

IGNATIEFF'S BAD MONTH » CRITICAL SURVIVAL

## Iffy Iggy: This is your 'real character moment'



JUDITH TIMSON

[jtimson@globeandmail.com](mailto:jtimson@globeandmail.com)

Michael Ignatieff should take heart.

Sure, the leader of the Liberal Party has been receiving the drubbing of his life. He has been "diagnosed" as narcissistic, damned as incompetent and dismissed as a dud. He's been mocked as Iffy and Igotist. And that's just in the past few weeks. Forget Tory attack ads: This non-stop blitz of searing criticism would erode even the strongest ego.

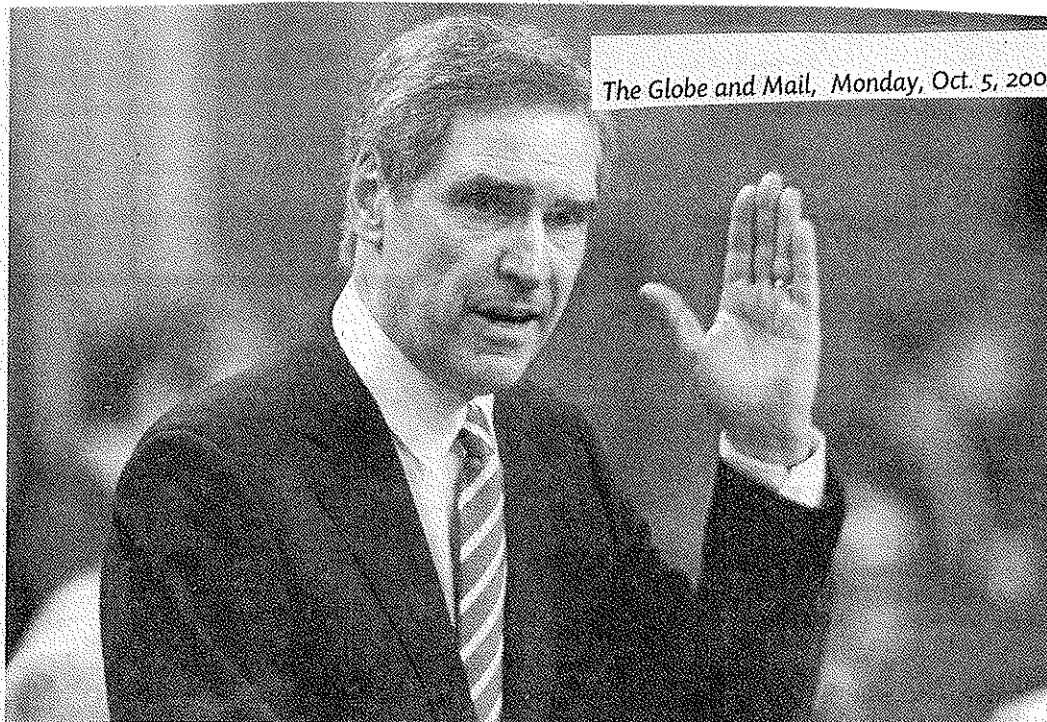
It's an orchestrated orgy of humiliation for an international intellectual who, only three short years ago, was ec-

statically described by one of his supporters, former general Roméo Dallaire, as "the only person who can articulate a vision of Canada, who can move the yardstick of humanity, who can move the country well beyond the borders in which we find ourselves."

Yeah, well, that was then, this is now and ouch, how it must hurt. Criticism always does, and it happens to everyone, although rarely as spectacularly or publicly as it has fallen on Iggy.

But all is not completely lost. How we survive such criticism constitutes what Toronto leadership consultant Patrick O'Neill calls "a real character moment." Under this kind of barrage, Mr. O'Neill said in an interview, there is no option of remaining the way you are: "You either shrink or you grow."

» SEE 'TIMSON' PAGE 3



Michael Ignatieff, a man who might have been Obamafied by the media by virtue of his intellect and relative freshness, has instead been thoroughly frounced. SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

## Give the poor guy a break

It should provide political scholars with enough thesis material for years that a man who, by virtue of his intellectual accomplishments and relative freshness to the scene, might have been Obamafied by the Canadian media has instead been roundly frounced. Whether it's a case of tall-poppy syndrome or whether he's genuinely — even alarmingly — the wrong man for the job, Mr. Ignatieff is in the thick of it now.

So how is he doing? Well, he is certainly not whining about a vast right-wing conspiracy. Nor is he overtly expressing self-pity, which is good. The closest he came to poor-meism was saying wryly, after a political kerfuffle that saw his main organizer in Quebec, MP Denis Coderre, resign in disgust, "It hasn't been the easiest week in my life."

But he then added, "Frankly, I rather like the problems I've got." (Which frankly made him look a little dense. Who would like those problems?) And in an interview published recently in Britain's *Observer* newspaper, Mr. Ignatieff concluded: "I married the right woman. ... I'm not going to die out there if people don't like me, because there's someone at home who thinks I'm okay."

It was a rather charming re-

mark, but also drew criticism, with one letter to the editor sniffing that he sounded like King Edward VIII in his abdication speech.

Give the poor guy a break, he was just pointing out he has balance and love in his life.

In the midst of all this, Iggy also marched into the House of Commons last week and delivered a highly focused speech about why his party wanted to bring down the government, which showed a man getting back in touch with his vision and sense of purpose, even as his non-confidence motion was defeated.

Politicians, like everyone else, reveal themselves not when the going is good, but when the going sucks.

Take Toronto Mayor David Miller, who recently announced that after a bruising civic strike, he would not be seeking a third term. When, during the strike, *Maclean's* magazine published a cover photo-illustration of Mr. Miller in a garbage can with a banana peel on his head, the Mayor bristled. What might have been an opportunity for a joke about the things you have to put up with to be a cover boy instead revealed a leader with a very thin skin.

On the other hand, U.S. President Barack Obama has been caught in a firestorm of criti-

cism about health-care reform, through which he's generally kept his legendary cool even as his approval ratings have plummeted.

The rules about handling criticism are the same for everyone: Consider the source, determine whether the criticizer wants you to do well, acknowledge but don't necessarily agree with the complaints, and then decide whether you need to make changes.

Oh, and don't hold personal grudges. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, renowned for his animus toward his critics, may have missed that memo.

Few arenas are more brutal than politics. I bet Iggy daydreams of being booed as director of *Tosca* at the Met (at least the humiliation was over in one night), rather than what he is today: a man with a Kick Me sign on his back — in two official languages.

But it ain't over till the you-know-what sings.

Michael Ignatieff may be a thin-skinned intellectual masquerading as a tough guy, a politician manqué, or someone who may yet surprise the country and himself by his own resilience and growth in the face of relentless criticism.

That's what the next few months will be about: Shrink or grow.