

## IN CANADA, A VERY DIFFERENT TORY

By Charles Trueheart March 6, 1993

TORONTO -- It's only a matter of time before Kim Campbell's mouth gets her in trouble, just as her shoulders have. But these days lots of Canadians are telling poll takers they'd like the relatively untried but politically dazzling 45-year-old Vancouver politician to be their next prime minister.

In the 10 days since Brian Mulroney announced he would retire, Campbell has been basking in the unexpected glow of front-runner status. A former justice minister and Canada's current defense minister, she is the favorite in the early soundings to succeed Mulroney as leader of the ruling Progressive Conservative Party. Mulroney has said he will step down after the party convention, probably in June, to allow his successor to run as the incumbent prime minister in the general elections that must be called this fall.

It's early yet, but polls show Campbell with the clearest shot of any Tory at beating the opposition Liberal leader, Jean Chretien. Though she has more experienced competition, her fellow conservatives in the House of Commons are lining up to endorse a leadership bid she has not even announced. Her campaign strategists and well-wishers hopefully offer comparisons to Bill Clinton, and up the ante: Their candidate would be not just another leader of the next generation, but North America's first woman prime minister.

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One senior party official, who must remain neutral and therefore anonymous, puts it this way: "Clinton was able to convey a new approach to the process of politics. People in Canada are fed up with the ins too, and want to see that same kind of zip. Kim has managed to convey that she is a person who thinks outside the box."

The spotlight generates heat. Implicitly identifying the adversary they most fear, the opposition MPs wasted no time after Mulroney's resignation speech, prodding and baiting Campbell in the roughhouse "question period" in the House of Commons, where she has served only since 1988. Her admirers and strategists worry that she has created far greater expectations than she can possibly meet. As she struggles to keep ahead of the publicity curve, she's closed the door on all appearances and interviews and retreated to Vancouver to plan her campaign.

Campbell's cool rationality, caustic wit, intellectual bent and palpable confidence make her an attractive candidate, but they are combustible qualities. Campbell is known for having a tongue with a mind of its own, and thus far she has not tried to tame it.

"As far as I'm concerned, if I can't be who I am, it's not worth the candle," she told Graham Fraser in the *Globe and Mail* of Toronto a couple of months ago. "I'm not prepared to submerge

my own identity. I believe in truth in advertising: Here's who I am. I'm much too lazy to tie myself into knots."

For example, in a remarkable speech she made in November Campbell confessed that "in the course of my life in Ottawa my marriage has ended and I'm very far from home. I find life here often unspeakably lonely and very difficult." Almost all of her female cabinet and Tory caucus colleagues, she noted, are single or divorced too. (Childless, Campbell has been divorced once before.)

In the same speech, she spoke with bald rancor about the portrait of ambition that is often painted around her. "What is it about a woman's success or a woman's aspiration that triggers that term?" she asked. "It reminds me of the old definitions we used to circulate at law school about how a man is forceful, a woman is pushy. A man stands his ground, a woman is a complaining bitch."

In what may have been an unconscious rehearsal for what she expects to hear in the leadership campaign to come, she said, "We cannot encourage women to participate and then punish them for their successes or punish them for the effrontery of aspiring to do more."

## Revelations

Now, to the shoulders. Campbell's capacity for attracting attention unconventionally is known already, far beyond Canada, for a recently published photograph that seems to be regarded as risqué, at least for a cabinet official.

In 1990, a few months after being named minister of justice, the former law professor posed for an arty picture in a book called "Portraits: Canadian Women in Focus," which Doubleday Canada published last fall. In the picture, her shoulders are bare, her smile is vaguely ironic, and she is holding her judicial robes on a hanger before her. The eye understands her to be undressed even if, as photographer Barbara Woodley insists, she was wearing a strapless gown.

In the last 10 days, bitten by this totem of Campbellmania, newspapers in Canada and around the world have run and rerun the photo, repeating the frankly ludicrous assertion that Campbell is "the Madonna of Canadian politics."

Campbell called this silliness "a hoot." She told the Globe and Mail, "To some people my picture is very threatening. ... I think it is a lovely picture. It is not even faintly titillating. I wish it were. It's not a sexual picture. What it is is a picture of a woman who is very comfortable with her bare shoulders, is comfortable projecting her own image of the relationship between the role {minister of justice} and who she is."

She'd earlier delivered herself of one of her well-crafted sound bites: "The difference between me and Madonna is the difference between a strapless evening gown and a gownless evening strap."

Her political career, little more than a decade old, is notched, and illuminated, by such one-liners.

In 1986, with no elective experience beyond the Vancouver school board and a failed effort to win a seat in the provincial legislature, Campbell ignored cooler and older heads around her and ran for the leadership of the Social Credit Party. (In British Columbia, the so-called Socreds are the major conservative party at the provincial level.)

She came in dead last, and in her pique delivered this parting shot at William Vander Zalm, the man her party would go on to elect leader: "Charisma without substance is a dangerous thing." The crack stuck to Vander Zalm, subsequently elected premier of British Columbia, until the ignominious conclusion of his political career five years later, a fulfillment of Campbell's prophesy.

