

Canada's excellent history of civil and human rights



by Conrad Black

Civil rights were not a burning issue when Canada was primarily the French colony of New France. The purpose of New France was entirely commercial and essentially based upon the fur trade until Jean Talon created industries that made New France self-sufficient. And to raise the population he imported 1,000 nubile young French women, and today approximately seven million French Canadians and Franco-Americans are descended from them. Only at this point, about 75 years after it was founded, did New France develop a rudimentary legal and judicial framework.

Eighty years later, when the British captured Québec City and Montréal in the Seven Years' War, a gentle form of British military rule ensued. A small English-speaking population arose, chiefly composed of commercial sharpers from the

American colonies claiming to be performing a useful service but, in fact, exploiting the French Canadians. Colonel James Murray became the first English civil governor of Québec in 1764. A Royal proclamation had foreseen an assembly to govern Québec, but this was complicated by the fact that at the time British law excluded any Roman Catholic from voting for or being a member of any such assembly, and accordingly the approximately 500 English-speaking merchants in Québec demanded an assembly since they would be the sole members of it. Murray liked the French Canadians and despised the American interlopers as scoundrels. He wrote: "In general they are the most immoral collection of men I ever knew." He described the French of Québec as: "a frugal, industrious, moral race of men who (greatly appreciate) the mild treatment they have received from the King's officers." Instead of facilitating creation of an assembly that would just be a group of émigré New England hustlers and plunderers, Murray created a governor's council which functioned as a sort of legislature and packed it with his supporters, and sympathizers of the French Canadians.

The greedy American merchants of Montréal and Québec had enough influence with the board of trade in London, a cabinet office, to have Murray recalled in 1766 for his pro-French attitudes. He was a victim of his support for the civil rights of his subjects, but was replaced by a like-minded governor, the very talented Sir Guy Carleton, Lord Dorchester. Murray and Carleton had both been close comrades of General Wolfe. The principal early controversial legal case in the colony spanned the terms of both men: a peculiar episode in which one of the most bigoted and authoritarian of the magistrates, Thomas Walker, was assaulted in his home while having dinner with his wife and part of his ear was severed. Murray disapproved, naturally, but did not consider the incident to have been entirely unprovoked. Carleton had to deal with the allegation of a discharged soldier, George McGovack, against the alleged intruders and despoilers of Walker's ear. In a

spectacular trial, it appeared that McGovack was not just a perjurer earning a conviction for perjury after the accused were acquitted, but that he had colluded with Walker, his former landlord. The trial was largely a French-English, Catholic-Protestant contest. French public opinion was against Walker who was eventually jailed by Carleton, rescued by Americans, and fled back to Boston. The whole drama vastly raised British popularity and satisfied many French Canadians that they could count on English support against the overbearing Americans.

The British had doubled their national debt in the Seven Years' War and the largest expenses were incurred in expelling the French from Canada at the urgent request of the principal American agent in London, Benjamin Franklin. As the Americans were the most prosperous of all British citizens, the British naturally thought it appropriate that the Americans should pay the Stamp Tax that their British cousins were already paying. The French Canadians had no objection to the Stamp Tax, even though it paid for the expulsion of France from Canada.

As Murray and Carleton foresaw, the British were not able to collect that tax from the Americans; British soldiers would be little motivated to fight their American kinfolk, and now that the Americans didn't have a neighboring French presence to worry them, they could certainly be tempted to revolt and would be very hard to suppress. As Murray and Carleton also foresaw, the only chance the British would have of retaining Canada and preventing the French Canadians from rallying to the Americans would be if the British crown became symbolic in the mind of French Canada with the survival of the French language and culture and religion. Carleton concluded that to retain Québec's loyalty, Britain would have to make itself the protector of the culture, the religion, and also the civil law of the French Canadians. From what little they had seen of it, the French Canadians much preferred the British to the French criminal law. In pre-revolutionary France there was no

doctrine of *habeas corpus* and the authorities routinely tortured suspects.

In a historically very significant act, Carleton effectively wrote up the assurances that he thought would be necessary to retain the loyalty of the colony. He wanted to recruit French-speaking officials from among the colonists to give them as much self-government as possible while judiciously feeding the population a worrisome specter of assimilation at the hands of a tidal wave of American officials and commercial hustlers in the event of an American takeover of Canada.

After four years of lobbying non-stop in London, Carleton gained adoption of the *Québec Act*, which contained the guaranties he thought necessary to satisfy French Canada. He returned to a grateful Québec in 1774. The knotty issue of an assembly, which Québec had never had and was not clamoring for, was ducked, and authority was vested in a governor with an executive and legislative Council of 17 to 23 members chosen by the governor.

Conveniently, the liberality accorded the Roman Catholic Church was furiously attacked by the Americans who in their revolutionary Continental Congress reviled it as "a bloodthirsty, idolatrous, and hypocritical creed...a religion which flooded England with blood, and spread hypocrisy, murder, persecution, and revolt into all parts of the world." The American revolutionaries produced a bombastic summary of what the French-Canadians ought to do and told them that Americans were grievously moved by their degradation, but warned them that if they did not rally to the American colours they would be henceforth regarded as "inveterate enemies." This incendiary polemic was translated, printed, and posted throughout the former New France, by the Catholic Church and the British government, acting together. The clergy of the province almost unanimously condemned the American agitation as xenophobic and sectarian incitements to hate and needless bloodshed.

Carleton astounded the French-Canadians, who were accustomed to the graft and embezzlement of French governors, by not taking any payment for his service as governor. It was entirely because of the enlightened policy of Murray and Carleton and Carleton's skill and persistence as a lobbyist in the corridors of Westminster, that the civil and cultural rights of the great majority of Canadians 250 years ago were conserved. The Americans when they did proclaim the revolution in 1775 and officially in the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, made the British position in Canada somewhat easier by their virulent hostility to Catholicism, and to the French generally.

