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From left to right: Jacques Muller, owner of *Le Mas des Oliviers*; Yvon Creton; *Alexandre et fils* owner Alain Creton; *Métropolitain* publisher Beryl Wajsman and community activist Sharon Freedman, co-organizer of the 25,000 person petition against the parking meter increase.

“Arrogants, vulgaires et disgracieux!”

Downtown merchants fed up with green onions, parking rules

Dan Delmar

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Some downtown business-owners came out swinging on Wednesday, saying the Tremblay administration has lost control over its employees and is driving people out of the heart of the city with overbearing regulations.

Led by restaurateur Alain Creton, the coalition launched an

internet petition and collected signatures from representatives of almost all major businesses between Bishop and Peel. Petitionparcometre.com invites Montrealers to join their call for a return to free parking on weekends, as well as on Monday to Wednesday evenings. They're also calling for a three-hour time limit, as opposed to the two hours now allowed in high-traffic areas.

“The city says it's always the same people who complain. So, I went to speak to downtown merchants one by one,” said Creton, owner of *Chez Alexandre* on Peel St. “We want to be heard. Downtown could become an area that people

won't want to visit anymore.”

En plus de commerçants importants, Creton affirme qu'il a reçu l'appui de plusieurs hauts responsables d'organismes tel Tourisme Montréal, Destination Centre-Ville et l'Association des restaurateurs du Centre-Ville. Durant la conférence de presse de mercredi dernier, il était aux côtés de Beryl Wajsman, directeur du *Métropolitain*, en tant que président de l'Institut d'Affaires Publiques de Montréal, celui-ci ayant participé à l'organisation de la première initiative citoyenne anti-parcomètres, qui a consisté en une

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LETTRES • LETTERS

Universities and free speech

Coming back to the office from a medical check-up at the Royal Victoria Hospital, to avoid walking down University Street I strolled down the hill through our vaunted McGill University campus. Just before reaching the Roddick gates is the playfield where on warmer days students sunbathe, play toss football or just sit around. But today was a little different. Walking down the main alley, a spotted hundreds, if not thousands, of little white flags planted in the playfield, like spring flowers, almost covering its entire length.

Then, large posters on the trees lining the esplanade caught my attention. One read: For every 110 Palestinian dead, there is one Israeli dead. So, I understood it is an in-you-face pro-Palestinian happening. Now, the morbidly obnoxious comparing of body-counts is not my idea of an intelligently effective message dealing with the issue and elucidating a grievance but I agree that the right to demonstrate by friend and foe is part of free speech and, like just everyone around these parts, who can be against that.

But then something else struck me: the site of this installation. The grounds of our venerable prestigious educational and research institution financed by well-intentioned donations, grants and tax dollars are being lent and pre-empted as a facility for this outside organization's cause. This is not placards made, brought and carried by some individuals to express their point of view on some issue; it is the property of McGill University being used by this private cause as part of its propaganda. Since when does an "independent and impartial" university of such standing a caliber provide its facilities and material to a sectarian political cause?

I think James McGill and many of the great minds that taught, researched and studied there over the centuries must be turning over in their graves.

Ura Greenbaum
Montreal

We are Montrealers

I am fed up with politicians and other leaders referring to certain religious groups in different areas of Montreal. We are all Canadian first, Not Protestants, Catholics, Buddhists or Jews, I don't hear politicians saying welcome to our Protestant or Catholic communities, Yet when I attend a gathering of types in St Laurent, I hear things like welcome all my Jewish friends, Or its nice to see Jew and Muslim sitting in the same room, Why can't they say "It is nice to see Canadians of all beliefs sitting in this gathering." By singling out one certain religious group or another it places a certain pressure on that religion, Are they the religious person first and Canadian second?, Let our politicians and community leaders stop singling out religions or groups for their own personal gain. We are Montrealers, living in Quebec and citizens of the greatest country in the world,

Terry Birch
Ville LaSalle

Better political competition

Up to now there are too many unanswered questions concerning the upcoming municipal election.

Why has the Tremblay union party requested online feedback from residents without listing the need of more parking for a good balanced transportation system unless he wishes only to embellish his directives? Why has the Labonté Vision Party not translated their message into English?

If Labonté associates with Louise Harel and her ignorant, inappropriate and negative comments which undermine multi-culturalism and the direct "hands on approach" provided by independent boroughs, cannot the public assume he may lose support of his elected team all of whom represent these boroughs? Would not it be a pleasant surprise if they all joined a 3rd party so come election time there would be a more democratic race to administer this city of which we are all part owners?

Michael Shafter
Montreal

What's the purpose of the Bank of Canada

With the economy so bad, the Bank of Canada may revert to printing money. The Bank of Canada creates money to buy the bad loans of private banks so that the banks can lend again. The banks often lend this money back to government at municipal, provincial and federal levels. Would it not make sense for the Bank of Canada to lend money directly to cities, provinces and the Federal Government for infrastructure spending? Any interest paid on these loans would revert back to the taxpayers who are the owners of the Bank of Canada. The question is: What is the purpose of the Bank of Canada? Is it to serve Canadian taxpayers, or is it to bail out the banks every time they get into trouble by creating new money for them to lend at interest back to government?

Larry Kazdan,
Vancouver, B.C.



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LA PATRIE

Les gaffes de l'Église catholique et la vague d'apostasie au Québec

Les apostats de la dernière pluie

Il existe pour un catholique deux façons de quitter l'Église : par une porte dérobée au fond de la sacristie, ou par la porte principale donnant sur le parvis. La manière discrète et la plus courante : on se désintéresse de la religion, on ne va plus à la messe, on ne reçoit plus les sacrements, on cesse de croire, mais sans le crier sur les toits ; la manière forte, c'est-à-dire l'apostasie. Manière forte et parfois bruyante, adoptée par les vingt-six signataires d'une lettre publiée la semaine dernière dans *Le Devoir* : « Veuillez donc considérer cette lettre, écrivent les auteurs, comme une démarche d'apostasie et nous retourner, comme il se doit, notre certificat d'excommunication. » Ces personnes recevront un accusé de réception qui sera aussi un aveu de déception, l'évêque ne pouvant qu'accepter avec regret la décision de ses ouailles démissionnaires. Il ne pourra toutefois excommunier des gens qui l'ont devancé en s'excluant volontairement de la troupe des fidèles. Lourde tâche quand même pour les évêques, car il paraît que le nombre d'apostasies est anormalement élevé actuellement dans les diocèses de Montréal, de Québec et de Sherbrooke.

La question que je me pose est la suivante (n'y voyez aucune intention moqueuse) : pourquoi maintenant ? Ce ne sont pourtant pas les scandales qui ont manqué dans l'Église ces dernières années, c'est-à-dire depuis le premier Concile de Nicée en 325 (dont tous les catholiques se souviennent avec attendrissement). Car enfin, si on apostasie le 1er avril, c'est qu'on était encore catholique le 31 mars... Bizarre ! Plutôt que de tomber, le fruit mûr pourrissait donc sur la branche ? Ou s'agirait-il plutôt d'une décision hâtive prise sur un coup de tête ?

Le moins que l'on puisse dire des apostats de la dernière pluie, c'est qu'ils sont fâchés noir. Fâchés contre l'Église en général bien sûr, contre le pape Benoît XVI en particulier, qui vient de se couvrir de ridicule lors d'un récent voyage en



Afrique en prétendant que l'usage du condom favorise la diffusion du VIH. Fâchés surtout contre l'archevêque de Recife au Brésil, l'ultraconservateur Mgr Cardoso Sobrinho, qui a excommunié la mère d'une fillette de neuf ans violée par son beau-père et enceinte de jumeaux, de même que les membres de l'équipe médicale qui a procédé à l'IVG. Cette affaire a fait grand bruit au Brésil, très rares étant ceux qui, dans ce pays

pourtant très catholique, approuvaient la décision de l'archevêque, si bien que ce dernier a dû finalement lever l'excommunication. En somme, l'Église a confessé son erreur, mais rien n'y fait, plusieurs catholiques ne décolèrent pas.

Reste, pour expliquer cette grogne persistante, la controverse autour du condom, qui, si vous voulez mon avis, est une tempête dans un verre d'eau, car il est de notoriété publique que l'influence réelle du pape est à cet égard presque négligeable, en Afrique du moins. Primo, la hiérarchie catholique africaine et plus particulièrement les clercs et les laïques qui travaillent sur le terrain ne suivent pas Benoît XVI (et ne suivaient pas Jean-Paul II) quant à l'usage de la capote. Secundo, l'Afrique compte près de 900 millions d'habitants dont seulement 15 % sont catholiques et théoriquement soumis à l'autorité papale. Benoît XVI responsable de la propagation du sida en Afrique ? Un muffin en latex avec ça ?

Hors de l'Église, point de salut, disait-on jadis. Aujourd'hui, c'est le contraire : point de salut dans l'Église. Dans quelque église que ce soit, d'ailleurs. La conviction est aujourd'hui fort répandue, sinon majoritaire, qu'aucune conséquence bénéfique ne résulta jamais de l'existence des religions monothéistes. Moi qui ne crois ni à Dieu ni à Diable et dont la vision est radicalement matérialiste, je ne partage pas cet avis. Mais peut-être faut-il, pour porter un jugement impartial sur les bienfaits et les méfaits des religions, n'en pratiquer aucune depuis suffisamment longtemps pour en être à jamais détaché. De toute évidence, ce n'est pas les cas des apostats de la dernière pluie. Mais n'allons pas les en blâmer.

Voltaire écrit un jour que « Dieu ne doit point pâtir des bêtises du prêtre ». Abandonnant l'Église, la plupart des apostats emportent Dieu dans leurs bagages. Pourquoi pas ? Pas besoin d'être athée ou agnostique pour combattre le fanatisme et l'intolérance.

...si le Gouvernement nous protège de tout,
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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DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS FED UP, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

pétition ayant rassemblé jusqu'à présent plus de 25 000 signatures.

Creton, qui est d'origine française, a également eu des mots très durs pour les membres du personnel chargés de la surveillance des parcomètres – les oignons verts – lesquels, selon lui, se montrent parfois « arrogants, vulgaires et disgracieux. Ils sont agressifs et frappent sans avertissement. Ils n'ont pas du tout les mêmes dispositions amicales que ceux qui m'ont accueilli lorsque je me suis établi au Québec. »

Il ajoute qu'il remarque régulièrement des oignons verts, sur la rue Peel, en train d'attendre que les parcomètres expirent, pour aussitôt infliger des amendes aux automobilistes. Une brève marche sur cette rue très achalandée du Centre-Ville permet de constater d'une manière assez évidente que les amendes sont très répandues, avec plusieurs pare-brises arborant des contraventions. Creton et d'autres commerçants avaient également tenu une conférence de presse le mois dernier sur la même question. Deux jours plus tard, le restaurateur se vit infliger une amende de \$ 500 pour avoir enfreint un règlement sur les contenants à ordures.

« Ils m'ont envoyé un huissier dans le but évident de me faire taire », a déclaré Creton, selon lequel la hausse constante des tarifs de stationnement et les amendes agressivement imposées pour de prétendues atteintes à la propreté constituent des taxes déguisées. C'est du vol. »

"It's senseless for my clients to walk out to put money in the meter," said Restaurant La Molisana owner Giovanna Giancaspro, who wants the double-dipping to stop (the city



PHOTO DAN DELMAR

Luis Miranda, the Montreal executive committee member in charge of economic development and citizen services, said he was open to sitting down with opponents of the parking system two weeks ago, but the meeting has not taken place as of yet.

can charge for the same spot, at the same time as cars come and go). She said she doesn't even shop downtown anymore since there is plenty of free parking on the West Island. "I'm hurting. Everybody is feeling it," she added. Her business hasn't seen drastic reductions, she said, because "three restaurants on my street (Fleury St.) have closed down. I have parking next door; I'm doing this on principle."

