



Delmar
Is journalism dead?

Page 6



Malouf
Rodéo à Québec

Page 3



Murphy
EI for the self-employed

Page 14

Ensemble et libres Together and free

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Crest of the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal

So just how Irish is Quebec?

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So Irish, in fact, that people with names such as Aubrey, Charest, Sevigny, Beaudoin, Duceppe, Bourque, Sylvain and Dore can claim to be sons and daughters of Erin. A new exhibition that opened this week at the McCord Museum illustrates how Quebec has been shaped by the blending of the Irish and French identities.

Although 500,000 Quebecers claim to be Irish, its estimated that 40 per cent of the population is of Irish ancestry.

“It represents a cultural success story, in terms of the blending of culture and heritage,” said guest curator, Lorraine O'Donnell

“Québécois music, for example, is derived from Irish reels It is influenced by Irish music and by Irish folklore.”

The McCord show is a joint effort of the St. Patrick's Society of Montreal, which observes its 175th anniversary this year, and the Irish Protestant Benevolent Society. The exhibition

Continued on page 17

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Broken promises The Ala Morales affair

Before we take on an advocacy issue that revolves around a single individual, it must meet one important criteria. The story must have within it a multiplicity of elements that affect us all. It is in that context that you should understand the headline of the story of Ala Morales.

We can assume that the intentions of legislators and regulators have some socially redeeming intent. The problems occur when laws and regulations are passed and the details of implementation are left to bureaucrats. Those details usually leave almost total power in the hands of functionaries, with little or no restraint from any compassionate authority. The result is that there is little room for any humanitarian consideration in straightjacket bureaucracy. A bureaucracy that in its rigour in enforcing the letter of the law, leaves no room for consideration of the spirit behind the law. And in so doing, puts the lie to basic assumptions of our society that we take for granted. We end up lying to the victims of the law, and to ourselves with regard to the quality of justice and mercy we believe exists in our programs and institutions.

Our governments in Quebec — regardless of party — have preached certain standards for years. We believe, they have told us, in a bilingual citizenry. We believe in the integration of immigrants. We believe that funding French-language training is a responsibility in order to achieve both integration and employment success. We believe in encouraging homecare to seniors, not only to relieve the strain on the healthcare system but because it is better for the person. We believe in giving the benefit of the doubt to a citizen if they forget some minor piece of information when faced with the juggernaut of bureaucratic inquiries for almost any government help. And finally, and perhaps most importantly, we believe that a helping hand is not a handout. That it is the right thing to do because we are a compassionate people and because — in the end — a person who gets back on their feet is not a burden on society. They become productive, tax-paying contributors to that society. They become builders of it.

These have been the promises of our patrimony. Alicja Pawlus Morales believed these promises. But over the past year she has seen the dream held out by these promises become a nightmare. And the garden of hope they once reflected, become a parched and withered landscape. The landscape of a life brought low. The banality of what

Continued on page 5

KILGOUR: Iran: Responsible choices

Page 11

PRESSER: Stressing the banks!

Page 13

LETTRES • LETTERS

Banks and consumers

It is not surprising that Canada's big banks are still profitable, given that the federal government has offered them and other financial institutions more than \$250 billion in direct and indirect subsidies in the past few months.

What remains incredible is that no federal government in the past 20 years has required any financial institution to do anything in return for these and past costly subsidies. Why do the Liberals and Conservatives, that both claim they want to win a majority government, continue to do so much to protect a few big bank executives and their multi-million dollar paycheques while doing so little to protect 25 million financial consumers and investors?

All these financial institutions are using Canadians' money to make money, and so we have a right to know the details of how they are making money, and losing it, and to require them to treat every customer fairly and well and to charge fair prices, and to penalize the executives who lose or abuse our money through overly risky investments or investments in irresponsible or criminal businesses, or unfair service to particular customers.

If the federal government would finally start auditing the big banks' and other financial institutions' prices, lending, investment and service records annually to ensure fairness and responsibility, and assessing regularly the level of actual competition in basic financial services in communities across Canada, it would help all Canadians and the economy.

Finally, the government should require financial institutions to facilitate the creation of a financial consumer watchdog group by enclosing a one-page pamphlet in their mailings to customers that invites them to join the group.

Until these accountability measures are in place, the big banks and other financial institutions will continue to gouge and abuse consumers, investors and communities across Canada, and to waste our money on risky schemes that do little to create jobs or sustain our economy.

Duff Conacher,
Chairperson of the Canadian Community Reinvestment Coalition (CCRC)



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Ideas before identities.
Justice before orthodoxy.

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Ex-dramaturge, romancier persévérant, essayiste et poète à ses heures, Pierre K. Malouf fréquente des fédéralistes et des indépendantistes, des gens de gauche et des gens de droite, des jeunes et des vieux, des écrivains et des ingénieurs. Gentil comme tout, il ne dit pas toujours tout ce qu'il pense, mais pense toujours ce qu'il écrit.

LA PATRIE

La Caisse de dépôt et le comportement des politiciens

Rodéo à Québec

La Caisse de dépôt a connu une très mauvaise année. La chasse aux responsables est maintenant ouverte. Le hic, c'est que dans cette affaire il n'y a que des IRRESPONSABLES. C'est la faute à personne parce que c'est la faute à tout le monde. « Il n'y aura pas d'empreintes digitales sur l'arme du crime, car il n'y a pas de crime. (1) » Pas de crime, une simple comédie d'erreurs.

Jean Charest et Monique Jérôme-Forget ne veulent pas dire la vérité, Pauline Marois et François Legault ne veulent pas l'apprendre. « La vérité n'intéresse personne » (2). La connaissance de la vérité ne sera éventuellement qu'un effet secondaire plus ou moins désiré. Tous tant qu'ils sont ne font que jouer la game ! Les libéraux refusent d'avouer les erreurs qu'ils ont réellement commises ; les péquistes veulent faire avouer aux premiers des erreurs qu'ils n'ont pas commises. Belle mascarade ! Tant pis pour les pertes en capital ! Ce qui importe c'est de se faire du capital... politique !

Le seul qui semble avoir dit plus que la moitié de la vérité, c'est Henri-Paul Rousseau, qui a fait son mea-culpa lundi dernier. Le papier commercial, c'est lui ! Après son départ, son successeur et le conseil d'administration ont fidèlement suivi ses traces. Mais ne venez pas me faire accroire que la responsabilité en retombe sur la ministre des Finances, qui se serait garrochée sur le téléphone pour forcer la main aux administrateurs de la Caisse. Ce qu'on peut reprocher à la ministre, c'est d'avoir été au courant de la débandade (ce qui n'est d'ailleurs pas prouvé), mais de l'avoir caché pour ne pas nuire à la réélection de son parti. Si c'est vrai, on est justifié de l'en blâmer. Mais eût-elle fait des aveux pendant la campagne électorale, que cela n'aurait rien changé à la réalité des pertes.

Sans présumer de ses motifs (qui pouvaient être basement partisans), le seul qui paraît avoir su (et dit) la vérité alors que tout le monde observait un silence gêné, c'est Mario Dumont



qui, pendant la campagne électorale, parlait de pertes de 30 milliards. Mais il paraît qu'il voulait effrayer les vieux... Ceux qui blâment aujourd'hui Jean Charest et sa ministre des Finances devraient surtout se repentir de n'avoir pas voté pour celui qui disait vrai. Les péquistes tentent aujourd'hui de rattraper l'ancien chef de l'ADQ en poussant des cris d'orfraie. Risible ! Que la ministre confesse ses vraies fautes. Il serait

dégoûtant qu'elle reconnût des péchés qu'elle n'a point commis.

Décidément, les politiciens québécois jouent un petit jeu dont ils inventent les règles au fur et à mesure que la partie se déroule. Même ce qui nous paraît habituellement certain, c'est-à-dire qu'ils ne veillent qu'à leurs propres intérêts politiques, l'intérêt public venant en second lieu dans l'ordre de leurs préoccupations, vient d'être remis en question par la dernière décision du premier ministre.

La nomination de Michael Sabia à la tête de la Caisse a toutes les apparences d'un coup de dé. Mais quelle mouche vient donc de piquer Jean Charest ? Ne présumons pas de l'avenir, M. Sabia fera peut-être du bon travail. Là-dessus les paris sont ouverts. D'ailleurs les commentateurs en perdent leur latin. Dans *La Presse* d'aujourd'hui (ces lignes sont écrites le 15 mars), André Pratte et Alain Dubuc y vont à quelques colonnes de distance de supputations contradictoires. Le premier écrit que la principale faiblesse de M. Sabia, c'est de n'avoir « aucune expérience dans l'industrie financière » ; le second affirme que « l'idée de mettre à la tête de la Caisse quelqu'un qui ne vient pas du monde de la finance n'est pas mauvaise. »

M. Charest semble prendre plaisir à semer le doute. Bien installé en selle pour les prochains quatre ans, il peut certes cultiver l'impopularité, car il ne risque pas d'être jeté à bas de sa monture quelles que soient les secousses qu'il provoque dans l'opinion publique. Devant un tel comportement, le citoyen que je suis demeure perplexe. Les raisons sont obscures, pour lesquelles M. Charest tient à transformer son règne pépère en véritable rodéo.

(1) Philippe Gervais, « La caisse comme la navette », *La Presse*, 14 mars 2009.

(2) Eugène Ionesco, « Le mirage de la Révolution », *Il Giornale*, juin 1975.

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qui donc nous protège du gouvernement ?

...if the Government protects us from everything
else, then who protects us from the government?

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Brother Tremblay

Is Marcel Tremblay done with politics?

The affable Marcel Tremblay – NDG councilor, Montreal executive committee member and City Hall’s resident crusader for civic-minded behaviour – is, as they say, in a period of reflection.

Tremblay, 65, told *The Métropolitain* that he is toying with the idea of retiring from politics. First elected to council in 2001, he has been the face associated with the one bread-and-butter issue that the city could just never seem to get right: Snow removal. After every storm, he would step in front of television cameras, repeating variations of, “we’re doing the best

we can,” and appealing for calm. Once in a while, his penchant for paternalism would slip through and he would scold Montrealers for not respecting post-snowfall parking restrictions or ignoring the fact that the city has a public transport system.

That is until his elder brother Gérald, the Mayor, decided to relieve Marcel of his duties last month as part of an executive committee shuffle.

“I can’t say that I jumped in the air because I was glad. It was a disappointment, for sure,” Tremblay said, while seeming mildly apprecia-

tive that a colossal weight has been lifted off his shoulders. “I think what added up to [the shuffle] was that we had a bad start to December. In politics, people give you a job and eventually they will take it away. One day you’re a King and the next...”

...You’re having an awkward Sunday dinner, facing the most important man in the city, who just chipped away at your political (and financial) capital. No hard feelings, Tremblay says, pointing out that he’s a “team player” and remains a member of the EC – the Mayor’s inner-circle – in charge of cultural communities, Parc Jean Drapeau and

planning Montreal’s 375th birthday bash (taking place in 2017, long after the Tremblay Bros. municipal dynasty has ended).

