

Canadians carried away by minister's bare shoulders: A provocative picture may help Kim Campbell become leader of her country. Hugh Winsor reports from Ottawa

From HUGH WINDSOR in Ottawa

Saturday 3 April 1993 23:02 BST

The Independent Online

SHE MAY read Tolstoy in Russian and play a mean Bach on the cello, but it was bare shoulders that put Avril Phaedra 'Kim' Campbell on a fast track to be Canada's next prime minister. Not since Pierre Trudeau was snapped sliding down a banister in Marlborough House - he was attending a Commonwealth leaders' conference shortly after being elected prime minister - has so much Canadian public attention turned on one photograph.

Ms Campbell, 46, is a twice-divorced Vancouver lawyer and university lecturer who has been in federal politics for less than five years. While obviously talented, intelligent and different, she has yet to reveal much of substance about how she would approach the leader's job. But she has been embraced by an electorate fed up with Brian Mulroney, who will stand down as Conservative leader and Prime Minister in June. The candidate picked by the party convention that month will automatically become prime minister until the election, which must be held by November.

Ms Campbell is being described as everything from Canada's Madonna to its Margaret Thatcher. The polls suggest that a Conservative Party led by her would double its support to more than 40 per cent, enough to overtake the Liberals led by Jean Chretien, who have topped the polls for the past three years.

Much of Ms Campbell's appeal can be traced to her cool, unstuffy handling of the media hullabaloo over the photograph: an arresting image of her standing, as if naked, behind a suit of lawyer's robes. It was taken almost three years ago, shortly after she became justice minister.

A Vancouver feminist photographer, Barbara Woodley, was assembling portraits for a book on unconventional women. Ms Campbell agreed to pose, holding the robes towards the camera to symbolise the law as a protection for women. Ms Woodley says they realised simultaneously that bra straps would detract from the aesthetic effect, and the minister agreed to drop them.

The result is a photograph that suggests far more than intended. Ms Woodley's book received little public attention at first, and became notorious only months later when the Ottawa Citizen spotted the portrait on display in the lobby of the National Arts Centre, and published it on its front page.

Ms Campbell has dismissed the fuss about the picture as 'a hoot', and says her only complaint is that no one has noticed that she has lost 30lb since it was taken. She represents a startling break

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from the greyness of most Canadian politicians. She has described herself as an intellectual, and once joked that she had a three-digit IQ.

During her speech to launch her campaign, she joked about the support she had received from 'raunchy ranchers', and said that was because 'they know that under this cool, arrogant, intellectual, urbane exterior, there beats the heart of a Texas line dancer'. (Line dancing is a new fad among country and western music fans.) On another occasion, she teased a male television technician, saying that his efforts to attach a microphone to her bodice was the closest she had had to a pass since her marriage broke up.

Propelled by her powerful media chemistry, Ms Campbell, at present Minister of Defence, is far ahead in the Conservative Party leadership race. Last week, she flew directly from the launch of her glitzy campaign to a conference of Nato defence ministers in Brussels. That was followed by a brief visit to London for discussions with the Defence Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, about Bosnia and Somalia.

Ms Campbell's independent streak surfaced early when, at 12, she rejected her given names, Avril Phaedra, and called herself Kim. As a talented musician - she plays classical piano and cello and more popular music on guitar - her father expected her to follow a stage career.

She chose, however, to **study** political science and, after an undergraduate degree at the University of British Columbia, she moved to the London School of Economics. She acquired a passable capacity in Russian and travelled in the Soviet Union for three months. After a temporary lecturing job in Vancouver, she married Nathan Divinsky, a professor and chess master 20 years her senior. The marriage broke up a decade later.

When she failed to obtain a permanent teaching position, she returned to university and obtained a law **degree**. While practising law, she became involved in politics on the local school board, then was elected to the provincial legislature. She switched to national politics in the 1988 election, and gained some attention for her strong support of Mr Mulroney's campaign to conclude a free trade agreement with the United States.

She was promoted quickly into the Cabinet, and within two years became minister of justice. She promoted a number of controversial Bills dealing with abortion, gay rights and other human rights issues, but her critics say her initiatives were dictated more by legal necessity than strong philosophical commitment.