



# C2C JOURNAL

IDEAS THAT LEAD

VOL 9, ISSUE 2  
SUMMER 2015

## LIGHTEN UP CANADA

Political Humour in  
the Age of Outrage

## If you have no sense of humour, stop reading now



Of all the literary genres, humour is the hardest. Especially political humour. Just ask Green Party leader Elizabeth May after her epic fail at the national press gallery dinner. Or the late Alberta premier Jim Prentice, after his “math is hard” jibe at his successor Rachel Notley in a televised election debate. Or deposed rookie Alberta NDP MLA Deborah Drever, after the skeletons of some lame jokes spilled out of her online closet. Or Justin Trudeau, after his self-immolating side-splitter about Russia invading Crimea in a snit over losing Olympic hockey gold. Or Jimmy Wang, the aspiring Ottawa high school student council president whose candidacy was scotched after a mildly off colour witticism in a campaign speech. Or Bassem Youssef, the brave Egyptian satirist who quit his TV show last year out of fear for his family’s safety.

Or just ask me, after an attempt at a light-hearted, self-deprecating send-up of the Alberta election result in *C2C Journal* a few weeks ago precipitated a deluge of angry, profane emails. Ouch!

All this was inspiration for the theme of the Summer 2015 edition of *C2C*. Our objective was to rebut oppressive political correctness, redeem the lost art of political satire, remind people that a healthy democracy knows how to laugh at itself, and give our readers something to relieve the Summertime Blues.

When we first put out the call for submissions, the working title was “Great Canadian Political Humour.” One wag wished us luck, saying he hoped it would turn out longer than the Book of German Humour. (Here I feel compelled to apologize to all readers of German ancestry, which tells you something about how thin-skinned we are these days.) And indeed, the initial response was pretty

thin. Not surprising, perhaps, since few of *C2C*’s contributors are professional humorists, and all of them know how hard it is to find and tickle readers’ funny bones.

But we persevered, and after some cajoling, wheedling and begging, the story pitches started to come in. As sometimes happens in these circumstances, the pitches led the theme in a new direction. Instead of being purely humorous, several of the proposals were for commentaries about political humour, in the context of our humorless times. Happily, this made for a no less funny magazine overall.

And really, political humour is pointless unless it makes a point – the sharper the better – as all the great political humorists and satirists and politicians with a comedic touch have always known. So brace yourselves, for there is some fairly pointed political humour in this magazine. It is designed to prick sensitivities, puncture pomposities, and poke fun at the powers that be. In the immortal words of the *Scott’s Coulee Outlaw*, a scurrilous Alberta rag that published vicious and hilarious anti-Conservative invective in the late 19th century, we offer “malice towards all and charity to none.”

As **Peter Shawn Taylor** writes in our opening essay,\* the funniest political actor in Canadian history was our founding prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. He could slay a rival with a flick of his tongue, sometimes literally, as occurred when barfed up a quart of whiskey at a candidate’s debate and blamed it on the nauseating content of his opponent’s speech.

Macdonald was the first in a long line of mirth-making Canadian conservative politicians and writers, including Stephen Leacock and John Crosbie (and Rex Murphy and Mark Steyn in our time), notes **Philip Cross** in an impolite polemic

arguing that liberal and socialists are congenitally humorless (Exhibit A: Liz May) because they wake up every morning wondering how to make a horrible world perfect, while conservatives greet every fresh news from hell with a let’s-make-the-best-of-it shrug.

If anyone knows how comedically bankrupt our political culture is, it is **Terry Fallis**, two-time winner of the Leacock Award for literary humour. He has almost single-handedly kept the art of political satire alive in Canada and we highly recommend his novels as well as his piece in this magazine lamenting the dearth of humour in contemporary political advocacy. If you find that a bit gloomy, then turn to **John Robson’s** tribute to Mike Duffy in the voice of Robert Service. Read it out loud to your family at the dinner table. They will snort chunks.

There is much, much more than I can recount here, including *Funny Tales From Campaign Trails*, among them some nuggets from the memories of 87-year-old **Ted Byfield**, whose storytelling gifts are as witty and pithy as ever. Maybe the funniest political anecdote in the book, though, comes somewhat unexpectedly from the pen of **Preston Manning**. Like most politicians with an ounce of instinct for self-preservation, he mostly kept his sense of humour under wraps when he was actively navigating the minefields of democracy in the Age of Outrage. In retirement, he cut loose with one of the funniest speeches we’ve ever read, reprinted in this edition of *C2C* for your enjoyment and edification.

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*Paul Bunner is the editor of C2C Journal.*

*\*The stories in the Summer 2015 edition will be posted on the [C2C website](http://c2cjournal.ca) one at a time every few days over the month of June.*

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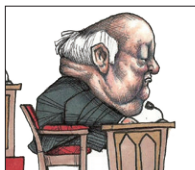
The humourless political landscape we call Canada was not always this way. Our founding Conservative Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, who was roundly pilloried in the media as a drunk and a racist on the occasion of his 200th birthday earlier this year, was also the funniest politician our country has ever known. Despite a life marred by personal tragedies, Macdonald remained a razor-sharp wit and irrepressible jokester throughout his career. Peter Shawn Taylor has assembled a hilarious assortment of his greatest puns, putdowns, and pranks.



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When Pierre Trudeau was asked how far he would go in imposing martial law during the October Crisis, his famously insouciant reply was, "Just watch me." Bada-bing. When Ronald Reagan was rehearsing a national radio address announcing expanded religious freedoms, he famously tweaked the opening line to announce "we begin bombing [Russia] in five minutes." Bada-boom. The contrast illustrates Philip Cross's argument that conservatives are intrinsically funnier than liberals. Always have been and always will be, because conservatives accept human imperfection, while liberals are obsessed with fixing it.



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by John Robson

Senator Mike Duffy may go to jail and he may bring down the Conservative government. He may eventually be judged the single most important cause of the abolition of the Canadian Senate. His name may join "carpetbaggery" and "featherbedding" as a new synonym for gross opportunism and petty corruption. But even if none of that happens, his place in Canadian history is assured, because C2C contributor John Robson has written an epic doggerel poem in the great comedic literary tradition of Robert Service that elevates Mike Duffy to the status of Dan Magraw and Sam McGee. Maybe even higher, because the only thing fictional about Mike is where he lives.



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Political outrage is so yesterday. Maybe it had a place in the Sixties, but today it feels like manufactured dissent. If you really want to change the "system," don't get angry, get funny. Jokes that ordinary Russians told among themselves (and were often repeated in speeches by President Ronald Reagan) even helped bring down the Soviet Union. Canadian satirical novelist and former Chretien PMO staffer Terry Fallis learned the power of humour from a legendary South African anti-Apartheid activist. And Canada's chronically grumpy democracy, he writes, could use a lot more of it.



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Just about everybody who's ever worked on an election campaign has at least one funny story to tell about their experience. Some of them are so funny they become the stuff of legend. The Summer 2015 edition of C2C Journal offers a compilation of such stories, some already legendary, some destined to be, including a few from such veteran political campaigners and campaign-watchers as Preston Manning and Ted Byfield.



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by Fred Litwin

Political correctness has always been a little funny, in the same way that watching a child's tantrum can be funny. Unlike kids' tantrums though, political correctness never goes away. It just seems to get sillier – and more sinister – over time. The old debates over things like feminine honorifics and words to describe physical and mental handicaps seem quaint by comparison to today's bizarre disputes over race and gender. They're funnier than ever in Fred Litwin's compilation of modern PC stories for C2C, but more ominous than ever too, in their implications for free expression, tolerance, social harmony, and humour itself.



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In 2003 Preston Manning was recently retired from a decade in federal politics and free to speak candidly about his experiences. On the occasion of the 34th annual Leacock Luncheon at the McGill University homecoming in Montreal, he did just that in a speech that did full justice to the event's namesake. Revealing a comedic talent rarely glimpsed by Canadians during his political career, Manning left the audience in stitches with a speech explaining Canada's unique political culture to Americans. An abridged version appears in this edition of C2C Journal.



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Despite Alberta's reputation as a bastion of conservatism in Canada, its voters have a long history of electing big, intrusive governments. Under Social Credit in the 1930s, the government started a bank, and even invented its own currency. Peter Lougheed's very Progressive Conservative regime bought an airline, created an oil company, and salted billions away in the Heritage Savings Slush Fund. It was probably inevitable the province would one day elect an actual socialist government. The only surprise, writes Colman Byfield, is how long it took, especially in light of how hard the ruling Tory dynasty worked to dethrone themselves.



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by John C. Thompson

In theory, public political protest is a sign of a healthy democracy. But John Thompson, who has been conducting a life-long anthropological study of Man the Demonstrator, has some doubts. His research suggests the "protest movement" is politically unbalanced – conservatives almost never do it – and often unconnected to anything the public actually cares about. It seems to be dominated by semi-professional mayhem-makers who know little and care less about their *cause de jour*, as long as they make the news. But at least, writes Thompson, it is a reliable source of amusement.



# A Toast to Canada's First and Funniest Prime Minister

by *Peter Shawn Taylor*

**A** bold suffragette once cornered Prime Minister Sir John A Macdonald and demanded to know why as a man, he could vote in Canadian elections while she, as a woman, could not. After a quick stage pause, Macdonald replied: "Madame, I cannot conceive."

While attending the funeral of a senator, Macdonald again found himself cornered, this time by a determined patronage seeker. "Sir John, I would like to take that man's place," said the insistent supplicant of the late senator. To which Macdonald shot back: "I'm afraid it's too late. The coffin is

nailed shut."

Around the table at a fashionable dinner party, talk fell to the vast wealth of Sir Hugh Allan, Montreal railway financier and central figure in the Pacific Scandal which caused Macdonald so much political grief. Someone commented playfully that as rich as Allan was, he couldn't take his money with him when he died. "No," Macdonald quipped, "it would soon melt if he did."

In 1886, Macdonald took his first and only cross-country trip on the CPR. Along for the ride was a Catholic bishop from Belgium on a tour of Belgian immigrant communities

in Manitoba. At one whistle stop the bishop was surprised to see the local Scottish population turn out in full Highland regalia to welcome Macdonald. Having never seen a man in a kilt before, he asked his travelling companion for an explanation. Macdonald assured him this was simply a sign of respect. In some places men take off their hats to honour a distinguished visitor, a straight-faced prime minister informed the bishop. In this town, he explained, men take off their trousers.

He's got a million of 'em.

"Macdonald was a genuinely funny prime minister," says biographer Richard Gwyn. "He was so quick witted he could come up with a clever line for just about anything. And he used that ability to absolutely charm everyone."

In fact there has never been a funnier prime minister than Sir John A. Macdonald. Beyond his rich legacy of monumental political accomplishments such as Confederation, the CPR, the Mounties and opening the West, Macdonald also endowed Canada with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of witticisms, jokes, humorous observations, put-downs and pranks. Beyond being Canada's first and greatest prime minister, Sir John was also this country's founding wit. No joke about it.

Many of Macdonald's snappiest one-liners, such as his rejoinders to the suffragette and senatorial hopeful described above, were the result of the day-to-day business of 19th century politics. Macdonald oversaw a vast apparatus of federal patronage appointments and was constantly besieged by supplicants eager to have their loyalty rewarded. In addition there were innumerable voters eager to have their pet causes promoted. It was impossible to say yes to everyone. "He often used humour was a way of saying no, but without being nasty or hurtful about it," observes Gwyn.

When discussing the vacant position of Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia with Conservative Senator Robert Dickey, Macdonald asked if Dickey was still loyal to the party despite having opposed Confederation. "I am still a Conservative and I shall support you whenever I think you are right," Dickey told his leader. With a twinkle in his eye, Macdonald harrumphed: "That is no satisfaction. Anybody may support me when I am right. What I want is a man who will support me when I am wrong!" (Dickey never got the job.)

With his lightning-fast verbal reflexes, Macdonald was always a step or two ahead of his political opponents. Yet amid the thrust-and-parry of the House of Commons, Macdonald never sought to humiliate his adversaries. "He always tried to get his opponents to laugh at themselves, which would lead to no harm or bitterness in the end," says Gwyn. During a raucous debate over a planned pay raise for a

Conservative appointment to the Chancery court, Liberal MP James McMullen blustered that members of his party were no longer willing "to hold our tongues" on such matters of patronage. To this outburst, Macdonald calmly replied, "Well, if I am on a jury when my hon. friend is tried for holding his tongue, I will say – 'not guilty.'"

"Macdonald stands on a podium, head and shoulders above everyone else in Canadian politics when it comes to his use of humour," says Patrice Dutil, co-editor of a recent collection of essays on Macdonald and a political scientist at Ryerson University in Toronto. "He was a very witty man who had the ability to see the funny side of all situations."

Once Macdonald and his solicitor general Hector Langevin attended an address at McGill University by Governor General Lord Dufferin, which he delivered entirely in Greek. The following day, a newspaper reported that Dufferin had spoken "the purest ancient Greek without mispronouncing a word or making the slightest grammatical solecism."

Langevin: "How would the reporter know that?"

Macdonald: "I told him."

Langevin: "But you don't know any Greek!"

Macdonald: "That's true, but I do know a little about politics."

And while he took the business of politics and governing quite seriously, his most trenchant observations about political life were often rooted in wit. "Given a government with a big surplus, a big majority and a weak opposition," he once observed. "You could debauch a committee of angels."

