

CANADA

Trudeau Apologizes Again as Another Old Image in Blackface Emerges

Canadian prime minister's re-election campaign still dealing with fallout from 2001 image in dark makeup

By Paul Vieira and Kim Mackrael

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OTTAWA—Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau tried to contain the fallout from a growing firestorm after a series of images emerged of him wearing blackface and brownface, damaging his reputation as a progressive champion of diversity amid a tough bid for re-election.

Three images surfaced since late Wednesday, the latest a video Thursday that shows Mr. Trudeau in the early 1990s in blackface. He is wearing a T-shirt and dark shorts, and is seen raising his hands and sticking his tongue out.

The events have upended his campaign ahead of an Oct. 21 election in which polls show his



Mr. Trudeau appeared in costume at an "Arabian Nights"-themed gala, in a photo from a West Point Grey Academy school newsletter about the 2001 event.

Liberal Party in a dead heat with the rival Conservatives. The Liberals had clawed back from a fall in popularity in the first half of this year, under the weight of allegations that he and his senior aides tried to politically interfere in a criminal prosecution of a Montreal engineering firm. That scandal undermined his promise to run an ethical, transparent government.

On Thursday, Mr. Trudeau apologized for the second time over the blackface scandal. “What I did hurt people who shouldn’t have to face intolerance and discrimination because of their identity,” Mr. Trudeau told reporters at a press conference in Winnipeg, Manitoba. “This is something I deeply, deeply regret.”

Mr. Trudeau’s first apology came Wednesday night after Time magazine published a photo from 18 years ago in which he appeared wearing dark makeup at an “Arabian Nights”-themed costume party for a Vancouver private school where he was a teacher. Mr. Trudeau, who was 29 years old at the time, said he now recognizes what he did was racist.

Mr. Trudeau said there was another time in high school in Montreal when he wore blackface in a talent show and sang “Day O,” also known as the “Banana Boat Song.” An image has since emerged of that event. Mr. Trudeau didn’t mention wearing blackface in the early 1990s on Wednesday night.

Andrew Scheer, the leader of Canada’s Conservative Party, said Mr. Trudeau’s omission undermined his initial apology.

“He committed a racist act and lied about the extent of the number of times he had done such a thing,” Mr. Scheer said in a campaign stop in Quebec. “After his inability to tell the truth Wednesday, he’s continuing to show Canadians that he’s not fit to govern this country.”

Reporters pressed Mr. Trudeau about the possibility of more images with him wearing blackface. “I am wary of being definitive about this because I did not remember the recent photos that came out,” Mr. Trudeau said.

Mr. Trudeau held a conference call with Liberal candidates from across the country Thursday, in which he expressed deep regret for his behavior, Liberal lawmaker William Amos said.

Mr. Amos said he was disappointed by the photos but hopes Canadians accept Mr. Trudeau’s apology. “It’s a heartfelt apology from a leader who has been nothing short of a champion on issues of multiculturalism, anti-racism, promotion of diversity and pluralism,” he said.

Other Liberal candidates contacted Thursday either expressed support for Mr. Trudeau or referred questions to Liberal Party headquarters.

Mr. Trudeau said he didn’t tell aides he previously wore blackface until he learned Time was asking about one of the photos. “I was embarrassed, particularly given the person that I’ve become and the leader I’ve tried to be,” he said. “I didn’t want to talk about it with anyone because I’m not that person anymore.”

The images are particularly problematic for Mr. Trudeau, whose advocacy for diversity and inclusiveness is one of the principal tenets of his leadership. He led an effort immediately after coming to power to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada. He has also promoted women and minorities to senior ranks and apologized for the past treatment by authorities of the gay and lesbian community.



One of the photos was taken in 2001, while he was teaching in Vancouver, at his school's annual dinner, which had a costume theme of "Arabian Nights." PHOTO: BOB MACKIN FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Shachi Kurl, executive director of polling firm Angus Reid Institute, said the biggest risk for Mr. Trudeau is that blackface revelations could thwart efforts to coalesce younger, left-leaning voters behind the Liberals.

"These are the people he not only desperately needs to support him, but also actually show up and vote," Ms. Kurl said. "It could be one more sign for them that he's not who he says he is."

In a busy east Toronto neighborhood lined with Indian and Pakistani restaurants and shops, reaction was split.

"When I first saw the photo last night, I thought this is outright racism," said Kshitiz Sharma, a Mississauga law student who immigrated from India four years ago.

Inder Jandoo, who has owned a store in this South Asian neighborhood since 1979, said Mr. Trudeau's blackface costume doesn't undermine his values or reputation as Liberal politician.

"Twenty years ago he was not preparing himself to be prime minister. This is not that serious a problem," Mr. Jandoo said.

The leader of Canada's left-wing New Democratic Party, Jagmeet Singh, said the photos and video are insulting and could be troubling for young Canadians dealing daily with racism. Mr.

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Singh is a Sikh who wears a turban. “This is so hurtful for so many Canadians,” he said. “Mr. Trudeau has a lot to answer for.”

Samya Hasan, executive director of the Toronto-based Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, said the images were hurtful and demeaning.

However, she added, the people her organization serves aren’t “as short-minded to look at one

thing and let that decide how our next four years are going to be.”

—*Jacquie McNish and Vipal Monga contributed to this article.*

Write to Paul Vieira at paul.vieira@wsj.com and Kim Mackrael at kim.mackrael@wsj.com

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