“My jobs have made me very public,” he said, bemoaning the “prestige problem” he has suffered at the hands of caricaturists, journalists and other naysayers. “Sometimes it’s better for some people to disappear so someone else (Anjou borough mayor Luis Miranda, who is now in charge of snow removal and other citizen services) to go to the front and change things for the better.”

Tremblay is no stranger to public service. In the early 1970s, he was a political attaché to former provincial Liberal leader Claude Ryan. He’s managed a few government agencies, including Participaction, the federal physical education program. Earlier in his career, he was a school principal, which may explain his unique, at times disciplinarian style.

“I basically solve problems,” he said, describing his off-the-cuff, blunt approach to politicking. “I don’t like to make new laws and bylaws. I don’t want any parades...that’s my nature. I’ve never been someone who makes decisions for (the good of) my career. I’m too old to have a career.”

His Union Montreal cohorts feel otherwise. Tremblay said he’s been asked to run again for council in November and he’s thinking about it. When asked which way he’s leaning, he said it depends on the day; he’ll finish his mandate, but some days the passion is there and some days it isn’t.

Opposition in NDG is already mobilizing: Local activist Peter McQueen plans to run against Tremblay for either Vision Montreal or the small Project Montreal party. An environmentalist and former Green Party candidate, McQueen is a constant irritant for Tremblay and other councilors, particularly on dossiers relating to public safety and urban planning.

The cultural communities and cleanliness portfolios are two that Tremblay prides himself on advancing since 2001. On cultural



communities, he said his brother’s administration has gone far beyond municipal jurisdiction is trying to welcome new Canadians and help find them work. “The first day they find work is the first day they integrate into our society.”

On cleanliness, Tremblay said that at the start, he had “absolutely nothing to work with,” and Montreal is cleaner now than it was under the Pierre Bourque administration. As head of Citizen Services, he was in charge of the OpérationMontreal.net cleanliness brigade that patrols city streets, in greater numbers during the summer months, collecting trash. He supports garbage inspections and fining of residents who don’t respect collection rules.

“I think our inspectors have a job to do and I encourage them to be as severe as possible so we can all recycle,” he said last year, when inspectors were threatening residents with \$1,000 fines. “We have targets at the provincial government level...but we have to improve.”

He makes no effort to hide his disappointment, sometimes deep frustration with Côte des Neiges-NDG residents who litter, leave discarded furniture along borough streets and even those who spit on sidewalks. Walking toward his home on Prud’Homme Ave. after this month’s council meeting, he stopped to pick up an errant plastic bag that once contained rock salt. He then crossed the street to put it in a resident’s recycling bin. Was the gesture for the benefit of *The Métropolitain*? Of course not, he said; just a tiny act of “civility.”

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HOW WE LIED TO ALA MORALES, AND TO OURSELVES, continued from page 1

happened to her — and but for the grace of God could happen to any of us — should rouse us from our lethargic obsession of kidding ourselves, and others, as to what we are all about.

Alicja Pawlus arrived here from Poland in 1960 as a teenager with her parents. Just the kind of educated, multicultural, multilingual immigrant we still boast of and yearn for. After finishing school she had no problem finding a job. Life proceeded properly apace. Marriage to her husband, a Canadian of Mexican origin, produced a son, Emilio. The perfect Canadian cultural mosaic. Polish, Mexican and all-Canadian. Tragically, her husband died in the early 1980s. Alicja, now known as Ala, decided to move to sunnier climes and leave some of her pain behind. She obtained a green card and got a job in Florida. For the next dozen years she lived there and frequently came back to Montreal to see her mother.

In 1994 tragedy struck again. Ala's mother was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease. Ala decided to give up her life in Florida and came back to Montreal to take care of her. Good French was a necessity since she last worked here, so she decided to apply for a government subsidy to take French courses. She was approved and began learning at Cegep St-Laurent near her home. She did so well that the program's directors encouraged her to go to an advanced level at the Cégep de Vieux-Montréal. She graduated with flying colors. Overall, she received \$500 a month from the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity

over a period of 18 months.

She quickly got a job with Rogers, and became a productive, contributing, tax-paying citizen. Given that she spared the health system chronic care for her mother, Ala was a great "return on investment". Sadly, her mother passed away in 2001. But further troubles awaited Ala.

In late 2007 the Ministry's Centre de recouvrement contacted her. They called her in for a series of meetings through 2008. The Ministry wanted money back. Its inspectors had obtained information, ostensibly from a family member upset at Ala and her mother who had taken a box of the latter's bank records and sent them to government agencies, that Ala had an account in Plattsburgh with \$2,500 in it at the time she was being subvented for French classes. The recovery centre wanted over \$8,000 from Ala. This amount was arrived at in a convoluted calculation that included capital, interest and of course penalties.

Apparently, because Ala's language subvention came from the same ministry that sends out welfare cheques, they were governed by the same rules. Those rules, originally meant to prevent people with means from getting public assistance — a proper goal — are encumbered with draconian regulations. In essence, before you get any assistance, you have to have spent your last dime. Not exactly a helping hand. Ala explained that she was not receiving welfare. She was subvented for language courses. She also tried to explain that no one had asked her about any bank accounts. And that account she had forgotten about

entirely because she had used it as a convenience in her years traveling between Montreal and Florida. The money was her mother's and she had the power of attorney.

She pleaded that she had saved the system money by taking care of her mom for six years. That though she was working, she certainly didn't have savings. No one was listening. Though her legal aid lawyer Roger Landry convinced the ministry's recovery people to somewhat lower the amount demanded, and confirmed to them that Ala was economically vulnerable despite her employment because, ironically, she had qualified for a Revenu Quebec housing credit. So while one Quebec ministry was chasing her for money, another had qualified her for aid!

Despite all these efforts, and the right to a review of the ministry's decision, its recovery agents seized her meager bank account last month. Ala had to give up her apartment in St. Laurent and now lives in several rooms near the factories of Chabanel. The government acted under the authority of secs.100 and 114 of the Individual and Family Assistance Act that allows it to seize even pending review. So a successful review, after a seizure, would be the equivalent of the old adage "the operation was a success but the patient died."

Ala turned to us as a last resort. We have contacted the minister's office and asked it to review the file once again. Our reception was cordial and we believe sincere. The minister has authority under sec. 104 of the Act to overturn decisions



of the ministry's recovery agents in cases of "exceptional circumstances." We hope he uses it. If he does not, then we as a society have lied to Ala Morales and we have also lied to ourselves.

What should we do? What should be our way of response? At the beginning of this story much of the responsibility for human tragedies like this was put on the backs of unfeeling bureaucrats. But that's not a get-out-of-jail-free pass for our elected officials. Nor for that matter for ourselves. Our politicians see and hear cases like this every day in every ministry. They have to get themselves back into the legislatures and reform the suffocating

rules and regulation that threaten us all. It is easily done. We as citizens have to be vigilant in seeing they do it. But more than that, every day and in every way whenever we see any representative of state power abuse that power, discard compassion and persist in denigrating the worth and consequence of a human being, we must fight. Right there and right on the spot. To the point of civil disobedience. We can no longer afford to say it's too much. We just have to get along. Our very lives depend on our courage. For if we continue in our obsequious complacency the fault, as Shakespeare wrote, "will not be in the stars but in ourselves."


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Is journalism dead?

I will not be reduced to Twittering for attention

Journalists, writers are insecure manic-depressives on a never-ending quest for praise – in the best of times. In a recession, they are still those things, but also hyper-aware of a new reality; no matter how much they are loved and admired, the advertising revenue is simply not

paying the bills these days. Journalism was on life-support long before the economy tanked. Now, one has to wonder if the printed word can survive, let alone thrive in new economic and social contexts.

Journalists have become highly expendable in times of crisis (excluding

this journalist, naturally). Information, opinion, analysis and free thought in general have become luxuries, not necessities in a healthy democracy. With the demise of newspapers all across North America, the timing is ideal for corporate crooks and the governments they bed to take

advantage of this collective state of confusion and fear. To paraphrase Naomi Klein's "Shock Doctrine," we all need to be more vigilant during hard times, lest we be taken advantage of by more powerful forces.

Proletariat rage was once the fuel that kept journalism alive and kicking, even in the worst of times. Sadly, the masses are too busy surviving to be conscious of the pesky inner workings of democracy. Instead, we've created a new form of news that is neither relevant nor informative. We Facebook our feelings, Twitter our thoughts and YouTube our quirky pets (Incidentally, is one who Twitters considered a "Twit?"). Who cares if the Conservative government is spending \$3-billion on who-the-fuck-knows, or that AIG executives are using taxpayers' bailout money to give themselves bonuses for a job...done. None of this matters to me today, because through Facebook, I've learned that "Juliana is psyched about her tax return," that "Alyssa is sick, and that must mean the semester is nearing its end," and that Erin is... "I can't take it any longer, thought that we were stronger, all we do is linger, slipping through my fingers," – whatever the hell that means.

Consider this to be one journalist's stand against this form of egocentric, antisocial networking that serves only to celebritize the most irrelevant among us, while steering our attention away from matters of actual substance. I will not blog this rant. I won't post it as a note on Facebook. I won't videotape myself spewing this venom for the amusement of bored data entry clerks browsing YouTube. And I will certainly not be reduced to Twittering for attention. I am, after all, a proud (and sometimes stubborn) journalist, with an undying love for a once-noble profession.

There is legitimacy that comes with having your name and views in black and white; a seal of approval from men wiser than I who have decided that my voice ought to be heard. Are those who contribute to The Métropolitain latte-sipping elitists, in that respect? Most, indeed, are. Who could be more qualified to hold the elitists who run the country accountable than the elitists

who secretly would love to run the country, if given the opportunity? However, the voices of my most beloved journalist colleagues are frequently lost in the Internet ether, only to be ignored in favour of videos of water-skiing squirrels.

And therein lies the problem: Instant gratification. If this piece were solely available for consumption online, I suspect many readers would have lost interest after, "a never-ending quest for praise." In print form, however, these same words have greater meaning. It's an acknowledgement that our (kind and loyal) sponsors believe in this endeavour enough to continue to write the publisher cheques in the midst of a recession, to cover the cost of the tiny rainforest we must destroy every other week. Unfortunately, we're not all so lucky.

The closure of *The Monitor's* print operations last month and the possible bankruptcy of CanWest, parent company to *The Gazette*, are highlighting just how dire the state of affairs are for newspapers in Canada. *The Monitor* had been serving NDG since 1926. That news source is now, of course, available only on the Internet, competing with the squirrel (who, by the way, received half a million hits). Filling the print news gap in the area is a tabloid called *Le Citoyen*, published by the borough's public relations office. It features masturbatory articles and photos, complete with uplifting headlines like, "Côte-des-Neiges wins it's (sic) bet." If journalism is in danger, publicly-funded PR certainly is not.