Macdonald's sense of humour also gave him a tremendous advantage when stumping for votes.

"Before radio, television or the Internet, public speeches were a collective pastime," notes Arthur Milnes, an historian and speech-writer who co-edited a recent collection of Macdonald's greatest speeches and serves as the City of Kingston's Sir John A. Macdonald Bicentennial Ambassador. "The people wanted to be entertained. While most of his competitors of the day were dry and dour, everyone knew that when they attended a speech of Macdonald's he would make them laugh," says Milnes. "He could also have great fun with his own image, and that endeared him to the public."

His quick wit rescued him from many situations that would have doomed lesser minds, particularly when a bottle was involved. Perhaps the most famous example concerns the time Macdonald overindulged during the train ride to a campaign debate in Northern Ontario, and then ungraciously threw up on stage while his opponent was making his opening remarks.

"Such a sight before a large audience disgusted even many of his friends, and the prospect for the Conservative cause that day was not bright," noted a contemporary account of the incident. His opponent, who's name has been lost to

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“Given a government with a big surplus, a big majority and a weak opposition, you could debauch a committee of angels.”

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history, stopped speaking mid-sentence. Everyone stared at Macdonald. Collecting himself, he turned to address the crowd. "Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," he began in a seemingly contrite tone. "I don't know how it is, but every time I hear Mr. J— speak, it turns my stomach." According to the reporter on the scene, "the audience went off in fits of laughter, and disgust was instantly turned into general good humour and sympathy."

"Ninety-nine point nine percent of politicians in the world would have been destroyed by such a thing," says an admiring Gwyn. "Vomiting in front of the public is surely one of the rudest things anyone could ever do. And yet he found a way to turn the situation to his benefit. People have a space in their hearts for a lovable rogue, and Macdonald was able to benefit greatly from that."

Where most politicians are inclined to hide or at least downplay their shortcomings, Macdonald celebrated his own. Confronted by members of his own caucus about his drinking, and that of his friend, colleague and enabler Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Macdonald said to his fellow father of Confederation: "Look here, McGee, this Government can't afford two drunkards – and you've got to stop." Another time he won over his audience by declaring that Canadians "would rather have John A. drunk than George Brown sober." It was not only a funny line, but had the added advantage of being entirely true as well.

Beyond his well-known weakness for liquor, Macdonald also earned himself the nickname 'Old Tomorrow' for his tendency to defer or delay difficult decisions. Yet no one took greater pleasure in the name than Macdonald himself; he always enjoyed a good joke, even when he was the punch line. When a rumour circulated that he was about to be offered a British peerage, Macdonald quipped, "I will be Lord Tomorrow."

Macdonald also delighted in word play and banter. Among the hundreds of little jokes and puns he left sprinkled throughout several decades of Hansard, here's one exchange between Prime Minister Sir Alexander Mackenzie and then-opposition leader Macdonald that shines with gleeful mischief: (At issue was the fact Sitting Bull and his Sioux warriors had just entered Canada after defeating Custer at Little Big Horn.)

Mackenzie: It is not the intention to make any representation on this subject



Toronto Star

Macdonald: I do not see how a Sitting Bull can cross the frontier.

Mackenzie: Not unless he rises.

Macdonald: Then he is not a Sitting Bull.

Even in his private moments, Macdonald's took great pleasure in a clever turn of phrase. He often, for example, signed guest books as "John A. Macdonald, cabinet-maker."

And while prime ministers are generally too busy to dream up and execute practical jokes, the 1891 book *Anecdotal Life of Sir John Macdonald* by journalist E.B. Biggar (which serves as the wellspring for Macdonald's quips and anecdotes), makes note of at least one prank pulled by Macdonald during

his early political career in the pre-Confederation era.

Col. Andrew Playfair, a veteran of the War of 1812 currently employed by the government as a local mail carrier, was lobbying Macdonald for an appointment as superintendent of a road north of his home near Perth, in what is now eastern Ontario. After numerous letters pleading his case, Playfair decided to trek to Macdonald's office in person.

After keeping him waiting all day, Macdonald finally emerged from a meeting and breathlessly exclaimed, "God bless my soul, Col. Playfair, is that you? I'm so glad to see you. We have just been discussing in council a military matter that we cannot decide. Now you, with your great military experience...will be able to solve the question." The sucker rose to the bait, so Macdonald laid it on him. "The question is: How many pounds of gun powder put under a bull's tail would blow his horns off?" As the old colonel pondered this puzzler, Macdonald slipped away. Playfair probably cursed his tormentor all the way home – until he discovered that the official announcement awarding him the long-sought position of road superintendent had been slipped into his mail pouch by a certain political jokester.

Macdonald's exuberant sense of humour was never an act or a stunt. Rather it was the embodiment of his outsized intellect, his irrepressibly sunny disposition and the enjoyment he found in the company of others. "Humour was absolutely essential to Macdonald's approach to governing, to his political affairs and his personal life," says Ryerson's Dutil. "That zest for living and ability to see the happier side of life is all the more remarkable when you consider no other prime minister went through more personal hardship or misery than Macdonald." The lengthy illness and death of

his first wife, the loss of his first-born baby son, a severely handicapped daughter, a crippling habit of binge drinking, the opprobrium of the Pacific Scandal, repeated financial difficulties – not only did Macdonald bear all these burdens, bounce back and succeed, but along the way he got a laugh out of nearly everyone he met.

There seems no risk Macdonald will ever cede his crown as Canada's funniest prime minister. Today even the slightest jest is bound to evoke paroxysms of outrage from at least one hair-trigger interest group, which are then amplified without context or mercy across the vast vindictive landscape of social media. Thus politicians have been cowed into abandoning any comic talents they might possess or, at best, relegated to playing straight man for talk show hosts

and professional comedians. If war is too important to be left to the generals, humour is now too risky to be left to the politicians.

Yet even in our era of stultifying politically correctness, Macdonald's boisterous and unstoppable sense of humour would surely find its way to the surface. "He'd be a natural for Twitter," offers Dutil. "Macdonald's wit and *bon mots* would still be razor sharp in 140 characters today as they were back then. I'm convinced he'd have a huge following if he were still around."

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*Peter Shawn Taylor is editor-at-large of Maclean's magazine. He lives in Waterloo, Ont.*



# Why Conservatives are Funnier than Liberals

*by Philip Cross*

**B**y the very nature of their philosophy, conservatives are disposed to be more optimistic and fun-loving than liberals. Liberals (a short hand I'll use to cover the political spectrum on the left including progressives and socialists) base their outlook on causes, whether eradicating social injustice in our society, eliminating human suffering around the world or saving the planet and every species on it. Try smiling with all that weighing on your psyche when you wake up in the morning.

Conservatives accept that the world and its occupants are fallible, and therefore are not as distressed by every manifestation of this imperfection. They know life

isn't always fair, outcomes are unequal and people and nature adapt to changes in their environment. It follows that conservatives are more optimistic because they can imagine how free people are capable of responding to challenging circumstances, rather than being limited by a sense of grievance about past transgressions. This was most evident in U.S. President Ronald Reagan's legendary sunny disposition, but also was apparent for Margaret Thatcher, Brian Mulroney, George W Bush, Mitt Romney and David Cameron. Even Tim Hudak, while running doomed campaigns for Ontario Premier, never stopped radiating the optimism many conservatives instinctively embrace.

The different dispositions of liberals and conservatives

were reflected in a recent Statistics Canada survey of how satisfied Canadians were with their lives. The most satisfied were in rural and conservative regions such as Quebec City, Saguenay, Saint John and Saskatoon. The least happy? The liberal bastions of Toronto and Vancouver (these results hold up even after adjusting for things like age and income). It is hard to be happy when you have to be relentlessly “on message” with whatever is deemed politically correct at the moment. Conservatives are more tolerant of a diversity of views since they know there is no one right answer, and the empirically-based right answer usually changes over time.

The kill-joy instincts of liberals were on full display in Ottawa during the Senator’s improbable drive to the NHL playoffs. To celebrate the totally unexpected success of 27-year old rookie goalie Andrew “The Hamburglar” Hammond, fans starting throwing hamburgers on the ice at the end of games (a player even picked one up and took a bite while saluting the crowd). However, the fun quickly ended when the head of the local foodbank scolded fans for wasting food, as if demand for its services had any relation to a physical shortage of food. As one local scribe noted, “those who would characterize a random, fun gesture as symbolic of our society’s indifference need to get a grip.” There is a reason Ottawa is called “the town that fun forgot.” P.J. O’Rourke made fun of the whole mentality that wants everyone “to grow all our own food, use only fair-traded Internet services with open code programming, heat the house by means of clean energy renewable resources such as wind power from drafts under the door, and knit our children’s clothing with organic wool from sheep raise under humane farming conditions in our yard.”

By comparison with progressive scolds, even taciturn conservatives have their lighter moments. Famous as a man of few words, Republican President Calvin “Silent Cal” Coolidge was once offered a bet by another guest at a dinner party that she could induce him to say more than three words during the evening, to which he replied, “You lose.” Another anecdote earned him an unlikely place in biology and psychology books for the “Coolidge Effect” that describes the effect new mates have on male sexual desire. When President and Mrs. Coolidge were being shown separately around a farm, she noticed the rooster was mating frequently. She asked the attendant how often that happened and was told, “Dozens of times each day.” Mrs. Coolidge said, “Tell that to the President when he comes by.” Upon being told, Coolidge asked, “Same hen every time?” The answer was, “Oh no, Mr. President, a different hen every time.” The President replied, “Tell that to Mrs. Coolidge.”

The template for witty conservatives and dour liberals goes back at least to the battles between Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone to lead Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Disraeli led a full life, raising a family, writing poetry and

books while leading the birth of the modern Conservative party. Famous for his barbs, Disraeli was once asked what was the difference between misfortune and a calamity: “Well, if Gladstone fell into the Thames that would be a misfortune; and if anybody pulled him out, that would be a calamity.” Meanwhile Gladstone, when not trying to pass home rule for Ireland, earnestly tried to reform prostitutes one at a time. Dubbed the Grand Old Man of Liberal politics, Disraeli chided him as God’s Only Mistake.

Conservative political leaders are more approachable for ordinary people because of how conservatives view the acquisition of knowledge. For liberals, knowledge is data-driven and acquired only at school, which helps explain why the previous two leaders of Canada’s Liberal party were deadly serious university professors (Stephane Dion and Michael Ignatieff, both with disastrous results). Justin Trudeau seems headed down the same road with his regular references to data- and evidence-based policymaking, although in his case it may be to rebut the impression that intellectually, he has little else to work with.

Conservatives allow a role for knowledge to be acquired by experience, history and folk lore as complements to evidence-based policymaking. Drawing on the past as a guide to future action allows conservative leaders to project a more folksy image, instead of beginning every sentence with “Studies show that...”, as if campaigning was an elaborate graduate exam. Some liberal leaders get this point, like Jean Chretien and Bob Rae. But they are being replaced by an increasingly technocratic approach that assumes building a society is the same as constructing an abstract academic model. The technocratic approach to coalition building in 2008 (“we’ve got the votes!”)

blinded its practitioners to the devastating optics in English Canada of getting in bed with the separatist Bloc Quebecois.

Leftist leaders can be unintentionally funny. Green Party leader Elizabeth May’s rambling, profanity-laced meltdown at this year’s annual press gallery dinner, which she called “an attempt at comedy that misfired,” was hilariously bad. And she was not the first left-wing leader to bomb on that stage; former Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe once provoked reporters to throw buns at him (which prompted the joke that waiters removed all the buns during May’s tirade). It’s hard for earnest people to suddenly switch to humour.

Holding fewer illusions about life and their fellow human beings, conservatives are less likely to be disappointed. Naomi Klein in her recent book *This Changes Everything* recounts having to comfort a tearful eco-warrior disillusioned by President Obama’s failure to deliver at the 2009 Copenhagen Conference on climate change. Sure, Alberta conservatives were disappointed with the performances of all their recent leaders – from Ed Stelmach to Alison Redford to Danielle Smith to Jim Prentice – but nobody cried about it. That came

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“Coolidge was  
bet he could be  
induced to say  
more than three  
words. His reply:  
You lose.”

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later, with the election of an NDP majority government.

Conservatives only sighed when Premier Wynne seized on the trendy push for pricing carbon to hike energy taxes, but without offsetting cuts to other taxes its proponents had intended. Conservatives knew that asking the Wynne government to curtail its need for tax revenues is like expecting sexual modesty from former IMF head Dominique Strauss-Khan (in court, he defended his predilection for orgies as a demonstration of restraint because “I only attended four per year over a three-year period.”) He would have made a splendidly typical Socialist President of France.

Conservatives are less constrained by political correctness in poking fun at particular individuals, groups or themselves, the basis for most humour in this world. John Crosbie apparently has dedicated his life to this proposition while serving in many federal and provincial cabinets and as Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador. He rankled opponents by christening the “Four Horsewomen of the Apocalypse” in reference to long-time foes Sheila Copps (for whom he later wrote an introduction to her biography), Mary Clancy, Dawn Black and Judy Rebick. Questioned about whether being unilingual was handicap when running for the leadership of the Progressive Conservatives in 1983, he replied “It is better to be honest and sincere in one language than a twister, a trickster and a twit in two” in a not so subtle dig at Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau’s fluent bilingualism and loose command of the truth.

