

## The Role of Politics

Political involvement has been in decline as public trust in political institutions has diminished. In Canada and in most Western democracies we lament the lower voter turnout election after election. As liberals who believe in democracy, we must work to restore the desire of individuals to engage in and contribute to the political process. We have to fight the widespread cynicism of so many about the present political debates. We have to re-instil confidence in public leaders and the role of government.

Moving beyond the political passions to the ethical passions that animate today's actors in the civil society movement will contribute a lot to re-instilling this confidence in the role of politics and of government. The political project must aim to re-establish conscience in its appropriate place alongside confidence in the liberal philosophy. This will create a space where conscience will inform confidence, the driving force of modernity. That space will allow for a dialogue with engaged citizens who have turned their back on politics. Liberals and democracy both need this dialogue. For, it must be acknowledged that the triumphs of confidence have recently led to the narrowing of conscience—I thus hope for the emergence of ethical passions.

As we respect the intelligence and interest of citizens, we must counter the “dumbing down” of political discourse and both modernize and actualize the issues central to this era of revolutionary change. I believe this very liberal political project will connect us with many who have abandoned the field of politics. It will re-engage individual citizens in the crucial role that politics plays in shaping our society.

We have to move beyond the political passions of the 19th and 20th century that focused a great deal on social advancement and national liberation movements. Both were important engines of history. Both of these political passions brought forward groups, mostly led by men. It is no accident that many newer social movements are for the first time being led by women, whereas the union movement and national liberation movements were and still are mostly headed by men. I believe