge also provides, for the first time publicly, more complete details of how he almost went to CBS in 1987. At the time, he was backup anchor to Knowlton Nash on *The National*. The American network wanted him to host their soon-to-be revamped morning show; implicit (without saying so) was that if things worked out well, he would be a prime candidate to replace the struggling Dan Rather as host of the *CBS Evening News*. Even then, major American network anchors earned salaries ranging into millions, and nightly audiences were in the tens of millions of viewers. CBS network head Sir Howard Stringer arranged for him to come to New York and offered an immediate three-year contract in the millions. Mansbridge was earning \$150,000—far above the average Canadian wage, but a tiny fraction of the CBS proposal. Mansbridge was leaning toward accepting—but Nash ended that by offering to step aside to give him the anchor chair fulltime.

Overall, Mansbridge, in the grand tradition of a professional observer, has kept his private thoughts and life to himself. That’s suitable for a non-partisan journalist, and a quality with which he is exceedingly comfortable. His quick, dry humour, often self-deprecating, is well-known to friends and in ample evidence here. He has also expanded his community engagement since leaving daily journalism (among other things, he is a board member of *Historica Canada*,

the non-profit organization of which I am CEO.) On the other hand, his longtime marriage to the actress Cynthia Dale, his siblings, children (and grandchildren) and other aspects of his personal life are generally off-limits—something, as he is aware, that remains much more possible in Canada than the US.

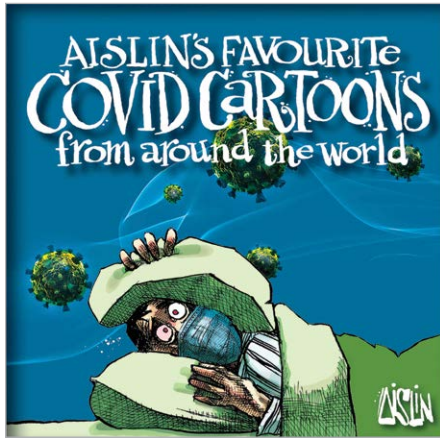
That sense of reserve is an anomaly in the white-hot environment of celebrity journalism today and 24/7 social media exposure in general. It also works greatly to Peter’s advantage, in terms of both his overall profile and with this book. By keeping his views to himself (other than his ill-fated, much-publicized fondness for the Toronto Maple Leafs) he has retained his image of trust with Canadians and avoided over-exposure, despite his nightly place for decades in millions of living rooms.

While he has spent much of his life mingling with some of the world’s most accomplished, best-known people, he knows better than to become part of the stories he covers. He retains the sense of wonder of someone who knows they have been given a particularly privileged seat from which to watch the world.

That awareness is evident in his chapter on being present during the nearly bombing in Jerusalem. He was still shaken when, on-air, a CBC anchor asked how many people had died. Mansbridge, by his own description, “lost it” and snapped back with a vivid, angry description of “body parts, strips of flesh, off the walls.” The show’s anchor and producer apologized—but Mansbridge apologized in turn, realizing he “would have asked something similar”.

He concludes: “Too often, in the comfort of the anchor chair on the other side of the world, we lose touch with the reality of what it’s really like out there.” But as this often-compassionate, always-engaging book shows, Mansbridge very seldom allows himself to forget. **P**

Contributing Writer Anthony Wilson-Smith, President and CEO of Historica Canada, is a former Editor of Maclean’s Magazine.



A Licence to Laugh in Trying Times

Aislin's Favourite Covid Cartoons

By Terry Mosher

Published by Aislin, 2021

Review by James Baxter

What's so funny about COVID-19? Terry Mosher can give you about 336 reasons to laugh, and that's just the start.

"They're still coming in," said Mosher, the world-renowned cartoonist, better known as Aislin, who just released a new book, *Aislin's Favourite Covid Cartoons from Around the World*. "It has been a really fascinating project, not to mention fun. And the response has been truly amazing."