No discussion of conservative political humour in Canada can ignore the contribution of the *National Post*, especially the *Financial Post* section. FP Comment editor Terry Corcoran and I were mulling over why we had unexpectedly received Queen’s Jubilee Medals in December 2012. I suggested maybe it was for antagonizing liberals, and realized there was a way to test that hypothesis: “Ask Peter Foster (a regular contributor to FP Comment) if he got two Jubilee medals.” If you want a good example of Foster’s satirical ability, read his review of the film version of Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*, which he titled “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Harper.”

Corcoran seriously considered entering the 2013 by-election in Toronto Centre, already a media circus due to the presence of two high profile candidates in the NDP’s Linda McQuaig and the Liberal’s Chrystia Freeland. The intent, like William F. Buckley’s 1965 candidacy for mayor of New York, was to publicize the conservative critique of liberal myth-making in the nation’s media centre. Like Buckley, if unimaginably Corcoran had eked out a win, his response would have been “I demand a recount.” Ultimately, he did not throw his hat in the ring, but we should hope he decides to lighten up – and enlighten – some future election campaign.

Judging by our current crop of leaders, humour coming from the political class is increasingly passé, the victim of managing the 24/7 news cycle, social media amplifying every mistake, and a suffocating political correctness (imagine a politician today repeating John Diefenbaker’s characterization of fellow Conservative MP Flora Macdonald as “the finest woman to walk the streets of Kingston since Confederation”). Prime Minister Stephen Harper showed he inherited a least some of the humorous legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald in a speech where he recalled Pierre Berton’s claim that a real Canadian knows how to make love in a canoe: “Now I think of myself as a real Canadian... I just prefer to say that I’m not much of a canoeist.” The nickname “Angry Tom” Mulcair has stuck because of his chronic state of outrage. As for Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, most of his humour seems inadvertent, as when he expressed admiration for China’s “basic dictatorship,” or tin-eared, as when he joked that Russia invaded Ukraine because it was in a “bad mood” after losing hockey gold at the Sochi Olympics.

Modern political humour is almost exclusively the domain of professional comedians today. Our political debate, and the rapport politicians have with the public, is the worse for them abdicating the field. A quick wit is usually the product of a quick mind. We need more of both in politics today.

*Ottawa-based commentator and consultant Philip Cross maintains an economics website called [InsidetheNumbers.org](http://InsidetheNumbers.org).*

# The Indictment of Mike Duffy

by John Robson

There are strange things done in elections won  
By the folks who moil for votes;  
The backroom trails have their secret tales  
That would make the cops take notes;  
Parliament's bleak lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that time police said all this must cease  
And indicted Mike Duffy.



Mike's just a guy who's from PEI, where the fair spud blooms and blows.  
Why he left his home in the East to roam 'round the Hill, God only knows.  
He was on the beat, but a Senate seat seemed to hold him like a spell;  
Though he'd often say in his homely way that his current job was swell.

Then one happy day he was on his way to pursue a trail of clues,  
When the call came through. They said Mike it's you for the Upper  
House we choose.  
If we hold our nose, and our eyes we close, then we cannot smell or see,  
What your vouchers say, when you're on your way, to support our great  
party.

From that very night, 'cuz he had the right, the expense claims  
they did flow,  
And when Mike was fed, and the hotel bed was cushy soft and low,  
Then he signed the chit, and laughed at it: "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;  
And whatever I say, I'm sure that they won't impose a stringent test."

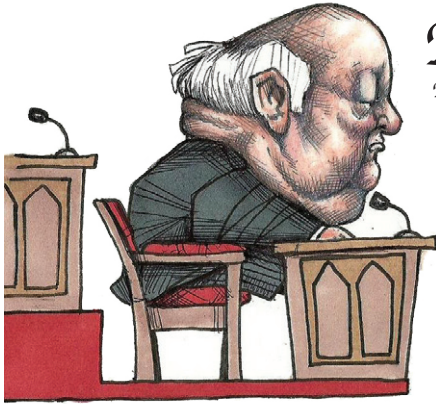
Well, he seemed so sure that they didn't demur; so he said with a sort of  
smile:

"It's pretty bold, but from what I'm told, though I've been away a while.  
Still it can be said — my face won't turn red — PEI my home remains;  
So you folks should pay, based on what I say, all my little housing claims."

Now a pol's cash need is a thing to heed, so they swore they  
would not fail;  
And they partied down in old Ottawa town, and swallowed his  
housing tale.  
For he traveled far, as a party star, with his home in PEI;  
Earning every plaudit till a Senate audit targeted that lovely guy.

And then Nigel Wright just to make it right wrote a cheque  
for 90 Gs,  
Duffy claims he said he was in the red, but don't give it oh no  
please;  
But they said you must or you bite the dust, so he took it with a  
tear,  
Saying you promised true, and it's up to you: make my problems  
disappear.





An expense claim made is a debt unpaid, at least once you get found out.  
In the days to come, though their lips were numb, they could see the PM pout.  
In the long, long night, by the neon light, the reporters, round in a ring,  
Endured denial waiting for the trial where Mike Duffy might well sing.

And day by day all the flaks could say was the PM did not know;  
And on it went, though the spin was spent and the talking points ran low;  
Brazeau and Wallin were tossed out, no stallin', PMO would not give in;  
And mud they'd fling at the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.

Till we reached the day when a judge did say, be seated in my court;  
It was jammed with press, drooling at the mess, hoping it all would be short.  
'Cuz to sit and sit, hearing lawyers' wit, would leave brains and buttocks numb;  
Until "Here," they'd say, with intense dismay, "we must sit till Kingdom Come."

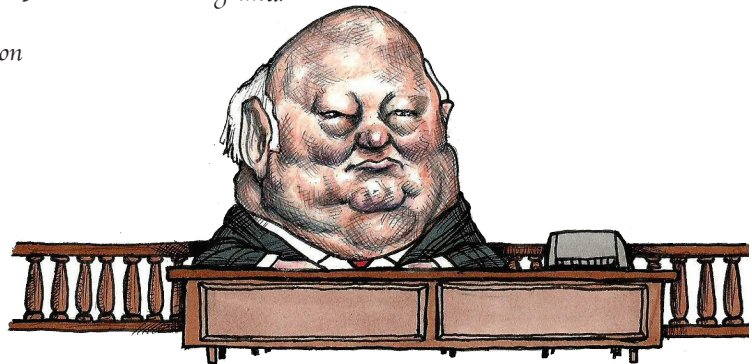
Some gum they chewed while the trial they viewed, or the ceiling of the room;  
While the lawyers droned, about who was phoned, and who had emailed whom;  
The tweets soon soared, though the press was bored — such a show you don't want to see;  
While each Tory soul wished to dig a hole, and then stuff in Mike Duffy.

Now the Senate rules were composed by fools who just didn't want to know;  
Though the public scowled, and the press corps howled, for inside a cheery glow,  
Lit the cozy seats, where for party feats, the insiders sure got by;  
Living here and there, travelling by air, and yet no one asked them why.

I do not know how long it will go before we get the facts;  
Will we then cry out and all jump about at Mike and his colleagues' acts?  
Or — I truly dread — when it's all been said, will nobody take the blame?  
Will Mike's goose get cooked, no one else get hooked, in this grisly PR game?

Meanwhile there sits Mike, and he doesn't like being inside the courtroom door;  
And he wears a frown you can see 'cross town, for he surely can't ignore  
That he's stuck in there, forced to sit and stare, while his whole career gets chilled —  
Since he left — oh why? — his home in PEI, it's the first time he's been grilled.

There are strange things done in elections won  
By the folks who moil for votes;  
The backroom trails have their secret tales  
That would make the cops take notes;  
Parliament's bleak lights have seen queer sights,  
But the queerest they ever did see  
Was that time police said all this must cease  
And indicted Mike Duffy.



John Robson, commentator-at-large with News Talk Radio 580 CFRA in Ottawa, journalist and documentary filmmaker, is also an Invited Professor at the University of Ottawa.



by Pierre Lemieux

The perennial strikes by college students in Québec represent one of the most misunderstood phenomena in the history of Western civilization. They are especially difficult to grasp for the rest of Canada (ROC), which doesn't understand Québec's distinct society. I will try to explain.

Some years ago, a separatist activist declared that we in Québec are so different from ROC that we don't even eat the same food. Indeed, Québec is apparently one of the few places in the world where Pepsi outsells Coke. And Yukoners beat us at wine drinking, which is humiliating. We would drink only wine if we could, but it is alas too expensive.

Why, you ask, is wine so expensive in Québec? The answer is obvious: it is to protect the unionized workers of our Société des Alcools du Québec, which is also part of our distinct society. It's a question of priority. South of the border, in Maine, they get good French Bourgogne at \$5.99, a third the price Quebecers pay. But they don't get Québec social

# The Québec Student Strikes Explained

solidarity, which is priceless.

Even Céline Dion, I am sure, dreams of leaving Los Angeles and bringing her family back to Québec. She and her husband must yearn for a real education for their children. And how do they survive without our health services? Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre recently invited Pope Francis to visit Québec in 2017. If for nothing else, he will certainly come for the health tourism.

But I digress from my main topic: the recurrent student strikes in Québec, which perfectly illustrate the fundamental

difference between Québec and the rest of the world (of which ROC is a small and insignificant part). This difference is difficult to explain, especially to an Anglo audience and without violating our Québec Charter of Rights and Freedom. But let me try.

The students who forcibly interrupted classes, blocked other students from school, and vandalized college buildings, are not monsters. They are our children, and our future. We have raised these children with all the right principles: they can do what they want and society bears the responsibility.

They are the first generation in the history of mankind to really see behind the lies of capitalism.

And nobody will stop them because their cause is just. Of course, they have to respect our collective will, like smoking prohibitions for example, which they do because our collective will is also their collective will. And they may not challenge our social gains, our welfare state, and our distinct society – which would never occur to them anyway.

Many teachers' unions supported student strikes. Their members – at least those teachers who bothered to attend the union's general assemblies – passed motions proclaiming solidarity with the strikers. Then they stayed home, at full pay, instead of going to work in empty classrooms. This was true selflessness, worthy of their students' ideals.

College students in Québec typically pay tuition fees of about half what ROC students pay. ROC's money helps, but not directly. Québec's government refuses federal money for education, because it is a provincial jurisdiction. However it does take transfer and equalization payments for things that do not offend provincial jurisdiction, thereby releasing some provincial money for education. It is of course normal for ROC taxpayers to indirectly finance Québec students: it is called solidarity, social solidarity, social and collective solidarity. But everybody cannot do solidarity, because no beneficiary would be left. If some have to do it, it's normal that it be ROC. And somebody has to do it. QED.

As they expressed forcefully in their demonstrations, striking students are fed up with austerity, that is, of government expenditures not increasing fast enough to satisfy all their desires. It's about time that the government either make taxpayers cough up more and/or stop giving money to other constituents. The striking students' reasons are not selfish: they only want the money because education is good for our social and collective society.

But this analysis is not totally correct. We must not get hung up on these contemptible money matters. As socialists, we don't like money – except as a necessary evil for the purchase of goods and services that are put to noble, collective, and social purposes. Here we start to see the true essence of the message the students are sending to us.

Look under the appearances. Why are the students striking against institutions that essentially give them something for free? I think they're really telling the taxpayer they don't want his money. They are striking against the gifts. They want to fend for themselves. They want to be self-reliant like their ancestors, the French Canadian pioneers, explorers, and *coureurs des bois*.

Even more deeply, their message may be that what they don't want is capitalist money. They would take money happily only from the governments of Venezuela or North

Korea, if they had any.

If you think that all this is logically inconsistent, you need to rethink your social conditioning under Anglo-Saxon capitalism.

Students do not engage in these strikes on a whim. They have democratic student unions, financed by compulsory levies. The students' general assemblies are democratic – for the minority that attends them. Student leaders have a democratic mandate. Any democratic mandate from whatever group must have priority over any other democratic mandate from whatever other group. Anyone who has studied the beginning of the rudiments of Aristotelian logic in a strike-shortened semester understands that.

You have to see the big picture, the holistic whole. Québec society represents a superior model of humanity. In Québec, contrary to ROC and the United States, you don't see people

dying in the street for lack of public health insurance. You don't see guns sold in the beer and chips department at Walmart. You don't see students obediently swallowing what is taught to them in colleges, or even attending classes.

All this flows from the Québec education system, one of the most advanced in the world (just like the health system). So smart, so foresighted were the elites of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s that they went a bit further than the welfare state builders in ROC: they created a brand new education system with an original set of institutions between high school and college proper. To demonstrate their creativity, they gave to these institutions a name that existed nowhere, "CEGEPs." Many CEGEP students, still pimpled teenagers, participated in the recent college strikes. Who said that social engineering could produce no good?

When the flood of Nobel prizes soon starts engulfing Québec universities, the world will understand what I mean.

The rich culture of the typical Québec student was illustrated by a sign at one of the student demonstrations: it read "*F--k toute*." This sign revealed a generous spirit of universalism by borrowing one word from the English language and misspelling the French one. The English language is truly rich. The word "*toute*" (everything) should of course have been written "*tout*," but the demonstrator obviously wanted to stress that "*everything*" really means everything, including the French language. You don't make a revolution without breaking some linguistic eggs.