Luis Miranda, the Montreal executive committee member in charge of economic development and citizen services, said he was open to sitting down with opponents of the parking system two weeks ago, but the meeting has not taken place as of yet. Miranda said he recognized that "the difficult economic situation has had a negative impact on the bottom line of many [downtown businesses]. We also have to recognize that competition is more and more intense between Montreal and commercial zones in the suburbs."

Councilor Marvin Rotrand, who also works on the parking dossier, questions whether the majority of downtown merchants support Creton's initiative.

"The bulk of the merchants accept the city's measures," Rotrand told The Métropolitain. When rates were raised, "the city wanted to do two things: Have a better rotation of vehicles to help businesses...and to favour at least a partial transfer to public transit. And that has happened."

"Montreal has some of the most generous parking policies of any major city," added Rotrand. "It's not that the city is anti-car, just pro-public transit. We will not ban the car."



Ideas before identities.
Justice before orthodoxy.

THE MÉTROPOLITAIN

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Panicking in the sunlight

After reading the details of the stimulus bill in the United States, the federal deficit in Canada and the upcoming deficits in Quebec and other provinces, I began to wonder why I was the only one to see this as absolutely normal. After all I had grown like anybody familiar

declined in duration and degree (even this one seems mild by certain standards) while expansion periods have lengthened and strengthened. Unemployment levels in Canada or the United States are no way near the 1981 levels to which everyone wants to make

ment and congress, cannot conceive the solution to “save” the economy. Nobody possesses that knowledge and it is better to let things unfold without interference. A nice example has been provided by Murray Rothbard who analyzed the 1819-21 recessions in the United States to conclude that the absolute lack of government intervention (because bad legislation failed to pass) made the panic end quickly and peacefully. In contrast, the Great depression was, in the opinion of Lee Ohanian and Harold Cole, lengthened by seven years because of the New Deal.

The evidence is there, lying under the sun light for everyone to see

It seems that after years of sustained growth, we have forgotten that recessions are part of the business cycle and of the self-correcting mechanisms of the economy.

except the government of course. So governments are panicking in the sunlight, they resort to fear mongering by saying that this is an “unprecedented crisis”. Even economist Christina Romer (now that she is in government) is doing the contrary of what she said in her own research on fiscal stimulus. They seem to be trying to block the sun like Montgomery Burns in that Simpson episode. This way, they obscure the facts from history and

then they can say that they have the solution and they, unlike other political parties, are getting things done. In that sense, it is rational for them to panic and to propose already tested-and-failed solutions under new branding.

When you are in the dark and you can't see where the hell you're going, that qualifies as a good situation to panic but panicking in the sunlight and trying to block the sun qualifies as political rationality.



with economics and public choice theory to think that economic irrationality is highly reasonable in political markets. A nice way to summarize this is a saying from a former teacher of mine who used to say that governments always have crazy solutions ready that are only waiting for problems. So governments multiply bailouts and rescue plans which dwarf the spending levels of World War II, the New Deal, the War in Iraq and many more. They already had the solution and a relatively small crisis provided the problem that politicians were looking for.

Is there really such a problem? It seems that after years of sustained growth, we have forgotten that recessions are part of the business cycle and of the self-correcting mechanisms of the economy. On top of this, if you look at the data from the National Bureau of Economic Research in the United States, you can see that recessions have

comparison and even job losses as a percentage of the labor force is equal to 1981 recession at 2.2%. To add to this, inflation is no way near the levels seen in other recessions since World War II. As to the situation of banks, American economist Mark Perry took the data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and from it, we can see that now we are no way near the number of problems banks as we had during the 1990 recession even though there are more than in the 2001 one. Sure, the situation is not rosy but all the fear mongering is pure non-sense from doomsday apologists or industrial fat cats seeking corporate welfare.

Economic history also sheds light on what must not be done to “rescue” the economy; fiscal stimulus, bailing out industries, subsidizing left and right are amongst those. It also teaches us that the idea that even the smartest genius on Earth, much less parlia-

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The Anglo exodus may be over

Angryphone alarmists would have you believe that the hemorrhaging seen in that community following Bill 101 and the referendums has not ended; that Anglophones are still driving U-Hauls down the 401 in droves to escape our oppressive Francophone overlords. Unfortunately, pesky facts and statistics expose that argument as one that

is misleading, exaggerated and rooted in paranoia. The fact is, the bleeding has stopped and some of the Anglo deserters of decades past are coming back.

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) told the Senate last month that “federal institutions must find innovative ways of supporting our community.” In other words, they

want money. What is offensive is that the QCGN has their hands out, making a pitch to our government, based on old platitudes about Anglo-Franco relations and, more troubling still, based on old statistics.

At the heart of their argument is that “the brain drain from Quebec continues. Between 1996 and 2001, Quebec lost more than 8,000 Anglophones a

year.” Allow me to take this opportunity to remind the QCGN that it is now 2009 and much has changed since the 2001 census data was released. The most important fact they chose to ignore is that the most recent census figures actually show an increase in Quebec’s Anglo population. A pleasant surprise, n’est-ce pas?

Between 2001 and 2006, Quebec’s Anglo community grew by 16,000 people. It’s the first increase in population seen since 1976; Statistics Canada attributed the gains, in part, to the return of some Anglos who left following the last referendum. These are the most recent census figures and the QCGN blatantly ignored them in their report to the Senate. It’s shameful that a non-profit organization that claims to be the voice for English-speaking Quebecers would be so manipulative with the facts, especially since updated data is so readily available.

Perhaps the influx comes as unwelcome news for the heads of the QCGN who, like Alliance Quebec, may not survive if there is no pressing need for an Anglo rights umbrella group. Proponents of the free market will surely agree that the laws of supply and demand could also be applied to activist groups; if there is not any need for protest, there is not any need to support the protesters.

The QCGN report contains some divisive language reminiscent of Galganovian two solitudes rhetoric, which has since gone stale. They question the “willingness of French-speaking Quebec to actively support our place within Quebec.” A sovereignist friend of mine recently summed up the attitude of the modern Québécois toward Anglos and other minority groups: “Do you like it here? Do you like the French language? If so, then welcome. You’re Québécois.” It may not always be as simple as that, but to suggest that Anglos are unwelcome in this province shows just how out-of-touch the QCGN is with post-referendum Quebec. Those who do not welcome Anglophones because of old insecurities and stereotypes probably would not welcome anybody who is not pure laine to being with; this problem not an Anglo problem. It’s a les autres problem.

In all fairness, the QCGN does make a few interesting points. Although the brain drain is not as pronounced as it once was, many Anglos do still leave Quebec because it simply isn’t profitable to stay (ask a med student who is forced to work in Chibougamau upon graduation). But, again, the problem isn’t one that is confined to this community. Everyone is tempted to leave; Anglos, Francos and everyone in between. I would encourage the QCGN to consider shifting the debate from one of Anglo victimization to one that points to a systematic failure of the Quebec model to foster success chez nous. The fixation with collective rights, although important to a point, has consequences; one being the stunting of human potential. Success, unfortunately, and staying in Quebec are often mutually exclusive concepts.

It’s not all doom and gloom. On top of the influx of Anglos to Quebec in recent years, there are small signs that members of this community can achieve greatness once again – provided they recognize that French is this province’s official language. For example, Kathleen Weil, a former lawyer for Alliance Quebec, is now the Minister of Justice. Granted, her past work with the Anglo rights group wasn’t exactly highlighted by the Liberal party during last year’s election, it can still be considered progress.

I also give the QCGN credit for pointing out that “French-language training that recognizes the French language as an essential job skill,” is lacking. “A successful human resources development strategy in cooperation and with support from key provincial and federal partners is of paramount importance to the survival of our community.” The ability for Anglos to learn and embrace the French language is key. It does not represent submission. It’s enhancing one’s self and recognizing that, for all its faults, this Francophone island inside Anglophone North America is a bastion of joie de vivre. There is much to discover east of St. Laurent Blvd. and the more borders we continue to break down, the more we destroy the divisive and antiquated concept of the two solitudes.

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L'histoire méconnue de nos libertés

Libres penseurs du Québec, DVD, Éditions L'Incrédule.

À peu près tout le monde, dit-on, connaît l'histoire dont il est question dans le présent compte-rendu. Elle nous a d'ailleurs été répétée à maintes reprises dès l'école primaire : c'est l'histoire du clergé et de son emprise sur le Québec. On sait aussi que l'élite cléricale prônait une idéologie profondément réactionnaire, antihumaniste et antilibérale, qui se manifestait notamment par son opposition à l'éducation gratuite et obligatoire, par la haine de la liberté d'expression et de création et par un nationalisme identitaire et étroit qui confinait au culte de la « race ».

Le recours au « contexte », pour justifier l'injustifiable

Le fait est que, même aujourd'hui, cette emprise cléricale, aussi nuisible qu'elle ait été pour notre société, n'est pas toujours vue de façon nécessairement négative ; pour s'en

rendre compte, on n'a qu'à lire certains écrits récents qui justifient encore les œuvres et l'héritage d'obscurantisme des Ignace Bourget, Lionel Groulx et autres maîtres à penser d'une idéologie qui, en plus d'être intrinsèquement arriérée, a causé à notre société d'importants retards tant culturels que politiques, sociaux et économiques.

Pour justifier, voire pour excuser les dégâts causés par l'action des réactionnaires, et aussi pour protéger la réputation du nationalisme dont ces derniers ont été les fondateurs chez nous, plusieurs membres des élites bienpensantes d'aujourd'hui se font un devoir de nous asséner le sacro-saint argument du « contexte ». À en croire nos gardiens du temple, les porte-étendards de l'idéolo-



gie cléricale, de même que leurs fidèles collaborateurs intellectuels et politiques, auraient seulement agi « en fonction des valeurs de leur temps ». Il faudrait donc en déduire que tous les gens du Québec d'alors auraient adhéré à l'idéologie rétrograde et réactionnaire des cléricaux-nationalistes, et qu'il n'y aurait par conséquent eu absolument personne pour s'y opposer, puisque tout le monde, sans exception, pensait d'une seule et même manière.

Cet argument, ou plutôt ce prétexte du « contexte » ne vaut rien et il est même fallacieux, nous dit Daniel Laprès dans sa conférence « Les libres-penseurs du Québec : la mémoire

Suite à la page 8



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L'HISTOIRE MÉCONNUE DE NOS LIBERTÉS, SUITE DE LA PAGE 7

volée », dont l'Association Humaniste du Québec vient de produire un DVD. Comme le souligne Laprès, s'il est vrai que l'argument du « contexte » historique sert surtout à justifier et à protéger l'héritage idéologique de ceux qui se sont toujours acharnés à imposer à notre société leur vision essentiellement arriérée et réactionnaire, ce même argument ne tient pas du tout la route pour ce qui concerne la prise en compte de notre histoire tel qu'elle était, dans toute sa richesse. En fait, cette tendance à justifier l'injustifiable contribue en grande partie à priver les Québécois de la conscience de l'héritage de libertés que recèle bel et bien leur histoire. En d'autres termes, c'est d'un vol de mémoire dont il s'agit.

Des libres penseurs plus nombreux et influents qu'on le pense

Le fait est donc qu'ils étaient plus nombreux qu'on le pense ceux et celles qui, dans le Québec d'hier, en plus d'avoir été de véritables libres penseurs, se sont opposés courageusement aux élites réactionnaires et obscurantistes. Ces champions de nos libertés étaient d'ailleurs issus, eux aussi, du même « contexte » que ces dernières. Le Québec les a toutefois oubliés : en effet, ils ne tiennent aucun rôle dans l'histoire officielle tel qu'elle est encore enseignée. Qui, en effet, a entendu parler, parmi tant d'autres, du baron de Lahontan, de Fleury Mesplet, de Louis-Antoine Dessaulles, de Godfroy Langlois, de T.-D. Bouchard, d'Ève Circé-Côté, de Jean-Charles Harvey ? Très peu de gens, sans aucun doute.