While cautioning that not all of the cartoons are "thigh slappers", Mosher said the impetus for the book was simple: he was finding COVID to be

an almost endless source of material for his regular editorial cartoons, which appear in the *Montreal Gazette* and numerous other news outlets throughout Canada, and he began to wonder what else was out there. When he began informally polling his cartooning colleagues, they reported having similar experiences.

As the idea of a retrospective anthology of COVID cartoons took shape, Mosher began receiving submissions from his network of brilliant Canadian cartoonists, including Malcolm Mayes (Edmonton), Bruce MacKinnon (Halifax), Brian Gable (Toronto), Patrick Corrigan (Toronto), Guy Badeaux (Ottawa) and Serge Chapleau (Montreal). From there, like the pandemic itself, Aislin went global. Mosher received cartoons from all over the world, including from some surprising places.

Iran, Mosher said, was the least expected of all. The quality of the car-

toons from the Middle East and the level of dark humour as social com-



Arash Shayesteh, Iran



Michael de Adder, *The Toronto Star*



Barry Blitt, *The New Yorker*

mentary stood out. He said many of the best cartoonists in Turkey and Iran are women, and they don't pull punches. "Women are kind of leading the way over there." He said that

while satirizing thin-skinned leaders is usually off-limits in countries we generally associate with media repression, corruption and social commentary are fairer game.

With hundreds of cartoons flooding in, Mosher and his wife, Mary Hughson, decided to create a book that would build a sense of a shared experience in the present and a meaningful retrospective that can be revisited by future generations. Profits from the book sales will benefit front-line institutions and their exhausted workers.

"All the cartoonists and illustrators agreed to contribute their work for no charge since I will be donating a percentage of the book's profits to a Montreal hospital that has done valiant work during the pandemic," Mosher says in the book's preface. "In return, these colleagues have free use of any of my cartoons to support a worthy cause in their own communities."

But as we face our third winter of discontent and as news fatigue takes hold, Mosher's book takes on even greater importance.

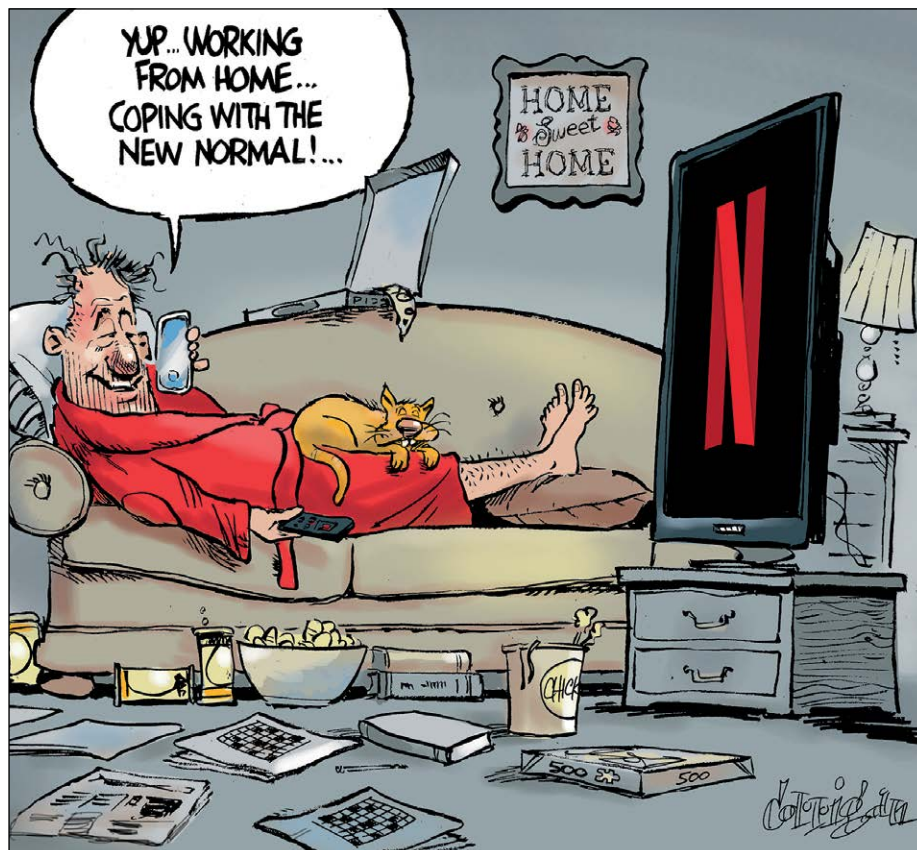
"The comic artists assembled in this anthology react to horrifying developments in close to real time, with a seriousness of purpose, variously providing not only perspective and humour, but occasionally assigning blame. They help us keep our wits about us," said Barry Blitt of *The New Yorker*. He added "Pomposity, pettiness, vanity and venality are all easy targets of a barbed pen... (but) the frightful COVID scourge is a once-in-a-century villain without a face to caricature." What makes Mosher's book so interesting is to see how cartoonists creatively gave COVID-19 a recognizable face—the universal spiky blob—and then used it to great effect to show how this ubiquitous enemy has upended the lives of everyone on earth.

