

Take our leaders... please

Everybody loves a clown. Everybody hates a politician. While these statements are sweeping generalizations, they do reflect actual public opinion to some extent; small wonder, then, that many politicians have recently taken to clowning around. In the past year we saw a strip-teasing Justice Minister, a robotic Liberal, and even a saxophone-playing president south of the border, and one wonders if politics are becoming more a form of show business than anything else. Political issues are bland and often somewhat depressing, so why not give the masses what they really want...entertainment! After all, with our still constitutionally divided country trying to struggle out of a recession, a few laughs might be just the thing to take voters' minds off the real issues. The public is a tough audience, and survival-conscious politicians are trying to put on a good show.

Mixing show biz and politics is far from a new concept. As ancient Rome declined, its leaders distracted the hungry populace with such public diversions as throwing some poor, unfortunate chap to the lions every now and again. More recently, a variety of somewhat less desperate politicians have been doing some rather strange things for publicity. Perhaps the latest erosion of political decorum was sparked by Bill Clinton, the saxophonist who would be president. Back when Bill was on the campaign trail, he made an appearance on the trendy, late-night talk show hosted by Arsenio Hall and wowwed viewers by playing his saxophone. Campaigning politicians are known for blowing their own horn, but this was a tad different. Bill was showing people that he could loosen up and have fun, that he's really a down-to-earth regular guy; it puts a human face on the politician for people to identify with. Compare this to George Bush and Dan Quayle: can people really identify with guys whose ideas of a good time include rousing games of horse shoes and picking fights with Murphy Brown? Evidently not, since the voters dumped Bush in favour of Clinton. It's too late now, but George probably could have benefited from some of the theatrical savvy of his popular predecessor, Ron Reagan, who at the "Shamrock Summit" joined our then-reasonably well-liked Prime Minister in a tear-jerking rendition of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling". That showed everyone what fun allows they were, not to mention the finest fish tenors this side of a drunk tank.

Other Canadian politicians are making similarly desperate bids for attention. Take, for example, upwardly mobile Conservative cabi-

net member Kim Campbell, regarded by many as the heir-apparent of the hated Brian Mulroney. She recently raised eyebrows and ire by appearing as a photo subject in the new book entitled *Portraits: Canadian Women in Focus*. The problem? Kim posed behind a lawyer's robe so as to make it look like she was naked behind it. Ethics aside, the book's cheesecake is selling like hotcakes and Campbell recently received a new appointment as Defence Minister, so her political career is not suffering. Meanwhile, the Liberal party's number one woman, Sheila Copps, has pulled off an even more bizarre publicity stunt by appearing on a Quebec television satire as "RoboCopps", half woman-half robot. Is there something in the water in Ottawa? Are the politicians crazy?

Copps and Campbell are crazy...like foxes. Virtually any publicity is good publicity, and stunts like these make a politician both highly visible and perhaps a bit more appealing. Copps

and Campbell may, like Clinton, represent a new, slicker breed of politician that seeks to win us over with spectacle, amusement, smoke and mirrors. The Prime Minister and the rest of the old boys might do well to learn a few new tricks before the hook reaches out to yank them off-stage. Mulroney's Irish eyes stopped smiling a long time ago, and most of his beleaguered colleagues are lucky to manifest vital signs, let alone star quality. Tired, jaded voters just may respond to politicians who show a bit of flash. It's rather ironic when one considers that the first meeting of our political founding fathers in Charlottetown was at the time overshadowed by the circus coming to town. Perhaps, 125 years later, Canadian politicians have decided that a touch of show biz might not be a bad idea. After all, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Sean McQuaid
Entertaining Editor



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