Ainsi, Laprès nous rappelle que le gouverneur Frontenac fut, dès le 17^e siècle, le premier personnage d'envergure à s'opposer à l'ingérence de l'Église dans la vie des familles et à ridiculiser les Jésuites, ces idéologues au service de l'absolutisme clérical qui, aux dires du gouverneur, « songeaient autant à la conversion des castors qu'à celle des âmes ». Il évoque aussi la présence chez nous, à la même époque, du baron de Lahontan, considéré comme un précurseur des Lumières en plus d'avoir inspiré par ses œuvres nuls autres que des Rousseau et des Voltaire.

Daniel Laprès poursuit en mentionnant Fleury Mesplet, « l'Imprimeur des libertés » et ami de Benjamin Franklin, qui, au siècle suivant, a été emprisonné suite à la fondation de la Gazette Littéraire, qui avait l'esprit un peu trop voltairien au goût du clergé.

Aussi, sommes-nous vraiment nombreux à savoir que Louis-Joseph Papineau, personnage surtout connu pour son rôle de leader du parti patriote durant les rébellions de 1837-38, n'a non seulement jamais partagé une idéologie fondée sur une quelconque haine revancharde et ethniciste, mais qu'il était avant tout un penseur profondément libéral qui a mené un

véritable combat pour la laïcité et le rationalisme, allant même jusqu'à abandonner toute croyance religieuse ? Force est de constater que la version nationaliste dominante de notre histoire, qui a complètement détourné à ses fins identitaires le sens principal de l'engagement de Papineau, ne parle guère de ces faits-là.

L'Institut Canadien de Montréal, foyer de libre pensée

Un peu plus tard durant le 19^e siècle, notre société a vu naître l'Institut Canadien de Montréal, véritable foyer de libre pensée dont Wilfrid Laurier était un membre en vue, et qui, sous l'influence du farouche libre penseur Louis-Antoine Dessaulles, prônait des « énormités » comme la laïcité, l'instruction publique obligatoire et gratuite, de même que la tolérance religieuse. Tous les membres de l'Institut furent excommuniés par l'Église. Laprès se penche d'ailleurs sur le combat entre l'Institut et l'évêque ultraréactionnaire de Montréal, Ignace Bourget, qui avait refusé à Joseph Guibord (un imprimeur qui avait eu la mauvaise idée de mourir juste après l'excommunication fulminée par Bourget) la sépulture catholique en raison de son statut de membre de l'Institut canadien. Après une longue bataille juridique, le droit de Guibord à être enterré dans son lot familial du cimetière de la Côte des Neiges fut rétabli grâce à un jugement du Conseil privé... de Londres. Il est aussi à noter que Bourget avait alors poussé son propre ridicule en allant jusqu'à désacraliser solennellement le lopin de terre où les restes de Guibord furent inhumés... sous la protection de l'armée fédérale !

Des journaux pour défendre les libertés

Le combat pour l'avènement chez nous du respect des libertés fondamentales a aussi suscité la création de journaux et périodiques divers. Arthur Buies fonda donc « La Lanterne » en 1867, Honoré Beaugrand suivit avec « La Patrie » en 1879 et, un peu plus tard, Louis Fréchette et un groupe de libres penseurs notoires créèrent « La Canada- Revue ». De son côté, Godfroy Langlois, journaliste à « La Patrie » et député libéral à Québec du comté ouvrier montréalais de Saint-Louis, prônera, avec la « Ligue de l'Enseignement », l'amélioration de l'hygiène à l'école et des conditions de travail des instituteurs, ainsi que la gratuité des livres scolaires... le tout sous l'œil réprobateur de Mgr Paul Bruchési, l'archevêque de Montréal qui réussit à détruire la Ligue et à imposer un délai de 60 ans à la création d'un ministère de l'Éducation.

Plus récemment, des libres penseurs comme T.-D. Bouchard et Ève Circé Côté ont continué le combat, souvent au sacrifice de leur carrière. Sans oublier Jean-Charles Harvey, fondateur du journal « Le Jour », seul journal francophone du monde

libre ayant ouvertement et résolument pris parti pour la résistance contre le fascisme durant la Deuxième guerre mondiale. Et il y en a encore bien d'autres, qui restent tout aussi méconnus malgré l'ampleur de leur contribution au développement global de notre société et à la conquête de nos libertés individuelles fondamentales.

Le combat continue

Ce qui surprend en écoutant Laprès, c'est le nombre important des libres penseurs qui ont marqué notre histoire, et aussi l'ampleur de leurs combats et de leurs réalisations. Mais pourquoi la méconnaissance de cette partie importante de l'histoire des Québécois est-elle encore si répandue ? Comme se fait-il que la grande majorité de ces défenseurs de nos libertés soient encore ignorés dans nos salles de classe et aussi par nos médias de masse ? Rassurez-vous : Laprès ne croit pas à un quelconque « complot » ourdi par les nationalistes. Un tel oubli serait effectivement difficile à « planifier ». Il déplore toutefois que l'élite nationaliste dominante continue encore de nos jours à banaliser leur héritage, voire à le maintenir dans l'oubli. On voit mal, en effet, comment des élites qui prônent l'adhésion en bloc aux « valeurs » d'une sacro-sainte « nation québécoise » puissent se réconcilier avec des idées qui priorisent le développement des libertés des individus plutôt que le collectivisme nationaliste.

Cette conférence est drôlement pertinente dans un contexte où le discours identitaire des nationalistes québécois, qu'ils soient d'obédience indépendantiste ou fédéraliste, est devenu un véritable dogme, et où aussi plusieurs intellectuels entretiennent encore des peurs envers les dangers potentiels d'une population qui, selon eux, serait trop éduquée (voir notamment le troublant texte de Christian Dufour sur l'apprentissage de l'anglais, paru dans la Presse du 2 avril dernier).

En somme, le contenu de ce DVD nous amène à espérer que les libres penseurs d'aujourd'hui se feront plus nombreux à rappeler que les vraies valeurs humanistes, celles notamment issues des Lumières, nous invitent à nous méfier constamment des discours à prétention hégémonique, quels qu'ils soient, et de tout ce qui contraint le libre développement des individus dans leur singularité. Et, surtout, espérons qu'ils soient mieux entendus qu'ils l'auront été jusqu'à présent.

On peut se procurer le DVD « Libres Penseurs du Québec » en visitant le site web asso.hum.org/en-vente/dvd/libres-penseurs-quebec, ou en adressant un chèque de \$15 à la Fondation Humaniste du Québec, 380 Boul. St-Joseph Est, Montréal, H2T 1J6.



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L'insensé a dit en son cœur...

La campagne publicitaire récemment affichée sur une dizaine d'autobus montréalais à l'initiative de l'Association humaniste du Québec (AHQ), a suscité réactions et débats. Chacun y est allé de son interprétation de la fameuse phrase traduite d'une publicité originellement anglophone : « Dieu n'existe probablement pas. Alors cessez de vous inquiéter et profitez de la vie. » Ont pu notamment s'exprimer les voix légitimes des athées, agnostiques, libres-penseurs et sans dieu, lesquelles sont trop rarement entendues dans notre société pourtant censée être laïque.

Disons-le tout de go : le thème de la campagne publicitaire de l'AHQ est essentiellement une affirmation positive d'athéisme. Au premier chef, cette affirmation n'attaque personne, contrairement à cette réaction qui a souvent été énoncée contre la campagne et qui reprenait un extrait d'un psaume biblique : « L'insensé a dit en son cœur : il n'y a point de Dieu. » Une pareille insulte faite aux incroyants constitue bel et bien une attaque directe à la liberté de penser. Aussi, malgré les hauts cris des dévots et bien-pensants de toute sorte, « Profitez de la vie » n'est pas une invitation à sombrer dans des comportements malsains ou immoraux comme certains croyants l'ont laissé entendre. On peut très bien ne pas croire en un dieu et profiter de la vie tout en étant une bonne personne.

À Halifax cependant, la compagnie de transport public Metro Transit a refusé



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d'apposer sur ses autobus la publicité « You Can Be Good Without God » (« Vous pouvez être une bonne personne et ne pas croire en Dieu »), et cela sous prétexte que ce serait offensant pour les croyants. Pourtant, l'affirmation que je citais plus haut, supposément divine parce que tirée d'un psaume biblique, « L'insensé a dit en son cœur : Dieu n'existe pas », n'est-elle pas elle une offense directe perpétrée contre les incroyants ?

Le 28 février dernier sur les ondes de la Première chaîne de Radio-Canada, l'émission « Ouvert le samedi » recevait Raymond Gravel, prêtre médiatique parce que médiatisé,

connu pour se situer à gauche tout en faisant des déclarations gauches en faveur d'une Église campée à droite et pas toujours adroite, et Michel Virard, président de l'AHQ, laquelle est suspectée par Gravel, représentant des croyants, de vouloir mener une campagne contre ces derniers.

À une auditrice de 70 ans qui racontait qu'elle était incroyante depuis l'âge de 11 ans parce que, disait-elle, les prêtres ne parvenaient jamais à répondre de façon convaincante aux questions concernant la foi, et que sa longue expérience de vie lui avait appris que l'humanité se porterait mieux sans

croissance religieuse, l'abbé Gravel s'empressa de répondre : « S'il n'y avait plus de croyances, il faudrait en inventer, madame ! »

Le cher curé Gravel n'aurait pu mieux dire : la foi serait donc une invention toute humaine, rien qu'humaine. Par conséquent, ceux qui, comme lui, prétendent que la divinité se serait révélée aux être humains par les « Saintes » Écritures, ne nous disent-ils pas que celles-ci sont, elles aussi, une invention toute humaine, rien qu'humaine ?

Pour ma part, je relierais les deux slogans publicitaires des incroyants en un seul : « On peut profiter pleinement de la vie et être une bonne personne, et cela sans croire en Dieu. » D'ailleurs, on profitera de la vie et on en prendra soin d'autant plus que l'on comprendra qu'il n'y en a pas d'autre après celle-ci. Alors on trouvera belle la vie, et on appréciera davantage le concert de merveilles bien réelles que nous offre la nature tel qu'elle est, dans toute sa richesse et son infinie grandeur. Surtout, on arrêtera d'avoir peur des châtiments éternels brandis par les tenants d'une divinité cruelle dont les dévots tentent en même temps de nous faire croire à la bonté, et on se libérera ainsi du poids de cette invention mythique qui fait plus de tort que de bien dans la conscience des êtres humains.

En un mot, il faut davantage craindre celui qui proclame : « L'insensé a dit en son cœur : Dieu n'existe pas. » Car, au vu et au su des fables qui servent de fondements aux religions, les chances sont très fortes que ce soit lui, l'insensé.

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Canada and Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a mess - increasingly violent, facing major hurdles in development and a severe food shortage - but according to a panel of experts lined up by the Canadian International Council, NATO needs to see its engagement through.

The Council is a non-partisan, nationwide body established to strengthen Canada's role in international affairs. It organized a national video conference in early December with Omar Samad, Afghan ambassador to Canada; Ronald Neumann, the former US ambassador to Afghanistan; Kevin McCort, president of CARE Canada; CBC journalist Derek Stoffel; and David Mulroney, Deputy Minister of Canada's Afghanistan Task Force.

None of the panelists hesitated in saying the country's situation was deteriorating.

"We're not winning, the violence is worse, and the Afghans are scared," said Neumann.

"We need to do a lot better. We all came into Afghanistan very quickly. You didn't have time for a proper planning exercise. Now, we have to both do and plan."