While we have all been forced into our little bubbles, this collection encourages us to look beyond our pods, our cities and our national borders to see how others are being affected. And, though faced with so much bleak news and uncertainty, Mosher's anthology gives us a licence to laugh, which is, and has always been, the best medicine. **P**

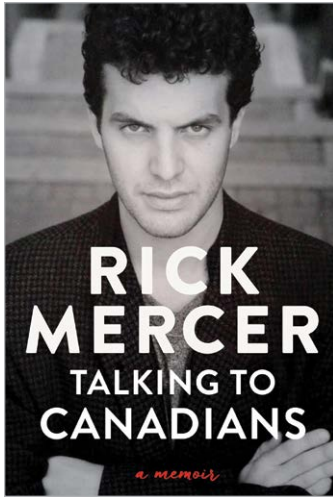
James Baxter is a journalist and writer based in Ottawa.



Bruce Mackinnon, *The Halifax Chronicle Herald*



Patrick Corrigan, *The Toronto Star*



Rick Mercer's 'Talking to Canadians': The Conversation Continues

Talking to Canadians: A Memoir

By Rick Mercer

Penguin Random House, 2021

Review by
Anthony Wilson-Smith

For someone whose Twitter tag is “anger is my cardio”, Rick Mercer has a not-so-dirty secret: he’s happy, content and grateful for the most important aspects of his life. Those include his upbringing in the community of Middle Cove, Newfoundland; his long personal and professional relationship with his partner, producer Gerald Lunz; his parents and family, his career, and the country in which he lives.

In fact, when Mercer was in the midst of writing his new memoir, *Talking to Canadians*, in the summer of 2020, he told a friend that his biggest concern was that “my childhood was wonderful and my family members are terrific, so how the hell can I make this book exciting?”

The answer, as the thoroughly engaging final product makes clear, is that Mercer is incapable of being boring. Just turned 52, he is three decades removed from the selectively

angry young man who burst on the scene in 1990 with his one-man play, the not-so-briefly titled *Rick Mercer's Show Me the Button: I'll Push It—or Charles Lynch Must Die*. (The title was sparked by a column written by Lynch, a legendary Ottawa commentator over many decades, that slighted Newfoundland. Lynch gleefully showed up at the opening night of the show in Ottawa, plugged it in his column, and the two became friends of a sort.)

Today, Rick's hair is more silver, and his reputation as a comic and satirist is baked into the country's DNA. But he remains a master of the timely rant—carefully calibrated, elegantly phrased takedowns of whoever is perpetrating the greatest foolishness any given week. The restless energy that characterizes his career shows no signs of abating.

“A key to Rick's enduring popularity is his extraordinary ability to read the room—to absorb the collective mood of Canadians and reflect it back to them in condensed, entertaining form.”

Talking to Canadians reflects the same vivid conversational style so familiar to millions of Canadians. For example, describing the Lynch column that set him off, Mercer says the writer “might as well have attached booster cables to my ears and run every drop of power generated in Labrador through my cerebral cortex.”

The book, in traditional memoir narrative form, traces his life from his birth to present times. But his career is in midstream, so rather than an end-of-line summing up, it's more a pause for reflection, leavened by his continuing wonder at it all working out so well.

