

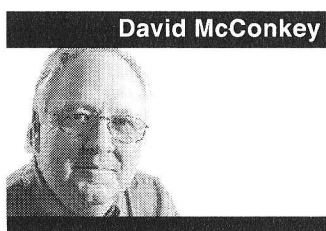
LOCAL VIEWPOINT

Could we have a Donald Trump in Canada?

We Canadians are as fascinated as Americans by Donald Trump! So, the obvious question: could we have a Trump here in Canada? "Of course we could," the rejoinder goes. "We had Rob Ford, didn't we?"

But not so fast. Despite surface appearances, the two men — and the two countries — are quite different. (Ford, who was a businessman and city councillor and then the mayor of Toronto from 2010 to 2014, died earlier this year.)

On first blush, there are similarities between Trump and Ford. (And we were often blushing with their rudeness and crudeness!) Both Trump and Ford remind us of some kids we knew back in high school. (The ones we wished we could forget!) Like the class clown, who derailed the lesson to distract the teacher from noticing that they could not sit still long enough to do the



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assignment. Or like the self-centred class bully, who brutally picked on the weaknesses of others.

But Trump is more disciplined than Ford was. And Trump does not drink alcohol or do drugs. So like Ford, Trump does say outrageous things. But unlike Ford, Trump does not do outrageous things. With Trump, there won't be any

crack-smoking scandals or reports of drunk driving or spousal abuse.

But even though Trump is more capable than Ford and not prone to behaviour problems, a Trump-like character would not get as far in Canada. Why? Because Canadian politics favours insiders.

Ford was an insider. Ford's father served as a Conservative member of the Ontario legislature. Ford and his brother Doug were avid supporters of the Conservative party and of Stephen Harper. The Fords were still campaigning with Harper in last year's federal election, just months before Ford died.

Ford was defended by his fellow conservatives. Left-wing folks called out Ford's bad behaviour as the result of moral weakness and poor decision making. Conservatives made excuses for Ford. His antics were justified as either friendly

exuberance or, perhaps, caused by an addiction "disease."

Conservatives even said that Ford's "drunken stupor" kind of lifestyle was more wholesome than that of liberal, marijuana-imbibing Justin Trudeau. So, the Conservative political slogan: "I'd rather drink with Rob than smoke with Justin!"

Now, over to the U.S. Trump is an outsider. He was not traditionally a Republican, and he engineered in effect a hostile takeover of that party. Trump still does not have the support of much of the Republican establishment.

U.S. society — and U.S. politics — are more open than Canada's. Their primary system, especially, enables an outsider to run and win. This was the theme of a book by Canadian journalist John Ibbotson that I reviewed here in 2009: "Open and Shut: Why America Has Barack Obama, And Canada Has Stephen Harper."

The same American openness that produced Obama is now producing Trump. Canadian prime ministers are — like Harper and Trudeau — conventional party insiders. (Sorry about that, Kevin O'Leary!)

What about discussing the issues? Ford was never known as a policy wonk. But Trump generates debate about issues by speaking his mind and by blasting apart the old stultifying political correctness.

Indeed, Trump does raise some taboo topics that should be debated. One example: military spending of NATO member countries. (Like Canada, eh? We spend near the bottom of the NATO pack and only half of our treaty commitment. Shh: we hoped nobody would notice!)

And on some issues — such as trade, the Iraq war, and the role of special interests — Trump is to the left of Hillary

Clinton. Too bad that much Trump talk is ridiculous nonsense!

Politicians like Trump and Ford can thrive only in right-wing parties like the Republicans in the U.S. or the Conservatives in Canada. So, Trump and Ford reinforce a popular stereotype. Compared to left-wingers, conservatives are not as thoughtful, not as informed, and — well — not as nice people!

But let's not allow the current political entertainment to hamper us citizens from crafting a better future. A future where everyone considers the best ideas from the right, from the left and from the politically incorrect.

A future where more politicians are as disruptive as Trump, but in a good way: civil, dignified and respectful.

And a future where a buffoon could never be elected as the mayor of a great city. Or as the president of a great country.

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