The ultimate aim of Canadian policy is to leave Afghanistan to Afghans, in a country that is better governed, more peaceful and more secure, but Canadians, faced with over 100 military casualties, have every reason to wonder whether the war is worth it.

Canada is currently leading NATO's International Security Assistance Force and has over 2,500 boots on the ground. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has committed to pulling our troops out of Kandahar by 2011 - a move backed by John Manley's year-old report on Canada's role in the war

which suggests a greater emphasis on diplomacy and reconstruction and a shift from combat to training Afghan national security forces.

But two years seemed like a long time as the panelists ticked off a succession of disquieting facts: at least 30 per cent of the country is out of coalition control, instability in the region - Pakistan, India's Kashmir province, Iran - is worsening the situation, kidnappings and bombings in previously secure Kabul are spiking, there's pervasive corruption in a nascent government replete with former drug- and warlords, the drug trade is on the upswing, and unemployment is at catastrophic 40 per cent. Each panelist outlined the problems from his own perspective.

For Samad, an uncoordinated NATO force was dragging the country down. "Different strategies, different agendas

are at play," he said. "And it hurts all of us."

Three decades of warfare have decimated the skills and abilities of the Afghan people to govern themselves, he added, and the political disputes in the surrounding countries are further destabilizing the country.

"We can't disassociate from the things that are happening in the region," Samad said, estimating 80 per cent of Afghanistan's problems could be solved by dealing with regional issues.

McCort was concerned with the pace of development. (Afghanistan is actually the single largest recipient of Canadian bilateral foreign aid.)

Care Canada established its mission in Afghanistan in 1961 and is currently involved in food distribution, road and infrastructure reconstruction, schooling and small economic activity

development.

McCort said much of their work has been a "tremendous success," but has been severely compromised by the military's attempts to combine aid with collaboration to help "win hearts and minds."

"All beneficiaries may appear to be collaborators even if they're collaborating with us," he said. "Our abilities to reach out have been severely constrained."

The tactic is endangering aid workers - 31 NGO workers were killed in 2008, 25 of them Afghans. Further, little aid is going to the rural areas experiencing the greatest need and civilian deaths have ignited anger against the NATO forces.

McCort also warned of the major food crisis on the horizon; only 35 per cent of the food appeal has been met and a third of the population is facing food insecurity this winter. There are also the presidential and provincial elections scheduled for the fall of 2009 in Afghanistan - elections that have been threatened by a dislodged, displaced, but undefeated Taliban insurgency.

One beacon of hope for the country is president-elect Barack Obama's promise of a 20,000-strong troop surge that would bring troop levels to 30 per cent of those in Iraq, a pledge to ramp up development assistance and a regional diplomatic initiative to tackle the interlocking problems of Afghanistan and its neighbours. "There's a lot of talk about surges and new strategies and that's all good," said Samad. "But it shouldn't only be a military angle. It needs to be accompanied by surges in development, diplomacy, and Afghan capabilities."

So what are the arguments for staying? The Afghan people want us there, the embryonic army and a police force, a justice system and a correctional system are taking small steps towards autonomy and - as Neumann bluntly reminded the audience - the region remains the hotbed for anti-Western terrorist activity and the stability of nuclear-armed Pakistan is at stake.

For those reasons, Canadian troops (along with the Afghan people) will continue to carry their share of the burden for the war and perhaps in 2011 we'll see an Afghan civil society able to govern itself.

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Afghanistan: Women's rights are human rights

It was a mistake from the beginning to allow the recognition of state faith into Afghanistan's constitution. It was an even greater error to allow the organization of faith-based political parties. Now the west's encounter with Afghanistan will be put to an important test. And Canada has a profound role to play.

Fundamentalist Shia clerics in Afghanistan pushed for the primacy of Sharia law, and exclusivity of it in family law matters. Not satisfied with this, they recently demanded, and obtained passage of what has come to be pejoratively called Afghanistan's "Rape Law".

This legislation effectively makes prisoners of women in marriage. It eliminates the criminal concept of rape if committed within a marriage. It legislates sexual submission of women. And it eliminates custody rights of wives over their own children.

One of the realities of Afghan life that coalition nations, and particularly Canada, are proud of is the elevation of the civil status of women. Under the Taliban regime it was not uncommon for girls to have acid thrown in their faces if they had the temerity to go to school. Women didn't face glass ceilings – they were imprisoned by brick walls. Figuratively and sometimes literally. If not bricks then burqas.

Today, some six million girls and young women attend schools at various levels. This could not have been dreamed of eight years ago. Women are taking their rightful place in

politics and the professions. And now because of the political clout of Shia clerics, that is being threatened. That is not what the best of our young people are fighting, and in some cases dying, for.

Coalition soldiers went there to make people free. Free from the theocratic tyranny of the Taliban. Free from existential threats of Al-Qaeda. It is a noble and necessary effort. That nobility should not be compromised by political expediency. By submission of the Karzai government to theocratic tyrants who may be less deadly to the body than the Taliban, but are just as deadly to the soul.

There can never be freedom when more than half a nation's population is treated as less than second class citizens. We Canadians are in a unique position to stop it. Our contribution to the survival and success of the Afghan democratic experiment is vital. What we as citizens here need to do is encourage



our government to continue sending the strong signals it has already begun to send that what is happening is unacceptable.

Prime Minister Harper needs to hear from Canadians that his message is right and that we would support an even stronger one. Our sacrifice in blood and treasure was not made for the abrogation of basic principle. Human rights, without women's right, do not exist. And the Karzai government must understand that this is a primordial foundational principle of our engagement in his country.

Canadians have proudly and boldly paid the price and borne the burdens for the survival and success of liberty. But not a truncated liberty. Freedom is indivisible. Freedom is not susceptible to the compromises demanded by cultural relativism. No culture has a right to be wrong.

Our engagement in Afghanistan is based on just cause. If this law is not revoked, we should make it clear to President Karzai that Canada is prepared to leave.

We cannot be partners in the making of a moral desert and calling it peace.

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

- George F. Lengvari, Sr.





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Star Wars Episode VII: Missile Defense

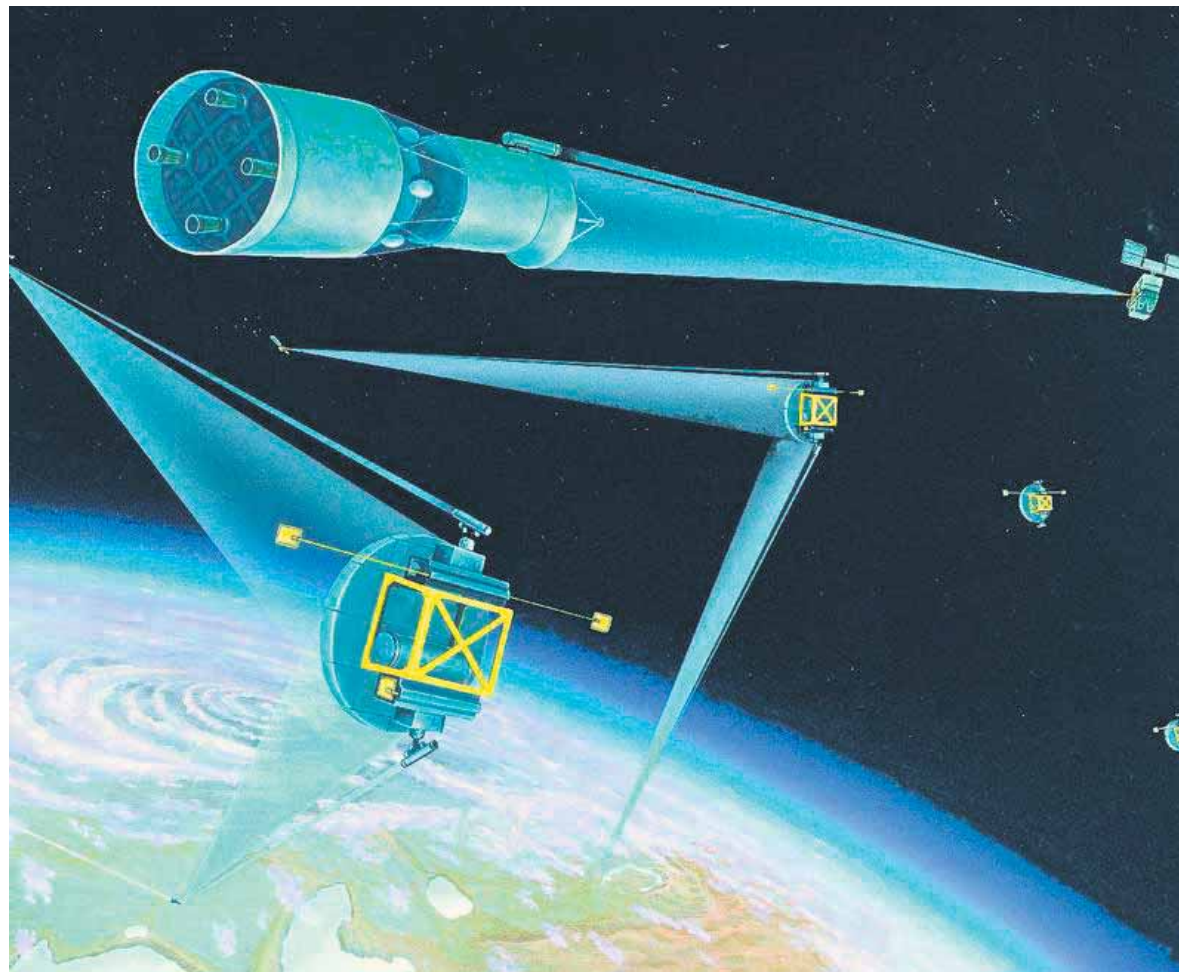
So President Barack Obama has delivered yet another stirring speech to a vast crowd of European well-wishers, this time in Prague, Czech Republic, on April 5th. This time, however, he threw his fans something of a curveball. President Obama made clear that he would not scrap the ongoing development of a nuclear missile defense shield. “As long as the threat from Iran persists,” he declared, “we will go forward with a missile-defense system that is cost-effective and proven.”

At this, the raucous crowd fell largely silent. Missile defense rubs Europeans entirely the wrong way. I, however, was pleased to see the president prick his transatlantic pep squad’s bubble. The sooner Obama’s fawning foreign acolytes—and America’s overseas enemies—learn that he will not conduct a “kum-bah-yah” foreign policy, genuflecting constantly before the altar of the United Nations, the better.

That said, though I am sympathetic to missile defense in principle, I am unconvinced of its desirability in practice.

The policy as we know it originated with President Ronald Reagan’s 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI (derisively nicknamed “Star Wars” by its detractors). The primary purpose SDI served was to flummox the Soviet Union. The Russians feared that their entire nuclear arsenal would be rendered obsolete by Reagan’s proposed anti-nuclear umbrella, while they would remain vulnerable to America’s nuclear ordnance. This realization, combined with the pain Reagan brought to the Soviets by funding anti-Communist insurgencies worldwide, helped propel Mikhail Gorbachev to the negotiating table, ultimately lowering the curtain on the Cold War.

It was this use of SDI as a geopolitical bargaining chip that Reagan Administration officials found useful. Reagan himself, however, eschewed this view. What is seldom remembered today is that Reagan personally advocated SDI not only to “psyche out” the Soviets, but also to render obsolete all nuclear stockpiles—including America’s own. To the chagrin of



If a Star Wars-style defense shield could be perfected, and could one day be expanded to protect the whole globe, no country need ever again fear being targeted with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.

most of his own national security advisors, as well as certain hard-nosed foreign allies like Britain’s Margaret Thatcher, Reagan had come to embrace a seemingly impossible dream, one now espoused by Barack Obama: that of a world without nuclear weapons.