It is thus clear that we have to support, not condemn, student strikes in Québec. Indeed, we have to go farther. We need a *general, unlimited strike* (as the adults' unions say), instead of the short, sporadic strikes we have seen. When a college closes for a few weeks, the teachers, staff, and

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“Teachers stayed home, at full pay, instead of going to work in empty classrooms. This was true selflessness, worthy of their students' ideals.”

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maintenance workers all continue to be paid, as per their collective agreements. The education the students don't want is not provided, but it continues to cost as much.

With a general and unlimited strike, real social gains could be obtained. After a year or two of closed colleges, the collective agreements with teachers and other school staff would expire. It would then be possible to let all the employees go, so that non-education would cost no money, instead of being, as it is now, as expensive as education itself. We must therefore encourage Québec's striking students to

follow the logic of their collective demonstration of social solidarity, and to launch a general and unlimited strike.

Besides, Québec students don't need an education anyway. They already know everything.

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*Pierre Lemieux is an economist and author who has published many books in Montréal, Paris, and New York. His latest book is Who Needs Jobs? Spreading Poverty or Increasing Welfare (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Born in Québec, he recently moved to Maine.*



by Terry Fallis

There was another rally on the lawns of Parliament Hill the other day. Three hundred or so protestors gathered in clumps to express their dissatisfaction about something or other. I don't actually remember the cause. Do you? Probably not. But I do remember there was anger and rage, and spittle flying, as there usually is. There were clenched fists held aloft. There were placards

pumping almost in time with chants that almost rhymed. The protesters didn't stay long. After a few megaphone-muffled speeches the group dispersed to make way for another clutch of disgruntled Canadians, mad about a completely different issue, heading across the grass for the mid-afternoon time slot. I don't remember what they were protesting either.

In the early 1980s I was very active in the national student movement. I'd somehow persuaded the undergraduates

of McMaster University to elect me President of the students' union. I marched in many protest rallies opposing higher tuition fees, in support of gender equality, against university funding cuts, and demanding more student financial aid. We made angry speeches. We hurled insults at the bastions of power in Ottawa and several provincial capitals. We railed against various tyrannies that simply did not understand, accept, or care about, the plight of the student. That's what we did back then. We felt like we were doing something, and perhaps even accomplishing something. And maybe we were. Now, all these years later, I'm not so sure. Hindsight is a cruel companion.

Don't get me wrong. Assembling to raise a flag, or sometimes burn one, for or against a government's conduct, decision, policy, or legislation, is an inalienable right of citizens in an effectively functioning democracy. I want more young people to get engaged in the democratic process and hold governments' feet to the fire. In fact, I think our future turns on it. I'm just not sure Canadians, the media, or governments take much notice any more when the protest signs are hoisted yet again and the semi-rhythmic chants begin anew. The rage just washes over us, now. We don't seem to care much anymore. We've heard it all before. Forged in the Sixties, the standard, garden-variety protest rally seems to have lost its lustre after fifty years. I think we've grown inured to the anger, the shouting, the signs, and the marching. There must be a better way. And I think there is. Let's laugh at what threatens us, appalls us, or enrages us. Let's just laugh at it.

In early 1985, just months removed from my student activist days, I was working on Parliament Hill for a Liberal MP. Somehow I was invited to represent the Young Liberals of Canada at a meeting in Strasbourg, France, of the International Federation of Liberal and Radical Youth (IFLRY). Surely you've heard of IFLRY. No, neither had I at the time. But I'm pleased to report they're apparently still around helping to nurture a progressive and enlightened world view among a new generation of young liberals. Bear with me, now, there is a point to this story.

I was thrilled to be the sole Canadian delegate to this assembly. I'd never been to France, and I was keen to commune with my ideological

soul mates from other countries. The meeting was about racism and xenophobia, and was attended by about 60 young liberals from almost every western European nation, all the Scandinavian countries, two from the United States, and me from Canada.

In 1985, despite nearly universal condemnation, Apartheid was still firmly entrenched in South Africa. The keynote speaker at that Strasbourg conference was a man named Donald Woods, the former editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, a newspaper in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. In the '70s Donald Woods befriended Steven Biko, the famed anti-apartheid activist and founder of the Black Consciousness movement. Over time, Woods came to reject Apartheid and became a harsh critic of the government. To make a long but important story short, eventually the police arrested Steven Biko and beat him to death while in custody. When the news broke, Woods was outraged and ran a front-page story featuring a photo of Steven Biko and the headline "A Hero for a Nation".

As you can imagine, the Afrikaans government was not a fan of Donald Woods. He was summarily banned and had to escape the country to neighbouring Lesotho disguised as a priest.

We all gathered in a meeting room in a Strasbourg youth centre to hear Donald Woods tell his story. We were a pretty well informed group of young Liberals who found Apartheid utterly abhorrent. We were enraged that in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the government of a seemingly modern and advanced nation could preside over a society where skin pigment was a pillar of public policy. Yet, about two minutes after Donald Woods began his talk, the room was filled with laughter. To be clear, I don't mean that there was a little smiling, chuckling and giggling. I mean that everyone, yes, all of us, were clutching our abdomens in the throes of unexpected paroxysms of hilarity. Sides were split that day.

Donald Woods told a series of funny stories that powerfully illustrated just how absolutely ridiculous and ludicrous were the pass-book laws and the other statutes of the Apartheid regime. He gave a tour-de-force performance.

I have a vivid memory of thinking to myself, as tears

“We’ve grown inured to the anger, the shouting, the signs, and the marching. A better way to protest, I think, is just to laugh at what threatens, appalls, or enrages us.”



of laughter streamed down my face, “I’m laughing about Apartheid.” I wondered if it were appropriate to be laughing about Apartheid. Shortly thereafter, it dawned on me that Donald Woods wasn’t making us laugh *about* Apartheid. He was making us laugh *at* Apartheid.

This was a revelation to me. I accept that it probably should not have been such an epiphany. I was 25 years old, and should have appreciated the power of humour to undermine and challenge the status quo. But until that moment, I really hadn’t. Back then, I was not a big novel reader. I’d missed out on the classic satires that used humour as a trenchant instrument of social comment. I hadn’t read Joseph Heller or Kurt Vonnegut, or Gore Vidal or the other humour heavyweights. So the performance of Donald Woods struck me like lightning. As a group, my fellow young liberals and I were no less motivated to work against racism and Apartheid because Woods had made us laugh at it. In fact, it made us feel stronger. Laughing somehow emboldened us and empowered us to fight the good fight.

After dinner that night, Donald Woods and I stayed up and played pool in the recreation room of that Strasbourg youth centre, and talked until the wee hours. I’ll never forget that encounter and what it meant to me. Before we said goodnight, he told me that Richard Attenborough was going to make a film about Woods’s friendship with Steven Biko, and his escape from South Africa. Two years later, I sat rapt in a darkened Toronto theatre watching *Cry Freedom*, starring Kevin Kline as Donald Woods and Denzel Washington as Steven Biko.

Donald Woods taught me that when you laugh at an unjust authority you weaken it. When you laugh at a corrupt government, you weaken it. When you laugh at injustice or inequality, you weaken it. When the impact of rage and anger, and chants, and placards, and rallies, and marches, has been softened through repetition, I learned that humour, satire and laughter can be new and powerful forces for social change if wielded with passion and skill.

When I got back to Canada after the conference, I went on a fiction reading binge. I read every satirical or comic novel I could lay my hands on. Not all of them took aim at righting wrongs, but many did. I loved laughing while I read. It was a new experience for me. I’d found my chosen literary fare.

I didn’t write my first novel, *The Best Laid Plans*, until 20 years after that fateful encounter in that French town near the German border. Yet, in a way, the fingerprints of the now late Donald Woods are all over that novel. I’d written a funny story about the sorry state of politics in Canada. If I’d written a rage-filled, non-fiction polemic railing against my dissatisfaction with the uber-partisan, ultra-negative, deeply personal nature of politics today, no one would have published it and no one would have read it. So I cloaked my ideas in a comic tale and put my thoughts in the minds

and mouths of some characters readers might come to like and even care about. While I’m always thrilled to hear that readers have enjoyed and laughed their way through the novel, I’m always even more fulfilled if they have given passing thought to the more serious issues I’ve tried to illuminate underneath the fun.

There are several scenes that play out in my first two novels in the seat of our parliamentary democracy, the House of Commons. It seems that humour in the Commons may only appear in fiction. In real life, you seldom feel the urge to laugh, or even smile when watching the televised proceedings in the House. The urge to bang your head on a nearby coffee table is more likely.

Don’t you think we need more humour in the House of Commons? It used to be that most Canadians, if pushed, would choose watching Question Period over having a root canal. Nowadays, I’m not so sure. It’s usually such a dreary, tedious and stultifying exercise with members of all parties

apparently honouring the no-humour zone in the House. It’s unnatural. I’m quite sure that safely concealed beneath the partisan armour each MP dons before entering the House, at least some MPs actually do have a sense of humour. Why not let it loose a bit more while in the chamber? I don’t mean MPs and ministers in the Commons should start playing the stand-up whenever they, er, stand up. But they might at least recognize that a wit-laced jab can be just as potent as a rage-tinged epithet. And it’s a hell of a lot more interesting for those who may stumble upon the Parliamentary channel as they move up the dial from TSN to Sportsnet. Humour lightens the load and inflicts perspective. We need more of it. Lots more of it. Why not give it a try.

I’m sure right about now, yet another demonstration is amassing on Parliament Hill. More power to them. If I believe in a cause, I will always support groups who want to demonstrate on Parliament Hill or in front of provincial legislatures. Hell, on some issues, I’ll be right there with them. There will always be a place for that brand of dissent. But I think it’s time we considered adding the humour arrow to the quivers of the advocate and the activist. It may even be more effective at mobilizing Canadians, challenging authority, and effecting social change.

So let’s not only rage against that which is unjust, let’s laugh at it.

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“I have a vivid memory of thinking to myself, as tears of laughter streamed down my face, I’m laughing about Apartheid.”

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*Canadian writer and public relations consultant Terry Fallis won the Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for Humour in 2008 for his debut novel The Best Laid Plans and again in 2015 for his novel No Relation.*

# FUNNY TALES

## FROM CAMPAIGN TRAILS

### Preston Manning: Reform Party of Canada candidate in Yellowhead (Alberta), 1988.

On one of our first door-knocking calls early in the Yellowhead campaign, Randy Murray (a stalwart volunteer) and I knocked on the door and introduced ourselves to the lady who opened it. Before we could say anything more, she asked, "What is your position on the ozone layer?" As I prepared to give a scientifically nuanced answer, Randy blurted out, "We're in favour of it, at least the western portion."



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In Edson, one morning in the same campaign, we started up the walkway to a house when someone yelled out, "If its religion or politics, I don't want it." To which Randy replied, "Actually, we're from Lotto Canada, but if you don't want to be disturbed, we'll leave."

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Later in the same campaign we encountered perhaps the most confused voter in Yellowhead. Two stories carried by the Edmonton media had apparently caught this man's attention. One dealt with the possible northward movement of killer bees from Brazil, the other dealt with the possible movement of PCB-contaminated oil from Quebec to Alberta for incineration at the Swan Hills waste-disposal facility. Somehow he had these two things mixed up, and when we knocked on his door the first thing he wanted to know was, "Why are the PCs bringing in all these bees? And from Quebec yet?" I whispered to my fellow doorknocker, "Just back away slowly. There's nothing we can say to untangle this."

### Ted Byfield: Journalist, publisher, raconteur.

The fine art of crucifying by word of mouth was, one suspects, more honed and skilled in the politics of bygone years than those of today, though many things grow richer in memory. In mine, few tongues could out-lash that of John George Diefenbaker, prime minister of Canada from 1957 to 1963. By the summer of 1965, however, he was back in opposition and delivering a campaign-style speech in a sweltering schoolhouse in (I think it was) Gypsumville, Manitoba.

Diefenbaker's primary target was the smooth, scholarly, icon of the respectable left, Liberal Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson. Two years into his first minority government, things were already going wrong in the promised Pearson Paradise.

There was, for instance, the prison escape earlier that year of Lucien Rivard, a hardcore Montreal gangster, whose trial

had been expected to provide sensational disclosures about Liberal people in high places. But for mysterious reasons that eventually led to the resignation of Pearson's justice minister, Rivard was sent out one warm evening to flood the prison rink, and used the hose to climb over the wall.

At the start of his speech in Gypsumville a few months later, Diefenbaker observed that it was a frightfully warm evening, and asked the "ladies in the audience" for permission to remove his jacket. That done, he resumed the microphone and began with a line that was no doubt heard many times by many audiences across Canada during the run-up to the fall election, convulsing all of them with laughter just as it did the Gypsumvillians: "You know, it was on an evening much like this that Lucien Rivard was sent out to flood the prison rink."

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Another favourite Diefenbaker target was Tom Kent, an English economist and Manchester *Guardian* editorial writer, brought to Canada to edit the *Winnipeg Free Press*. Kent parlayed that job into a senior post in the Pearson Ottawa bureaucracy, where he was put in charge of the government's so-called "War on Poverty." One day soon after in the House of Commons, Diefenbaker took aim: "I see that Mr. Tom Kent has been given command of the War on Poverty, at a salary of sixty thousand," he dryly observed. "Well, he's certainly won *his* war on poverty!"

