

# Trudeau machine hits Halifax

by Martin Cohn

Trudeau will arrive in about two hours.

A stunning female party worker is greeting new arrivals; she will pin a rose on Trudeau's lapel at this \$125 a plate fund-raiser at the Chateau Halifax.

His press officer is very upbeat tonight. "Be sure to take some good shots of it," he quips to photographers.

Cocktails are served. The event is a sellout: 350 well-dressed party supporters are hobnobbing in the congested hall, adding \$35,000 to party coffers.

The entrance is packed. Everyone is waiting for a handshake, an autograph, a snapshot.

Then a stir; heads turn; a blitz of flashbulbs.

Trudeau is chatty, but stilted. People are tugging at his sleeve from all directions, seeking introductions. The smile is constant. He seems overwhelmed by the surge of the crowd, the aggressive familiarity of acquaintances. One lady presses up and beseeches him for a posed snapshot.

A mob trails him to his seat, but now the dinner is getting underway and they retreat to their places.

The menu is unspectacular. No fancy French names or exotic dishes: Roast beef and baked potato and vegetables and desert for their \$125. But people have come to hear the Leader of the Opposition.

Asked if Trudeau should step aside, everyone tells the *Gazette* that the party and country need him, that the leader must be a French Canadian, that he is best

equipped. There is no Dump-Trudeau movement here tonight.

Liberal House Leader Allan MacEachen is leadoff speaker, and the audience loves him. A local boy who has made it big. He digs into the Clark government for excluding Nova Scotia from the inner cabinet. As Deputy PM under Trudeau, he was "the voice of Nova Scotia," he says.

Now Trudeau steps up to the podium: standing ovation. A few jokes. He pays tribute to MacEachen, endearing himself to the audience. His elocution is powerful, the enunciation measured and flawless. He starts out philosophically, reflecting on the role of a party in opposition.

"Playing politics is like playing the stock market. The time to buy in is not when it's at its peak. It's now. You get into it when it's in opposition." He calls for "a reinvigorated party of the center."

He lambastes the Clark administration for neglecting the province: "For the first time in living memory, Nova Scotia is deliberately excluded from the highest councils of government." The audience laps it up; from the back of the hall people call out "Shame, shame."

"No Tory MPs have raised . . . a whimper that they must wait for the evening news to hear what will happen to Nova Scotia." Roars of laughter.

He also criticizes the Tories for high interest rates and "an unnecessarily rapid rise in the price of imported oil." He neglects to say that his government was committed to similar policies of matching U.S. interest rate hikes and

moving to world oil price levels.

Trudeau complains that "Tories don't believe in confrontation. They like to smile at each other a lot, silently." He cites Clark's intention to keep a low profile in the referendum debate. "In the most important debate on Canada's future survival, the Prime Minister will leave it to others to campaign against it."

Now Trudeau speaks briefly in French. The subject is Acadians—their future if Quebec separates.

CBC has two camera crews present—one each for French and English TV. Gérard Jolivet is Radio-Canada's Atlantic correspondent. He and his camera crew have been waiting for Trudeau's remarks in French, of which the press officer gave him advance notice. But Jolivet says later that he will not file a report for the evening news in Montreal. Nothing new has been said in the clip.

Speech over. The crowd is on its feet. Trudeau is called back to acknowledge the standing ovation. The atmosphere is electric.

Gerald Regan, provincial opposition leader, thanks "our former and future Prime Minister." The crowd leaps up again to applaud.

Meantime, the Radio-Canada TV crew is packing up. The Atlantic correspondent for Southam News says he won't file either. "Good speech, but no news." Trudeau gets brief coverage on the ATV regional report, but doesn't make the CTV National News.

Regan is winding up. "I am



Trudeau: good speech, but no news

confident that as Macdonald . . . and Mackenzie-King . . . and as Muhammad Ali came back after defeat, so will you." The crowd roars its approval.

Now the dash is on to catch Trudeau.

Well-wishers converge on him. A college radio reporter shoves a microphone in Trudeau's face and barks questions. Trudeau declines an interview—he has his hands full greeting supporters. The student demands answers. Newsmen look on in horror as the student shouts at the Leader of the Opposition; tension escalates. A Dartmouth radio reporter tries to barge through; the press officer stops him—he's not giving interviews, he says. The radioman retorts: "I don't care if he doesn't want to talk, people out there want to hear him." He starts his tape recorder: "You're with Trudeau's office, aren't you?" He turns the microphone on the press officer, but in a flash, the frustrated aide shuts off the recorder and brushes the microphone aside. Meantime, the persistent student radio reporter has been forcibly shoved aside. Things calm down.

Several minutes later Trudeau is inching toward the exit, 50 feet away. A mob has him surrounded. The beleaguered college radio man is

circling frantically to find an opening through the crowd.

The press officer purses his lips. "This is piss-poor," he mutters. Suddenly he brightens up. "Are there any back exists?" he asks of an aide.

The kitchen staff is waiting expectantly. They're young, female, pretty. Trudeau's contingent finally strides through the kitchen door, and the Leader of the Opposition stops to say hello. Nervous giggles. Handshakes and kisses.

Then down and out through a side elevator.

The workers say they all voted for Trudeau and want him to stay on.

The party fat cats are all enraptured: "He was great tonight" . . . "Extremely intelligent" . . . "People aren't saying Joe Who anymore, they're saying Joe Why" . . .

Gerald Regan says, "It was a fighting speech."

The man from Dartmouth radio is grilling MacEachen about pipelines. It's crowded and hot, and MacEachen is perspiring.

Regan is roving about, backslapping, chitchatting.

Trudeau slipped out about an hour ago. Things have wound down.

MacEachen and Trudeau leave for Ottawa the next morning.

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