Of course, a generation later, missile defense still has not achieved liftoff, as it were. Nonetheless, Reagan was on to something here. If a Star Wars-style defense shield could be perfected, and could one day be expanded to protect the whole globe, no country need ever again fear being targeted with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles. The best way to dissuade countries from pursuing nuclear missile technology is to minimize its usefulness, and

comprehensive missile defense, in theory at least, would do that. For this reason, the principled objections raised by opponents of missile defense—that it wrongfully alienates America’s allies, that it violates the arms-limitation treaties of the past, and so on—leave me cold.

It is the practical objections to missile defense that pack some punch. An article I read in *The Economist* soon after September 11th argued that jettisoning missile defense at that juncture would be akin to scrapping one’s flood insurance if the house caught fire. This was the wrong analogy. Pragmatically speaking, pursuing missile defense is more like buying flood insurance for a house in the middle of the Mojave Desert.

What credible threat of a nuclear missile attack against the US or its allies actually exists? The old Cold War doctrine of “mutually assured destruction” remains very much a thing of the present. None of the less responsible nuclear powers—regional rogues like North Korea, hotheads like India and Pakistan or fanatics like the mullahs in Iran—dares ever launch nuclear warheads at anyone, anywhere, for they know the fate that would await them. Even a purely conventional American military response could still bring most nuclear perpetrators to heel.

This is why I scoffed at the chorus of condemnation that followed Hillary Clinton’s election campaign vow to “obliterate” Iran if it ever

tried to nuke Israel. The good Senator, if you’ll forgive the expression, was simply keeping it real.

It is also why I do not quake at the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran. The worst the mullahs would have the chutzpah to do is use their nukes to deter any potential foreign intervention, enabling them to sponsor terrorist groups like Hezbollah with even greater impunity. Quite frankly, this would not be much worse than the status quo.

The real danger is that Iran (or North Korea, or a Pakistan taken over by Islamists) might relay nukes to terrorists who would not hesitate to use them. In such a situation, missile defense would be worse than useless. No terrorist group possesses the resources or facilities to even maintain nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, let alone deploy them. An antimissile shield would not stop terrorists from carrying nukes in suitcases or smuggling them in cargo containers. This is likely the principal nuclear menace of the 21st century—and missile defense would be helpless in the face of it.

Even if the technology is one day perfected, then, it may not be worth the price Uncle Sam will have paid in fiscal and diplomatic capital. The policy has generated as much consternation among America’s allies as among its rivals and enemies. Given this geostrategic disruption, and given its exorbitant expense—especially in this era of industrial bailouts and bloated stimulus bills—how wise an endeavor is this?

On the whole, the technology formerly known as “Star Wars” is a noble pursuit in principle, but a misguided one in practice. It could never rid the world of all nuclear weapons, and the only nukes against which it would protect us are the ones no one would ever have the gumption to launch in the first place. President Obama would do best to heed Winston Churchill’s wise warning in his last address to the US Congress: “Be careful, above all things, not to let go of the atomic weapon until you are sure...that other means of preserving peace are in your hands.”



The view from the top of Debt Mountain

What will the post-recessionary world look like?

After the conclusion of what is probably the most important G20 meeting ever held, one can be forgiven for feeling optimistic. While unemployment in the US is at a quarter-century high at 8.3% and first world economies continue to contract, G20 leaders looked past their local economic miseries, resulting in an remarkable level of international commitment expressed in London. This solidarity was truly exceptional given the divergent opinions held by many going into the meeting. The US and UK wanted the continental Europeans to spend massively to stimulate their economies further, which was sternly rejected by France and Germany. The Europeans wanted an international financial regulator, seen as an unacceptable level of intervention by the US, and China bristled at EU efforts to cover Hong Kong and Macau in the quest to halt international tax havens, on which a compromise was brokered by President Obama at the last minute. If there was every a moment which could be defined as the pivot point towards recovery, this was probably it.

This does not mean that recovery is imminent, nor that it will be powerful enough to sweep away the mistakes that led to the longest recession since the depression of the 1930s. Recovery may begin in earnest towards the middle of 2010 rather than the second half of 2009; while a rising economic tide will lift all boats of state, some will rise higher in the water than others. Looking ahead, here is what the post 2010 world will probably look like in macroeconomic terms.

Massive debt and slow growth for the US and EU

The developed world's governments were already carrying a high level of debt going into this mother-of-all-recessions; they will emerge far more severely indebted and will face painful political and economic decisions if they ever intend to bring their debt ratios back down. A study by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) speculated that by 2012, the national debt to GDP ratio could hit 97% in the US, 80% in France, 79%

in Germany, and 75% in the UK. Canada looks positively sparkling since our ratio will stay below 50% even if the Harper government's predictions of a short 2-3 year period of deficits proves delusional; compare that to the IMF's estimate for Japan, which could hit 224%. These debt levels are only exceeded by the post-WWII period and in many cases are not comparable to current conditions, since Europe and Japan's economies had been wrecked by the conflict, while the US' had been resurrected from the Depression by the massive industrialization required for the war effort.

Eventually, all of these nations will be forced to reduce government spending, increase taxes substantially, or do both. With aging populations, the baby-boomers of Europe and the US are unlikely to vote for politicians who cut spending, especially on health care which will be growing massively to match the demographics. The result will be heavy taxation on generations X and Y just as they approach their most innovative and productive years. This tax burden will reduce their desire to take risks, create companies, build wealth and innovate to create new business models to remain competitive against the economies of the developing world.

The result will be slower growth for decades and a lower standard of living for the middle classes who will be forced to repay the debts of their elders. In the past, innovators from the developing world emigrated to the US and Europe to put their ideas in motion; now they will most likely stay home or seek out other countries with more accommodating tax regimes and business environments in which to build their fortunes.

Enter China the Ascendant

China has the money, the talent, the military and the diplomatic moxie to displace the US as the superpower of the 21st century, and its political leadership knows it. Several salvos were fired earlier this year; warnings to the US to control its debt, with no assurances that China would continue to buy up US Treasury notes; a call to

replace the US dollar with another currency as the international trading standard; and now, refusal to "recognize" efforts by the EU and US to curb international tax havens, but they did accept to "note" that these efforts were underway. For some, this last move was puzzling – why would China hold out on this point when it would seem to be in their best interests as well?

One can only imagine how China could use Hong Kong and Macau to attract all the international money that is being driven out of the EU and the US. These areas are SARs (Special Administrative Regions) whose regulations can be tailored to attract financial talent and capital without affecting the regulation of the mainland. As the US and the EU seek to tighten regulations over financial institutions, one cannot imagine that the financial instruments these nations are seeking to curtail are going to shrivel up and die; once you let a financial construct into the marketplace, you cannot make it go away. Financial creations like credit-default swaps, the undoing of insurer AIG, made billions of dollars (for a while) for its creators. Those who developed and managed these swaps and other similar products will be attracted to more liberal financial regimes in Hong Kong and Macau, and China will reap billions of dollars from providing them with a home. Think of the tens of billions in tax revenue that New York City received from the financial industry – if these jobs and instruments go to China, then New York, and London, Paris, Zurich and other financial capitals will never see those revenues again. China will be richer, and first-world re-regulation will be to blame.

A plethora of failed states on the heels of Afghanistan and Iraq

If there is one lesson to be learned from the US-led interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is that it is cheaper, both politically and militarily, to equip a sovereign state to fix its own problems than to intervene and take over the keys to the kingdom. There is significant concern among the G20 that tens of states could

crumble into civil war or outright dissolution if they are not offered financial salvation. According to the US think tank Fund for Peace, the list includes names like Somalia, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Chad, Iraq, and Afghanistan (these are not surprises) but also includes potential failures like Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey (further down the list) and we should also add Mexico, given the massive drug violence that the federal government is unable to control. The list is longer than one would imagine, and it is disturbing. That is why the G20 committed another \$500 billion USD in funding to the IMF to assist countries facing financial difficulty and an inability to raise debt in public markets.

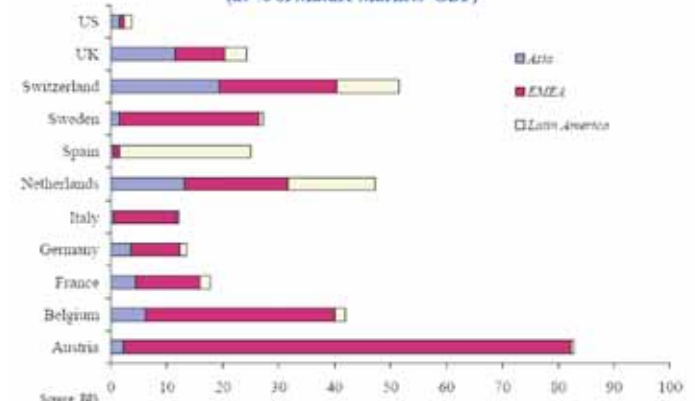
There is also a great deal of self-interest from the first world to prevent their existing financial commitments to these nations from evaporating. Many countries have significant banking exposure to the developing world that would prove catastrophic for their domestic economies in the case of default by a failed state. Consider the graphic illustrating the banking exposure of various mature economies to those of the developing world – if you were an Austrian banker, how well would you sleep at night without the IMF helping out your client states?

Afghanistan, though not for the same reasons – and these failed states will provoke international catharses well beyond the end of the recession.

Inflation will return to torture us all

In the past several days, Ben Bernanke of the US Federal Reserve Bank reaffirmed the Fed's commitment to price stability and remarked that it could withdraw its financial stimulus in order to control an outbreak of inflation. Our own finance minister, Jim Flaherty, indicated in comments that inflation is going to be our long run concern as the recovery takes hold. All the debt being issued will have a hard time being repaid by its issuers, unless its value is undermined by an increase in inflation across all nations that allows the debt to be repaid in somewhat devalued dollars. We have become accustomed to inflation rates of 3% and below – this will not last. We will all live with a decade or more of 5-6% inflation, with the collusion of the US and EU central banks, in order to make repayable the massive debt issued by first world nations to exit the crisis. As a result, we will all be poorer, with our savings devalued by this policy. We can only hope that the stimulus packages will be successful, so that we will have the opportunity to earn back our lost savings though

Figure 7. Bank System Exposures to Emerging Markets (as % of Mature Markets' GDP)



Even with the promised intervention of the IMF, there will be more failed states, some requiring massive financial intervention, and some perhaps military occupation. There will be more cases like Iraq and

renewed economic growth. At the moment, this outcome is still uncertain – we will have to wait to see if the era of cooperation heralded at the end of the G20 meeting delivers on its promise.



À contre-Coran

Djemila Benhabib, *Ma vie à contre-Coran*, Montréal, VLB Éditeur, 2009, 268 p.

Comme on l'a vu durant les audiences de la commission Bouchard-Taylor, plusieurs bien-pensants considèrent que notre société démocratique devrait se plier à toutes les revendications faites au nom de l'Islam. C'en était trop pour Djemila Benhabib qui, dans l'éclairant ouvrage qu'elle vient de lancer, critique notamment le fait que, dans leur rapport, les commissaires Gérard Bouchard et Charles Taylor ont complètement négligé de faire la distinction entre « musulmans » et « islamistes », ces derniers étant de la graine de fanatiques et ne constituant, de ce

fait, qu'une infime minorité parmi les immigrants de religion musulmane.

Djemila Benhabib connaît très bien les islamistes. En Algérie où elle a grandi, elle les a vus envahir l'espace public et semer la terreur et la barbarie. Comme l'indique son récit souvent bouleversant, elle a toutes les raisons du monde d'appeler à se méfier d'eux, elle qui fut la cible de menaces posées non seulement contre son intégrité et sa liberté d'expression, mais aussi contre sa vie. Par exemple, durant son enfance algérienne, elle n'a pas eu la chance de fréquenter une école ouverte sur le monde. Elle a fréquenté ce qu'elle appelle une « usine à fabriquer des mutants » : beaucoup de ses camarades de classe

sont devenus aujourd'hui des assassins capables du pire. Sous la houlette des islamistes, nous rappelle l'auteure, les « écoles de la honte et de la haine » pullulent, et cela non seulement en Algérie, mais à travers tout le monde musulman.