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When Diefenbaker was in power, his finance minister Donald Fleming introduced his first budget by recounting the many hours he had spent, night and day, preparing it. But no sacrifice, he declared, was too great to make for the fiscal security of the country he so dearly loved.

I wish I could remember the name of the Liberal financial critic who arose in reply to Fleming's budget address. Going from memory, it went something like this: "It is the custom for the man responding to the budget from this side of the house to begin by paying tribute to the minister for the work he has done in preparing the budget. Unfortunately, however, neither I nor any other Canadian could think of any tribute to pay to the minister that the minister has not already paid to himself, so on this occasion I will dispense with that courtesy."

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My father, who covered the Ontario Legislature for the *Toronto Star* in the 1930s, told me many funny stories about Liberal leader Mitch Hepburn, the man who deposed Ontario's ageless Conservative government in 1934. Hepburn's wisecracking style skewered many a Tory opponent. On



one occasion, however, a Hepburn jibe backfired on him. Speaking at an agricultural implements show in the market gardening country of southwestern Ontario, he stepped up into the bin of a manure-spreading machine. "This the first time," declared Hepburn, "that I've ever spoken from a Tory platform." As the laughter subsided, there came a loud voice from the rear: "Well, throw her into gear, Mitch. It's the first time it's ever been loaded."

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Alcohol played an omnipresent role in the politics of the Thirties and in much else besides, as the country sought refuge from the miseries of the Great Depression. Most politicians were prodigious toppers, Hepburn included. My father recalled that after Hepburn's first election victory, he and a *Star* photographer showed up at the scene of the Liberals' gala celebration party the next morning to get some comments and pictures of the premier-elect. The residue of the festivities still littered the room, including Hepburn passed out on the buffet table. The sandwiches had to be peeled off his jacket before the pictures were taken. It was an inauspicious beginning, perhaps, but booze notwithstanding Hepburn became a remarkably good premier.

### **Ron Wood: Former press secretary to Reform Party Leader Preston Manning.**



In the early 1990s Preston Manning wrote a book and we set off on a national promotion tour with a dual purpose: sell books and promote the Reform Party.

One of our first stops was a book store in downtown Vancouver for a lunch hour book-signing event. A fair-sized crowd gathered, including a television news crew which filmed Preston and interviewed some of the book buyers. I stood on the sidelines holding two books, cover out so people could see them and perhaps be prompted to buy one.

Mistaking me for a book buyer, the reporter approached and asked why I was there. I gave him an answer and later in my hotel room watched the supper hour news to see what coverage we got.

It was an excellent piece, plenty of front cover shots, friendly smiling faces, a relaxed Preston Manning obviously enjoying himself.

Even the brief interviews with onlookers and buyers were good. Especially the clip showing a guy in the crowd holding two books with covers out and saying, "I'm here to get his autograph because he's going to be the next Prime Minister of Canada."

### **Ted Morton: Former Alberta Conservative MLA and cabinet minister.**

It was December, 2004 and I had just been elected as the new MLA for Foothills-Rocky View in the Alberta provincial election. I received a phone call from Richard Marz, a veteran



PC MLA from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Richard explained that he would be seeking the position of Deputy-Speaker, and asked for my support.

I barely knew Richard, but I did know a number of his constituents who were active in the Federal Reform-Alliance-now Conservative Party. I intended to run for leader of the PC party when Ralph Klein decided to leave – which was anticipated to be soon – and my strategy was to tap into the large number of Reformers across Alberta, including those in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. So I said yes to Richard. I would support him for Deputy Speaker.

Several days later, I got a call from Shiraz Shariff, another veteran PC MLA. Shiraz said he too was seeking to be elected as Deputy Speaker. Would I support him? I explained that I had already promised my vote to Richard Marz, and said I hoped he would understand that I had to keep that promise.

A month later I was seated in the Legislative Assembly as the results of the secret ballot vote for Deputy Speaker were announced. The winner was Richard Marz. Sitting just in front of me was Shiraz Shariff. He was visibly upset, and soon was almost sobbing. Later I tried to comfort him. "Don't take it personally," I said. "Your day will come."

Shiraz thanked me and said, "Ted, I was supposed to win. I phoned everyone in our Caucus, and you were the only one to say you wouldn't support me."

This was my introduction to Caucus politics.

### **Clare Denman: Campaign manager for Kerry Diotte, 2013 Edmonton mayoralty election.**

"I want to know where the candidate stands on abortion," demanded the voter. "I'm not voting for him if he doesn't have the right answer." It was her third time in the campaign office that week, insisting on a response while helping herself to the volunteers' food table.

I explained again: "Ma'am, abortion is a federal issue and city council won't be making any decisions regarding the matter. The answer will not affect his ability to do the job." She scoffed, declared she would not be leaving the office until she had an answer, and settled in with the Peek Freans for the afternoon.

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At an all-candidates' forum hosted by the LGBTQA community, a man stood up and mischievously asked the candidates, "What is your shoe size?" The crowd was mostly silent as each of the candidates dutifully supplied their unremarkable measurements, until the man who would go on to win the election announced that his feet were size 15. A chorus of "Oooh's" swept over the room. Looking back, I think that was the moment I realized he was a shoe-in for mayor.





# CAUTION:

## This Article Defends Privileges

by Fred Litwin

Before you read this article I want to make sure you have the proper trigger warnings. I will be touching on some delicate issues and if you are a minority of any kind, you might want to find a safe space in other parts of the *C2C Journal*. Some people find the use of the term “trigger warning” itself to be offensive, and so you can alternatively consider this to be an “activation warning” or a “stress warning.” There might also be some micro-aggressions peppered throughout my article, and I apologize, in advance, for that.

In the 1990s, I was working in England for the American multinational, Intel Corporation, and my Scottish boss, John Breslin, would come back from trips to head office shaking his head at the latest manifestations of political correctness. There were never-ending seminars on sexual harassment which even included guidance on what jokes were safe to tell at work, and when/how you could touch a fellow employee. He would laugh and comment on how lucky we all were to work in the U.K., where we were immune to the craziness. It didn't last and soon we had Americans flying

“Intergalactic night at the college featured space ships with aliens and a buffet of Mexican food, prompting complaints of racism because of the association between Mexicans and illegal aliens.”

over to teach the Brits how to properly behave.

Sometimes political correctness would seem to recede, only to re-emerge in a new format. After 9/11, it morphed into irrational concerns about Islamophobia and George Bush derangement syndrome. Recently, we've entered a new stage – political correctness 2.0 – and now we have to talk about white privilege, cisgender privilege (living the gender

you were born with), male privilege, and the notion that “privilege” should be “checked at the door.”

Here is just a taste of some of the stories making the rounds:

- As reported by Heather MacDonald in *City Journal* last year, UCLA professor Val Rust was teaching a graduate course in dissertation preparation. In one proposal he corrected the capitalization of the word indigenous to lowercase. This supposedly showed disrespect for a student's politics. In November 2013, five of his students of colour, accompanied by other



students and reporters, marched into the class and surrounded Rust and read a “Day of Action Statement.” Administration then announced that three other professors would help teach his course, one of whom was a proponent of critical race theory. At a town hall to discuss the matter Rust approached a student “who had berated him for not seeking forgiveness,” and “reached out to touch him.” The student promptly filed criminal charges of battery. Rust was then given a choice – if he agreed to stay off the campus for the remainder of the school year, the University would not pursue disciplinary charges.

- Two white students were barred from an on-campus meeting at Ryerson because they were not “racialized.” The meeting was hosted by the Racialized Students Collective, and two students were asked, upon entry, if either of them had been marginalized or racialized. When they said no, they were asked to leave. Explained the head of the Collective, Rajean Hoilett: “Speaking as a racialized student, as a black student, the conversation looks very different for folks that are looking to talk about racism when they’re talking about racism amongst other folks that also experience racism.”
- Stevenson College, part of the University of California at Santa Cruz, recently held an intergalactic night featuring robots and space ships with aliens. As part of the evening, they served a buffet of Mexican food. Complaints were filed that the event was racist because of the association between Mexicans and illegal aliens. The College apologized and decided to add “cultural competence training” for its staff, and implemented “measures for future program planning that will ensure college programs are culturally

sensitive and inclusive.”

- In January 2015, McGill University had Rad Sex Week which included a series of “talks, workshops, discussion and performances on the topics of gender, sexuality, sexual health and less conventional sexual practices.” One seminar was called “Desires: A QT\*POC [Queer Transgendered People of Colour] Exploration.” The event description said “white folks need not attend.” The *McGill Daily* agreed with the ban and wrote: “Grounded in decolonization principles, [the seminar] seeks to analyze and deconstruct experiences and perspectives that arise specifically from the intersection of race and queerness. In addition to the predominant place taken up by whiteness and heteronormativity in public discourse, queer POC often face race-based marginalization even in queer spaces.”
- The People’s Social Forum was held in Ottawa in August of 2014, featuring over 3,000 participants, 500 seminars, a film festival, concerts, a protest march, and several assemblies. It was sponsored by all the major unions in Canada as well as rabble.ca. A subsequent article by Steffanie Pinch, Rabble’s activist toolkit coordinator, was upset by “the overwhelming whiteness of the forum.” She noted that “during the report-backs from the Assemblies, representatives from the People of Colour’s caucus called out the whiteness of the forum, beginning their report with ‘dear white people....’ They stated that their signs for specific people of colour-only spaces were repeatedly removed and that the vast majority of workshops and presenters did not reflect an anti-racist framework that put people of colour at the centre.”

- Here's an April 2015 tweet from Murtaza Hussain, a fellow journalist at *The Intercept* with Glenn Greenwald: "Newest form of white privilege: converting to Islam, committing heinous acts, dying, letting all the brown/black people take the heat for it."
  - There is an annual conference on White Privilege in Louisville Kentucky. Some of the partners include the Sierra Club, the Chicago Theological Seminary, the ACLU and the University of Louisville. It is extremely inclusive: "WPC is a conference designed to examine issues of privilege beyond skin color. WPC is open to everyone and invites diverse perspectives to provide a comprehensive look at issues of privilege including: race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, etc. — the ways we all experience some form of privilege, and how we're all affected by that privilege." One of the films shown at the event this year was "The Whiteness Project" which was "launched in partnership with PBS as an ongoing digital project that examines white privilege. The Project is compiling interviews with 1,000 white Americans from all walks of life on their views on race and how they experience their whiteness."
  - A theater group at Mount Holyoke College will no longer put on the Vagina Monologues, partly because it excludes women without vaginas.
  - This April, the White House finally dedicated a gender-neutral bathroom. Valerie Jarett, Obama's key political advisor, wrote that it was designed "to ensure that everyone who enters this building feels safe and fully respected." (This was around the same time the White House was negotiating a deal with Iran allowing its nuclear program to proceed.)
  - Now, despite all this incredible silliness, here is some good news: Some people on the left are noticing (such as [Jonathan Chait](#) in *New York Magazine*) and writing critically about this, and in some delightful instances, the stupidity is now feeding on itself.
  - In November 2014, Omar Mahmoud, a student at the University of Michigan, wrote a satirical piece making fun of political correctness in *The Michigan Review*. He then received word from the other campus newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, which he also wrote for, that he had created a "hostile environment" among the editorial staff and that someone had felt threatened. He was asked to write a letter of apology or leave the paper and when he refused, he was fired. Four students then went to his apartment, splattered eggs, and left messages like "shut the f--k up" on his door.
  - John McWhorter, a black Professor at Columbia University notes that "it's a safe bet that most black people are more interested in there being adequate public transportation from their neighborhoods to where they need to work than that white people attend another encounter group session where they learn how lucky they are to have cars. It's a safe bet that most black people are more interested in whether their kids learn anything at their school than whether white people are reminded that their kids probably go to a better school."
  - Peter Tatchell, a gay rights advocate in the U.K., and one of my heroes — he's been beaten up several times in Russia and once tried to personally arrest Robert Mugabe — signed a letter in *The Observer* last February, with 129 other intellectuals, calling for more free speech in universities. It was a response to student unions' "no-platforming" strategy to stop unpopular views, including banning feminists whom they believed were "whorephobic" or "transphobic." Tatchell was then bombarded with 5,000 tweets, many of which were insulting and threatening.
  - Laureen Harper wrote a letter of support in April of 2015 for the Day of Pink — a day to wear pink to show your opposition to bullying. Gay activists went ballistic and encouraged people to boycott the event because of Mrs. Harper's husband, who is supposedly homophobic. Their campaign went nowhere and was roundly condemned in the press.
- So, it's nice to see some opposition to politically correct extremism coming from the left. If enough people stand up, this will all recede. Not without a fight, of course, but there is a glimmer of hope.
- I should add that the left doesn't have a monopoly over political correctness; sometimes it is on the right. Conservative curmudgeon Jeremy Clarkson, host of the popular TV show *Top Gear*, was sacked by the BBC after beating up his producer because there wasn't a hot dinner waiting for him at a hotel. Various defenders in the right-wing press claimed Clarkson was fired because he was conservative, including on in the *Daily Mail*, which sniped that it was because he was "too white, too male, and too damned British for the BBC."
- British journalist Nick Cohen notes that, "the infantilising left is matched by the infantilising right. No one on either side of the culture wars is responsible for their actions. They are the victims of a conspiracy by enemies with hidden agendas."
- Though honourable mention



goes to Canada's own [Rex Murphy](#) for a recent courageous defence of "white privilege" in the National Post, the best rejoinder to all this nonsense came from Tal Fortgang, a Jewish student at Princeton University who wrote an essay in April of 2014 called "Checking My Privilege: Character as the Basis of Privilege."

