

# A disgraceful attack on free speech

By Conrad Black

Once again, commentators in friendly countries throughout the western world are expressing sincere alarm over whether Canada has succumbed to terminal wokeness and is voluntarily and by force of law strangling free speech and ceasing to be, by traditional definition, a free country. Leah Gazan, a Manitoba New Democratic MP, who has been a tireless propagator of the



New Democrat MP Leah Gazan speaks during a press conference in Ottawa, on Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2022. PHOTO BY SPENCER COLBY/THE CANADIAN PRESS

defamatory fraud that French and English Canadians attempted to perform an act of genocide against Canada's indigenous people, is at it again. Her private member's

bill, supported by the NDP, proposes to make it a crime to question, dispute, minimize or justify the activities of the so-called Indian residential schools which she continues falsely to represent as a genocidal enterprise.

No one disputes that there were many tragic and frightful occurrences in the schools, but there is no doubt that the purpose and intent of them was to assist native children in

escaping poverty and illiteracy and giving them a route to a normal and prosperous life. Nor is there any dispute that can withstand even cursory scrutiny that many of the approximately 150,000 students in those schools did in fact go on to much more successful lives than they might have led without having attended them. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission resisted with evident reluctance the rampaging temptation to try to swaddle this macabre fable in the winding sheet of genocide, but it did come to a number of conclusions that were not justified by the large volumes of accompanying documentation and the report has effectively failed as a basis of reconciliation.

There is a general consensus among thoughtful Canadians that as a society we have not adequately addressed the needs, and rightful ambitions and grievances of Indigenous communities. This has not been for many years a question of inadequate funding. Tens of billions of dollars have been poured into a cornucopia of programs designed to compensate and durably improve the lives of Indigenous communities. The residential schools themselves began contemporaneously with legislation seeking to assure that all children in Canada were educated, and the indigenous populations were so dispersed that it was fiscally impractical to build the number of day-schools that would have been required to educate large numbers of them. Tuberculosis was a widespread problem in society and not just in native communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, even amongst prosperous families. Schools in general, including elite boarding schools, had an excessive amount of corporal punishment in that era and there was undoubtedly, in almost all western countries, inadequate monitoring of the deviant and even sadistic behaviour of some teachers.

The commitment, by Canadian governments and churches of \$7 billion of reparations for claimed victims of the residential schools is excessive and if these awards and concessions had

been coordinated properly, they would have been conditional on the native victimhood industry ceasing to press on what has been an open door of Canadian majority guilt while steadily escalating its outrageous demands. The former minister of justice of Canada, Jody Wilson-Raybould, went so far as to order that no claims made by native individuals or organizations against the government of Canada should be litigated: they should instead be settled by negotiation. Canada is not and has never been a uniquely deliberately or systematically unjust jurisdiction. But in these matters it has consistently been a stupid jurisdiction, and remains so.

The respected Americas commentator of the Wall Street Journal, Mary Anastasia O'Grady, recently wrote, as a number of Canadians have, (including me), that the unmarked graves scandal, after more than three years, has yet to be supported with one scintilla of probative evidence. If Canada is to be taken seriously in the world or even by itself, it must arm itself with the self-respect to investigate such controversies promptly and thoroughly, to redress matters fully and generously when that is appropriate, and to revise or debunk the allegations when that is justified. As I have written here and elsewhere before, our own government is complicit in blood libels against the founding European nations of this country. That is not the purpose of government.

Given that our entire society has effectively capitulated to ever more extreme complaints, who seem to be cranking up to claim the estimated 200,000 mostly nomadic Indigenous people who roamed around the 3,800,000 square miles of what is now Canada when the Europeans arrived 500 years ago, were invaded and occupied in a manner legally indistinguishable from the conquest of Poland by Hitler and Stalin in 1939. What is needed is a comprehensive assessment of the past and plan of action for the future, worked out by impartial and altruistic people in intimate discussion and agreement with a representative group of Canada's many extremely talented and

successful native people.

Illustrative of the sort of semi-formalized misinformation and cant and emotionalism that obstructs serious discussion of these matters was an email sent to the eminent writer and journalist Robert MacBain (and shared with me), whose most recent book was on the tragic death of the young native boy Charlie Wenjack, from the fund that has been established in the boy's honour. The email claimed that Charlie was "taken from his family at nine years old and forced to attend" the residential school at Kenora, Ontario; that he "had run away from the school to reunite with his family 600 km away," and "succumbed to starvation and exposure," and that his death "became the first to spark a formal investigation into the treatment of indigenous children in residential schools."

It claimed that the school changed the boy's name from Chainie to Charlie, and has given mass circulation to drawings of Catholic nuns delousing Charlie and other Ojibway boys. It is clearly alleged that Charlie was sexually abused by the school staff. All of these assertions are false, as Robert McBain meticulously demonstrated, Charlie attended a Presbyterian school, not a Catholic school with nuns, and there is incontrovertible evidence that all these claims are bunk. Clergy are caricatured as hideous and brutal people, and perhaps a few of them were, but the Kenora school has many positive and grateful alumni.

Until we demand and elicit the truth about all these issues, we will have no defence against the self-defamation of our country and its history and no adequate response to the Indigenous people who have so long awaited one. Canada is becoming a laughing stock in the world. This entire issue goes to the heart and moral core of this country and it has to be faced and resolved, and not by repealing free speech and criminalizing legitimate discussion of it.

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