

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Turning jurisprudence on its head

Until last week, most Canadians had never heard of either Scott Andrews or Massimo Pacetti, two Liberal MPs who are both married with young families.

But, thanks to Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau's unseemly (and self-aggrandizing) rush to judgment, both men had their names and faces plastered across the country and both were booted out of the Liberal caucus and stand accused of, well, of what exactly?

Nobody is saying, but, humans being what they are, most people are thinking it's bad.

The two MPs, we're told, did something ? although we don't know what, and they deny having done anything untoward ? to two unnamed female NDP MPs, at least one of whom explicitly asked the Liberals not to go public with whatever IT is.

Since the political careers of the two Liberal MPs ? not to mention their personal reputations and possibly their marriages ? are now at risk thanks to Trudeau's actions, a real leader in search of justice, rather than one intent on exploiting the issue to win Brownie points in the feminist community, would have dealt with the matter in a responsible way.

But that's not Trudeau's way. Rather than take the matter to the Speaker ? which is what one does on Parliament Hill when serious accusations are made ? and spark an investigation before going public and either substantiating the accusations or not ? Trudeau claims he punished them for ?serious personal misconduct? (whatever that means).

In his unseemly rush to make himself appear to be a champion of women's rights, Trudeau headed to the nearest microphone ? without telling either the NDP, who had asked him to keep it private, or explaining to his two MPs what they're accused of.

Turning centuries of jurisprudence on its head, Trudeau solemnly announced that in cases such as this ? whatever ?this? may be ? victims must be afforded ?the benefit of the doubt.? In Trudeau's world ? at least when it comes to issues involving what appears to be inappropriate behaviour toward women ? it's no longer innocent until proven guilty, but is guilty until proven innocent. As they used to say in the old westerns, ?Hang 'em high. We'll convict 'em when the judge gets here.?

Initially, Trudeau was well received in most media reports ? which, pathetically, appears to be his objective ? but that was before NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair accused him of ?revictimizing? the two women by publicizing their complaints against their wishes (and not even alerting them beforehand) and before some more sober-minded people ? not completely caught up in the current media frenzy created by the Jian Ghomeshi CBC scandal ? wondered aloud about the wisdom of assuming accusations ? from a rival political party, no less ? are completely valid and worth publicly shaming the accused victimizers without benefit of a) them knowing what they're accused of; and b) getting their side of the story; and c) allowing the Speaker and the Board of Internal Economy to investigate what may indeed be serious transgressions ? or may not be ? before going public.

Trudeau says he had no choice when one of the two women NDP MPs approached him on a bus and told him about the incidents. Nonsense. To be sure, he couldn't ignore it. Otherwise, if an investigation ensued and it was shown Trudeau knew and did nothing, he'd be in a pickle. But there's a big difference between doing nothing and punishing his own MPs for unspecified and unproven accusations by unnamed MPs against them.

In most sexual misbehaviour cases ? which everybody assumes this is ? the victim is in the unenviable position of being an underling to the perpetrator. But here, we're talking about four elected MPs, people who are not without power and resources, mature adults who, as Tom Flanagan wrote in *The Globe and Mail*, ?have been toughened by public struggles for nomination and election.?

This is the kind of story that ignites a public mania ? how often, in the past week, have we read about the ?culture of sexism? on the Hill, based apparently on two unknown accusations by two anonymous MPs against two publicly-outed MPs? No doubt bad things occur, but one sensational example ? and an unproven one at that ? hardly constitutes an epidemic or a ?culture.?

But then, Trudeau, who touts the fact that he used to work with women who were victimized by men, sees himself as the women's go-to champion. I

t's the same game he played to announce, with no debate and no consultation, that Liberals who don't subscribe to his pro-abortion views are not welcome in his party; the identical high-handed approach in cavalierly booting Liberal Senators out of the Liberal caucus, again without warning or consultation.

People say Stephen Harper is dictatorial. Hah! Imagine what Trudeau would do if he were prime minister instead of the leader of the third party.

The mind boggles. The earth quakes.

