

BROCK'S BANTER: Truth Amid The Smoke

By Brock Weir

The Canadian political system has gone to pot, or so pollsters would like us to believe.

But, perhaps this isn't really the case.

Take, for example, the collective shrug that went up when Liberal leader Justin Trudeau 'admitted' that while hosting a dinner party for friends since becoming an MP, a guest brought a joint over to dinner and they passed it around.

This, in and of itself, is not a surprising revelation. After all, Mr. Trudeau's views on marijuana are clear and on the record. What surprised me, however, was not just the blasé reaction that greeted it in most quarters, but the candor in which he addressed the issue.

There is little doubt, however, regarding the spontaneity of the revelation. The pros and cons were certainly weighed, knowing full well that even if the comments generated little more than a titter or a tweet at first, battle lines will almost certainly be drawn on the issue.

It will not, however, become a wedge election issue; something which will bring people to the polls in droves to vent their collective spleen about, but it could very well bring that elusive younger demographic back into the civic sphere

Personally, I would not be surprised if it did. In a world where we have cabinet ministers admitting to using pot, albeit in any variety of baked goods, and while memories of US President Bill Clinton admitting to taking a toke or six with the caveat he never inhaled, this might be a brave new frontier. However calculated, the 'admission' (that word does have its own particularly negative connotation, doesn't it?), it was a refreshing bit of honesty that is going to resonate with younger voters.

Failing that, it will make the battle lines between 'young' and 'old' even more apparent for the limited sector of post-boomers that still turn out to the voting booth.

When asked about Mr. Trudeau's drug use in a scrum on Thursday, the Prime Minister said that the admission 'speaks for itself.'

Let's see how long that lasts.

While any jabs at his opponent's character might not emanate from his lips for the time being, it should be no time at all before this is added to the litany of attack ads on Trudeau's character which seem, in an affront to arts-minded people across the country, to suggest that no former drama teacher has a right to walk in the corridors of power. Although my personal experience with high school drama teachers actually suggest the Prime Minister might have something there, that is, of course, beside the point.

It will be very tricky to mock Trudeau's admission which might alienate significant potential voters. Pot users are probably the least likely to vote Conservative, but who knows what goes on in the bedrooms and man caves of the nation.

Recent polls have indicated voters are softening in their stance towards marijuana use. Of course, this is particularly prevalent amid that coveted demographic, a group in which many politicians would sell their left arm and right index finger to strike a chord, or make the most tenuous of connections.

Occasionally, political attempts to reach this audience can be embarrassing, or uncomfortable at the very least for everyone concerned. Young voters, or potential young voters, are not an audience largely susceptible to snow jobs. In my experience, they have built-in, ultrasensitive bull-o-meters.

I'm not going to take this opportunity to take a jab at any particular municipal examples that have taken place over the last few years, including the present administration. Those should still be all too clear and, unfortunately, all too real.

With Trudeau being so straightforward about his marijuana use, some of the skeptics will question whether it was simply a cynical ploy to appeal to this ultra-elusive youth crowd, or whether it is the start of a different kind of political environment.

As the Conservatives 'aside from Stephen Harper at the moment' all too eager to make hay and score political points over Trudeau's apparent 'irresponsible' example (a word used by Peter McKay in Thursday's online edition of *The Globe and Mail*), it will be interesting to watch how it shakes down.

Will the Conservatives come out unscathed as the moral bastions for today's youth? Will the Liberals come out on top with a leader that is seen more in touch with society?

Proceed with caution. A misstep could put any and all parties on the wrong side of the age divide. Will all parties tread carefully, cautious that however they respond could run the risk of putting their party either on the side of the age divide?

Perhaps, in the end, it will usher in a new age of politicking where politicians aren't as cautious on what sound bites will cause the least amount of ripples and actually say what is on their mind, what they have done, and life experiences that have informed who they are which might not necessarily fit the Hallmark template.

It might be a refreshing change from politicians either afraid or unwilling to go off script, even for a moment. It will certainly make things more interesting.

And, of course, this burning issue and Monday's out-of-left-field talk about Canada possibly making a moon landing over the next three decades, certainly took your mind off yet another prorogation of Parliament just as opposition parties were revving up for a September scrutinizing Senate spending, didn't it?