It's not simply a question of the average citizen needing to be more interested. Journalists themselves need to be more interesting. There is an explanation beyond all that is economic as to why the interchangeable press-release editors, information forwarders and glorified stenographers find themselves in danger, or out of a job altogether: They are dull. Reviving this great profession is not simply a matter of scolding the public until they submit; it's taking on the squirrel and winning. Until journalists learn to adapt to this new reality, we will all collectively remain as irrelevant as the average Twit.

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Sunday's C.R.A.P. demo

Last Sunday afternoon, only minutes after they began to gather in front of the Mount Royal Metro station, Montreal's CRAP (La Coalition contre la Repression et les Abus Policiers) lost no time as they began to pick their annual fight with city's police. Only weeks after pro-Gaza mobs took over the city's streets on several occasions during the latest Arab-Israeli conflict, hundreds of Montreal police had to spend most of the day playing cat and mouse with hard core gangs of self-described anarchists who were doing their best to tear their way through the streets of the downtown core. While no one was seriously injured, early estimates report well over \$200 000 of damage was done to both public and private property. At the end of the day, police made 39 criminal code arrests for assault, vandalism and assorted weapons charges. Another 189 municipal tickets for illegal assembly were issued to various people.

"Why did the city allow this to happen in the first place?" asked one paint-splattered policeman. "This isn't free expression...this is nothing but a bunch of a—holes breaking up the city."

The trouble started shortly after the STM (Société des Transports de Montréal) closed down the city's orange line to prevent the mob from using the metro as an escape route. While only a few hundred protesters were milling about in the Mount Royal metro station, police dressed in riot gear formed a line across the street to prevent the protesters from going east into the Plateau district. Even as CRAP organizers continued to maintain the demonstration was supposed to be a protest against police brutality, several members of the mob were doing their best to provoke the police and cause an incident. The police

Continued on page 10



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SUNDAY'S C.R.A.P. DEMO, continued from page 7

remained silent and continued to maintain their discipline while their faceguards were being covered with spittle as people screamed filthy epithets only inches away from their face. As usual, female officers were singled out for the most abusive language but they held their place as did everybody else along the line. For such a spontaneous demonstration, more than a few observers weren't surprised to see a box full of fruit and vegetables suddenly appear on the street only twenty feet away from the police. While protestors in the front lines provided a convenient screen, others behind them began to throw garbage along with a few rocks and bottles at the police. Tomatoes followed by rocks and bottles began to fly through the air but, apart from a few shots of pepper spray to encourage the more vociferous core to keep their distance, the police didn't budge and the crowd began to move west towards St. Denis Street. As the crowd headed

south, experienced observers began to notice more and more people coming out of the side-streets to join the march as it made its way towards Sherbrooke. There were no police in sight and some journalists in the crowd said the stores along St. Denis Street could be in for a bad afternoon, giving rise to a serious class action lawsuit against the city of Montreal. Luckily, nothing happened but many of the marchers were turning their 'hoodies' inside out to confuse police observers and photographers while others were rooting through garbage cans looking for bottles and other suitable missiles to throw at the police.

While turning his own jacket inside out, 'Joe' said he was having a great time. After earlier pelting the police with tomatoes in front of the Mount Royal Metro station, he tried to beat up an old man who was peddling Marxist pamphlets before joining the crowd heading down St. Denis Street. In Montreal's contem-

porary fractured street French, he told The Métropolitain he had nothing better to do and he liked the action "when things get hot". When asked what he did for a living, he said he was a cook in Father Emmett 'Pops' John's youth shelter on Ontario Street.

Once the crowd hit Sherbrooke and St. Denis, another police line formed blocking the way down St. Denis where the crowd could have done some real damage. While there was no direct confrontation, someone tossed some 'thunderflash' fireworks at the police after which they fired the single plastic bullet which fractured a pane of glass in a door frame only five feet away from where The Métropolitain was standing. While everybody was kept busy at the intersection, more than a few gangs broke away from the crowd to make their way across St. Louis Square towards St. Lawrence and Sherbrooke where they regrouped. That's when the trouble



PHOTO BY ROBERT J. GALBRAITH

began to get serious. While there was no critical mass of rioters, separate gangs began to tear their way down Sherbrooke Street towards McGill while doing as much damage as possible. Beer bottles began to fly, pedestrians were jostled, man-handled and pushed out of the way while Styrofoam coffee cups full of paint were being tossed against the police. While bins full of garbage were being set on fire, beer bottles

were usually ineffective until some of the protest's hard core developed the city's newest low-tech offensive weapon. Usually, an empty 1.5 liter bottle of beer isn't worth much more than .20 cents at the corner store until a few guys piss in it, fill it, cap it and toss it through a tinted plate glass window at which point the bottle is worth a few thousand dollars in property damage. As if Québec's UQÀM hasn't got enough problems, the 'people's university' received all the mob's attention as 'loaded' bottles were tossed through more than a few of the multi-storied building's plate-glass windows.

A police helicopter kept the whole downtown core under observation but the hard core was moving too fast for the police to organize any coherent action to prevent further damage. It soon became a case of 'hit and run' as police and firemen were forced to stop and deal with one mess as the instigators were sending each other text messages to meet up at another location for more trouble. Police kept playing cat and mouse all day until the instigators finally made a mistake and began to regroup around the intersection at Bleury and Ste. Catherine Street where there were few alleys, a massive fenced off construction site and no exits. Lines of police in riot gear formed up across every possible exit and it wasn't long before they moved in to arrest everybody in sight.

As he watched the police began to round up all the people they arrested around the intersection, senior citizen Robert Côté wasn't impressed.

"It's hard to believe how the city can permit this kind of thing to happen year after year," he said. "This never used to happen in my day. Now it happens all the time and the rest of the country thinks we're crazy. No wonder this place is such a mess."

The System is the Scandal!

"The ability of powerful corporations to influence politicians is one of the ongoing challenges to democracy. And organizations such as Democracy Watch play a critical role as monitors and whistle blowers, especially when all of the major Canadian media organizations are enmeshed with government." — Hugh Winsor, Columnist, *The Globe and Mail*

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Government's not the solution to our problems; government is the problem

The late English historian A.J.P. Taylor elucidated in 1965 on the intrusion of the state into the private lives of its citizens.

"Until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state. All this was changed by the impact of the Great War. The state established a hold over its citizens which though relaxed in peace time, was never to be removed and which the Second World War was again to increase. The history of the English people and the English State merged for the first time."

State expansion has always fed off crisis. When war didn't provide fodder, an inopportune economic crisis always substituted just fine.

The parallel drawn between Barack Obama and Franklin D. Roosevelt is now a hackneyed cliché. An editor might say that calling a cliché "hackneyed" is redundant, but the cross-generational comparison between these

two Harvard legal whizzes graduated to full-blown hackneyed cliché when it was used as the theme for the cover of the November edition of Time Magazine. Obama is pictured dressed like FDR, smoking a cigarette through one of those ridiculous bakelite holders like the character Boris used in the Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoons.

The implication is that if FDR pulled America out of the Great Depression with his New Deal which expanded the state and exponentially increased federal spending, so too can Obama save the economy with a compatible approach. And the "thinking" has spread to Canada.

But guess what? FDR's New Deal didn't save the American economy in the dirty thirties. The Great Depression started with the stock market crash of 1929; FDR became president in 1933, but the American economy was still depressed when the United States entered WW2 eight long years later.

In fact, it was not until late in the second year of America's involvement in the war, with hundreds of thousands of Americans being sent overseas and American industry running at full capacity building matériel for war, that FDR finally managed to push unemployment just below ten percent.

Apologists claim the New Deal just needed time to take effect, but that's what's referred to as a hackneyed rationale.

Yes a financial crisis is indeed upon us. But why exactly should we accept that if government pumps large sums of our own money into the economy it will halt a recession? We're told there's not a moment to lose; we've got to spend and spend now! But where's the historical precedence to prove this might work?

In the depths of the Great Depression, the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises observed that it was the late eighteenth-century development of the laws of economics that allowed the

potential of all humankind to be realized. Economic laws are not perfect, but in von Mises' words it was the broad realization by our forbearers that "there is something operative which power and force are unable to alter and to which they must adjust themselves in precisely the same way as they must take into account the laws of nature" that led to the modern, democratic age.

Leftists and environmentalists, some of whom are politicians, but most of whom are just professional activists, decry that Western civilization has come too far. But our indisputable success is the result of nothing more complicated than taking the economic rules of commonsense that we all apply to the running of our households, and applying them to the running of the state. History shows that once every individual is subject to these same, uniform economic laws, freedom is unleashed, and the state benefits from every citizen's ambition. But we're now being asked to give that up.

In the midst of the recession left behind by President Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan set the tone for a full recovery in his 1981 inaugural address: "In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Non-conservatives dismiss these words as the ranting of a retired movie star. But unlike FDR's plan, Reagan's plan worked. The full recovery led to some of the most prosperous years Americans have ever known.

Marcus Cicero, the first-century Roman statesman was among the first Westerners to advance such a conservative approach. "The budget should be balanced," he said, "the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled... lest Rome become bankrupt." We're now poised to barrel ahead blindly as FDR did when he brought National Socialism to the shores of North America. Have we learned nothing in the last two millennia?

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The Israel 'Apartheid' lies

"Israel is not South Africa"
~Prof. Edward Said,
author of "Orientalism"

Recently we witnessed the fifth Israel Apartheid Week manifestations. In cities from Oxford to New York to Montreal we saw the usual collection of Islamist apologists and their fellow-travelers in academic, political and diplomatic circles. These events sought to portray Israel as an apartheid-era South Africa in relation to its Arab citizens.

It would have been tempting to ignore it. But silence would be a submission that cannot later be overcome. These propaganda campaigns are the psychological and intellectual germ warfare of the naked aggression of hate. And they debase our public discourse. Witness Canadian Arab Federation president Khaled Mouammar calling Immigration and Multiculturalism Minister Jason Kenney a "professional whore" for his support of Israel. These campaigns have already wiped out much of the historical and institutional memories of many in one generation of citizens in the free world, and are well on the way to infecting another, younger, generation.

The Islamist propaganda blitz in this new World War creates an enormous challenge for those still dedicated to the fate of freedom in the world. For the propagandists are engaged in an effort to destroy the legitimacy of one specific nation, a sister democracy, that is the free world's frontline guardian against the spread of theocratic tyranny. And for only one reason. That reason was eloquently expressed by Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff when he recently wrote, "Israel Apartheid Week singles out one state, its citizens and its supporters for condemnation and exclusion, and it targets institutions and individuals because of what and who they are--Israeli and Jewish."

Freedom of expression

Perhaps one of the most eloquent testaments to the fact that Israel may be many things (and one can disagree with it on many policies) but an apartheid state it is not, is that Jamal Zahalka, an Israeli Arab Muslim Member of the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, has travelled freely, and frequently, in the west pronouncing on the "myth" of Israeli democracy. Zahalka is not just any ordinary MK. He is a member of the Balad Party.