Avec raison, Djemila Benhabib considère que, dans notre société libre et démocratique, il ne saurait y avoir d'accommodements que si ceux-ci se révèlent compatibles avec l'esprit de la laïcité : « La puissance publique ne doit imposer aucune croyance », comme le disait Condorcet. Et surtout pas dans le domaine de l'éducation. C'est la raison pour laquelle l'auteure nous sensibilise sur la nécessité de protéger les enfants de l'influence des dogmes, qu'ils soient

idéologiques, religieux ou politiques, afin qu'ils puissent devenir des citoyens autonomes, libres et capables de penser par eux-mêmes.

En d'autres termes, le « vivre ensemble » oblige à ne pas fermer les yeux sur les tentatives d'intrusion du religieux dans l'espace public, car les conséquences n'en sont jamais banales ou anodines. Djemila Benhabib déplore aussi que certains leaders politiques et sociaux de chez nous, comme entre autres Françoise David, font preuve d'une troublante naïveté et d'une incroyable irresponsabilité face aux revendications de l'islamisme radical, dont le programme idéologique se situe pourtant à l'exact opposé du progrès social, des droits des femmes et des



libertés.

On comprend aussi à la lecture de ce livre que les intégristes islamistes sont devenus dans l'espace public ni plus ni moins que des imposteurs communautaires, qui usurpent la cause des immigrants de religion musulmane, dont en réalité ils ne sont aucunement représentatifs. Ce sont ces ennemis de la démocratie qui, afin de mieux étendre leur influence sur notre société, revendiquent bruyamment des accommodements que Djemila Benhabib qualifie à juste titre de « déraisonnables ».

Bref, ce livre nous rappelle que la lutte pour les libertés, que ce soit chez nous ou ailleurs dans le monde, est loin d'être achevée. Comme le signale Djemila Benhabib, « les double discours, les forces brutales, ne doivent plus nous impressionner, ni nous faire peur ». En effet, les islamistes fanatisés terrorisent leurs femmes et leurs filles, et du même souffle ils crient au racisme et à l'islamophobie contre quiconque dénonce leurs crimes et se dresse contre leur idéologie totalitaire !

En somme, Djemila Benhabib, malgré les dangers bien réels qu'elle peut encourir, se dresse, et elle se dressera toujours de toutes ses forces, contre ces brutes islamofascistes qui cherchent à miner nos libertés fondamentales. Nous pouvons souhaiter qu'elle ne soit pas seule dans son courageux combat, et que nous serons nombreux à lutter à ses côtés pour nos droits démocratiques et humains qui, aujourd'hui plus que jamais, ont besoin d'être défendus contre les adeptes de l'obscurantisme et de la barbarie.



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David Jones, co-author of *Uneasy Neighbo(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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Following Mark Twain and the Mississippi River

It is a pity that political correctness has driven Mark Twain out of style. A generation ago, Samuel Clemens (whose nom de plume was “Mark Twain”) was both an iconic author of children’s stories (*Tom Sawyer*, *Prince and the Pauper*) and regarded as one of the “greats” in American literature for the classic *Huckleberry Finn*. Although “Tom” and “Huck” were often presented as a duality of “boys’ stories,” Huck was anything but a child’s tale with its sophisticated story of adult duplicity and mendacity along with Huck’s efforts to get a slave friend, “Jim” to safety.

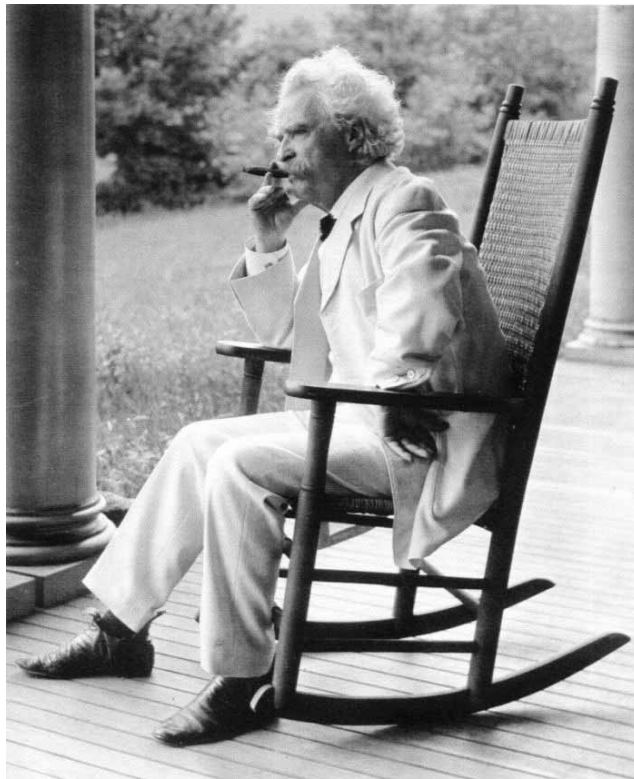
It was, however, Twain’s utilization of the unspeakable/unprintable “N word” to identify Jim that has driven the book almost into the brown-paper wrapper status previously reserved for steamy Henry Miller sex novels not published in North America until the 1960s. And with this opprobrium for *Huckleberry Finn*, undeserved as it is, has also come a general neglect of the rest of Twain’s body of work, notably his travel books such as *Roughing It*, *Innocents Abroad*, and *Life and the Mississippi*. This is not to say that Twain does not offend—at least not offend 21st century readers—with blunt sociological comment on aboriginal North Americans in *Roughing It* and contemptuous criticism of residents of the Middle East (“Holy Lands”) in *Innocents Abroad*. Still the acuity of his observations and the trenchant quality of his prose have a 21st century style, avoiding the over-inflated bombast of most of his 19th century contemporaries.

Life on the Mississippi is far from the greatest of Twain’s travel accounts. It is a somewhat jumbled pastiche of the history of steam boats immediately before the Civil War and nostalgia for a lost era in which Twain travels, as an older (and famous) man, the Mississippi that he learned as a river boat pilot a generation earlier. Fascinating albeit flawed, *Life* has doubtless inspired subsequent generations to take that “once-in-a-lifetime” steamboat Mississippi cruise to seek, even at many removes, Twain’s sense for the Mississippi River as the central artery of the United States.

It was under Twain’s impetus that in November 2008, we took a “bucket” trip combining a first-in-a-lifetime visit to New Orleans with a once-in-a-lifetime Mississippi River steamboat trip from New Orleans to Vicksburg and back.

New Orleans. For most Americans and Canadians, New Orleans used to epitomize the Mardi Gras carnival, “Cajun” cuisine, and the mélange of racial and ethnic mixes that saw the city controlled by multiple European states before passing into U.S. hands with the 1803 Louisiana Purchase. Now, however, the first thought is often “Katrina” and the hurricane that revealed comprehensive failures in U.S. disaster planning and management the consequences for which continue to reverberate.

Our first surprise was the French Quarter—old New Orleans. Media had suggested that it had survived because it was on “high ground.” My mind’s eye pictured the Quarter built on a bluff substantially above the river akin to Natchez, Baton Rouge, or Vicksburg. Instead, the Quarter is only modestly above Mississippi River level—the problem was that other sections of the city were substantially below normal, let alone hurricane driven, water levels. But the Quarter is quite sufficient for the tourist—even without pre-Lent parades and hoopla. Whether you are dining at K-Paul’s featuring master chef Paul Prudhomme or munching a “poor boy” sandwich, you will be getting a memorable meal.



The Quarter is saturated with early North American architecture and replete with ante-bellum history that *inter alia* provides a more nuanced vision of slavery than available in Northern abolitionist literature. For those seeking a touch of the macabre, the above ground cemeteries and mausoleums—where every cemetery seems to mix disintegrating ruins with whited sepulchres—you can visit the tomb of a “Voodoo Queen” and wonder just what those leaving tokens and coins are seeking?

For the modernist, there is the still emerging World War II museum, which is headed toward becoming the best North American museum addressing this conflict and built around amphibious landing craft used at D-Day Normandy and countless Pacific Ocean island assaults. These “Higgins boats” evolved from swamp boats used in the bayous of Louisiana and were produced by the thousands in New Orleans during WWII.

Indeed, the city may never recover to its pre-Katrina geography and demography. Rebuilding in areas that exist only because of dikes and water control will require levels of insurance unlikely in current fiscal realities. And consequently we skipped visiting the “disaster tourism” sites, just as we have never visited “ground zero” in NYC as we are not voyeurs into the tragedies of others.

Steam-boating the Mississippi. There are a variety of cruise/steamboats making trips of different distances on the River. Once the epitome of luxury for 19th century America and the primary mechanism for moving passengers and cargo through the central artery of the United States, they are now tourist spectacles—historic in style, closely replicating their ancestors, and designed for traveling comfort. The more famous steamboats, the *American Queen* and *Delta Queen*, are now in temporary retirement (we took the last official voyage of the *American Queen*). It was amusing to—at social security age—be among the youngest of the passengers. Consequently, nightly nostalgia entertainment had more of a taste of the 1930s-40s than any more contemporary

era. But we were a well-fed assembly: the aphorism was that “you come on board as passengers, but you disembark as cargo.”

American Queen had a standard set of port calls: Natchez, Vicksburg, and Baton Rouge as the primary points. Natchez featured a selection of ante-bellum mansions (the city was fortunate enough to be seized quickly by Union forces during the Civil War and thus the mansions were only looted by occupying troops rather than being burned to the ground in scorched earth fighting). They provided a quick reminder that the White House in Washington DC was hardly palatial when compared to the home of a successful Southern plantation owner.

Now a sleepy small town, Vicksburg was the primary fortified bastion of the Civil War South. It served as the connecting point between the east and west of the Confederacy as well as preventing the Union from fully exploiting control of the Mississippi River but fell after an extended siege. General Ulysses Grant’s military maneuvers designed to isolate Vicksburg and defeat its supporting forces remain text book illustrations of tactical brilliance (and prompted his promotion to command of the Union army in the east). The seizure of Vicksburg came virtually simultaneously with the Union victory at Gettysburg—and sealed Southern defeat.

Baton Rouge, as the capital of Louisiana, still heavily reflects the aura of Huey Long. Assassinated under still disputed circumstances in 1935, “the Kingfish” ran the state as a personal fiefdom featuring semi-dictatorial corruption. With clever populist demagoguery and radio commentator wit, Long would have been a serious rival for the presidency against FDR, not in 1936, but in 1940 when Roosevelt was facing the three-term shibboleth, the Depression remained unabated, and isolationism was popular. Baton Rouge also features a governor’s mansion built for Long as a duplicate of the White House (down to the positioning of the light switches, reportedly so he would not have to relearn their locations when he moved to Washington). Equally impressive is the state legislature, a 32 story replica of NYC’s Empire State building, built in 14 months—a construction time noteworthy for those 21st century builders for whom remodeling Ottawa’s Peace Tower took considerably longer. Doubtless there was corruption in construction, but the legislative building looks considerably better than most structures that are 70 years old.

But in passing, a traveler also learns that the aphorism, “all politics are local” is pointedly true outside the Washington Beltway. One week after our historic national presidential election, the *Baton Rouge Advocate* headlined “Woman Slain in Klan Rite” with no post-election coverage of the president-elect.