She was elected to the B.C. legislature in 1986, and two years later was recruited by the Progressive Conservatives to run for Parliament. During that 1988 campaign, she caught Prime Minister Mulroney's attention with her passionate defense of his controversial free trade agreement with the United States. Passionate and caustic. When hecklers finally got under her skin during a free-trade speech, she turned on them, wagging her finger, and said, "What are you people afraid of?" It was another line that would go on her political playbook. She won her seat in Parliament by the smallest margin in the country that year.

Mulroney was impressed all over again by the new MP from Vancouver when he listened to her make her maiden speech in the House of Commons -- alternating between English and fluent French. In Canadian politics, the skill is not uncommon. But in the West, where it's said they don't even like French toast, it is rare indeed. Among possible future leaders of a country founded by French-speakers and English-speakers and long divided by language, bilingualism is considered indispensable.

Campbell, who has studied Soviet history at the London School of Economics, also speaks what is said to be passable Russian. Canada's minister of national defense may get a chance to use it four weeks from now when Mulroney hosts Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin in Vancouver. That's another bit of political serendipity for Campbell: a historic summit in her home town during her campaign for the leadership.

Her intellect translates into arrogance and aloofness to many who have worked with her. She doesn't suffer fools gladly -- she takes them on, publicly calling an honorable member's ideas "stupidities" or "ridiculous statements." "She sounds like Margaret Thatcher sometimes," observes the senior party official. "She can put you right under the table with a cutting remark." This is the temper and temperament that her supporters fear, and that her rivals hope, will undo her quickly in the leadership race.

She is peeved by the recurrence of another quote that has followed her since she arrived in Ottawa: "As an intellectually oriented person, I like to socialize with people who read the same things as I do" -- she named Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Jane Austen -- "and have a similar level of education." Compounding the blunder, she added, "But I genuinely like ordinary people."

Comedy and Conservatives

Campbell's other reported likes -- her horseshoes and bacon rinds, as it were -- are improvisational comedy (she is known for wicked sendups of her fellow Tories) and what she has called "puberty music" (the Platters, Roy Orbison, Elvis). She also plays the cello (in the famous photo shoot, she almost posed behind hers) and more recently, with her marriage in tatters, has taken up oil painting.

Although a professed feminist, she has sneered at the notion that, as she put it, "if women ruled the world there would be more truth, beauty and justice." Feminist politicians left of the political center clearly mistrust her. Campbell quotes approvingly from England's great conservatives, Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott, but is at the liberal edge of her party -- "a Red Tory," as they say in Canada -- and has been outspoken in her support for abortion rights and gay rights. Her riding, or home district, in Vancouver is about a quarter gay. On the other hand, as a loyal and -- let's face facts -- ambitious Tory, she has been attacked by some Canadian feminists for her dutiful support, as justice minister, of the half-a-loaf party line on abortion legislation.

The pack that Campbell stands out from was trimmed by one yesterday when Michael Wilson, the minister of international trade, said he wouldn't run -- openly acknowledging that the party needed a fresh face. But it still includes some formidable contenders.

The most perfectly bilingual of them is Jean Charest, the minister of the environment, who is just 34. Canadians may not be ready for a generation that new. Another strike against him is that Charest, like Mulroney, is from Quebec, and unwritten Canadian protocol would discourage two consecutive Quebecers as prime minister. Besides, Campbell has impressed the rubber-poulet circuit in Quebec and is already marshaling prominent supporters there. The common speculation of Canadian pundits is that Charest will ultimately join forces with Campbell as her Quebec "lieutenant."

The two other candidates wondering whether to take on the Campbell juggernaut are from Ontario, Canada's largest province: Perrin Beatty, minister of communications, 42, with middling French, and Barbara McDougall, secretary of state for external affairs, 55, with barely passable French.

Obscured from view in this mad internecine scramble is the man who, until just a few weeks ago, was widely regarded, and poll-anointed, as the next prime minister of Canada -- Liberal leader Jean Chretien, whom Mulroney's successor will face in the fall.

A finance minister under prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, a homespun politician of fuzzy definition and dated style, a Quebecer without much support in Quebec, the 57-year-old Chretien looked to lead the Liberals in forming the next government of Canada. They may yet, but most analysts agree that with Campbell in the race, a Liberal victory would be far from easy. The epithet that clings to Chretien like a barnacle is "yesterday's man," an image the Tory Madonna would reinforce.

Canada's third major party, the New Democrats, had hoped to offer the striking alternative to Chretien with their woman leader and candidate, Audrey McLaughlin. The New Democrats would lose even that slender reed with Campbell in the race.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/03/06/in-canada-a-very-different-tory/0cd9a257-c887-47b7-a4a5-58868530ba1b/?utm\\_term=.7f13e3c1f7ea](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1993/03/06/in-canada-a-very-different-tory/0cd9a257-c887-47b7-a4a5-58868530ba1b/?utm_term=.7f13e3c1f7ea)

The particular vulnerabilities of the opposition help Campbell's bid for the leadership even if, by most accounts, her ties to the party are not nearly as close or longstanding as those of the other candidates. The Tories have the chance to build their first dynasty, as Mulroney sees it, by electing a second prime minister in a row. But like all Canadians, they also don't know Campbell very well; she has, in truth, come out of nowhere. And bare-shouldered yet.