Balad was founded by Azmi Bishara, also a member of Israel's parliament,

who started his political life as a communist. On the 8 of February 2004 the High Court sitting in Nazareth found that members of Balad were "...guilty of having put in place a Hezbollah proxy terrorist cell inside Israel in order to carry out suicide bombings..." Bishara himself declared in Beirut's "L'Orient-le-jour" on the 13th of June 2001 that, "I do not consider Hezbollah to be a terrorist organization."

Despite this, Balad has not been banned in Israel nor have its members, like Zahalka, been stopped from traveling. Indeed, Israeli diplomats in the various cities he has spoken in could not criticize him because Israeli protocol demands respect for a Member of the Knesset. Meanwhile Jews still cannot obtain visas to most Muslim countries. One more thing. Zahalka obtained his B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in pharmacology at Hebrew University. Hebrew University's student body is some 25% Arab.

Political participation

Zahalka is not a rare case. There are about a dozen Arab Muslim members of the Knesset. They represent several Arab political parties including two who expressly support terrorism. Those two had been disqualified by Israel's election authority but re-instated by order of the Israeli Supreme Court.

In fact Israeli Arabs, overwhelmingly Muslim, turn out to vote in greater percentage numbers than North Americans do. Arabs serve in the diplomatic corps with no glass ceiling. Israel's Ambassador to Finland is Arab. It was Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who appointed the first Israeli Arab, Salah Tarif, to the Cabinet. In May 2004 Salim Jubran was appointed to the Supreme Court of Israel.

Though making up some 18% of Israel's population, 22% of the membership of the Israeli Labour Party that ruled Israel for most of its existence was Arab as of May 2005.

Civil rights

Arabic is an official language in Israel, even posted on all road signs which is more than we can say for English in Quebec. More than 300,000 Arab children attend primary and secondary schools in Israel. In 1948 there was only one Arab high school in Israel. Today there are hundreds. There is of course one "discrimination" in relation to Arabs in Israel. They are not obligated to perform military service though there are many, - particularly Bedouin, Druze and Circassians - who

volunteer.

Though discrimination in employment and social services is outlawed, there are certainly many cases of individual prejudice. But a 2000 study published in the Jerusalem Post shows just how close the living standards are between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Unemployment among Jews stood at 6.8%; among Arabs it was 10.4%. The average Jewish household had 1.80 persons for every room; the average Arab household 2.30 persons for every room. Life expectancy for Jews averaged 75; for Arabs 73.

One of the big issues in every year's Israel Apartheid Week is that the Jewish National Fund and Israeli government agencies control most of the land in Israel and won't sell to Arabs. Well the fact is that those lands aren't sold to anyone. They are leased. And there are no religious or ethnic restrictions whatever on who can lease it. A reality affirmed in an Israeli Supreme Court judgment written by Chief Justice Aharon Barak.

The "wall"

The real story of "apartheid" is on the flip side. The "Waqf", the Muslim Religious Authority, has the protection of Israeli law to possess land and the Waqf - with no Israeli interference - has openly issued proclamations that its lands are strictly reserved for sale or lease to Arab Muslims only. In fact the Palestinian Authority has from its inception enforced the Jordanian law in place since the Jordanian occupation of the West Bank that no land be sold or leased to anyone other than Arab residents of the West Bank on pain of death.

"Apartheid" week has of course railed against the security wall calling it an "apartheid" wall. Speakers at various events always point to the World Court decision demanding that Israel change the route of the wall. What is always neglected is that the Israeli Supreme Court demanded the same thing months before the World Court and the Israeli government complied. And has complied with several other route changes demanded by courts. I am not the strongest advocate for a security wall as a permanent solution to anything, but let's keep in mind that most of it hugs the 1967 border. And Israel has special cause for concern. When the Palestinian Authority was organized it was Israel that supplied 150,000 arms for the PA's militia only to see many of those arms used against Israel's citizens by both Fatah and

"The false equation of Zionism with racism is simply an Arab ploy to take the focus off of the real enemies of humanity. Zionism is a healthy form of nationalism." - Edward H. Brown, Jr., former chief United Nations representative for the Congress of Racial Equality

Hammas factions, in addition to the suicide terrorist attacks. And finally, one last thing. Where in the Arab world would you ever see the Supreme Court ruling against its government and the government complying?

The justice system

Another big lie of Israel Apartheid Weeks is that Israel has created in the West Bank a regime of separation based on discrimination, applying two separate systems of law in the same area and basing the rights of individuals on their nationality. This is the classic half-truth. Residents of the West Bank can choose the legal jurisdiction they want to have recourse to. Including religious courts if they like. Part of the reason West Bank Arabs choose Israeli justice is the abject failure of the Palestinian Authority in implementing not only a constitution, but a functioning court system with legislation it can act on. What legislation there is, is nothing but a remnant of the Jordanian occupation from 1947-1967.

A December 2002 study by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research of residents of the West Bank and Gaza showed just how mistrustful they are of Palestinian justice. To the question "How would you evaluate the state of democracy and human rights in the Palestinian Authority?" 19.1% said good; 28.4% said satisfactory; and 50.5% said bad. When that question was asked of these same residents about Israel 65.5% said good; 11.9% said satisfactory; and only 17% said bad.

Land and international law

The fact is that whatever one may think of the occupation, aside from the settlement policies which are objectionable in far too many instances, Israel is exercising the same rights in international law as France and the United States did after the Second World War of holding onto territory acquired in its own defense after surviving an aggressive attack until peace is achieved. And under Israeli occupation, Palestinians have the highest percentage of university students; the lowest infant mortality and the longest life expectancy of any front-line Arab state. All that due to the

assistance from the Israeli social service infrastructure.

The intellectual godfather of Palestinian nationalism Edward Said once wrote that "Israel is not South Africa" As Irshad Manji has pointed out, he could have stated nothing less since an Israeli publishing house translated his seminal work "Orientalism" into Hebrew. Israel is not so much the Jewish state as a state of Jews. The only preferential legislation that exists is the "Law of Return" that gives a Jew automatic citizenship while other prospective immigrants must wait three years. That law reflects the reality of a world that butchered millions of Jews and no country would take any in. Including Canada with its infamous "none is too many" policy. Israel was a haven for many Vietnamese boatpeople when Saigon fell, but there was no haven for the Jews of Europe.

The real facts on the ground

Had the early socialist Zionists had their way there would have been a secular bi-national state. But even before Hitler, the Palestinian Muslim Arabs' religious and political leader Haj Amin al-Husseini of Jerusalem encouraged the wanton slaughter of Jews in Palestine under the British mandate, particularly in the years 1929-1940. He spent the years between 1941 and 1945 as Hitler's personal guest in Berlin broadcasting Nazi propaganda in Arabic and helping raise two Muslim divisions for the SS. He was to be tried at Nuremberg as a war criminal, but with the help of the French and British got back to his home and continued his bloodlust even after Israel became the only nation to recognize the Arab state of Palestine by accepting the UN's partition plan. Al-Husseini's frontline Arab cousins' response was to invade Palestine and hold the West Bank and Gaza prisoner for twenty years. His nephew Feisal was a member of Arafat's inner circle.

These are the facts on the ground. Facts that the Palestinians must reconcile with their history if they are ever to achieve maturity as a people and as a nation.

The Hon. David Kilgour

The Hon. David Kilgour is Canada's former Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific and for Central & Eastern Europe and the Middle East. He is a tireless international human rights campaigner and has co-authored, with David Matas, the seminal study on the tragedy of organ harvesting in China. He is the co-author with David T. Jones of *Uneasy Neighbours*.



Iran: Responsible choices

Iran is a country with immense human, cultural and hydrocarbon resources, but its people continue to be severely repressed by a government headed by a clerical Supreme Leader and president, who practise state terrorism, flaunt genocidal rhetoric, and are seeking to build nuclear weapons. Iran is pivotal to regional peace and world stability.

I stress immediately that those who judge that there are only two policy options available--continued appeasement of the regime in Tehran or bombing strikes against presumed nuclear weapon development sites--are both seriously mistaken. An attack on Iran--as deeply problematic as it would be from a human standpoint--is not going to address the questions of terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, or the deplorable human rights violations of the Iranian regime. A much better and peaceful choice would be for the rule of law countries to begin working with all democratic opposition groups in Iran.

Iran's mullahs support organizations that splinter governments across the Middle East. Representative democracy and the rule of law in Iran would encourage a democratic domino effect, ending support for Tehran's proxies and opening political space for legitimate solutions to many of the the region's peace and human dignity problems.

Successive governments in Washington, Europe, and Ottawa have regrettably sought to weaken and de-legitimize the People's Mujahadin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), despite it being the largest opposition movement among the Iranian people. The PMOI seeks for Iranians the rule of law, separation of religion and government, a nuclear-free Iran, equal rights for women and all religious and ethnocultural minorities, normalized relations with all governments and representative democracy for Iranians.

In June 2001, the PMOI renounced violence against the regime in Tehran, which had executed--and continues to murder-- tens of thousands of PMOI supporters and other Iranians. European courts have looked carefully at this issue, examining both classified and non-classified security evidence and found decisively in the PMOI's

favour as a non-violent opposition movement.

PMOI Refugees in Ashraf

There is a specific concurrent problem. About 3500 Iranian refugees live in Camp Ashraf, Iraq. Some of them fled from terror in Tehran in 1981, and others have lived in Iraq since the mid-1980s as refugees. Among the residents of Ashraf are former political prisoners as well as leaders of the student movements.

There is a considerable support for the PMOI and Ashraf refugees among the Iraqi people, who want their country to be independent from Iran. Millions of them, including three million Shiites in June 2008, petitioned in their favour.

The current al-Maliki coalition government in Iraq, however, has been sending mixed signals about the future of the Ashraf refugees. While it officially stated last September that they would be allowed to stay in Iraq, its National Security Adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie has been quoted as indicating another intention. The French News Agency quoted al-Rubaie as saying on January 23, 2009: "Iraq will hand over members of the Iranian opposition to Iran". Reuter's news agency quoted him on the same day as saying, "Iran's security is our own security"

The ongoing designation of the PMOI as a terrorist group in the US and Canada, once the 27 EU countries removed the group from their list in January, is still being used as a pretext by officials like al-Rubaie to maintain pressure on them and justify their expulsion from Iraq back to Iran, where they would face certain execution.

Human costs of further delay

As the British journalist, Christopher Booker put it before the EU Council of Ministers decided on January 26th to respect the seven EU/UK court rulings disallowing the listing of the PMOI:

"What makes this contempt for the law truly incomprehensible is that the EU's confessed motive is to appease the one genuinely terrorist regime in the Middle East. Its agents, the Revolutionary Guards, have done more than anyone to destabilize the entire region, from Lebanon to Iraq and Afghanistan. To this murderous

theocratic dictatorship, the only real hope of a democratic secular alternative is Mrs (Maryam) Rajavi's NCRI and the PMOI, the very body the EU seems prepared to stop at nothing to suppress."

