

Barbara Kay: If writing off 2019 gets us a real conservative party, so be it

[National Post](#) - Tuesday August 28th, 2018

Rub a dub dub, three men in a tub: Trudeau and Scheer fight for the oars, while a smiling Bernier rocks the boat. Did Bernier walk away from the CPC or was he pushed? Whatever, a poll immediately following Maxime Bernier's exit showed striking positive reaction to his declaration of a projected new party, with 13 per cent support nation-wide (15 per cent in Quebec, second to Libs). Seeing this, I tweeted: "Suspect initial burst of enthusiasm may soon shrink numbers-wise. Nevertheless, this indicates either great dissatisfaction with Scheer or a genuine belief that only a new party has the vigor and integrity to push the big issues that both the Libs and CPC won't frankly discuss."

By "big issues," I mean, in particular, immigration and supply management, both niche concerns for Bernier. On immigration, Bernier is fine with society evolving, but "organically and gradually." Huge numbers of ordinary Canadians agree with him. But calling for immigration constraints gets one called a racist by Trudeau and the chattering classes, so they stay shtumm or vent amongst themselves, while Scheer tiptoes around it with vague immigration bromides like "safe, orderly and compassionate." As for supply management, the bane of Bernier's free-market soul, that's non-negotiable a done deal. Scheer's behaviour at the CPC18 convention — burying the supply-management resolution at the bottom of a too-long list, so it wouldn't make the discussion cut — and then publicly partying with his dairy entourage: Was the point humiliation overkill? Like "Hey Max, check this out — nyah nyah" — to fully discredit Bernier to CPC members once and all? If that was the idea, it was a massive fail. Scheer only prevailed over his rival for the leadership 51 per cent to 49 per cent — and only by a complete sellout to the Quebec dairy cartel. Bernier was at first gracious in defeat; as leader, it was Scheer's job to respect the numbers by accommodating Bernier respectfully to encourage more graciousness. That didn't happen. Bernier was always more than a gadfly. He is a conviction politician, with conviction followers, unlike the many CPC members who support Scheer glumly, because they figure he has — or had — the best shot of beating Trudeau. Well, Scheer's put paid to that idea, hasn't he. Bernier and his tribe will be burning up social media night and day for the next year, jeering at — amongst other things — Scheer's shotgun marriage with the NAFTA-disrupting dairy bolshies. Bernier has nothing to lose with this dramatic gesture. He can't win an election, but he doesn't have to in order to force the national conversation rightwards, which is what the Reform Party did in its day. Then, when the CPC loses the next election, and a leadership review takes place, there Bernier will be, fresh as a daisy, and accompanied by a sea of followers ready to rejoin the CPC in order to crown him. Right now the CPC is so squishily left of where it should be that all Scheer can offer voters is a promise of better management, tax cuts here and there, and, not incidentally to be sure, a promise to protect "freedom of speech" (to Scheer's credit, before he was leader, he opposed Bill C-16, which opened the door to compelled speech, while Bernier only understood its dangers after Jordan Peterson briefed him).

I understand and sympathize with Scheer's dilemma. When the polls started looking good for the CPC, he began to suffer from "summit fever." That's what happens to people climbing Mount Everest when they near the top. They still have a tough climb ahead, and they aren't sure they have the strength for it, but they have climbed so far already, they'll do whatever it takes. So they start jettisoning heavy gear, even oxygen tanks, for the final sprint. Summit fever is a contributing factor in many an Everest death. The political equivalent of summit fever is the willingness to jettison principles, the readiness to make compromises, even to make deals with those they recognize in their hearts as the devil, because the glittering prize has them mesmerized with its siren call. On the whole, even though it doubtless means another Trudeau term, I think the Bernier effect will be salutary in the long run. Yes, sad for the next election, which Trudeau — a "post-national" progressive chugging through an unexamined life, riding an undeviating politically correct train of thought that requires no intellectual locomotive — doesn't deserve to win. But the CPC does not have its ducks in a conservative row, conviction-wise, and therefore it too does not deserve to win. Bernier's putative new party may have a clarifying effect in — to continue the Everest metaphor — a presently foggy Base Camp. Will Bernier lead the next CPC expedition to the summit? Too soon to tell. Let's see how he works out as a Scheerpa.