

“THE DOMINION OF CANADA HAD SPENT OVER TWO THOUSAND DOLLARS IN SHAVING THAT FACE”: POLITICIAN’S IMAGES AND THE PUBLIC PURSE

Several comments are made about public money being spent on Bagshaw’s personal grooming. “He had... a smooth statesmanlike face which it cost the country twenty-five cents a day to shave” (161), and he “wore a long political overcoat that it cost the country twenty cents a day to brush, and boots that cost the Dominion fifteen cents every morning to shine” (161).

The narrator ironically quips “But it was money well spent” (161).

Spending public money on the grooming of a politician may seem obscene, but it happens quite often. Some of the most famous examples in recent history come from France, where president after president has spent countless euros on makeup and hair stylists. It has been a problem in Canada, too. For example, Senator Mike Duffy spent \$10,000 on a personal trainer. As well, former Prime Minister Stephen Harper once had a personal stylist on the public payroll.

Even though Canadian politicians have moved away from paying for their personal grooming with public money, they have found other ways to spend public dollars to manage their image. For example, every Prime Minister since Pierre Trudeau has had a photographer document their time in office, paid for out of the Prime Minister’s communications budget. These photographers are justified because they are creating a historical record of the Prime Minister’s time in office. However, their photographs are also used while the Prime Minister is in office, distributed in order to enhance the Prime Minister’s public image.

1. a) Is it okay for politicians to spend public money on personal grooming, so that they look better to the public?
 b) Is money spent on photographers different? If so, how?
2. What does spending money on Bagshaw’s image tell us about the human nature of politicians? What does it tell us about the human nature of voters?