Rule of law supporters in all of our countries and beyond were delighted when the EU ministers finally heeded the court rulings in their Brussels decision. Consider, however, only three of the consequences of the much-delayed decision:

1- PMOI supporters have suffered severely in many ways during their seven year legal battle for legalization. The regime in Tehran used the terrorist label as yet another ill-founded excuse to persecute PMOI supporters of all ages mercilessly inside Iran. According to its "Islamic Punishment Act" of 1997, "killing", "hanging", "amputation of the right hand and the left leg" or internal exile, are some of the punishment prescribed for PMOI members and supporters.

2-In order to untie its hands and win the seven legal battles in Europe, the PMOI diverted virtually all of its human resources, finances, and energy from its main goal of achieving the rule of law, human dignity, and representative democracy in Iran. Meanwhile, unchallenged, the Iranian regime has continued to imprison and murder its own people for their search for religious freedom and the right to voice dissent.

3-During these lost years, the EU, US, and Canada were in significant respects in effect in line with the mullahs, together inflicting enormous harm on many PMOI supporters inside and beyond Iran, including refugees in the Ashraf camp.

Canada and PMOI

In Canada, the government of Paul Martin added the PMOI to its list of proscribed entities in May 2005. The only explanation by government officials at the time was that it "met the threshold of being a listed entity". The timing was bizarre as the regime had brutally murdered Canadian photo-journalist Zahra Kazemi in Evin prison two years earlier after she attempted to photograph a student protest in Tehran.

Only last fall, a Canada-led campaign won a major victory at the

The time for democratic change in Iran by the Iranian people is long overdue. The long-term political and economic relations of Canadians, Americans, and Europeans are best served by standing with the Iranian people, not their totalitarian regime.

United Nations. A General Assembly committee defeated Iran's call not to consider a long list of human rights indignities alleged against it. The vote on censure, which highlighted regime abuses, including flogging and amputations, then passed. Despite this, the Harper government nonetheless decided late last year to continue listing the PMOI as a terrorist organization in Canada. It is not at all clear whether the department responsible for reviewing the listing even considered the European and UK court judgments.

The time for democratic change in Iran by the Iranian people is long overdue. The long-term political and economic relations of Canadians, Americans, and Europeans are best served by standing with the Iranian people, not their totalitarian regime. Appeasing the ayatollahs and suppressing the Iranian opposition must end. The next step for both the Harper government and Obama administration should thus be to de-list the PMOI with all deliberate haste, especially now that the EU ministers and British Parliament have done so.

Conclusion

Observers of Iraq have noticed that the PMOI and its supporters in Ashraf have worked for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, where the Awakening Councils are reducing violence between the Shiite and Sunni communities in the country.

Such evidence points to the fact that the PMOI represents the aspirations of the Iranian people for a democratic society of peace and the rule of law. The Council of EU Ministers demonstrated their respect

for the rule of law by respecting the findings of its courts and removing the ban on the PMOI.

It is time that the US and Canada follow the EU lead, pay equal respect to the findings of the EU and UK courts, de-list the PMOI as a terrorist group, and help to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe otherwise in the making for Ashraf residents.

The best legal advice available indicates that the residents of Ashraf continue to be protected persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention; that the United States retains its Convention obligations despite having transferred responsibility for their protection to the government of Iraq. The analysis concludes that if the government of Iraq is unwilling to abide by the treaty then the United States under the established principles of international law, including the Geneva Convention, is obliged to resume primary responsibility for the security of the residents of Ashraf City.

President Obama, who has called for a "constructive dialogue" with Tehran, knows that this cannot be productive with continuous concessions by one side only and that one has to deal with Tehran from a position of strength. Indeed, if history is the judge, carrots without disincentives don't work as has been the case in Iran over the past 30 years.

Any useful engagement with Tehran must include encouraging the development of the rule of law and the respect for human dignity. De-listing the PMOI would be a constructive step in that direction.

Thank you.



David T. Jones

David Jones, co-author of *Uneasy Neighb(u)rs: Canada, the USA and the Dynamics of State, Industry and Culture*, is a former U.S. diplomat who served in Ottawa. He now lives in Arlington, Virginia."

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Separatists have a point

Washington, DC History is never "dead." Not even when all of the participants have long gone to their rewards (or punishments) is it over.

The contretemps over the now aborted recreation of the battle on the Plains of Abraham demonstrates this reality.

In the past generation, there has been a renewed interest in historical recreation with often semi-professional "re-enactors" investing considerable sums in historically accurate reproductions of clothing, equipment, and armament. While media attention has gravitated to the boys-with-toys recreation of assorted battles with whiz bang noise and clouds of smoke, a great deal of "learn from the past" effort has been devoted to revisiting social, political, civilian pursuits of previous eras.

Nevertheless, the planned recreation of the battle on the Plains of Abraham as a highlight of the 250th anniversary of the battle was clearly a one-in-your-eye to many Quebecers.

The fact that it had been re-enacted several times previously had clearly passed beneath the radar of separatist attention; however, its juxtaposition with a major anniversary had clear political overtones.

We won; you lost—say Anglophones. And for Quebec's frequently beleaguered Anglophone minority, memories of this predominance doubtless generate more than a scintilla of pleasure. One notices that it is invariably the winners who say that the losers should "get over it" and "move on." However, the reverse of the coin is exactly what you have seen—the sensitivities of a number of Francophones were abraded sufficiently to prompt squawks of protest. To be sure, it was a tourist attraction and doubtless local Quebec patrons and merchants sense diminished profits. But it was also a political event, and attempting to mix politics with profits has predictable perils.

Some defenders of the Plains of Abraham re-enactment attempted to

justify it as an equivalent to the annual re-enactment of U.S. Civil War battle at Gettysburg. That is a feeble analogy. Gettysburg was fought in the North; the Union army repelled an invading force of Confederates. We are not holding major re-enactments of Union victories in the South, e.g. Sherman's march through Georgia and the burning of Atlanta. We have no interest in reviving the angers of those who still believe it was a war of Northern aggression. Slowly, over the years and then over the decades, the South became reconciled to defeat—and the United States which prior to the Civil War was described in plural terms ("The United States are...") became a singularity ("The United States is...")

Without question, the Civil War was the defining element in U.S. history; no war before or since generated more casualties. It was the hardest possible way to obtain national unity—and hardly to be recommended. Nevertheless, it is equally clear that Canada has not achieved such

cohesion. The persistence, indeed the frequently bitter persistence, of a substantial element of the population that would prefer an independent Quebec demonstrates this circumstance—perhaps the existential circumstance of Canada.

Thus, in this regard, those responsible for orchestrating the battle recreation could have demanded the right to proceed with the activity. They could have insisted on appropriate security for the event—and excoriated any demonstrators who moved beyond accepted norms of protest. After all, the victorious also have rights even when the defeated don't like defeat. And the separatists might well have found that semi-violent protest cost rather than gained support. Conflict avoidance through "reasonable accommodation" doesn't resolve the roots of conflict; it just puts a cosmetic gloss on its scars.

In the United States, re-enactments have a further dimension. The financial and intellectual effort devoted to developing Colonial

Williamsburg in Virginia starting in the 1930s and the closely related facilities of Jamestown and Yorktown have combined archeology and historical research. At their best, these efforts provide the visitor a sense beyond the written word of how people lived and interrelated (minus to be sure the absence of sanitary facilities and close proximity of family life to their livestock). Or on the grander scale, one can visit Mount Vernon (Washington's home) or Monticello (Thomas Jefferson's estate) and gather an appreciation of the human qualities of these men from well-briefed staff in period costume. Moreover, our history continues to struggle with the role of African Americans in colonial society—previously all but invisible, they are claiming appropriate recognition as part of U.S. history.

There is much that Francophone and Anglophone can celebrate and mutually appreciate in their interrelated Quebec past without reviving old hatreds.

"You can get anything you want in life if you help others get what they want."

- George F. Lengvari, Sr.



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Stressing the banks!

Phase 2 of the banking crisis: government investigations and more mortgage debt implosions.

Investors around the world could be forgiven for expressing some optimism given the stock market results for the week ending on March 13th 2009: US markets posted the biggest gains in twenty years, with the Dow up over 9%, with similar gains on the broader S&P 500 index and the Canadian TSX. One of the catalysts for this surge of optimism was an announcement by Citigroup that after receiving \$45 billion in government assistance, the bank was able to post an \$8 billion dollar profit in their current fiscal quarter. As a result, the stock was up nearly 80% on the week, to just under two dollars. With so much cash on the sidelines for so long, investors rushed into the banking sector, sending the S&P Financials index up 34% (!) for the week.

Investors should not be so giddy with their money. The US government, under Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, has announced that investigators will comb the assets of all US banks with more than \$100 billion in assets (about 2/3 of all US banks) to determine their ability to survive two scenarios of protracted recession, as well as evaluate the quality of the assets on their books. These assets include trading assets like financial instruments purchased as investments by the banks as well as conventional assets like mortgages, commercial and personal loans provided to individuals and businesses. The timing for this “stress test” as it has been called, could not be worse – the banks were just beginning to recover depositor and investor confidence after months of disastrous headlines filled with billions in write-offs, billions more in capital injections, and the stigma of thousands of layoffs in the financial industry. Just as a relative calm had settled in, the US government is going to discover that a whole tier of regional and local institutions have questionable assets on their books and they will require saving – either through outright closure, forced merger, or a new round of government capital injections. Transparency in the financial industry is a lovely platitude, but this was not the time to pry open the books and expose the ugliness that lies between the covers.

The misery of the “mark to market” requirement

Since the subprime mortgage mess created a new class of junk investments in securitized mortgage products, these assets have plummeted in value because no one has wanted to buy them. The US Treasury has moved in and purchased some of these troubled assets from financial institutions, but the government cannot sweep in and pick up all of the toxic assets that the banks would like to unload. Now, some of these assets

are still performing, meaning that “only” 20% of their loans may be in arrears. Normally this would mean that the market value of the security should fall by a corresponding amount, depending on the yield versus risk-free investments available in the marketplace. The problem is that since no other financial institution wants these assets, the price may be discounted by 50% or in some cases, much more. As a result, banks and other institutions have been forced to write down these assets using the depressed values in the marketplace, even if the cash flow being generated by those assets would justify a higher price if there was a healthy trading market for them.

The fear is that the “stress test” will uncover a whole new series of non-traditional mortgage products like “jumbo loans” (loans greater than \$625,000), “Alt-A” loans, which were given to less than prime borrowers but who still had better credit scores than “sub-prime”, and then the now well-known sub-prime loans which include low/no documentation loans (liar loans) and low credit score clients. According to a study of the mortgage market by Credit Suisse from January 2009, we are only 1/3 of the way through the mortgage crisis. There are two more waves of troubled mortgages that are supposed to see their interest rates re-set to much higher levels, precipitating a new wave of home repossessions and continued pricing declines in the US housing stock. The banks will want to dump the securitized assets represented by these mortgages, and there will be no buyers. Therefore, the Fed stress test will force a new wave of asset write-downs that could decimate the banks’ capital and put many banks into negative territory.