A key to Rick's enduring popularity is his extraordinary ability to read the room—to absorb the collective mood of Canadians and reflect it back to them in condensed, enter-

taining form. When he and Gerald Lunz were planning what would become the 15 season-long *Rick Mercer Report*, they understood that Canadians were feeling buffeted by collective uncertainties and needed reminders of their country's strengths. They decided that while they would lampoon politics and politicians, the show would celebrate the rest of Canada. The operating rule, he writes, was ‘at this show, we don't’s—on Thunder Bay’—or anywhere else within the country's borders.

If a town is big enough to have a theatre or meeting hall, chances are Mercer has done a show there, or perhaps visited because he heard of a local, quintessentially Canadian attraction worth sharing with a national audience. If members of Canada's military are on peacekeeping missions far beyond our borders, Rick is likely to be there, bearing best wishes from home and bringing theirs back in turn. The sections of this book on visits to Bosnia and Afghanistan are among the most emotional.

As for politicians, the withering snark he delivers with such gusto is born of a mix of affection and frustration. He genuinely likes (most) politicians, observing that “walking around Parliament Hill with a cameraman and armed with a Parliamentary Press Gallery pass was everything I'd ever wanted.” For every time he lured an unwitting pol into a career-shortening clip, there was a moment when he humanized a politician in particular or politics generally (the naked leap into a lake with now-United Nations Ambassador Bob Rae comes to mind.)

What's startling is to realize how many times Mercer has not only successfully satirized the news, but also become part of it. In 2000, Canadian Alliance party leader Stockwell Day promised that if he became prime minister, he would pass legislation requiring a referendum for any petition that obtained more than 350,000 signatures. Rick, then a charter member of the *This Hour has 22 Minutes* cast, launched a petition calling for Day to change his first name to ‘Doris’, after the iconically perky American singer and actress. Even though it was early days for the internet, the petition quick-

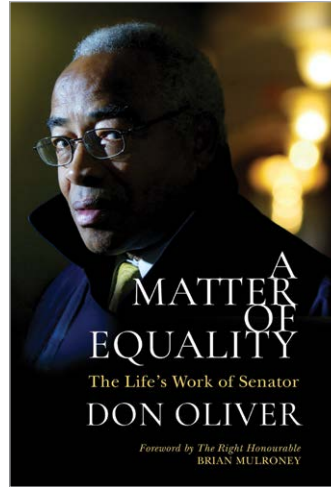
ly received more than one million signatures. Day—Stockwell, not Doris—shelved the idea.

Then, there was the way Mercer played off Americans' eternal, usually benign ignorance of Canada with the *Talking with Americans* feature, in which he asked absurd, patently false questions about Canada to which they faithfully, cheerfully and solemnly responded in a way that betrayed hilarious levels of bilateral ignorance. Among the victims: presidential candidate George W. Bush accepting the endorsement—shouted at him by Mercer, feigning the role of reporter—of Canadian prime minister “Jean Poutine”. (By then president, Bush joked about the incident during a visit to Halifax years later.)

What sets Mercer apart from most performers is that he's as happy listening to his audience as he is talking to them. In private conversation, his stories invariably have more to do with people he meets rather than himself. The cutting humour of his rants is juxtaposed against his delight in most aspects of Canada and the people within. Wherever he goes, he keeps in mind the advice of his partner, Gerald Lunz: “Just do what you're good at, just talk to people.” When he writes that, “We were going to the greatest place on earth via Bearskin Airlines...we were headed to Iqaluit, Nunavut”, he means it. Although, of course, he might fondly apply the same description to other places across Canada—in particular, of course, anywhere in his beloved Newfoundland.

That passion—for Newfoundland, all of Canada and the people who live within—sparks the fire that feeds Mercer's trademark rants. It is also evident throughout this alternately funny, moving and always heart-felt book. **P**

Contributing Writer Anthony Wilson-Smith, President and CEO of Historica Canada, is a former Editor of Maclean's Magazine.



