



The Promise of Progress

Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada

Wilfrid Laurier, Canada's seventh prime minister and the first francophone to lead the country, once said that “Canada is free, and freedom is its nationality.”

More than a century later, this wisdom endures. It endures because it articulates a simple truth: that our success as individuals, and our success as a nation, cannot be separated from our liberty and our willingness to defend it.

In Canada, the defense of liberty has a unique expression. It's not about freedom from social responsibility or permission to act in one's exclusive self-interest. Rather, it's about a deliberate and enduring commitment to build a progressive society, one where individual liberty and collective identity both thrive and mutually reinforce one another.

We haven't always gotten it right. We're a young country, and we're still learning. But the steady pace of Canada's progress offers some reassurance.

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While critics argued that to do so would compromise our traditional values or somehow dilute what it means to be Canadian, successive generations of Canadians stood fast and fought to expand liberty to those who had been denied it. These efforts to gain greater freedom for our fellow citizens didn't undermine Canadian values, they defined them.

In that sense, Canada is—and I hope will forever be—a shining example of the progressive spirit. But those of us who seek to build a better future for ourselves and for our children and grandchildren also understand that there's a limit to how far vision and values will get you. Progressive ideals mean little without a practical and pragmatic plan for real change.

Taking our cue from Canadians, our party offered such a plan and was rewarded with a majority mandate. Some dismissed that success, saying it was simply the result of an electorate that was clamoring for change. But those who paid attention would have noticed that Canadians weren't just seeking a different government. They wanted a better government.

Canada's election offers an important point of instruction for the global progressive movement. It proved that real change demands real choices—not the kind dictated by polls and pundits but tough decisions informed by shared values and made by leaders who trust and respect the citizens they seek to serve.

Using Canada's experience as an example, four things stand out as essential to the future success of progressive politics.

First, real progress demands an inclusive economic vision designed to give all citizens a real and fair chance at success. In the past century, it was Canada's growing and optimistic middle class that built a better country, not just for themselves but also for their children and for each other.

That success can—and should—be encouraged. It's why we made a middle-class tax cut a central part of our platform and our number one priority after forming government. At the same time, we introduced a new tax bracket that asked Canada's wealthiest 1 percent to pay a bit more. By giving less to those who don't need help, we will be able to give more to those who do. It's the fair thing to do and the smart thing to do for Canada's economy.

Second, progressive leaders need to promise greater openness and transparency, and they need to deliver on that promise. Citizens now have access to more information than at any point in history and are right to expect the same from their public institutions. Governments have a choice to make: They can either set a higher bar for openness and transparency or have voters reset it for them at the next election.

In Canada, this means committing to electoral reform. It means bringing an end to partisanship in our Senate. It means listening—truly listening—to citizens and seeking out ways to make their participation in our democracy more meaningful. For me personally, it means avoiding the temptation to become cynical and recommitting myself each day to staying hopeful and vigilant when it comes to democracy. Yes, democracy can be messy. But it doesn't exist to make leaders look good. It exists to do good for the people.



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Third, progressive voices around the world must do more to encourage innovation—not as an end goal but as a means to extend the ladder of opportunity to more people. Earlier industrial revolutions created the middle class, now the base of the world's most resilient economies. A similar opportunity exists today.

It's not hard to see how the connections between computing, information, robotics, and biotechnologies could deliver spectacular progress. It's also not hard to imagine how it could produce mass unemployment and greater inequality. Technology itself will not determine the future we get. Our choices will. Leadership will.

Progressive leadership should be focused on policies that create growth and on ensuring that growth produces tangible results for everyone. Progressive leadership creates a virtuous cycle. The more results we achieve for people—the more we grow the middle class and the more opportunities we create for those working hard to join the middle class—the more our citizens will grant license for further ambitious leadership.

Finally, no progressive movement can succeed if it doesn't embrace the fundamental truth that diversity is strength. Canadians know this. Canadians live this truth every day. So to do citizens of many other countries, despite the ongoing efforts of some to make people more afraid, more anxious, and more suspicious of the unfamiliar.

Fear, once stoked, whether by populist media or by an aspiring politician with a dog whistle, is a dangerous thing. There is no way to predict where it will end. But at the same time, there is cause for hope. In the world, as in Canada, people are more often kind than they are cruel. They are generous, open-minded, and optimistic. And it is to those instincts that we must make our appeal, respecting our differences but remaining always mindful of the things we have in common and the common good that we can build when we work together.

None of these four things—an inclusive economy, greater openness and transparency, a focus on sustainable and shared growth, and a commitment to diversity—will happen by accident nor will they succeed with continued effort. I'm confident that Canada will respond in ways that will do us and the world proud: with honesty and humility, with consideration and care. It is who we are and what we do.

Canadians know, instinctively, that our country is strong and prosperous not in spite of our differences but because of them. We know that a more inclusive and more generous approach enriches not only our society, but our economy as well. And we recognize, as Laurier did, that no matter how much progress has been made, we must always strive to do better.

That is Canada's challenge, and it is our promise to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Justin Trudeau', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.