Without the stress test, these banks would have been able to wait for the Obama Administration’s

plan to deal with these toxic assets, which has been the subject of a great deal of speculation. The US government has been slow to deal with the disposition of these toxic assets because the Department of the Treasury is still vastly understaffed – there are over a dozen under-secretarial positions that remain unfilled, and this has slowed the formulation of policy at this critical juncture.

Who’s going to be the bad bank?

There has been a lot of discussion amongst economists over the pros and cons of creating a “bad bank” like the fabled Depression-era Resolution Trust Corporation which was created to wind-down the banking crisis of that era. They call it a “bad bank” because it becomes a home for all the bad assets like the securitized mortgages that financial institutions no longer want. Essentially, the federal government would capitalize the bad bank, and it would exchange good securities, like cash, for the toxic assets. Once the banking industry has washed itself of these troubled investments, they would be able to lend with confidence once again, or so the theory goes. The bad bank could be patient enough to hold these assets to maturity, or work them out to realize maximum value and even turn a profit for the government.

The Swedes created a bad bank after their financial crisis in the 1990s – however, this was a tiny country whose problems were measured in the billions of dollars, while the US is a world power whose problems are measured in the trillions. The US government is hesitant to get into the difficult task of valuing these hundreds of billions of dollars (or trillions, who really knows) of distressed assets – if they pay too much for them, the US taxpayer will be on the hook for the losses.

The US government’s response is anticipated any day now. There probably won’t be a US bad bank – instead, the government is likely to provide financing to hedge funds and other vulture-like buyers of distressed assets if they agree to buy these holdings from the banks. The government believes that these specialized investors and traders are better positioned to determine a fair price for these assets and will intervene more quickly than government would once the financing was put in place. You should expect all kind of interesting new investment funds to pop up offering the possibility to participate in the enormous potential profits to be had as these assets are worked-out and liquidated over time.

Do mortgage-holders get a break as well?

The housing market must be stabilized – and the government knows that a whole slew of new foreclosures are imminent as the loans made in 2006 and 2007 come up to have their interest rates re-set. There will be some kind of relief for homeowners facing this imminent pain – the banks who will be allowed to get these toxic assets off their books will also have to assist homeowners to re-work their mortgages to keep them in their houses and avoid adding to the glut of foreclosed housing stock that is decimating pricing for existing and new home construction.

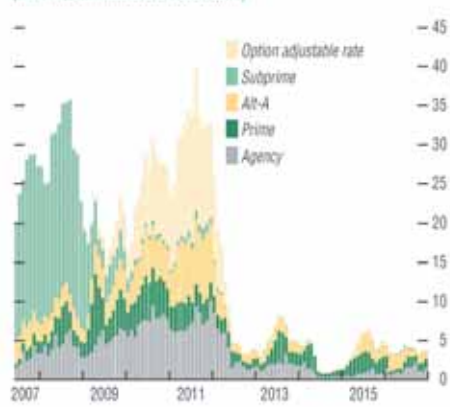
Ironically, now that the Federal Reserve has set the overnight rate practically to zero, buyers can get mortgages below 5%, if they qualify. The government will put a program in place to incentivize the banks to get as many existing mortgages up for renewal into new mortgages that take advantage of these historically low rates and allow them to stabilize their family finances. If a homeowner can convert a variable rate mortgage into a 25 year fixed-rate mortgage at 5%, then that family will probably have more cash available on a monthly basis for renewed consumer spending. Since consumer spending is 2/3 of the US economy, the real long-term objective of any homeowner stabilization plan is to revive the consumer economy and re-ignite spending on durable consumer goods like automobiles.

Canada’s banks will feel the stress, too

Canada’s banks are rated as the most solid in the world – but they suffered under forced write-offs last Fall under the mark-to-market rule, since they were holding some of the same toxic assets as the US banks. If the US stress test forces American banks to revalue a new series of toxic assets, then any of these securities held in Canada will be subject to the same revaluations with balance sheet losses as the result. Canadian banks do not have representatives around the boardroom tables at the Federal Reserve, nor at the Treasury Department, and their lobbyists at Congress will be powerless to influence the valuation of the assets in question.

Canadian bank shares have continued to fall through 2009, with a respite this past week. The smarter players in the market have probably figured out that though Canadian banks may be the strongest the world has to offer, they may be somewhat weaker once the US stress test evaluation is complete at the end of April. If you believe in this analysis and are interested in buying Canadian bank shares, then maybe you should wait until the merry month of May.

Figure 1.7. Monthly Mortgage Rate Resets
(First reset in billions of U.S. dollars)



Source: Credit Suisse.

SOCIETY



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EI for the self-employed

Chris Hopkins never really wanted to be an entrepreneur. But facing dire job prospects after moving to Prince Edward Island, he started a home business that eventually failed.

Now, Hopkins is using his free time to spearhead a campaign to allow entrepreneurs to opt into the federal employment insurance program.

In doing so, he's highlighted a hole so big in Canada's social safety net that it could fail 15 per cent of the country's work force – about 2.6 million people.

"Why is it that self-employed people aren't even asked to contribute?" said Hopkins.

"Many small businesses are failing. Their employees will be able to draw EI, but the owners won't. The owners have nothing to fall back on. For people trying to build the economy, hiring people and creating cash flow, there's nothing."

If his campaign is any indication, it's an idea whose time has come.

"I got into every daily newspaper across Canada," he said. "So the word is out there. And we're going to keep at it. I'm getting more members every day. People stop me in the grocery store and say: 'well done.' It's a battle worth fighting. But I'm not doing it for myself. My business is already toast."

In an economic climate where massive job cuts are daily news, there's been an upswing of interest in employment insurance program reform. But the discussion centers on the estimated 20 to 25 per cent of workers who pay into it but who are excluded from collecting benefits and the unequal access to benefits from coast-to-coast.

The debate ignores the 2.6 million people who in 2007 were classified as self-employed in Canada, about one third of them women.

Self-employment has grown steadily since the 1970s. In 1987, 13.8 per cent of the workforce was self-employed and by 1998 the percentage had risen to 17.2. It accounted for 43 per cent of employment growth in the 1990s.

Because self-employment increases during time of recession, we can only expect a surge in that sector over the coming years. (It also shrinks during economic growth – the percentage of self-employed workers fell in 2002, for example).

Many of Canada's self-employed face a severely precarious work situation. In 1995, over 55 per cent of own account workers made less than \$20,000 while only 2.2 per cent made over \$80,000. In comparison, almost nine percent of employers made over \$80,000. In terms of earnings between men and women, the wage gap in self-employment is also greater than that among paid workers. "I don't think Conrad Black needs

Employment Insurance, and he's self-employed," said Larry Haiven, an associate professor with St. Mary's University Sobey School of Business in Halifax.

"But a lot of people are self-employed involuntarily or semi-voluntarily. They've been laid-off, or been contracted out, or their industry runs that way. More and more people who are in precarious work are self-employed. I would say they are in a position of dependency."

Canada's social programs have yet to fall into line with our new labour reality and that leaves a large chunk of our work force without social welfare programs that we took for granted only a couple of decades ago.

"All the labour law and employment law is based on the model of standard employment," Haiven said.

Entrepreneurs also miss out on many of the benefits that come with employment. Some, like health and disability

insurance, can be bought through private channels, though the cost can be prohibitive for the self-employed working poor.

Other benefits - including vacation time and days off, sick leave, overtime pay and minimum wage, regular hours, workplace health and safety standards, maternity and parental benefits, and the right to be able to sue for wrongful dismissal – simply no longer apply.

Extending employment insurance benefits to the self-employed is not unprecedented policy.

Seasonal and fishery workers fought and won for coverage under the plan and the Quebec government allows self-employed persons to apply for its parental insurance plan under its assurances-emploi programs. The Tory government supports providing EI maternity and parental leave to women who opt into the program.

Maternal and parental leave is one area where the idea of extending benefits to entrepreneurs has gained traction, notes Sylvain Schetagne, an economist with the Canadian Council on Social Development, who's been advocating for extended benefits for almost a decade.

"We have a false perception that EI is there for us, but it's not," he said.

EI helps stabilize the economy and keeps people consuming goods and services when there have been layoffs, Schetagne says, and when the self-employed are deemed ineligible, "it means when they lose their business, a significant proportion are running out of money and are no longer contributing by consuming. Giving them access to EI would have a positive impact at the micro level."

Federal, provincial and municipal governments promote self-employment and offer incentives to Canadians to start their own business. The Business Development Bank of Canada, for examples, helps start-ups and government employment agencies have programs that help the unemployed launch their own careers.

But they're not there when the business fails.

"This whole area is full of myth and ideology," Haiven said.

"We want to celebrate the self-employed, but we also use them. They're seen as the real true heroes of the economy, but they're no more heroic than employees."



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Canada provides hundreds of million of dollars in aid to dictators, tyrants, and corrupt governments around the world.

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Instead of working to bring about positive change, Canadian aid allows these dysfunctional and sometimes tyrannical regimes to remain intact while we apply band-aids to the symptoms.

Canada consistently fails to support democracies around the world such as India, Taiwan, America and Israel. In many cases, we actively work against them. And with the exception of Ukraine, Canada refuses to take measurable action to support the billions of people aspiring for democracy, freedom and accountable governments around the world.

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SO JUST HOW IRISH IS QUEBEC? CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

skirts the religious and political differences that define Irish history. There are no shades of Kelly Green or Orange to inflame partisan feelings. The over-riding colour is a soothing, pastel shade of green. The most controversial displays - if you can call them that, deal with Dr. Edmund Bailey O'Callaghan, who was charged with treason for his part in the 1837 rebellion, and Thomas d'Arcy McGee, the outspoken father of Canadian confederation who was assassinated in 1868.

"We tried to achieve a balance and represent the historic realities," said O'Donnell, a consultant with the Quebec English-Speaking Community Research Network. We didn't hide any of the tensions, but we didn't dwell on them. The process of what we would showcase was a long and complicated one. What we wanted to do above all was to reveal the variety and the complexity of the Irish experience in Quebec." The exhibition showcases 10 historical figures, including one of the one of first Irishman to appear in census in New France, Tadhg Cornelius O'Brennan, and ends with a salute to Marianna O'Gallagher, the Quebec City author who founded Irish Heritage Quebec and who is still alive.

Other exhibits focus on Grosse Ile, the quarantine station where many of the famine Irish died, Griffintown, an old Irish Montreal neighbourhood, and the St. Patrick's parade, which this year celebrates its 185 anniversary.

The first major wave of Irish immigrants came to Quebec after the War of 1812, when labourers were recruited to build the Lachine and Beauharnois canals.

"The parade is a symbol of the ongoing success story we are talking about," said O'Donnell, "It is still organized by the Irish, but it is for everyone. It's great."

Archeological evidence suggests that Irish monks established settlements in the Gaspé long before Jacques Cartier claimed the area for France in 1635. In fact, some suggest that the name Cartier itself may be derived from the Gaelic, McCarthy.

