

The PPC's strength is their dedication to free speech

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The nationalist Brexit Party, led by outspoken euroskeptic Nigel Farage, came into existence last January. Four months later, it boasts 29 MEPs (Members of the European Parliament). By contrast, this past May, Canada's Green Party elected its second member of parliament after 36 years of existence.

There's a message here. The Green Party is not a "disruptor" of the status quo, and it doesn't represent a groundswell of voices who feel left out of the conversation. It's just a more fibrously left wing form of the same political granola served up by the NDP and the Liberal Party. It's not really needed. But the Brexit Party's success is a genuinely organic statement of anger directed at traditional parties by great swaths of citizens who not only felt disrespected and ignored, they actually were, by any objective standards, disrespected and ignored. It was needed.

Forty percent of Canadians routinely choose not to vote. A certain number are politically indifferent, but another number don't vote because they don't feel any of the parties represent their views. Normally, they don't feel worried enough to bestir themselves. Will the pattern hold in October?

Or is this Maxime Bernier's "disruptor" moment? His People's Party of Canada was officially launched in January, and it presently has more members than the Green Party. The PPC is fielding candidates in all 338 ridings, an impressive accomplishment given the time constraints. Their basic platform, which includes tax simplification, the abolition of supply management, as well as long-overdue abolition of inter-provincial tariffs, indicates commitment to fundamental conservative principles.

But those issues speak to the mind, not the heart, and a slew of anxious Canadian hearts are what is presently up for grabs. One of Bernier's great strengths is that in spite of years of political experience, he has not become jaded or cynical. He wears his own heart on his sleeve. Not a thespian, mantra-driven, lachrymose, pre-programmed "heart" of the kind Trudeau is so famous for, but an unsentimental heart full of deeply-considered convictions that beat, like ruggedly-manned boats, against the progressive current upon which Justin Trudeau is a dreamily bobbing twiglet.

One of those convictions is that chronic breast-beating about the sins of the past and suppression of pride in Canadians' national identity is creating an unhealthy social and cultural environment, dominated by grievance-mongering special-interest activism that corrodes national confidence and unity of purpose.

Another related, perhaps pivotal strength is Bernier's passion for freedom of speech.

Over the last decade, and all over the West, democratic nations have sailed into politically choppy waters, with populist parties and anti-establishment leaders making steady gains. Many people feel stifled by political correctness. It's like a giant plastic bag settling over the culture, making it more and more difficult to breathe freely. You can't voice concern about immigration without getting slapped down as a racist (even though a recent Leger poll shows 63% of Canadians think our immigration rates are too high). You can't voice concern about biological males having access to women-only spaces without being attacked as a transphobe. You can't voice concern about late-stage abortion without being vilified as a misogynist.

In fact, more and more, you must affirm—and sometimes act out (I am thinking here of health professionals bullied into performing or providing referrals for medical interventions they conscientiously object to, with the imprimatur of the Supreme Court of Canada)—the dogmas our chattering-class elites believe, whether you agree with them or not. You know you're not a racist or a transphobe, but you start censoring your speech anyway. Sometimes you say things you don't believe, or even sign attestations to thoughts you don't uphold, because it's uncomfortable to be publicly shamed, or you need the government grant, or, as in the case of the Law Society of Ontario's compelled values attestation, because you won't get professional standing if you don't.

The Conservative Party does not represent these Canadians. Andrew Scheer has made it clear that he will be walking very close to the wall on all politically correct issues that cannot be challenged without triggering rage from ideologues and their political puppets.

Examples of his hypersensitivity to progressive shibboleths abound.

London candidate Salim Mansur just got turfed by the CPC, for example, because he is a democratic Muslim who speaks out against Islamism. Islamism is a serious problem in the West, but we have now arrived at a moment where a national leader is so cowed by political correctness that he won't defend a candidate who speaks objective truth about a known threat to our national security.

For another, recently Scheer removed MP Michael Cooper from a Parliamentary Justice Committee and forced him to apologize for speaking the truth to a Muslim witness about the Christchurch mosque killer (Brenton Tarrant was not motivated by conservative views, as the Muslim witness alleged; he was on the contrary an eco-facist and an admirer of left-wing totalitarians) and acquiesced to Cooper's quotes from the killer's manifesto being expunged from the record, an unprecedented Orwellian impulse that revolted conservatives without gaining Scheer a single new vote from non-conservatives.

Fears around the erosion of free speech have been simmering in a non-organized way for decades in Canada, but it took two shock-and-awe incidents to create what one might call a free-speech movement in Canada.

The first shock wave followed University of Toronto psychology professor Jordan B. Peterson's 2016 release of three videos, in which he inveighed against the dangers of Bill C-16, which included spurious new rights of "gender identity" and "gender expression," legislation that would make failure to use "preferred pronouns" punishable by law. These videos went viral, literally inspiring millions of already vaguely alarmed minds to a state of articulate resistance.

The second event was the public release of Wilfrid Laurier University teaching assistant Lindsay Shepherd's recorded interrogation by her academic superiors for having exposed her students to Peterson's point of view – a tape that disturbed the nation with its unsavoury detail, exposing the duplicity, arrogance and inhumanity of typical humanities academics seized with Leninesque determination to suppress what they perceived as dissension in their party ranks.

For newly-awakened free-speech crusaders, both these galvanizing moments make Bernier's platform on free speech very attractive. The PPC would prevent the reinstatement of section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, and repeal freedom-abrogating C-16 and M-103, two particularly freedom-abusive initiatives. The obvious question arises: Is encouragement for the PPC, which has no chance of forming a government (this time), worth diminishing the CPC's chances of winning the next election? Shouldn't ousting the intellectually jejune and politically shambolic Justin Trudeau trump support for fine ideas with no hope of policy implementation?

In a telephone interview, I put that question to one of Lindsay Shepherd's earliest and most proactive supporters, David Haskell. A Laurier Liberal Arts associate professor, Haskell is the PPC candidate for the riding of Cambridge, Ontario, presently represented by Liberal Bryan May.

Originally approached by the Conservatives, Haskell was poised to accept their offer, especially since Cambridge riding has toggled between Liberal and Conservative in the past. But, in discussions, when he brought up his concerns over "diversity culture" and its effects, as in the Shepherd affair, he was told, "You can't say those things...we don't want to lose this election."

It was about this time that Bernier launched the PPC. Haskell reached out to Bernier immediately, and here he is. Haskell believes he has "a genuine shot," as the Liberals have squandered so much political capital over the last year (SNC-Lavalin, "male construction workers" et al).

As to the question of vote-splitting, Haskell told me, "If you're a Canadian with conservative leanings, this next federal election can't just be about getting Justin Trudeau out, it has to be about getting a "conservative" government in. And the CPC is no longer conservative, outside of their name. On running a deficit, keeping immigration numbers high, giving government handouts, even censoring conservative opinions, Andrew Scheer is the same as the Liberals. There's only one conservative party in Canada today and that's the PPC under Max Bernier. We're not splitting the conservative vote, we're gathering it, because people can see we're the real deal."

That is a harsh assessment of Scheer and his party, and I wish I could say that it is too harsh, but I am afraid I cannot. Many Canadian conservatives have been extremely patient with Scheer, hoping for a platform reveal that would reflect even some of their freedom-related concerns. That has not happened.