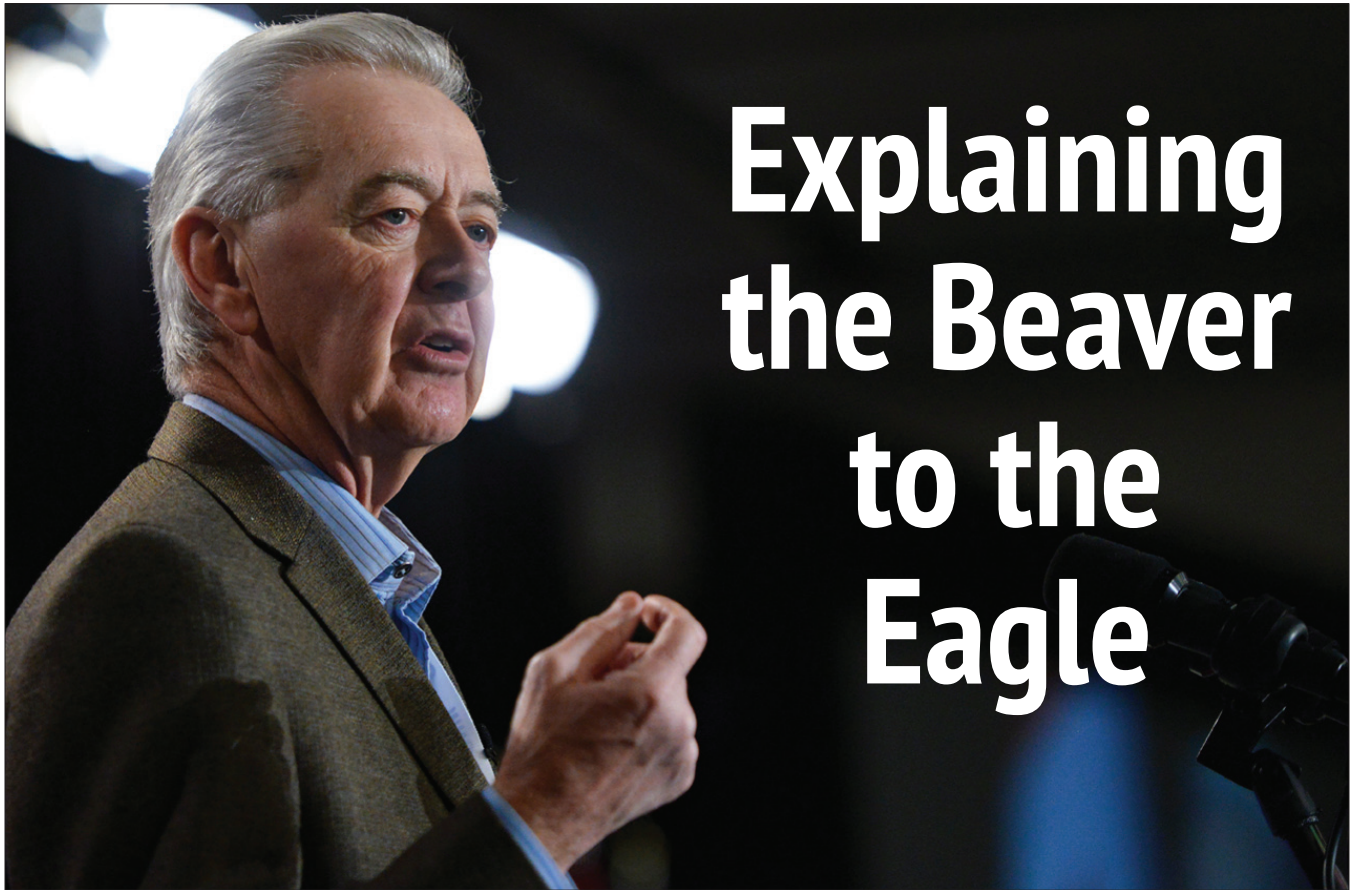
He wrote: "Perhaps it's the privilege my grandfather and his brother had to flee their home as teenagers when the Nazis invaded Poland, leaving their mother and five younger siblings behind, running and running until they reached a Displaced Persons camp in Siberia, where they would do years of hard labor in the bitter cold until World War II ended. Maybe it was the privilege my grandfather had of taking on the local Rabbi's work in that DP camp, telling him that the spiritual leader shouldn't do hard work, but should save his energy to pass Jewish tradition along to those who might survive. Perhaps it was the privilege my great-grandmother

and those five great-aunts and uncles I never knew had of being shot into an open grave outside their hometown. Maybe that's my privilege....It's been made clear to me that education begins in the home, and the importance of parents' involvement with their kids' education – from mathematics to morality – cannot be overstated. It's not a matter of white or black, male or female, or any other division which we seek, but a matter of the values we pass along, the legacy we leave, that perpetuates 'privilege.' And there's nothing wrong with that."

Thank you Mr. Fortgang.

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*Fred Litwin is the Founder and President of the Free Thinking Film Society which is dedicated to showing films on freedom, liberty and democracy. This article was adapted from a presentation he gave at the 2015 Civitas conference in Calgary.*



# Explaining the Beaver to the Eagle

*This is an abridged version of a speech Preston Manning gave at the 2003 Leacock Luncheon at McGill University.*

**Y**ou may have noted from the newspapers that there is a new effort to "unite the right." Actually the original idea behind this was to "unite the bright," but there was a typo in our original press release and this is where we ended up.

I once tried to work with Joe Clark to unite the right, but Joe didn't trust me. And it all went back to an incident

involving a dog in the 1988 federal election campaign.

I was running against Joe in the Yellowhead riding in Alberta, and I was door knocking in the oilfield town of Swan Hills. It was getting dark. I leaped up the porch steps to greet a man at his door. His puppy ran across the step. I stepped on its paw and the poor thing started squealing like a stuck pig.

The owner, glowering at me, swept up the dog and disappeared into the house, to be replaced by his bewildered wife who came out to see what the fuss was about.

And here's the great test of a candidate and a political door-knocker. What do you say to make amends, in a town where dogs are more highly valued than politicians? Of course, there is only one thing I could say: "Good evening, my name is Joe Clark and I'm running for Parliament."

I later tried to convince Joe that impersonation was the sincerest form of flattery but he just wouldn't buy it.

Eventually I did get to the House of Commons where my friends and I tried to introduce some radical ideas – like democracy. I was just glad that Stephen Leacock, whose memory we honour today, wasn't a member of the House. In Leacock's day, it was socialism that was the radical political idea. But his comment was that "socialism...would work only in heaven where they don't need it, or in hell where they already have it." I shudder to think what he might have said about Reform.

I spent nine years in the House, being released in 2002 for good behaviour. And during my time in federal politics I completed two books entitled *The New Canada* and *Think Big*. They sold about 30,000 copies each, but my publisher told me we could have sold more if I'd had better titles.

Now you may have heard that Bill Clinton has been advanced millions for his up-coming book, all on the basis of the title, *Sex Between the Bushes*. Wish I'd thought of that – the title, that is....

I would have gone further in federal politics if it hadn't been for my image. We tried hard to fix it, but nothing really worked. In fact, a lady who tried very hard to help fix my image is in the audience today – but she wishes to remain anonymous.

One thing we tried was to enlist the help of a "tie consultant" in Calgary who had a unique service. He would come to your house or office with his laptop computer and a program for designing custom-made ties that improved your image.

He would feed all sorts of relevant information into this computer – like your hair colour, eye colour, skin colour, diameter of your Adam's apple, the distance from your navel to your chin, your astrology chart, the Farmers' Almanac, and your appointment schedule – and it would design a tie exactly right for every circumstance.

There was the "power tie" which radiated executive authority, the "come-hither tie" which was warm and friendly, the "back-off tie" which established psychological distance, not to mention the "look at me" tie and the "don't look



at me, I'm just part of the woodwork" tie.

We bought them all, but the problem was that I couldn't remember which tie did what. My wife Sandra tried attaching little yellow stickum notes to each tie, but they would come off in my suitcase, or worse yet, come off and reattach themselves to the wrong tie.

In fact, it was that kind of a mix-up that again got me on the wrong side of Joe Clark. I went to this meeting on uniting the right, intending to wear my "come hither" tie, only to find out later that I was wearing my "back off" tie.

Image, of course, is part of a much broader subject: communications. And it is communications that I really want to talk to you about today – especially communications between us Canadians and our American neighbours, something Stephen Leacock himself wrote extensively about.

The Americans just don't understand us these days, so I have developed some guidelines on understanding and communicating with Canadians which I intend to share with them. But I thought it might be wise to give you a little preview just to make sure I'm on the right track.

We begin by explaining about Canada's two official languages and how Canadians are so linguistically accepting that it is possible, like Jean Chretien, to become Prime Minister of Canada without being able to speak either official language.

I am linguistically challenged myself, but when I went to Ottawa I actually enjoyed speaking in French because in the House of Commons they give you this little thing to put in your ear, and if you listen carefully you can find out what you've been saying.

I received a number of compliments

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“Canadians are so linguistically accepting that it is possible, like Jean Chretien, to become Prime Minister without being able to speak either official language.”

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from the media on my first French speech in the Chamber. They said my accent wasn't that bad, and the only question they had was whether I had really intended to declare war on Chile.

But let's get beyond language. I once called up 20 Canadians from a client list I had as a consultant and asked them a simple question: "How are you today?" The most frequent response I received was, "Not too bad," which tells us several things about the Canadian psyche and how we communicate.

The first is that Canadians use negatives to convey positive feelings and aspirations. These people who said they were feeling "not too bad" were actually feeling pretty good. But they expressed that sentiment by using a double negative, "Not bad."

You can see how this explanation of how Canadians communicate positive feelings through negatives could help our relations with the United States. When our Prime Minister and those around him refer to the Americans as "morons" and "bastards," these words are not intended as insults; these are terms of endearment.

These are exactly the same words our Prime Minister uses to express his affection for his good friend Paul Martin.

It is quintessentially Canadian to use negative terms to express positive feelings and aspirations. In fact, we even do this in our original Constitution, the *BNA Act* of 1967.

The first substantive section is labelled "Union." But having proclaimed the positive desire to unite, our Constitution

immediately declares that "Canada shall be divided into provinces." In particular the United Province of Canada shall be divided into two separate provinces, Ontario and Quebec.

Here we have the genius of Canadian federalism – pursuing unity through division – the positive through the negative. We deliberately divide ourselves so as to make unity a priority concern and preoccupation.

You may think that separatist sentiment is confined to Quebec. But polling data shows that Vancouver Island wishes to separate from British Columbia; that Northern Alberta wishes to separate from Southern Alberta; that rural Manitoba wishes to separate from Winnipeg; that Newfoundland would like to separate from Atlantic Canada; and that the rest of Canada would all like to separate from Toronto.

Quebec of course is indifferent to separatism, now that most of the country has embraced it.

But obviously, if all these separatists would get together, they could unite this country! We pursue positives, negatively. It's the Canadian Way.

I said that the most frequent response to the question "How are you today?" was "Not too bad." The presence of that little modifier "too" tells us something else about the Canadian psyche.

We Canadians, as Pierre Trudeau once observed, are "extreme moderates." Why did the Canadian cross the road? To get to the middle. We love the middle. Football, soccer, and basketball games are divided into two parts



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– the first and second halves. But our national game, hockey, how is it divided up? Into three periods. Why? So there would be a middle.

We Canadians prefer the centre. We're scared of falling off the edges. (That's why people live in Winnipeg.) We don't like the edges; they are too far from the middle.

This also means that we Canadians hate being confronted with stark choices. "Here's (a) and here's (b). Now choose one or the other." We hate that situation because there is no middle. If we're forced into these stark choice situations, we're quite likely to invent a middle by saying, "Why can't we do both?"

Remember the Fathers of Confederation? They had a choice between adopting the British parliamentary system and the American federal system. What did they say? "Let's do both."

We prefer the muddle of the middle to the clarity of choice. Or in American parlance, we follow the Yogi Berra strategy of, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." That's us.

And of course our extreme moderation is rooted in the simple fact that we Canadians are a modest people. Modesty is rooted in our very origins as a nation. Canada is the only nation on earth founded on the pursuit of a rodent – the beaver – or as some historians have said, "the founding rodent," unless you include the muskrat, in which case we must speak of the "two founding rodents,"... but I digress.

Modest beginnings produce a modest people. Our Constitution is a very modest document. Despite references to the monarchy there is absolutely nothing imperial about our Constitution at all. The Constitution doesn't even mention the Prime Minister or the Cabinet. It vests all authority of the government in what it calls "The Queen's Privy Council for Canada."

Now, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – and here we come to the modest and delicate part – a "privy" was commonly understood to mean an outhouse. Some constitutional historians have speculated that the Queen's Privy Council for Canada may actually have been a committee established to suitably locate a privy for the Queen in Canada should she choose to visit. This interpretation is reinforced by Section 16 of our Constitution which declares that the seat of government of Canada – not the "head" but the "seat" – shall be in Ottawa.