By the early 18th century there was an identifiable Irish presence in what is today Quebec's

Portneuf county. One of them, Jack Reilly, who arrived in Boucherville in 1704, changed his name to Jean-Baptiste Riel, and his grandson, Louis, founded the province of Manitoba, led two rebellions in the North West Territories, and was hanged for treason in Regina in 1885.

More came after the Conquest in 1760 with the 99th Irish regiment. Few people are aware of it, but the first St. Patrick's parade was held in Trois Rivières in 1776 when soldiers with the American revolutionary army from Boston marched through the streets.

The first major wave of Irish immigrants came to Quebec after the War of 1812, when labourers were recruited to build the Lachine and Beauharnois canals. Then, the famine Irish arrived in 1847. Many of those orphaned by the famine were Roman Catholics adopted by francophone families. The prevailing attitude, as Mavis Gallant has described it so succinctly, was "The Irish were not English. God sent them to Canada to keep people from marrying Protestants." Some, like the ancestors of Brian Mulroney and Claude Ryan kept their surnames; other families, like those of Louis ST. Laurent and Jean Charest did not.

Three members of the same Irish family wound up being premiers of Quebec, Daniel Johnson, who derived his interest in politics from his Irish grandparents was Union National premier of Quebec from 1966 to 1968. His sons, Pierre-Marc and Daniel Johnson Jr., also served as premiers, one of them as a Péquiste in 1985, the other as a Liberal in 1994.

Significantly, the show is being held at the McCord museum. David Ross McCord, who founded the museum in 1921 is the descendent of an illustrious Irish immigrant family which had its roots in Dublin.

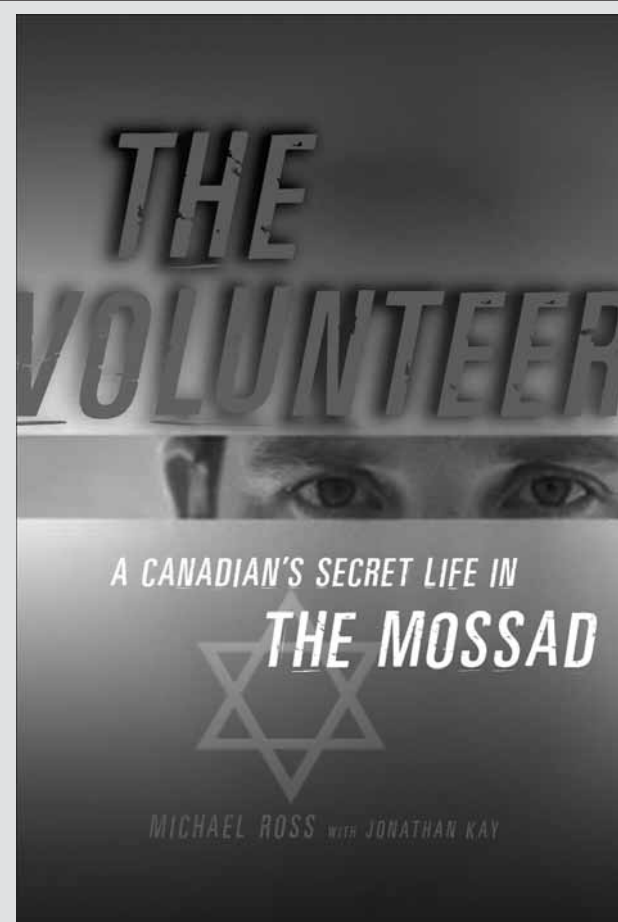
BEING IRISH O'QUEBEC, opened this week at the McCord Museum, 690 Sherbrooke St. W., 514-398-7100, www.mccord-museum.qc.ca

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Tousignant

Can there be a more dazzling art exhibition around than the Claude Tousignant retrospective at the Musée d'art contemporain?

The last show put together by gallery director Marc Mayer before he left for the National Gallery in Ottawa in January, the exhibition, curated by Paulette Gagnon and Mark Lanctôt, is the first major survey of the Tousignant's work in more than 25 years. The 90 paintings on view celebrate the artist's ability to render abstract sequences of colour into pure sensation. The effect is mesmerizing and difficult to achieve - this is not a robotic sameness of execution, but a visceral, oscillating delight, spirals and monochromes of pure colour.

A seminal figure in the history of abstract art in Quebec since the 1950s, Tousignant has long been known for his fluorescent palettes, cubes and circles. The exhibition is a chronological circuit, beginning with tachist paintings, which juxtapose dabs of pure colour, followed by paintings, sculptures and reliefs that draw on Piet Mondrian for inspiration, and on to his rings of circular paintings and his monumental monochromes.

His monochromatic pictorial spaces and chromatic screens, *Nord*, *Céphéide* and *Ailleurs*, are drenched with colour that tilts toward indescribable shades of pink, icy blue and a mossy green.

Although monochromatic works are perhaps the most difficult of minimalist art to understand and appreciate, it is hard not to be impressed by the richness of the unusual color combinations in Tousignant's diptychs and other multi-faceted works.

Another monochrome, *Èspace Mnemonique*, black acrylic bars on canvas mounted in a small alcove by itself surrounds the viewer almost like a religious experience. Other soaring works, like *Electrolysation*, are hypnotic.

And then there are his signature gongs and spirals - floating circles of drenching colours in green, pink, yellow, vermillion and orange.

This is a gallery show; many of the works are far too large to be

displayed in the average house or apartment. But moving slowly and repeatedly through room after gallery room of Tousignant's art is sheer magic, a magnificent visual experience that offers a new look at his work as a whole.

Claude Tousignant, a Retrospective: at the Musee d'art

contemporain de Montreal until April 26. Call 514-847-6226 or visit www.macm.org. You might also want to check out Claude Tousignant: Retrospective on Paper (1955 - 2004) until April 4 at Art Mur, 5826 St. Hubert St. Call 514-933-0711 or visit www.artmur.com it www.artmur.com

This is not a robotic sameness of execution, but a visceral, oscillating delight, spirals and monochromes of pure colour.





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Let us Prey: One Twisted Sister.

You've got to have doubts about a production of John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt* at the Centaur until March 29 that reduces a complex, engrossing 80-minute play to little more than a war between the sexes.

You also have to wonder why the theatre would stage *Doubt* when the Academy Award nominated movie version with Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman is still running at your local cineplex.

Although the 2005 Pulitzer Prize

winning script operates on a number of levels, director Micheline Chevrier has reduced the play to a power struggle between an astringent Roman Catholic nun, Sister Aloysius (Brenda Robins) and a popular young Irish priest, Father Flynn (Alain Goulem). Sister Aloysius is out to crucify Flynn and all he represents, and Flynn may just have a few metaphorical nails in his pocket to help her do the job. We're never quite certain.

Doubt is set in 1964, when the

Roman Catholic church was torn before reformers and old school disciplinarians. Aloysius is certain that Flynn has interfered with a young, black altar boy and in her campaign to have the priest exposed, recruits a young, idealistic nun Sister James (Lina Roessler).

Robins is one twisted sister. Her performance is so strident, it upsets the delicate balance that has to be borne equally among the four characters if an audience is to sort out whom to believe and who is



Brenda Robins as Sister Aloysius and Alain Goulem as Father Flynn in the Centaur production of *DOUBT*.

PHOTO BY YANICK MACDONALD

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telling the truth. As written, the play is as much about sexual politics as it is about a suspected sexual deviant. In this production, Robins is vicious - a nun without an ounce of compassion or understanding. She spits out her fury when dealing with the secular world lurking beyond her school's doors. This Sister Aloysius is simply a harridan in a habit.

Alain Goulem as Father Flynn sports a big smile and a broad physical presence. Even when he squirms under the weight of the accusations against him, you can't help but want to root for him. Goulem's Flynn is an infinitely likeable and sympathetic clergyman. He may - or may not have been - indiscreet in plying his young altar boy with wine - but it's hard to believe he's perverse.

Lina Roessler, as nervous Sister

James is a frightened bird torn between the priest she wants to trust and her superior who demands unblinking obedience. Hers is a performance of such nervous energy that she seems ready to shatter.

Stealing the show as the altar boy's mother is Lucina Davis, deeply grounded and deeply convincing as a parent with reasons of her own to avoid the question.

Costume and set designer, Pierre - Étienne Locas needs to do a bit more research into ecclesiastical garb. Roman Catholics of a certain age will have doubts about a play that allows a Roman Catholic priest to deliver a sermon wearing a maniple and stole without his chasuble. His spare set, essentially a black box framed by two religious statues, like the entire production is adequate, but leaves you wanting more.



Compelling “Tryst”

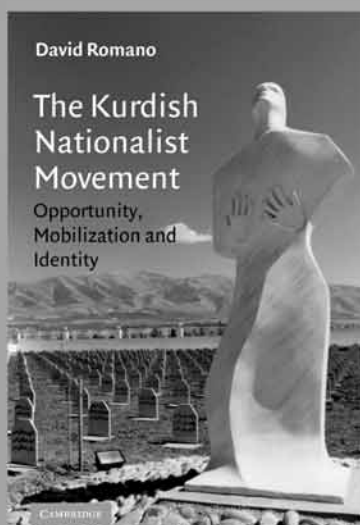
British playwright Karoline Leach’s unsettling romance, *Tryst*, running at the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts until March 29 is a compelling, heartbreakingly superb evening of theatre. It’s the story of an Edwardian gigolo, a charming rake with the rather suspect name of George Love (C. David Johnson). Mr. Love is the sort of smooth talker who steals roses from the cemetery to give to the lonely women he’s about to swindle. He is, he tells us “a careful person. Organised. I know what I’m after, I know what I want. And I get it. I live on my wits. And my charm. And I do quite nicely.” And he does. His latest conquest is Adelaide Pinchin, (Michelle Giroux) a prim, sexually repressed hat-maker with “the sort of face that belongs to a woman who teaches piano, or serves tea, or issues library books.” Adelaide has inherited a small fortune, about \$35,000 and a rather expensive brooch from her late aunt. Love sets out to woo her, marry her, then take her money and run. But the unexpected feelings he develops as he attempts to seduce Adelaide throw a wrench into the scam and threaten to undermine the devious way he makes a living. And her willingness to let Mr. Love take advantage of her once she knows what he’s up to, complicates the plot. The play turns on unexpected psychological complexities. From the moment Johnson opens his mouth, we sense the evil beneath the charm; he is brilliant at blending humour with emotional cruelty. Giroux is especially touching and creates an indelible portrait as the lovelorn hat-maker yearning for affection at any cost. This is flawless acting, a cat and mouse game, at its best. Diana Leblanc has directed with sublime nuance and a mix of menace. Sherri Catt and Astrid Janson have designed an abstract set of beaded walls and a few pieces of furniture evocatively lit by Luc Prairie. *Tryst* is a riveting evening that blurs the lines between love and hate, romance and desperation all the way to the bitter end. This season, with each of its productions, the Segal goes from strength to strength.



