

Teachers 'insulted' by Harper Tories for Trudeau attack ads that 'target' their profession

By Glen McGregor, Ottawa Citizen April 25, 2013

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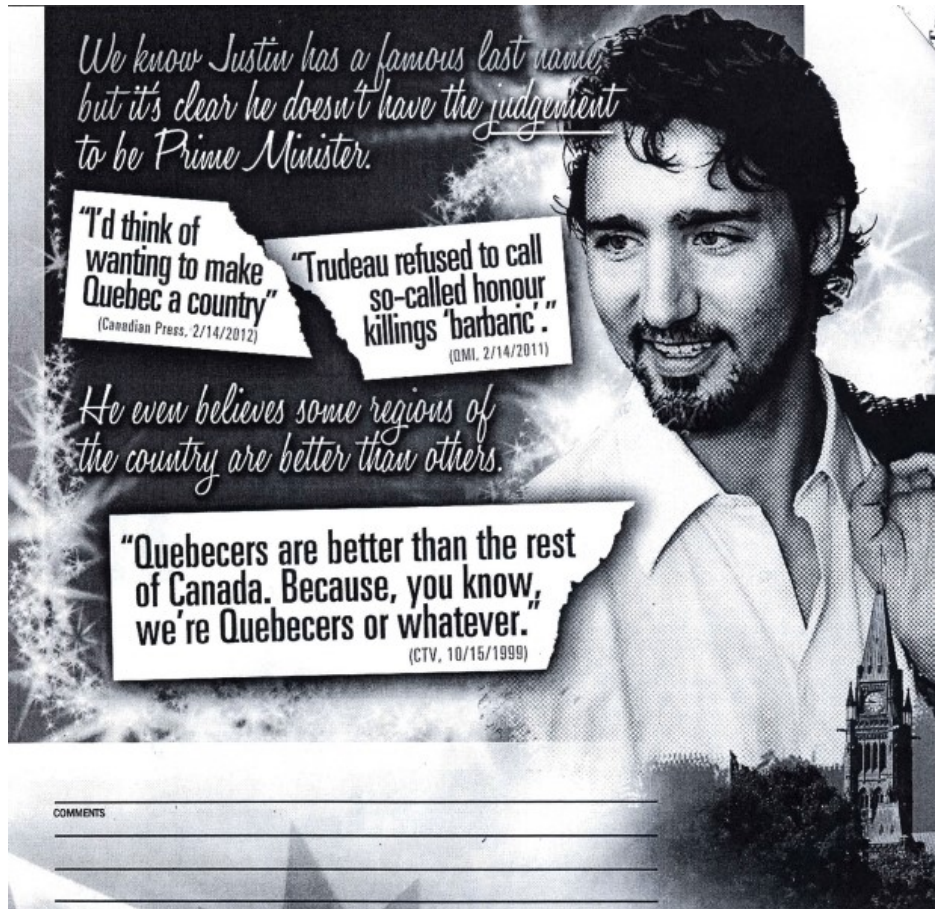
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Documents obtained by the Liberal Party show the Tories are planning to send thousands of taxpayer-funded mail-outs to households across the country reiterating their message that Trudeau is in over his head. The mail-outs, called 10 per centers, are supposed to be used by MPs to update their constituents on what is happening in the House of Commons. **Images cropped from a pdf** For Lee Berthiaume (Postmedia News). update-trudeau ORG XMIT: POS1304241425499524

OTTAWA — Conservative Party advertisements that denigrate Justin Trudeau's past employment as a teacher are an unwarranted attack on the profession and akin to the kind of bullying schools are trying to control, says a national teachers' organization.

The head of the Canadian Teachers' Federation says members have been contacting him since the Conservatives began running TV ads that refer to his past as a drama teacher as a sign of his inexperience and unsuitability to lead the country.

"People are very insulted that their profession was targeted in that way," said Paul Taillefer, president of the federation, a national organization representing about 200,000 teachers. (Taillefer is also a former Liberal candidate who ran unsuccessfully in the 2008 federal election.)

"To say that it is not a worthwhile profession and the skills you garner in a teaching career don't really count for anything, well, people are pretty upset about that."

The day after Trudeau was elected leader of the Liberal party, the Conservatives unveiled the TV ads that contrast his work experience, including time as a drama teacher, to Prime Minister' Stephen Harper's accomplishments in government.

The same message was conveyed in mail-out prepared by the party and offered to MPs to send out at taxpayer expense. Under the heading "INEXPERIENCE," the document erroneously lists "Drama teacher for 2 years."

In fact, Trudeau primarily taught math and French in British Columbia, but did fill in for a drama teacher who was a maternity leave for one half-year semester.

Taillefer says about 500 teachers serve as elected officials at the various levels of government.

"Teachers have a number of skills that a transferable to all facets of public life."

He said it's ironic that the ads are appearing as the Conservatives speak out against cyber bullying following two high profile suicides of bullied teenage girls.

"This type of behaviour by a federal government sends the wrong message to kids. It says its OK to put things out there about anyone," he said.

"We know that has lead to very serious consequences as far as our youth are concerned, with disastrous consequences. This is the type of behaviour we discourage with our students."

Taillefer says he tells teachers who contact him to complain about the ads to address their concerns to their members of Parliament.

The Conservatives deny the ads were an attack on teachers and says the party holds teachers in the highest regard.

"Many teachers feel that they are still at the beginning of their learning curve after only two years in the job," said spokesman Fred DeLorey in an email.

"Being a drama teacher for two years doesn't provide you with the experience to run a G-7 economy in a period of global economic uncertainty. Pointing this out isn't an attack on the teaching profession or people who've built a solid record of success by sticking with the teaching profession for more than two years."

The Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators is also irked by the Trudeau ads, says the feminine style and imagery used is meant to reinforce a stereotype about the sexual orientation of drama educators.

"There are fewer male teachers and there is always that stereotype of the gay male drama teacher," said president Brooke Charlebois.

"I don't think perpetuating that stereotype is beneficial."

Charlebois says some of her group's 900 members have contacted her to express concern about its portrayal of drama education.

"People were quite upset by the tone of the ads," she said. "What I'm hearing about from the members is the tone that he worked as 'just' a drama teacher, that drama is somehow lower on the totem poll."

Trudeau is not the only teacher currently sitting in the House of Commons.

The parliamentary website lists 24 current MPs who count teaching as a past occupation including nine Conservative MPs. Among them is junior cabinet minister Diane Ablonczy, the minister of state of foreign affairs.

The householder intended to be mailed out Conservatives MPs, using their House of Commons mail privileges, also noted that Trudeau had been a camp counsellor, a whitewater rafting instructor and a bungee jumping coach.

These résumé items are presented next to a list Harper's work in government, including the yet-unproven claim he will balance the federal budget by 2015.

The document does not describe Harper's pre-politics work experience. Although he studied economics, Harper never worked as a professional economist. Before running for office, he served as an aide to a Progressive Conservative and Reform MPs.

Harper also worked as the head of the National Citizens Coalition, a conservative lobby group originally formed to oppose medicare.

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