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Martin's new Canada sounds like the one we've already got

Watching Paul Martin and his "transition team" is like following the television melodrama *The West Wing*. The characters always confuse their own power-lust and bureaucratic infighting with national vision and real accomplishment.

Martin reminds me more all the time of John Turner. An old man pretending to be a young man. A political virtuoso, we're told, but somehow on television he always seems nervous. A policy-planner, we're told, who somehow reached his long-sought goal with no policy plan.

Instead what we get are buzz words--"transformative policy," "politics of achievement," "democratic deficit."

There are really only two kinds of leader, and two kinds of politician: those who see government as "dynamic," "creative" and "progressive," and those who see it merely as a dangerous necessity.

Martin, like most, is of the first sort, and the most irritatingly earnest variety. He BELIEVES--in himself, in his career, in his cliches, and in the miraculous power of the State to transform society, to guide and nurture, to get things done, to be the heart and mind and soul and conscience of the nation.

It's a 'sixties thing.

He fuels himself with metaphors about change. He talks about a "new deal," "a new confidence," and "great national achievements."

"The status quo," he declares challengingly, "is not an option."

For instance he's going to fix our failing health system. How? Apparently by putting a new national bureau in charge of it, and shoveling in a couple billion more tax dollars.

More bureaucracy and more government spending. How transformative!

He's going to rebuild trust from the provinces while at the same time invading their constitutional jurisdiction over urban affairs.

He's going to stop the Chretien practice of appointing party favorites to run as Liberal candidates in strategic ridings, while at the same time ensuring that 52% of Liberal candidates are women.

He will make peace with the West while increasing the presence of francophones in the civil service and refusing to appoint senatorial nominees elected in Alberta.

He wants a political system that "lets leaders lead," and parliamentary reforms that let backbenchers stop them from leading.

He wants stronger ties to the U.S., but also stronger ties to U.S. opponents.

He wants more spending but lower taxes while paying down the debt.

The more Martin declaims on how he's going to solve the urban green space crisis, solve the homeless crisis, solve the national

daycare crisis, solve the Indian crisis, and lead Canada into a decade as transformative as the 1860s, the more I can't help wondering if he's an idiot.

But he probably isn't. He understands there's an infinite capacity among most eastern Canadian voters for self-delusion. Martin shares it.

Politics to them isn't about maintaining a just governing order. It's about dreaming the impossible dream. The fact that their delusions actually wreck our country never seems to occur to them.

What really would constitute a new national vision is a leader who respects Canada's constitution and makes the nation's judges do the same, allows people to keep more of their money, liberalizes charitable exemptions to build society, and reduces government activities and intervention.

A leader, that is, who trusts Canadians to create their own solutions instead of having governments try and fail to do it for them.

THAT would be a new national vision.

- Link Byfield

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