C. David Johnson and Michelle Giroux

RANDY COLE PHOTO

Cambridge Middle East Studies



David Romano focuses on the Kurdish case to generally try and make sense of ethnic nationalist resurgence. In a world rent by a growing number of such conflicts, the questions posed about why, how and when such challenges to the state arise are becoming increasingly urgent.

Throughout the author analyzes these questions through the lens of social movement theory, considering in particular politico-social structures, resource mobilization strategies and cultural identity. His conclusions offer some thought-provoking insights into Kurdish nationalism, as well as into the strengths and weaknesses of various social movement theories.



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Pour que les Lumières ne s'éteignent pas

Philippe Val, Reviens, Voltaire, ils sont devenus fous, Paris, Grasset & Fasquelle, 2008, 300 p.

Philippe Val est directeur de Charlie Hebdo, hebdomadaire satiriste français dont la réputation s'est étendue à toute la planète après la publication, le 8 février 2006, des douze caricatures de Mahomet qui avaient paru pour la première fois le 30 septembre 2005 dans le journal danois Jyllands Posten. Objet de poursuites de la part de la Grande Mosquée de France, de l'Union des

laïcs d'origine musulmane, et mes accusateurs les plus radicaux dans la mouvance d'extrême gauche... »

Justement classé à gauche dans l'éventail politique français, Val s'était déjà fait avant 2006 de nombreux ennemis... à gauche ! Ses prises de position successives lors de la guerre du Kosovo, de l'affaire du voile - il était favorable à la loi interdisant le port des signes religieux à l'école, de la deuxième intifada, de l'affaire Dieudonné, du référendum sur la constitution européenne, etc., lui avaient déjà aliéné la sympathie de ceux qu'il décrit ainsi

On ne veut pas voir la différence entre critiquer une religion parce qu'elle est manipulable par des terroristes à qui elle sert d'outil de propagande et dire "sale Juif riche"

organisations islamiques de France (UOIF) et de la Ligue Islamique Mondiale pour « injure publique à l'égard d'un groupe de personnes à raison de leur religion », Charlie Hebdo sortit vainqueur d'un procès qui fut tenu les 7 et 8 février 2007, jugement confirmé le 12 mars 2008 par la cour d'appel. « Étrangement, note Philippe Val, plus d'une fois, j'ai trouvé mes meilleurs avocats parmi des religieux ou des

dans son livre : « [...] une gauche altermondialiste violemment antiaméricaine et anti-israélienne, qui voit secrètement dans l'islamisme radical le seul élément déstabilisateur de l'Amérique et d'Israël. »

Plutôt discrets lors de l'affaire des caricatures (il aurait été gênant de prendre ouvertement le parti de fanatiques religieux qui combattent la liberté d'expression), les petits amis des



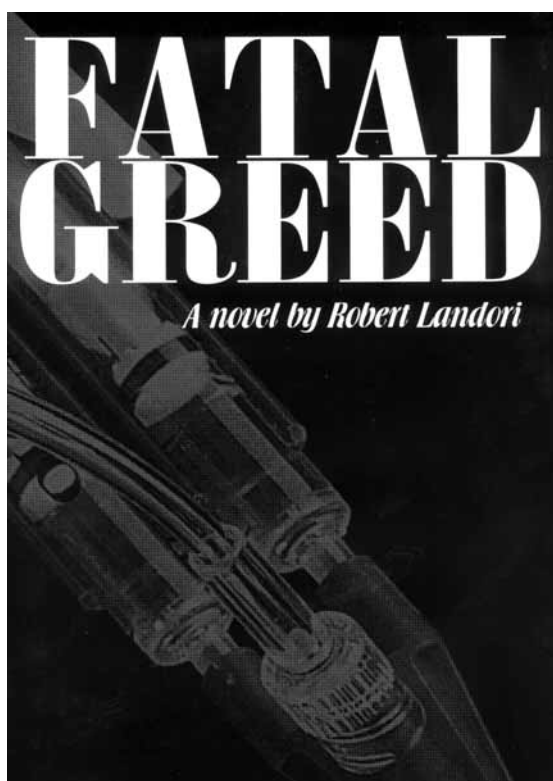
islamo-fascistes se sont déchaînés l'an dernier lors de l'affaire Siné, le célèbre caricaturiste qui dut quitter Charlie Hebdo après avoir refusé de s'excuser pour un texte où il reprenait à son compte, dans une attaque personnelle contre Jean Sarkozy (le fils du président de la République était fiancé à une Juive), le poncif éculé qui associe les Juifs à l'argent. Daniel Cohn-Bendit dira à Philippe Val, propos rapportés dans le livre : « Le lien entre Juif et argent, c'est la base de l'idéologie nazie. Et ça en Allemagne, c'est fini. Un dessinateur se

serait fait virer pour ça, personne n'aurait levé le petit doigt pour le défendre. » En France, Siné a trouvé une foule de défenseurs. Il a été reconnu depuis que Siné a toujours été antisémite, mais son départ de Charlie Hebdo a déclenché contre Val une véritable campagne de haine.

Certains ont voulu voir dans l'affaire des caricatures et dans l'affaire Siné des causes symétriques, à cette différence près qu'il serait interdit de critiquer les islamistes alors qu'il serait permis de dire n'importe quoi à propos des Juifs. « Lorsqu'on me tance avec l'histoire des deux poids deux mesures, répond Philippe Val, je suis toujours obligé d'expliquer que ce n'est pas la même chose de s'attaquer aux hommes à travers leur origine, et de s'attaquer aux idées. [...] On ne veut pas voir la différence entre critiquer une religion parce qu'elle est manipulable par des terroristes à qui elle sert d'outil de propagande et dire "sale Juif riche" ».

Relisant le chapitre intitulé « Islamo-nazisme » (qui est sans doute le plus percutant de l'ouvrage), je revois soudain l'image, chez nous, d'un INNOCENT (comédien célèbre) brandissant fièrement le drapeau du Hezbollah, celle également de deux INNOCENTES (l'une présidente de centrale syndicale, l'autre co-chef d'un parti politique) paradant en compagnie de vociférateurs pro-Hamas. S'il revenait sur terre, Voltaire aurait quelques leçons à servir aux faux amis des Libanais et des Palestiniens. Mais sans doute ces sinistres plaisantins l'accuseraient-ils alors d'islamophobie.

À lire absolument !



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Pour débusquer les préjugés

Paul-Henri Thiry D'Holbach, *Essai sur les préjugés*, Paris, éditions Coda, 2008, 233 p.

Cet ouvrage constitue l'une des meilleures démonstrations à l'effet que les préjugés entretiennent l'absence de démarche intellectuelle face aux fausses représentations du monde. En d'autres termes, il s'agit de montrer en quoi consiste l'abdication pure et simple de la raison devant tout ce qui est présenté comme étant à croire sans examen, et aussi comment les pensées humaines sont, en quelque sorte, embarrassées par les préjugés qui remplacent souvent le manque d'éducation.

Dès les premières pages, le lecteur entre dans une expérience profonde de connaissance de soi. Une expérience pure qui dépasse, voire annihile tous les mysticismes mystificateurs, toutes les oraisons incantatoires à quelque dieu imaginaire ou à quelque gourou imposteur qui polluent notre monde actuel. Au lieu des pensées magiques ou des prières stériles adressées à des dieux imaginaires, ce livre promeut le travail naturel de la raison délestée des faussetés qui entravent son exercice. Encore faut-il que la raison reconnaisse ces faussetés. C'est pourquoi d'Holbach met en relief l'immense richesse que chacun de nous porte en tant qu'individu, une fois opéré le départage entre les préjugés et la réalité. J'ajouterais que cette richesse, loin de prôner une quelconque nation qu'il faudrait absolutiser, nous renvoie avant tout à cette humanité que nous avons tous en partage.

D'Holbach nous montre comment les préjugés nous infestent sans même que nous en soyons conscients, principalement en ce qui concerne deux domaines qui affectent nos vies plus ou moins quotidiennement : le religieux et le politique. On comprend ainsi l'importance de l'éducation à la raison, et aussi le fait que la vraie morale est incompatible « avec les principes religieux et politiques des hommes ». (En passant, on devrait peut-être s'en inspirer pour enseigner à nos enfants une vraie morale à la place de cette fantaisie insensée que, dans le système québécois d'éducation, l'on appelle Éthique et culture religieuse).

« L'erreur, nous dit d'Holbach, n'est une maladie innée du genre humain, la guérison de son esprit n'est devenue si difficile, que parce que l'éducation lui fait sucer avec le lait un venin dangereux qui finit par s'identifier avec lui et qui, développé par les circonstances, produit dans les sociétés les ravages les plus affreux. »

Pour ce qui est des préjugés dans le domaine politique, les humains, nous dit d'Holbach, « trouvent bien plus commode et plus court de se laisser entraîner par l'autorité ». Tous les régimes d'essence autoritaire ou à pensée unique en profitent amplement, et il est vrai que l'éducation aux valeurs humanistes n'est pas leur fort. Ils « calomnient la Nature et la raison ; ils les font passer pour des guides infidèles ». Ils parviennent à montrer que la

D'Holbach

Essai sur les préjugés

ou
De l'Influence des opinions sur les mœurs & sur le bonheur des hommes



vérité est dangereuse, tout en se gardant bien de dire qu'elle le serait avant tout pour eux-mêmes. Aussi

ils la présentent comme difficile à atteindre, à moins de passer par leurs judicieux conseils qui souvent ne sont qu'affabulations ou mensonges.

D'Holbach ne fait pas qu'insister sur les préjugés : il offre aussi de savoureuses pages sur leurs envers plus lumineux, et en ce sens son ouvrage constitue un véritable plaidoyer en faveur de la vérité. Par exemple lorsqu'il attaque le préjugé bien tenace qui consiste à prétendre que « la vérité peut être dangereuse pour les peuples. Dire qu'il est des vérités que l'on doit taire, c'est prétendre qu'il est des maladies et des plaies auxquelles il est à propos de ne point appliquer les remèdes infallibles et connus. »

J'encourage donc le lecteur à constater par lui-même l'étendue de la richesse d'enseignements

pertinents que d'Holbach nous offre en si peu de pages. C'est un texte qui n'a pas d'âge, ni de frontière ; il s'adresse à tout être humain qui aime la réflexion et penser par lui-même. Pussions-nous être nombreux à tirer profit de la sagesse et du bon sens qui en émanent et, ainsi, faire connaître et apprécier de nos contemporains les œuvres éclairantes de ce colosse des Lumières, malheureusement trop souvent oublié, qu'était Paul-Henri Thiry, baron d'Holbach.*

*Les œuvres de d'Holbach, qui étaient introuvables depuis longtemps, voire des siècles pour certaines d'entre elles, sont de nouveau disponibles grâce à Coda, une petite maison d'édition indépendante qui, depuis quelques années, en a entrepris la réédition (www.editions-coda.fr).

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