Don Oliver's A Matter of Equality: The Epitome of 'Ubuntu'

*A Matter of Equality:
The Life's Work of a Senator*

By Don Oliver

Nimbus Publishing/October, 2021

Review by
Wanda Thomas Bernard

Senator Don Oliver has given us a fabulous gift by sharing his life story in his own words. As the first African Nova Scotian, indeed the first African Canadian man to be appointed to the Senate of Canada, he is a notable Canadian. We all have much to learn about the fight for equality and social justice through his lived experiences, growing up as he did poor and Black in racially segregated and race-conscious Nova Scotia. Positioned for purpose throughout his life, Senator Oliver is an elder statesman, ambassador, community builder, mentor and strong advocate for human rights, whose life is a road map of triumph in the face of adversity.

Senator Oliver's career and life's work fully embody the concepts of “racial uplift” and human rights advocacy. His work has influenced, inspired, and changed the lives of countless people, either directly or indirectly.

Oliver not only sought education and opportunity for himself but assumed the huge responsibility to fight for freedom and justice for others. From the time he became aware of the systemic racial oppression of fellow African Nova Scotians, he worked with others to fight against anti-Black racism, throughout his career. Oliver shares many valuable life lessons that can help others who are struggling to find a way out of oppressive conditions. Furthermore, we get a glimpse into his work as a senator, which gave him a national and international platform to lead strategies for systemic change.

This book will have relevance to multiple audiences. First, parliamentarians can learn from the ways in which the former senator viewed his parliamentary responsibilities. His interdisciplinary, collaborative approaches to policy development are insightful. Secondly, this book is a call to action for people in leadership positions, especially those with white privilege who have the power and ability to fulfill his vision of a racism-free society as a matter of equality. This is a call for you to use your power in a way that helps move the dial on public policy in a way that will elevate and improve members of equity—deserving groups and communities.

Third, for students, advocates, allies and supporters of equity and social justice movements, the book offers critical hope that turns anger into action. There are many life lessons that can guide us to the next stage of work in the fight for equality. This is truly a passing of the torch.

Oliver's thoughtful strategies, including through becoming a part of powerful systems to affect change from the inside, gave him opportunities to cultivate relationships with those in power to help in the fight for systemic change. His ability to ask questions, to garner support and to speak truth to power in each space he occupied is a valuable model for activism.

Among the most compelling elements of this story are the strategies Oliver used to develop social policy. His work in securing funds to do research that led to the Business Case

for Diversity was seminal and we continue to build on it today. Oliver used collaborative approaches to build policy, for example hosting “Dialogue Dinners” with deputy ministers and senators—breaking down silos and getting these key players talking to each other about issues that truly mattered to Canadians.

The book also offers an unprecedented look at who Oliver is as a person, a husband, a father, a brother, and a friend. He values each of his relationships, is a loyal and dedicated human being with deep spiritual roots and values. He is humble, caring, supportive and community minded. I found it intriguing to learn about his younger self. He remained focused, goal-directed, sought and received mentor-

“ *This book is a call to action for people in leadership positions, especially those with white privilege who have the power and ability to fulfill his vision of a racism-free society as a matter of equality.* ”

ship with humility, and continues to pay it forward to future generations. His tenacity is infectious. He was not stopped by racism but became more determined to succeed and to bring others along in spite of it—the embodiment of Angela Davis’ motto, “lift as you climb”.

As an African Canadian senator and an African Nova Scotian activist, I was very humbled and moved by reading this autobiography. I’m one of the students who benefitted from Oliver’s leadership, mentorship, sponsorship, and human rights advocacy. I stand on his shoulders. The word Ubuntu comes to mind: “I am because you are! You are therefore I am”. Oliver’s message of hope and commitment to give back to one’s community had taken root in my own journey long before I was able to read this amazing story of his. **P**

Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard is an Independent Senator from East Preston, Nova Scotia and the first African Nova Scotian woman to be appointed to the Senate.