Our first Prime Minister and how he is presented in our history, continues to reflect this modesty of Canadians. Our first Prime Minister was not a military hero. He did not at all see himself as the personal embodiment of federal power and authority.

What was Sir John A's favourite section of our Constitution? The clauses which brought tears to his eyes when they were first read at Quebec and Charlottetown? It wasn't Section 91 listing all the powers of the federal government. No, it was modest sections 97 and 98 which declare, "Judges of the provinces shall be selected from the respective bars of the provinces."

In discharging his responsibilities under these sections, our first Prime Minister, rather than striding the halls of power, chose to mingle with the common folk in as many of those bars as possible.

Of course, Sir John A always said he was sorry for his drinking habits. In fact, in the Canadian Etiquette Handbook for Members of Parliament receives, there is a whole section entitled "Fourteen ways to say you're sorry."

As Canadians, we say we're sorry even when we aren't or shouldn't be. It's an integral part of being modest. Like all our other characteristics, this modesty of Canadians ultimately reflects itself in how we communicate. We are uncomfortable with strong, declarative sentences. They're too stark. Too far from the middle. They're too, well, assertive.

So we soften the front end of the sentence with the word "like" and we soften the end of the sentence by adding the little word "eh" as we seek for a little affirmation of what we've just said. We don't say, "It's a wonderful day." We say, "Like, it's a nice day, eh?" We don't say, "That was a great game last night." We say, "Like, it was a good game, eh?" And we don't say to our American friends, "You're wrong." We say, "Like, we're not exactly sure that was the right thing to do, eh?"

So where do we end up when we are trying to explain the beaver to the eagle? We explain our humble origins – the founding rodent, our modest

Constitution with its union through division and its outhouse for the seat of government. We point to our first Prime Minister humbly searching the bars of the provinces for wisdom.

And most importantly, we lay bare our national character: our pursuit of positives through negatives, our extreme moderation, our affection for the middle, our penchant for being sorry, our softening of the declarative, and our longing for affirmation.

And having laid all this out for our American friends, we challenge them: Who else would you prefer to occupy this vast land beyond your northern border?

"Like, we're really not too bad, eh?"

We're really not too bad!

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“Canada is the only nation on earth founded on the pursuit of a rodent – the beaver – unless you count the muskrat, in which case we must speak of the two founding rodents.”

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## May Day! May Day! Alberta Elects the NDP

*All the world that's owned by idle drones is ours and ours alone.  
We have laid the wide foundations; built it skyward stone by stone.  
It is ours, not to slave in, but to master and to own.  
While the union makes us strong.*

*From Solidarity Forever, sung at the Alberta NDP victory party*

**by Colman Byfield**

**A**fter abiding 44 years of Tory hegemony and at least a decade of open contempt, Alberta voters celebrated May Day by casting the Tories into electoral purgatory and probably eternal hellfire. With Solidarity Forever ringing through the Edmonton night, voters from Rainbow Lake to Carstairs felt a stab of compunction.

The New Democrats? Really?  
How did this happen?

Jim Prentice, for my money, was a decent, competent man who inherited the burnt-out skeletal husk of the great Tory machine that Ed Stelmach had previously driven over a cliff before Alison Redford stripped it for parts and set it on fire. And while Ralph Klein's corpse might still deliver a solid majority, the drift and decline really began in his latter two terms.

The scandals of the Redford era are well-documented: after inheriting the "no-meet committee" fiasco she gave us Tobacco-gate, South-Africa-gate, the Skypalace imbroglio, "Ghost Riders in the Sky", and a dozen or two smaller disgraces involving fundraising malfeasance, travel expenses, and government jets. It's difficult to imagine Redford getting

into much more trouble in three years than she did, short of getting caught ordering ministerial henchmen Horne and Horner to kidnap 99 Dalmatian puppies.

She left the Tories hovering around 20 percent popularity in the polls, while Danielle Smith and the Wildrose surged to 40 percent. When Prentice declared his intentions last August, many wondered why he'd leave Bay Street to become a mortician.

Prentice faced two former Redford cabinet ministers in a race that was never close. Although Rick McIver and Thomas Lukaszuk acolytes began playing a silly game of what-if within seconds of the May 5 PC rout, Prentice was really the only choice last fall. As Redford's Skypalace Minister, McIver was thoroughly tangled in her most cartoonish outburst of megalomania. He also has embarrassing friends – for one, a Calgary incarnation of the Westboro Baptist Church that blames the 2013 flood and probably the Flames recent playoff exit on "them gays."

Lukaszuk, though engagingly frank and popular amongst Twitter-savvy centrists, was perhaps the second-most polarizing figure in Alberta politics. Abominated on the left for the post-secondary cuts and union-busting in his capacity

as Redford's all-purpose bully, on the right he was widely considered, in the words of Jason Kenney, "a complete and utter asshole." Neither candidate was exactly breaking out in stigmata.

### The Prentice interregnum begins

Prentice, on the other hand, had somehow remained unsullied by eight years in Stephen Harper's cabinet. Confident and utterly compelling in person, practically the entire Tory caucus swooned as he talked hockey, humble-bragged about mining coal as a youth, and, most refreshingly, didn't foul up before breakfast.

For once the Tory party brass and what was left of the membership agreed on a leader, while the general public yawned and went about their summer. Prentice ascended to the premiership on a wave of 18,000 votes, a total which would've secured him a solid fourth place finish in the last Edmonton mayoralty contest.

He moved quickly to mop up Redford's more superficial messes, initiating a hasty fire-sale of her well-worn jet aircraft, abandoning her petty crusade to expunge wild roses from Alberta licence plates, and promising to return to honest budget reporting (although he didn't).

Late summer polls reflected a Prentice honeymoon as he prepared to fight four big city by-elections. He boldly appointed two unelected ministers, popular former Edmonton mayor Stephen Mandel and life-long educator and administrator Gordon Dirks, to health and education respectively. Dirks' CV at least fit his file, while Mandel's chief qualification for the job seemed to be that at 69 he probably spent a lot of time in doctor's offices.

The October by-elections would see Tory fortunes, however fleetingly, reversed. Wildrose ran a quixotic negative campaign against the departed Redford, while Prentice drove pleasantly around the province without contriving Redfordian deviations to Palm Springs or Johannesburg. The Tories' toughest fight was in Calgary Elbow, where upstart Alberta Party leader Greg Clark compelled a desperate Dirks to award new portables to a local school in a naked bit of vote-buying that would later rankle.

With Wildrose flailing at Redford's ghost and the NDP showing little sign of its impending electoral explosion, Prentice swept all four by-elections to seemingly re-establish the Tories as Alberta's Natural Governing Party.

The Wildrose Party promptly began coming apart. At their November AGM, a motion to officially endorse the fundamental rights of "all persons... regardless of race, religious belief..." etc., "or sexual orientation" was rejected

by members in favour of the less discriminating "all Albertans." Much of the party leadership, especially Smith, had pushed the LGBTQ initiative hard and were reportedly seething at the rustic obstinacy of the members. A week later 'Rosers Kerry Towle and Ian Donovan crossed to the Tories under curiously contradictory pretexts (she, because Wildrose was too right-wing and he, because Wildrose was too left-wing). Smith, looking forlorn, called it a cowardly betrayal.

### The Right unites, for a moment

On December 17 Prentice and Smith jointly met the media with triumphant grins. The Wildrose leader and eight of her 14 remaining caucus-mates were suddenly Tories. The fall collapse of oil prices represented the greatest challenge in a generation, Smith insisted, and conservatives needed to unite

behind Jim Prentice. In his three months in office, Prentice had proven to her that he was an honest and trustworthy leader, a staunch conservative fiscal manager, a true friend, a dependable stay-at-home defenseman, a first-rate chuck wagon driver, and made the fluffiest pancakes she'd ever tasted.

The rumour was, and persists, that Prentice had agreed to adopt much of the Wildrose fiscal playbook, shelter the crossers in their upcoming nomination battles, and toss them a couple of major cabinet posts, all of which Smith and Prentice half-heartedly denied.

In a low moment, Alberta's only credible opposition had sold out for government backbenches in a backroom deal. What they termed a "merger" was negotiated in secret with neither party's membership consulted. Albertans reacted with near-universal disgust. Smith and her fellows would wear the deed immediately, particularly deputy leader and habitual floor-crosser Rob

Anderson, who soon announced his departure from politics after receiving an anonymous "death threat" (join the club, Rob).

Prentice initially seemed to escape the floor-crossing opprobrium unscathed, and, with the Wildrose Party out of the way and oil prices in the tank, attempted to hammer home the fiscal realities wrought by a decade of deficits and \$40 oil. As he diligently pre-positioned for an expected austerity budget, an innocuous remark blew up in his face.

During an early March CBC Radio appearance, a caller asked who was to blame for Alberta's dire economic situation. Prentice, speaking comfortably off-the-cuff, replied that Albertans had long enjoyed fine public services which, thanks to energy revenues, they had never actually paid for, suggesting that "we all need to look in the mirror."

Forgetting or maybe ignoring that by any reckoning

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“Jim Prentice inherited the burnt-out skeletal husk of the great Tory machine that Ed Stelmach had driven over a cliff before Alison Redford stripped it for parts and set it on fire.”

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we are entirely to blame, many Albertans went apoplectic. Prentice was arrogant. Prentice was shifting blame for Tory mismanagement to hardworking, taxpaying Albertans. Prentice was out of touch. Prentice was the one who needed to look in the mirror.

So began the Tory spiral. The March budget made things immeasurably worse by introducing 59 fee and tax increases of such pervasive scope that every Albertan could expect to be stung twice a day just in their regular course of existence. Gas, booze and tobacco taxes, fee hikes for registering a car, a birth, a death and on and on.

Prentice, that sternest of fiscal conservatives, would only “hold the line on spending.” There would be no substantial cuts; in fact, the first year would see a slight overall spending increase. The proposed deficit rang in at a record \$5 billion, and the government would rack up \$31 billion in debt by 2020. Slight progressive tiers would be chiseled into Alberta’s flat income tax rate, obliging the rich to pay “just a bit more.” The only target not on the hit list was corporate income tax, which was the best news yet for the NDP.

In short, Prentice had produced a budget everyone could hate.

With that masterstroke, he circumvented a brand-new fixed election law and dropped the writ, arguing he needed a mandate to pass his transformative budget. With two of the main opposition parties leaderless and in chaos and the other having elected its new leader in October, the move would only serve to offend voters’ sense of fair play.

### On to Armageddon

The initial stages of the campaign were, as expected, rather boring. Everyone – perhaps literally everyone — expected another Tory majority. Rachel Notley had announced to sniggers that this time she really was running for premier. Undistinguished former Conservative MP Brian Jean, who had taken over the Wildrose leadership on the very night Danielle Smith lost the Okotoks-High River PC nomination to a complete nobody, conceded he was running to retain official opposition status.

As the campaign wore on, though, poll after poll depicted a three-way race between the Tories, a resurgent Wildrose Party, and a suddenly relevant NDP. Burned in 2012 by the accused pollsters, everyone quite reasonably ignored them. Notley, though, consistently delivered solid performances. Her one embarrassment came with the release of the NDP platform, which promised to balance the budget as quickly as the Tories while substantially increasing health and education spending. A day later the blushing Dippers



admitted their math was off by a couple billion.

One might have expected such a flub would be lethal for a party whose grasp of fiscal reality has always been suspect in Alberta. But voters shrugged, and turned to the spectacle of the ongoing revelations of Tory nomination skulduggery that were now drawing RCMP investigations and lawsuits. The PCs appeared to be getting nervous. The ten-year fiscal plan that Prentice had explicitly made the election question was now being remodelled with each campaign stop. The polls no one believed were now showing the Tories in second place or even third.

Elections Alberta’s first quarter fundraising numbers revealed a healthy flow of small donations to the NDP and Wildrose parties from grassroots supporters. The Tories were raking in twice as much, but, metaphorically speaking, it was almost all coming in bigger cheques from Big Alberta Tarsands Corp., the Alberta Association of Parasitic Lobbyists, and the Legion of Government Appointees.

The suddenly high-stakes televised debate was mostly uneventful. Jean repeated “the Wildrose Party will never raise your taxes” so often concerned viewers began to wonder if he’d had a stroke. Notley was smart, sensible, and by far the most aggressive. Prentice handled the three-front attack reasonably well, but focused his fire on Notley. In attempting to chide her over the abortive NDP platform release he suggested with a bit too much condescension that “math is hard.”

That one tiny act of mansplaining quickly boomeranged into a twitter hashtag that would haunt him for the rest of the campaign and maybe forever; some future unfortunate cemetery caretaker will probably at least weekly find himself scrubbing a scrawled #mathishard from the Prentice

cenotaph. It was obviously a fair comment – a serious contender for government should have an accurately costed platform – but hopelessly out of step with our gender-sensitive times.

The charges of First Degree Arrogance and Aggravated Condescension would stick. And the Tories would just keep compounding their guilt.

Meanwhile, Notley cruised from one large rally to the next larger rally. The NDP policy book, even with the math corrected, still contained some ominous suggestions for a provincial economy teetering on the brink of recession, including a 20 percent increase in the corporate tax rate, a new royalty review, and a 50 percent boost to the minimum wage. But for the most part she stuck to sunny high-level messaging, and refrained from shouting and spitting and generally going full Polina Molotova.

