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## What the NDP are scared of: Justin Trudeau

GERALD CAPLAN

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Although it's not often acknowledged within the party, many New Democrats are worried sick about Justin Trudeau. They should be. The NDP can't win power without attracting a substantial new group of progressive Canadians who previously voted Liberal. Yet these are exactly the people who might find Mr. Trudeau appealing enough to keep them in the Liberal camp. Nor do party strategists have much of a clue how to counter this first flush of incipient Justinmania.

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New Democrats feel hard done by, and no wonder. On the basis of precious little, much of the media has been lavishing star treatment on Mr. Trudeau. He receives uncritical front page coverage for doing and saying nothing. Maclean's magazine devoted a good part of last week's issue to singing Mr. Trudeau's praises, treating old pals as credible sources. Stories without a soupcon of news are often accompanied by photos of him and family that any politician would die for.

And yet, when you search for the beef beneath the sizzle, you find a strange phenomenon. It's tempting to parody or satirize the message that Mr. Trudeau has articulated so far, until you realize that no one parodies him better than he does himself. Since every one in Canada knows he's been criticized for being a featherweight, you'd have thought he'd immediately set out to reveal his true gravitas.

Yet what Mr. Trudeau has so far offered Canadians is something rare in the Hobbesian world of politics. What he has offered is love. He seems to think that all you really need is love. Mr. Trudeau bubbles over with love. As he announced at his campaign kick-off, "I love Montreal. I love Quebec. And I am in love with Canada." Jack Layton told us that love is better than anger. But for politicians, love without a serious



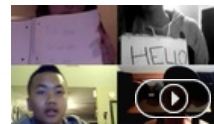
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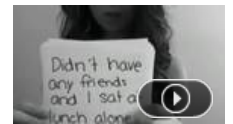
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Nor does the love stop with Mr. Trudeau. Describing her husband at the launch of his leadership campaign, Sophie Grégoire called him "The man I love" and made it clear she was selflessly donating him to Canada. Yes, it meant a "sacrifice" for her family, but it was for a "noble cause." Canada, it seems, needs Mr. Trudeau even more than she and the kids do.

This was quite an endorsement of a man who so far in life has moved from snowboarding instructor to private school teacher to third-party backbencher. But his real destiny is now finally clear. You might even think he was entitled to it.

Mr. Trudeau agreed. As he put it to Maclean's: "Can I actually make a difference? Can I get people to believe in politics once more? Can I get people to accept more complex answers to complex questions? I know I can. I know that's what I do very well. Why am I doing this? Because I can, not because I want to. Because I must."

He must. He has discovered his calling, his entitlement.

When asked by The Globe's Jane Taber to describe his big weaknesses, he finally came up with this: "Sometimes I'm impulsive about the things I say. I try to answer the questions that are asked...Has it got me in trouble? Yes. Will it get me in trouble? Yes." Like his wife, he sees in himself remarkably few flaws.

Mr. Trudeau now matters a great deal, at least to much of the media. Yet when they cover the full panoply of complex questions asked and answered, one finds there is no there there.

Listen as he tries to inspire his audience, asking them for help "because this road will be one long, Canadian highway. We will have ups and downs. Breathtaking vistas and a few boring stretches. And with winter coming, icy patches. But we will match the size of this challenge with hard, honest work."

Listen as he offers his bold new vision and solid new ideas. "We need to learn what we have forgotten. That the key to growth, to opportunity, to progress, is a thriving middle class." And jobs are important too, he doesn't fail to add. How has everyone else blinded themselves to these complex truths?

Mr. Trudeau boldly challenges his listeners: "Think about it for a moment: when was the last time you had a leader you actually trusted? And not just the nebulous 'trust to govern competently,' but actually trusted, the way you trust a friend to pick up your kids from school, or a neighbor to keep your extra front door key? Real trust? That's a respect that has to be earned, step by step."

While Thomas Mulcair, once briefly the new boy on the block, immerses himself in crucial and controversial issues and (one hopes) pursues serious new policy initiatives, determined to make the NDP a credible choice for government, Mr. Trudeau proffers self-parodying, sophomoric piffle.

Is this good enough for the Liberal Party? Is it good enough, as the NDP fears, for liberal Canadians? Is it enough for the media to continue peddling? So far, it seems it is.

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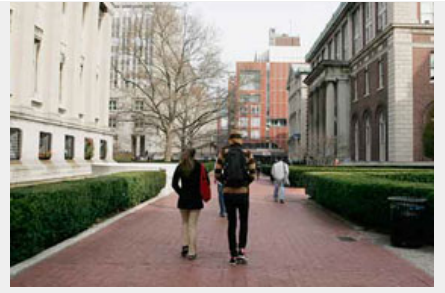


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