

So much for Mad Max Bernier and Bikergate

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So much for the Maxime Bernier controversy. Advance copies of Julie Couillard's tell-little book have been released. No fuel for the fire.

We learn that Mad Max, as some have called him, frequently bad-mouthed Stephen Harper as being chubby and other things. Well, no doubt every cabinet member fires off shots at the boss on occasion.

We learn that the former cabinet minister felt the Prime Minister was "a dictator who wants to control everything." No news there, but added confirmation. The D-word is strong language.

We learn that, in Ms. Couillard's opinion, Mad Max was vain and superficial. A modern-day George Hees, you might say. Mr. Hees was the cabinet minister in the Diefenbaker government who arrived once at a leadership convention in a double-decker bus with all the pom-pom girls occupying only the lower half. It prompted one fellow to crack, "Just like George. Nothing upstairs."

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In the view of Ms. Couillard, her old boyfriend didn't have much in the top half either. He was intellectually lazy, she writes. As for his being careless with secret cabinet documents, there are interesting tidbits in the book: He had loads of documents and one day told her to chuck some in the wastebasket. She forgot, left them on the kitchen counter, thus causing both of them all kinds of later grief.

If there is any poison in the Bernier story, it will come from the RCMP. The force is investigating allegations that Ms. Couillard (who before she met Mad Max, had ties to biker gang members), lobbied Conservative officials on a real-estate deal. There is also the allegation that a party official helped Ms. Couillard's mother obtain a federal patronage appointment. But the Mounties won't be reporting before election day.

Mr. Bernier has described the book as "soap opera politics." Coming from a soap opera guy, fair enough. He initially built a hot image in Ottawa, so much so that, as the book confirms, he thought of himself as a future leadership contender. But before long, he got the lightweight tag, his performance in the Commons having all the depth of a Sarah Palin.

The book, entitled *My Story*, was of considerable concern to the Conservatives. There was no telling what the biker lady would say. And coming late in the campaign, they thought it might be a momentum-hurter, especially in Quebec.

But Mr. Harper's image will hardly suffer a scratch. This has been a campaign of bullet-dodging for him. There have been many unanticipated developments, most of them involving mishaps from underlings. One of the few times *he* miscalculated was when, in speaking of his culture cuts, he trashed Canadians who attend galas. You could see by his body language and hesitations that he regretted it the moment it came out.

Mr. Harper's personal numbers have not been on the up in the campaign. A Nanos poll released this week said that a whopping 83 per cent of Canadians polled said their opinion of him has remained the same or worsened. Those nice-guy sweater ads were thought to be paying off. But this poll said Canadians are not being taken in by the new image. Given that the leadership issue has been such a high campaign priority,

however, it speaks well for the Conservatives if their leader's numbers are stalled but they still maintain a big lead over the Liberals. It suggests the party brand is finding favour.

In Mr. Bernier's Quebec, contradictions abound. One Quebec poll released yesterday showed the Tories just one point behind the Bloc Québécois. Another released the same day showed the Bloc holding a 45-24 lead.

As for Mr. Bernier himself, he appears set to romp to victory in his riding of Beauce. As in the case of the Prime Minister, Bikergate isn't taking much toll.

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