Jean, who is actually a thoughtful, expansive, and humorous public speaker, grew visibly more comfortable during the campaign, and even won over a few detractors by poking fun at his own wooden debate performance. His platform was to the fiscal right of Prentice's but not drastically so, and on files like urban development and environment he was in many ways more progressive.

The definitive image of the campaign (and a healthy reminder of what the Tories had become) came in its waning days when five Edmontonians of substance called a press conference. There were four prominent businessmen, all big Tory donors and, of course, regular jostlers at the teat for hundreds of millions in government contracts, joined by the Tory-appointed chair of the board of governors of the University of Alberta. Clearing their throats importantly, they warned that Albertans weren't "thinking straight" and called the New Democrats "amateurs." One went on a sustained plaintive whinge, crying, "Why is it always the corporations? Why me? Why is it me?"

Arrogance. Condescension. Entitlements.

In my old stomping grounds in Sturgeon County the Tories had almost literally written Arrogance all over their own election signs. Tory incumbent Jeff Johnson plastered the countryside with signs saying "Thanks Jeff, for \$4 Million Renovation to Namao School," and various other projects Albertans had paid for and built but "Jeff" was taking credit for. In Calgary Elbow placards boasted that "Gordon Dirks is Re-Building Elbow Park School" and other messages of gross malfeasance in election advertising. It was old-time Tory politicking, but this time Albertans who weren't outraged merely laughed.

### The Orange revolution

Election night finally arrived for a nervous public and a subdued commentariat. Despite persistent evidence of a

looming NDP victory, no one seemed quite able to imagine it. Former Finance Minister Doug Horner, who presided over three consecutive budget deficits during years of record revenues, once again demonstrated his superior predictive powers and pronounced on CTV that another PC majority was in the bag. And indeed, the advance poll results at first put the Tories in front.

And then, suddenly, it was all orange.

It was a night of reckoning and justice, as cabinet minister after crony after benchwarmer went down in orange flames. Every single Wildrose floor-crosser would be purged from the Legislature. The party they had abandoned was raised from the dead. The government's preferred PR firm, Navigator Ltd, was satisfyingly scorched. And Prentice, speaking to an empty hall, conceded his leadership, his seat and his political career even before all the votes had been counted.

The initial elation that burst from the hearts of the droves of centrist and conservative voters who voted for anybody but the PCs was quickly tempered by the realization of what they had done.

New Democrats. In the Legislature. New Democrats with flowers and actual power. In our Legislature.

The polls seem to confirm the popular notion that the May 5 result was more a Tory defeat than an NDP victory. According to Abacus a full 93 percent of NDP voters were voting for "change" before all other considerations. Only 7 percent said the NDP itself was their prime motivation.

The right had split to a degree so mutually destructive that no one (despite Danielle Smith's recent efforts at rehabilitative revisionism) would have believed it possible even a month earlier.

The Abacus pollsters found that the New Democrats swept almost every conceivable category. Wildrose hung on to rural Alberta and the PCs maintained a plurality only among the white-topped demographic who first voted for them and last considered an alternative over four decades ago. The NDP took every other category – all other age groups, genders, income brackets, the public sector, the private sector, religious believers, non-believers, dogs, cats, and quite possibly the younger members of Jim Prentice's immediate family.

Albertans wanted change, or maybe more accurately to strike a hard cosmic blow against arrogance, condescension, and entitlement. Either way, Rachel Notley's NDP was the handiest instrument.

The New Democrats were likely not the result most of us favoured. But had we elected another Tory majority, how would we ever look ourselves in the mirror?

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## All the World's a Political Stage. And all the Protestors Merely Players

by John C. Thompson

Current thinking about evolutionary theory allows for the continuing development of sub-species and sub sub-species as a result of a constantly changing environment. The evolutionary process is not necessarily progressive, and new sub-species aren't necessarily an improvement on the old. This seems to be the case in a developing split in our own family – *Homo Sapiens Sapiens*.

I have spent 35 years observing the development of what may be a distinct sub-species: *Homo Demonstrandi*: Man the Demonstrator. Of course I may be dead wrong, and the late British essayist Terry Pratchett may have been quite right when he proposed that the real taxonomical name for mankind should be *Pans Narrans* – the story telling ape.

Let me set aside my banana and tell stories of my encounters with Man the Demonstrator.

All evidence to the contrary sometimes being a first year university student really can be mind-expanding. Such was

my experience many years ago when I was hanging around my University of Toronto residence on a late September Saturday afternoon engaging in that favorite student activity of procrastination. Suddenly I saw two individuals approaching. Judging from their demeanour, I thought they might be proselytizing for some cult (Hare Krishnas were big in those days) or else were really desperate encyclopedia salesmen.

They were proselytizing, but not for Krishna or Grolier. They were pushing copies of *Socialist Worker* and trying to convince us that all the world's problems could be solved by "making the rich pay." They, and others like them, came back to work the residence every few months. But I was a tough sell, especially in my second year when I joined a fraternity after a summer spent in the Armour School at the Combat Training Centre in Canadian Forces Base Gagetown. Still, I enjoyed arguing with the *Socialist Worker* hustlers because it afforded me further opportunities to procrastinate and I

abstractly wondered where their zeal came from.

That second year Rhodesia was all the rage and Bobby Mugabe was the radical chic poster boy of the year (Africa never loses its power to amaze). His nation's new name of Zimbabwe was becoming *au courant* on posters tacked up around campus. "All out for Zimbabwe!!!", many of them shouted. I was a bit confused at first, wondering why it was such a big deal the fledgling country had lost a cricket match.

Yet the biggest demonstration that year on the U of T campus was inadvertently launched by my fraternity. For some reason not unconnected to the consumption of cheap beer, we decided to hold a party. Inspired by the Iranian hostage crisis that was underway at the time, we called it the "Death to the Ayatollah Party." A cheap banner and an effigy of Ayatollah Khomeini were hung above the front door while we had a grand old debauch under his stern gaze.

In the morning as we coped with hangovers and a not inconsiderable mess, we discovered we had a hostage crisis of our own. A campus sorority had kidnapped our president (who was a sucker for feminine wiles) during the night; his return was assured if we made a charitable donation. The matter was discussed and a consensus reached that we would not bow to terrorists and would attempt to rescue the hostage. Refortified with refreshments, we set off on foot to retrieve our president, with the party banner and effigy at the front of our procession. By the time we were half-way across campus we had picked up several hundred students and the chant from our banner was echoing off the buildings.

The hastily summoned Campus and Toronto police had no idea what to do, let alone what we were doing. Eventually we accidentally collected a thousand demonstrators chanting "Death to the Ayatollah!", but most were very confused when the march ended on the front lawn of a sorority house. Our revolutionary vanguard then stormed the house, but the masses were disinclined to follow. As I would later learn, this is common behaviour for *Homo Demonstrandi*.

Another summer went by at the Combat Training Center. As a reconnaissance officer, part of the syllabus involved learning about Soviet military equipment, tactics and organizations. There was a lot to learn. The Soviets were piling up plenty of tanks and guns in Central Europe in those days and us poor NATO types were outnumbered something like three-to-one. I could imagine a personal future that involved going to war if our governments weren't careful.

Back at school the leftists apparently had the same thought, but a very different way of responding to it. As we now know – thanks to the Mitrokhin Archives – while the USSR was stocking up arms they also used their overseas Communist Parties and political fronts to rekindle the western peace movement. The domestic Marxists, Trotskyites,

Socialists and Anarchists never took their marching orders directly from the Kremlin (and largely mocked Canada's Communist Party as stooges). However, when the NATO nations undertook to keep pace with the Soviet build-up, it became necessary to campaign for "peace" and the tribes joined in common cause. *H. Demonstrandi Peacenik* was born.

My friends and I felt compelled to know more. My chum Dave – now the head of the history department in one of our universities – and I undertook some field observations. Clad in trench coats and fedoras, armed with cameras, binoculars and notebooks (the old fashioned kind), we climbed to a handy roof-top to watch one of the first big peace marches in Toronto.

One of our first observations was that the act of observing affects the observed. Typically the first reaction was consternation and alarm; followed by hostility; then a sort of satisfaction. As Dave put it, these three phases could be characterized as: "I'm being watched! How dare they

watch me! I'm important enough to be watched!" In the decades since, I've noticed that conservative protestors (rare to be sure) only go through the first two phases.

I've also noticed that most protestors, whatever their political orientation, have shed any inhibitions they once had about being observed. Everyone now understands that demonstrations are political theatre, staged and scripted for the media, and calculated to deliver calibrated messages to as many eyeballs as possible.

Continuing fieldwork since the early 1980s yielded other discoveries, notably that *Homo Demonstrandi* often doesn't have a very firm grasp of the issue they're protesting. When Canada allowed the U.S. to test guidance systems for a new generation of cruise

missiles on Canadian territory; the inevitable protests soon followed. When a flock of something-or-others-for-peace alighted with their placards on Nathan Phillips Square to interrupt an ice-carving contest during Toronto's 1984 sesquicentennial celebration, I interviewed one:

Me: "So why are you against the cruise missile?"

Peacenik: "Cruise missiles suck, man!"

Me (cleverly baiting the subject): "Why?"

Peacenik (closing his eyes to call forth his key message briefing): "Cuz they're first strike weapons and are non-verifiable!"

Me: "That's not true, Soviet Air Defence would certainly detect the approach of the launch platforms, and bomber inventories are verifiable. Moreover, an inability to get target sets for static air defence platforms would not constitute a failure of early warning."

Peacenik: "Cruise missiles suck man!"

Countering the arguments of *H. Demonstrandi* may be

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“All out for Zimbabwe!!!” they shouted. I wondered why it was such a big deal the country had lost a cricket match.”

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easier than clubbing baby seals (and makes you as much of a bully), but it makes no difference, for they are almost impervious to logic. But it must be said that *H. Demonstrandi* can be capable of great powers of mimicry and may do more than parrot slogans. Almost any perusal of *Socialist Worker* will turn up articles where a complex social problem is resolved by feeding it into the hopper of the dialectical sausage maker; the author turns the crank and voila! "True worker solidarity" inevitably solves the issue.

Whatever "True worker solidarity" is, it must be powerful stuff. It apparently obviates the need for environmentalists to understand ecology, for peace activists to know about defence issues, and for "social justice"-seekers to comprehend anything about economics, criminology or even elementary street-smarts. I've seen *H. Demonstrandi* blissfully unaware that they are proudly marching alongside gangsters and providing cover for vandals and looters.

Never did I see a better display of a total absence of common sense than at the 1988 G-7 Conference in Toronto. This time Dave and I consumed single malt and cigars from on high while watching the parade from the "People's Summit" en route to the Conference venue. With some reluctance, we descended to the street to watch the "storming of barricades." University Avenue was locked off by curb-to-curb crowd barriers, backed by an equally solid phalanx of police.

Elementary reconnaissance would have revealed that two parallel routes into the conference area were wide open and seemingly unguarded. But that would have defeated the protestors' purpose – good visuals on television. The police were two-deep behind the barrier, but the media were four deep in front of it. Every time a demonstrator wrestled his way through the press of the press to hurl himself over the barricade, cameras bent on close-ups sealed off the breach; particularly when one of the more enthusiastic demonstrators slashed his own forehead with a razor and started screeching about police brutality.

It reminded me of the skit in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: "Come and see the violence inherent in the system. Help! Help! I'm being repressed!"

Some of the more astute observers of these kinds of events – like Christie Blatchford (then writing for the *Toronto Sun*) – had started to notice that the same faces always seemed to appear on the front lines. The bigger demonstrations were usually fleshed out with bused-in

members of public service unions, but even then, the noisiest, angriest and most energetic protestors invariably seemed drawn from a core group of a couple hundred activists. In Britain, this phenomenon came to be known as the "Agitprop-rent-a-mob."

Demonstrators often turn up with the wrong signs for a protest, evidently after missing the memo about the day's theme. It hardly matters. The chants change little – "Two-four-six-eight, something, something ends in ate!" – and marchers are so well drilled that they can muster from column to picket to angry mob with the same speed and purpose that an infantry platoon demonstrates in elementary fieldcraft.

I still watch demonstrations; it's free, more fun than the circus, and sometimes the cheekiness of the performers is amusing. Sometimes I even see things that give me comfort about the future of the sub-species, and humanity generally. In April 2002, I was in Washington making the rounds. Out on the streets, things were brewing for a major anti-IMF and World Bank protest, with a topping of good old "anti-US imperialism" for good measure.

The demo brought in a huge gathering of diverse American leftists and a strong contingent of apologists for the Jihad movement. I watched a throng of about 800 Islamists getting themselves worked up under a big black Shahada battle flag. On the outskirts of the chanting whirling mob stood a lone teenager wearing a gay rights t-shirt. His mind was clearly in conflict.

His forebrain was telling to enter the mob and express solidarity with the Islamists. He would take a tentative step in their direction, but then something deeper in his brain would cause him to retreat. An excited mob is a dangerous thing, and this is especially true of one composed of Salafist and Wahhabi activists. For as long as I watched him he did this shuffle, which seemed to me a struggle between the reason of his instinct and the irrationalism of his ideology.

Somehow, this was reassuring to me. *H. Demonstrandi* is not fully lost to *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* so long as he is prepared to listen to reason. Hope abides.



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