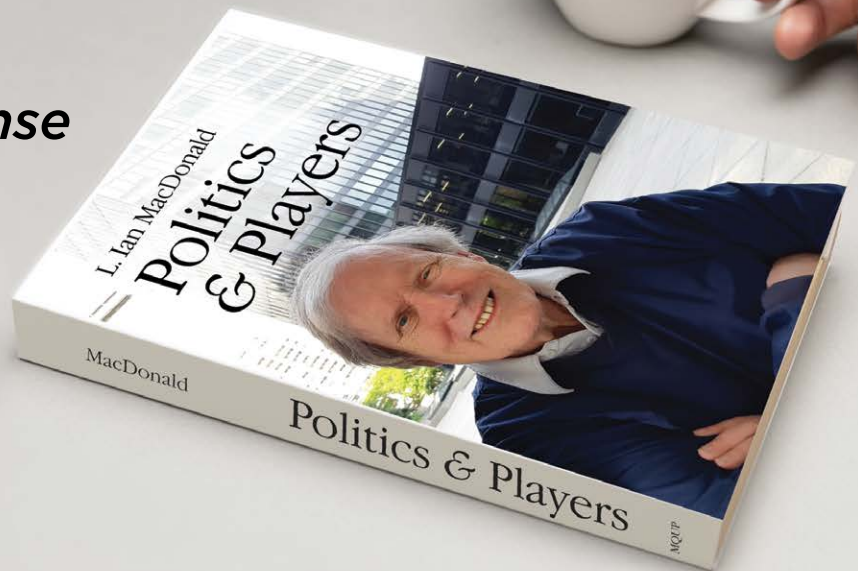
COMING THIS FALL

“A compelling sense of the humanity of politics”

GRAHAM FRASER, Senior Fellow, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa

“With his characteristic clear, graceful prose, Ian MacDonald takes us into backrooms and onto stages alongside major players.”

ANTHONY WILSON-SMITH, President and CEO, Historica Canada



L. Ian MacDonald’s *Politics & Players* will be available this fall from McGill-Queen’s University Press. You can order now online at policymagazine.ca



Beyond the Pandemic and the Election— Helping Charities Help Canadians

An Open Letter to Canadians,

A new agenda for Canada comes down to one word—recovery.

Recovery from the pandemic. Recovery of health. Recovery of the economy. That’s a bi-partisan agenda for Canada.

Beyond the election, the challenge is getting there. Recovery has always been the mission of Canada’s charities. Recovery and renewal, by re-investing in Canadians.

From child care and job training, to home care for seniors and housing for the homeless, from healthcare to education, Canada’s charities have always been there for Canadians.

Never have charities been more needed, and their services more in demand, by Canadians.

By last spring, a year into the pandemic, demand for charities’ services had risen by nearly 50 percent, while charitable organizations saw their revenues drop by 44 percent, according to the Imagine Canada Sector monitor. At a time when their services have never been more needed, they’ve never been more challenged in terms of their financial ability to deliver.

The new Parliament can help, at virtually no cost to government.

Ottawa can simply eliminate the capital gains tax on donations of private company shares and real estate to charities. This would generate an estimated \$200 million per year, every year going forward. It would trigger donations to over 85,000 registered charities serving millions of Canadians.

We’ve been talking about this for years. It’s time to get it done. For Canada’s charities. For Canada. And for Canadians.

Yours sincerely,

Donald K. Johnson, O.C., LL.D.

Director, UHN Foundation
Chair, Vision Campaign, Toronto Western Hospital
Member, Advisory Board, Ivey Business School, Western University
Chairman Emeritus & Director, Business / Arts
Member, 2021 Major Individual Giving Cabinet, United Way Greater Toronto

“From child care and job training, to home care for seniors and housing for the homeless, from healthcare to education, Canada’s charities have always been there for Canadians.”

THE GOLD STANDARD IN SUSTAINABILITY



Long before ESG became a market mantra, its governing principle – sustainability – was already an integral part of the way Barrick does business, deeply embedded in our organisational DNA.

Powered at all levels by Barrick’s partnership philosophy and a close relationship with all stakeholders, from investors to host communities, our ESG strategy ranges widely from the support of local development through care for the environment to the protection of human rights. At every point it has the same objective: to make Barrick the industry leader in sustainability as well as value creation.