Nevertheless, the primary actor on the cruise remained the River—listed at 2,350 miles, the length regularly changes as the Mississippi has repeatedly changed course over the centuries both shortening itself by cutting through “S” shaped bends and lengthening with breaks through dikes into “old” river beds. With 257 tributaries, it drains 41 percent of the U.S. from 31 states, it remains the most efficient method for moving bulk cargo as one standard barge can carry 15 train car or 58 truck loads of material (and a 15 barge tow is normal). Although it is “out of sight; out of mind” for the majority of Americans distributed on the east and west coasts, it is the primary geographic characteristic of the United States; it has shaped our past and will continue to mold the future.

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Age of arousal

Sexuality is turned up full throttle in The Centaur's lavish production of *Age of Arousal*, a stylish, often outrageous and sometimes tedious take on how women relate to one another, and how a man can poison that relationship. Linda Griffith's feminist play about a group of sexually repressed "new age" women in Victorian London, is inspired by George Gissing's *The Odd Woman*, the 19th century novel which deals with the fate of emancipated women in a male-dominated society. Reminiscent of plays by British dramatist, Caryl Churchill, *Age of Arousal* relies on a theatrical device Griffith's has dubbed "thought speak." Characters deliver lines in which they say one thing and mean another, and the subtext is underscored by an abrupt change in lighting. Clever at first, the idea eventually becomes as distracting not unlike being bounced around in a verbal pin-ball machine.

The year is 1885, and the typewriter has just been invented. Mary Barfoot (Clare Coulter) and Rhoda Nunn (Alison Darcy) are lesbian lovers who run a secretarial

school. They're on a mission to help women become self-sufficient by learning to type. They take into their sisterly fraternity the three down-and-out Madden siblings, all of them genteel spinsters - Alice, (Diana Fajrajsl), Monica (Gemma-James Smith) and Virginia, (Leni Parker). The five women, dressed in garishly sumptuous costumes, buzz around the sliding panels of Michael Eagan's magnificent set, which is really the star of the show. The plot starts turning when Mary's philandering cousin, Dr. Everard Barfoot, (Julian Casey) seduces both Monica and Rhoda.

The production is anchored by Coulter and James-Smith, who originated their full-bodied roles two years ago in Toronto's Factory Theatre production. Coulter is perhaps too regal to be believable as a street-smart rabble-rouser. The entire cast, however, deliver stand-out performances, especially Gemma James Smith, caught between her loyalty to her sisters and to her lover, who she to "lick fine wine off my belly;" Diana Frajajsl, the menopausal Alice, who wants



PHOTO: YANICK MACDONALD

"To service a husband, whisper with women about my genitals, and burn and sweat through the change of life in quiet seclusion;" and Leni Parker the mannish lush, Virginia, who escapes to Berlin to "smoke cigarettes and wear trousers." Casey holds his own as the lone male character in the cast of man killers. As he so aptly puts it: "Men aren't afraid of women," he observes ruefully. "only of women in groups."

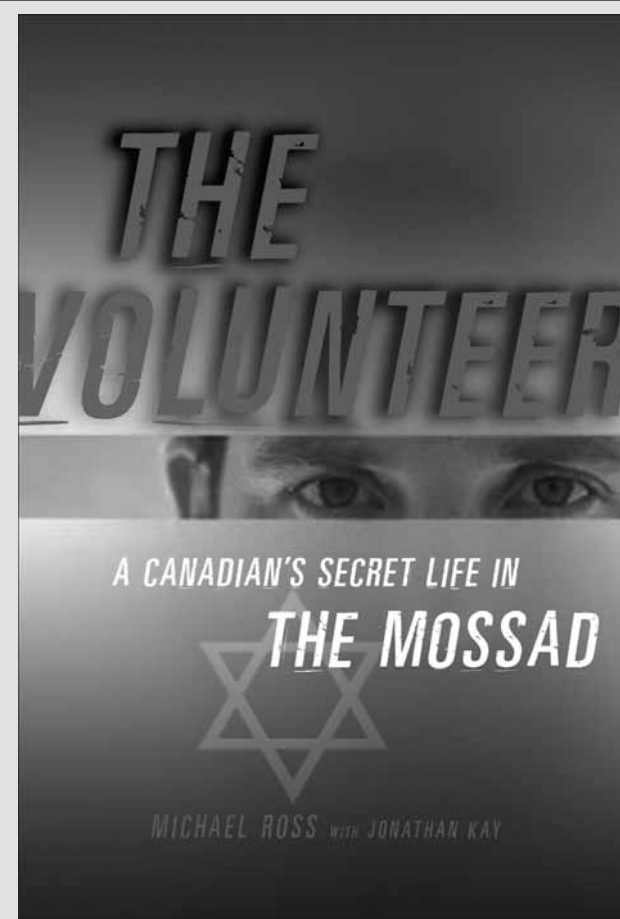
The music is glorious, and some of the scenes are small gems, especially the one at a modern art exhibition which melds the womens' lack of self-esteem with growing confidence and awareness. The second act, however, features an overly similar progression of comic riffs that are meant to draw parallels between the old and new feminist worlds, and break no new ground in the endless war between the sexes. There would perhaps be more laughs if director Sarah Garton Stanley had paid more attention to the rhythm of the script. *Age of Arousal* runs at the Centaur until April 19.

THE VOLUNTEER

The riveting story of a Canadian who served as a senior officer in Israel's legendary Mossad.

For seven-and-a-half years, Ross worked as an undercover agent — a classic spy. In *The Volunteer*, he describes his role in missions to foil attempts by Syria, Libya, and Iran to acquire advanced weapons technology. He tells of his part in the capture of three senior al Qaeda operatives who masterminded the 1998 attacks on American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; a joint Mossad-FBI operation that uncovered a senior Hezbollah terrorist based in the United States; and a mission to South Africa in which he intercepted Iranian agents seeking to expand their country's military arsenal; and two-and-a-half years as Mossad's Counterterrorism Liaison Officer to the CIA and FBI.

Many of the operations Ross describes have never before been revealed to the public.





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IMAGINE

John Lennon and Yoko Ono created a brand of fame 40 years ago that remains strikingly contemporary – shades of which can be seen in both the earnest activism of U2's Bono to the self-obsessed flashbulb frenzy surrounding today's vapid starlets.

Fed by, and feeding off of the media, the couple catapulted their message of peace across the world with the unshakable belief that we would not only listen but care what

they had to say.

It's an effect that's highlighted in the latest exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, a multimedia show that follows on the heels of the museum's popular Andy Warhol and Yves St-Laurent exhibitions of the past few months.

The show's mix of musical, political and artistic memorabilia follow the couple's relationship through to Lennon's murder in 1980 - documented through 140 drawings,

unpublished photographs, videos, films, and artworks - and continues with some of Ono's more recent work.

Commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Bed-In at Montreal's Queen Elizabeth Hotel, *Imagine: The peace ballad of John and Yoko*, ties the couple's message into its historical context.

Visitors are reminded that in 1969, Berkeley students were rioting, the Vietnam War was at its peak, Pierre

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PHOTO ROBERT J. GALBRAITH

Trudeau was pushing through the precursor to our rights charter, the Omnibus Bill, and in Quebec, the Quiet Revolution was in full swing.

There are also some re-created art works from Ono's 1966 exhibition at London's Indica Gallery and their playfulness and positivity is carried through to this show.

Visitors - accompanied by a near-constant soundtrack of Lennon's and Yoko voices in conversation - can play Lennon's *Imagine* on a white piano, sit down to a chess game on Ono's all-white sets and hang wishes on her *Wish Tree* installation.

But the tongue-in-cheek humour in the couple's work throughout the late 60s and through the 1970s often falls flat, feeling instead like sanctimonious inside jokes being broadcast to the world. Still, when stripped of the trappings of global celebrity and political message, the pieces can have a well-crafted simplicity.

Lennon's sketches of the couple's marriage ceremony and subsequent coupling are playful, charming and

honest. 'Glass keys to open the skies' is heart-breaking in its hopeful sweetness. A set of large glass keys are displayed alongside a quote by Ono: "I can never give up on life as long as the sky is there."

This exhibition will be popular. It's been widely advertised and will be accompanied by messages of peace recorded by Ono and broadcast throughout Montreal's metro system. People will be drawn by its positive message and its pop culture art.

But even Lennon, near the end of his life, seemed to be distancing himself from his own message.

In an interview quoted in the exhibition's documentation he says: "It's easier to shout 'Revolution' and 'Power to the People' than it is to look at yourself and try to find out what's real inside you and what isn't."

That's a message that should also be heard.

Imagine show runs through to June 21, 2009 at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and is free to the public.



Regurgitating the 60s

It will be 40 years in May since John Lennon and Yoko Ono held their bed-in for peace at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. Apart from 60-something fans wrapped in the reassuring womb of nostalgia, why should anyone care? Lennon has been in his grave for almost 20 years and at the age of 75, his moody widow's contribution to peace is to run around the world handing out pretentious little rubber stamps that bear the message, *Imagine Peace*. Still, local newspapers, French and English, have recently devoted their front pages to 40th anniversary hype. To commemorate the event the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts has mounted a free photographic exhibition that runs until the end of June. and, for those who can imagine the taste of mixing rice wine with gin, The Fairmont Queen Elizabeth Hotel has come up with a commemorative martini - British gin for Lennon and Japanese Sake for Yoko. The actual hotel suite, number 1738, that the couple occupied, no longer exists, but Suite 1742 a remodeled version in the proximity of the original, has been converted into a shrine to Lennon, and rents for \$600 a night.

During this year's anniversary week the musical revue, *Beatles Story*, is booked to play the Corona Theatre with Ricardo Branchini impersonating the martyred Lennon. (John Oriettas is McCartney, Jean-Francois Cyr is Harrison, and Ted Doyle is Ringo.) None of this is news, of course, but advertising copy.

There is much about pop culture to commemorate but as publicity stunts go, bed-in for peace ranks up there with flagpole



sitting and goldfish swallowing. Barred from the United States because of drug convictions, John and Yoko were originally 'going to do a Cuba,' and beam their message of peace to the world from The Bahamas, but were repulsed by the heat and settled on Canada instead. Writing about the event on the 30th anniversary in 1999, David Bist, who covered it for the *The Gazette* as a pop music critic, admitted that even at the time, "No one quite knew what to make of these freaks and their bed in for peace, but there was an underlying sense of awe, nonetheless. We're talking 1969 here, and this guy's a Beatle. Let him preach about World Peace and Blue Meanies."

True, *Give Peace a Chance*, was recorded

during the event. But even that memorable little tune is no longer the potent anthem it once was for a generation of flower children. In the newest Lennon biography, published last month, Philip Norman tells us how the song was written: "Early in the week a journalist asked for a capsule summary of what he and Yoko were trying to do. 'All we are saying is give peace a chance.' It was a phrase with an inbuilt rhythm like *Honi Soit qui mal y pense*, and within hours, prompted by Yoko, he turned it into a song, or rather a mantra like those he had learned in India. The verses were pure nonsense, spinning off rhythms from *Bagism* (*Shagism*, *Dragism*, *Madism*) and *Revolution*, (*Evolution*, *mastur-*

bation, flagellation, regulation, integration,...) and listing some of the people who had joined the bed-in with others he wished had done so; Timothy Leary, Rosemary, Tommy Smothers, Bob Dylan, Tommy Cooper, Derek Taylor, Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg... 'I sort of cheated,' he later admitted, 'the word *masturbation* was in it, but when I wrote the lyric sheet, I copped out and wrote *mastication*.'

Few anniversary accounts bother to mention that the day after the song was recorded, John and Yoko were deported from Canada and were sent on the first flight out of Montreal to Frankfurt.

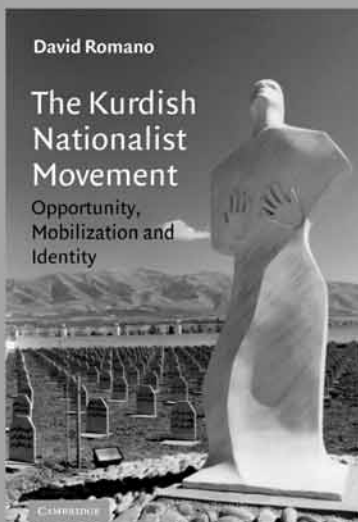
Chatting over a drink at Alexandre last week with some bright, articulate McGill undergrads in their 20s, who didn't know much about the significance of bed-in-for peace, but knew the song, they described it as a third rate effort by a first rate talent. Not one of them knew much about Yoko Ono either, apart from the fact that "She was the one that broke up the Beatles. If she hadn't come along, who knows, they might all still be touring like the Rolling Stones."

Now there's a sobering thought.

Brace yourself. This is only the beginning of a year-long celebration of non-newsworthy events. 2009 is also the 40th anniversary of the dawning of the Age of Aquarius, The Apollo 11 moon landing, Woodstock, Bob Dylan's first appearance at the Isle of Wight Festival, and the Sharon Tate murders.

The 60s are long gone. Unfortunately, most of the editors who determine what we read these days are now in their 60s and won't let them go.

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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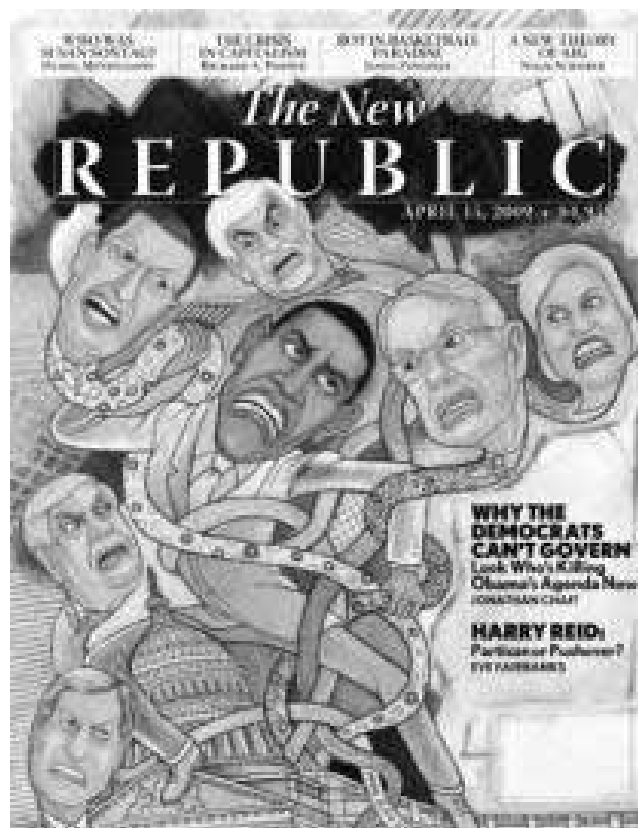
The New Republic and the Mind Minus Imagination

I don't know about *The New Republic*. Occasionally an excellent writer, say a Paul Berman or an Adam Hirsch, will embellish its pages and generate a certain positive impact. But its measured tones and prudential camber, giving the impression of considered good sense, is largely deceptive. A vital element seems lacking. Beneath the ostensible judiciousness and studied objectivity there is a curious feel of waffle, an *haut goût* of empty sophistication, of something not quite kosher.

Indeed, it is still recovering from the stigma of two of its former associate editors, Ruth Shalit and Stephen Glass, who perpetrated outright news scams. This has not deterred it from publishing several articles by a certain Scott Thomas Beauchamp, husband of *New Republic* fact-checker Elspeth Reeve, impugning the character of American troops in Iraq and later revealed to be rife with unchecked fabrications.

And I don't know about its literary editor Leon Wieseltier, a man with a gifted pen and a virile mind, but who suffers from a crippling paralysis of imagination—the occupational hazard of unanchored brilliance. Wieseltier is by no means unique in this affliction, but he does provide an exemplary instance of what I'm tempted to call *theaplegia*, the inability to envisage a scene or a prospect, or to actually *view* the subject of one's discourse. It is an infirmity peculiar to the supra-cerebral and often over-educated intellectual who manifests as an avatar of disinterested plausibility.

I focus on Wieseltier and his *New Republic* because they are superbly representative of this condition. A case in point. Wieseltier recently published an essay, *Washington Diarist: At The Window*, in which he faulted Israel after Operation Cast Lead for “a coarsening of conscience” and for having used “blunt instruments” in the prosecution of the war. His evidence for this unfavorable assessment of Israeli behavior derives from the fact that civilians, including children, deployed as human shields by Hamas resulted in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces)



having killed non-combatants. “This means,” he pontificates, “only that another way at them, another course of action, must be found. It cannot mean that children may be killed. Morality is a restraining condition.”

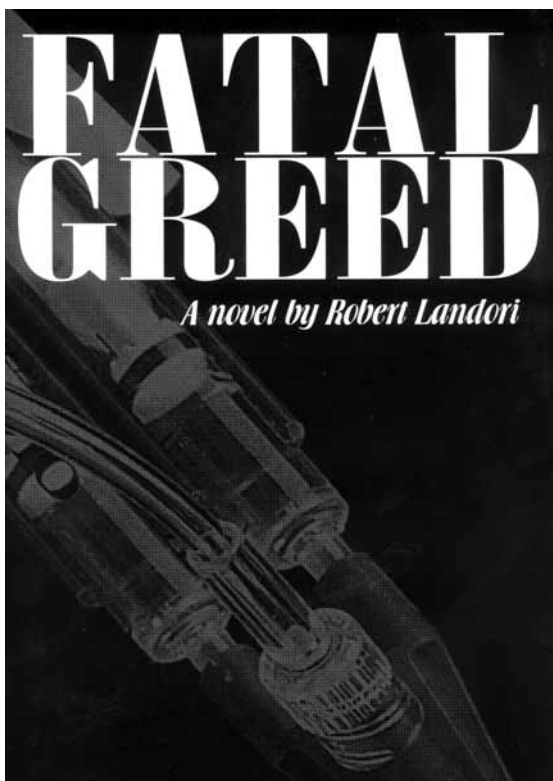
Not being a child killer myself, I admit to the initial thrust of his argument. At the same time, it is revelatory of how the unanchored intellect works that Wieseltier does not suggest what this other “course of action” might possibly be. For the fact is that he does not have a single, feasible idea of how, for

example, an Israeli soldier, faced with a gunman hiding behind a woman or child and advancing with intent to kill, should respond. Wieseltier cannot *imagine* himself in a similar predicament or suggest a credible alternative to self-defense that a soldier on the ground might adopt.

Well, let's see. Perhaps he should just drop his weapon and reason with his enemy on the assumption that mutual understanding would quickly supervene upon a bullet. Or should he rather offer himself up as a sacrificial victim and permit himself to be shot out of consideration for the principle of a higher morality? Is this what Wieseltier would do, and so deprive *The New Republic* of its literary editor as a worthy oblation to the Categorical Imperative? Would Wieseltier put his own children at risk so as not to inflict harm upon the children of a proven murderer. Would he refuse to bomb a rocket firing platform embedded in a civic neighborhood out of concern for its inhabitants even if the next missile launched from the premises might strike his own home and lay waste his family? Is this what *we* would do?

Of course, the Israeli command did attempt another “course of action,” telephoning ahead and leafletting its targets, signalling to the enemy where it meant to strike. Apart from this being poor military policy, it was also counter-productive. There were fatalities nevertheless, especially since Hamas, warned in advance, often prevented civilians from leaving the targeted site in order to swell the body count and blacken Israel's reputation in the world press. Exploited by a ruthless enemy, the effort to avoid casualties led to even more casualties. So much for the ethical option, notwithstanding Wieseltier's fine distinctions or the IDF's lofty miscalculation.

Like many intellectuals, Wieseltier prides himself on the lucidity of his moral discriminations and has no difficulty producing limpid formulations that glitter on the page. But, like many intellectuals, his imaginative faculty is pretty well moribund. He cannot transport himself into the situation of the



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other; he can only pronounce with the authority of the trained but ungrounded intellect on a set of events he is unable to imagine as impinging upon his own life.

Further, in order to make up for this, perhaps instinctively sensed, glaring deficit of empathetic imagination, the erudite but free-floating mind seeks for corroborating information without submitting it to competent analysis or diligent fact-checking—an old *New Republic* habit and a moral dereliction in its own right. Thus, Wieseltier will cite the “revelations in *Haaretz*” and claim that they “did not surprise me.”

Haaretz, a die-hard, left-wing newspaper invariably critical of the defensive actions of the Israeli armed forces, printed the damning comments of a few Israeli soldiers who accused the IDF of killing Palestinian innocents. Wieseltier did not trouble to take into account the paper’s probable motives, given its long and tarnished history similar to that of the *New York Times*. Nor did he have anything to say when these recriminations proved to have been based on pure hearsay, the accusers not having been present on the scene. Nor did he utter a *mea culpa* when it very soon became clear that the allegations were the invention of bad faith by those with a documented grudge against their own country.

Wieseltier is also suspicious of Israel’s recently elected Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, “who cannot bring himself to say a good word about a two-state solution.” A little fact-checking would have shown that Netanyahu has indeed committed his government to the two-state solution, but a solution which abides by the letter of the 2003 road map. Netanyahu opposes only the acceleration of the procedure, the so-called “fast tracking” of a process which leapfrogs the preliminary, cumulative steps to the final stages of a negotiated settlement. This is like arriving magically at a destination without having to make the intervening journey and Netanyahu is perfectly right to demur.

To give him his due, Wieseltier

does have some harsh things to say about the “racist mullahs in Palestine and beyond” and the existential attacks of the United Nations Human Rights Council against the welfare and *bona fides* of the Jewish state. This stance enables him to set up an appearance of balance and sound judgment, censuring each side for its failures and depredations. In this way he establishes an equivalence between Israel’s new Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who has been denounced as an intransigent hawk, and Richard Falk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Palestinian Territories, who is one of Israel’s most venomous and implacable detractors.

“I propose to fight Avigdor

Lieberman as if there is no Richard Falk,” he concludes, “and Richard Falk as if there is no Avigdor Lieberman.” But Wieseltier has set up a false dichotomy since there is no moral correspondence between these two individuals. That Lieberman has accepted the proposition of two states living side by side in guaranteed peace while Falk would like to see Israel shrink to indefensible proportions, or be absorbed into a single state, which would be majority Muslim by definition, or disappear from the map entirely does not ruffle Wieseltier’s composure. He simply cannot see the difference between Lieberman and Falk. He cannot conceive that one is struggling to

survive and the other laboring to destroy. No more than he can put himself in the place of an Israeli soldier approached by a civilian who may be equipped with a suicide vest or by a Hamas operative hiding behind a child.

What we have here is the same old wishy-washiness and preening affectation of virtue typically associated with *The New Republic*, which regards itself as a paragon of the elevated left. It is an attitude that defines the mindset of the theaplegic intellectual, prone to a kind of retinal detachment from the real world. The corollary of this mental state is an obvious reluctance to ascertain the facts which might jeopardize the apparent moral reasonableness of the

positions it purports to uphold. But it is best characterized as the illusion of an intellectual sobriety devoid of the visionary power that would allow it to sift the dross from its conjectures. In this respect, the members of the new republic of letters bear a strong filial resemblance to their predecessors.

In the absence of imaginative vigor, of the ability to see oneself in the situation one describes, the theaplegic intellectual can neither sustain nor validate his seemingly noble pronouncements. I propose we name the syndrome, which is highly contagious, after one of its most prominent sufferers and call it *Wieseltieritis*. Unfortunately, no cure has yet been found for it.

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