The indomitable Benjamin Franklin and still loyal revolutionary Benedict Arnold were rebuffed when they tried to entice and bully the French-Canadians to rally to the Americans, and Carleton, by the narrowest of margins, and after masquerading as a civilian to avoid capture, evicted the American intruders from Canada. He did so because of his championship of the rights of the French-Canadians, twenty years earlier a subject people. Despite the immense fanfare of the American claim to bear the standard of human freedom, Canada's civil rights record was better than the American and was well illustrated by Carleton's refusal, at the end of the Revolutionary War, to hand over to General George Washington 3,000 American slaves who had joined the British forces. Instead, they were given passage to the British West Indies and their emancipation was confirmed. This was just the beginning of extensive Canadian assistance to American slaves and abolitionists.

A significant number of Americans who were loyal to Britain and despised the American Revolution moved to Canada during and in the decades after the Revolutionary War. And as the number of English Canadians steadily increased along the Great Lakes and west of the Ottawa River, Carleton created what became the province of Ontario, Upper Canada, in 1791. The

first lieutenant governor, John Graves Simcoe, devised and implemented an ambitious program of enticing Americans to Canada by effectively giving them rich farmland. The population of English Canada rose swiftly toward parity with the French. In 1792, Simcoe took it upon himself to abolish slavery in Upper Canada, 42 years before this was done in the British Empire, and 71 years before the United States. It was an admirable and pioneering endeavour in the principal area of civil rights controversy in North America in the coming century.

Unfortunately, as the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars unfolded, the British could not resist the temptation to employ their mastery of the high seas to impose blockades and harass the shipping of neutral powers. The young United States did not have the military force to deter such treatment, and in 1812 those countries went to war. Canada was the blameless focal point of most of the fighting. Canada with the continuing solidarity of the French-Canadians, was able to mount a very solid defense. The many thousands of recently arrived Americans did not support the United States and the generous policy of enticing settlement from the United States was completely vindicated. There were pressures to expel them, monitor them, disqualify them from holding local offices and positions. But it was soon agreed that they could become citizens after eight years of residency. This affected about 40 percent of English-Canadians and this must count as another very successful chapter in Canada's early record of respect for civil and human rights.

As reasonably successful wars do, considerable national sentiment was created and encouraged by the successful joint struggle to avoid American occupation. Out of these experiences came increased ambitions for democratic self-rule in domestic matters as the British and Americans enjoyed, instead of autocratic rule by British governors. Canada's position was complicated by the fact that it could not agitate

for home rule too energetically or the British would lose patience and sell Canada to the United States for cash or other territory or for a comprehensive alliance. Outright rebellion was not an option for Canada as it had been for the Americans, as the United States would seize Canada if it were not under British protection.

The Canadian solution for agitating but not completely exasperating Great Britain was the Gilbert and Sullivan rebellions of 1837 led by William Lyon Mackenzie in Ontario and Louis-Joseph Papineau in Québec. The Ontario uprising was just a rowdy group of malcontents who became disorderly and were easily chased off, and the French-Canadian group were essentially pamphleteers, though there were some exchanges of fire and small rebel and military units marched to and fro in poor winter weather. A total of about 300 people died, there were 14 executions and 92 people were transported as prisoners to Australia. The rebel leaders fled but were eventually pardoned and returned.

There was enough commotion to get Britain's attention, but the loyalty of most of the population gratified the British, and they determined to put things right. London sent the well-known reformer Lord Durham to Canada in 1840 to make recommendations. After a year of research by a couple of biased examiners, Durham came to the insane conclusion that the source of Canadian discontent was that the French-Canadians wanted to be relieved of the intolerable burden of being French. Durham proposed uniting Upper and Lower Canada and assumed that the slight resulting English majority would assimilate the French in about 10 years. Of course, this was precisely what the French feared, and the English-Canadians had no desire for it either. But after several years of rearguard action by British governors, the movement for autonomous government succeeded, after the 25-year-old Queen Victoria sent Lord Elgin to Canada as governor to give the Canadians what they wanted. Elgin and Robert Baldwin and

Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine achieved this and secularized a great deal of territory owned by the principal churches so that they could be more easily settled and made the principal universities officially nondenominational. These were again great and non-violent steps in the civil rights of Canadians who now numbered over two million people.

All of North America was now walking on eggshells over the immense problem of American slavery. Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1834. In practice, there had not ever been more than a couple of hundred slaves in Canada, apart from the natives enslaving each other. Slaves had been imported to the southern states because of their efficiency at harvesting tropical crops such as cotton, so Canada was effectively spared that horrible institution, because of its climate more than its virtue. Canada consistently had a fine record in accepting about 40,000 fugitive slaves that reached the Canadian border in the thirty years before the U.S. Civil War. The leading American anti-slavery advocates Harriet Tubman and John Brown, and Josiah Henson, the model for the chief character in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which sold an unheard-of two million copies in the 1850s, all lived in Canada for years. There were at least 11 black Canadian doctors who were fugitive slaves or sons of fugitive slaves who served in the Union Army in the Civil War, and the white Canadian anti-slavery activist, Dr. Alexander Ross, at the request of President Lincoln, assisted in breaking up a Confederate spy ring in Montréal. Escaped slave Joseph Taper, of St. Catharine's, wrote this letter back to his former and still putative owner in 1839: "I now take this opportunity to inform you that I'm in a land of liberty, in good health...In the Queen's dominions, man is as God intended he should be; all are born free and equal, not like the southern laws, which put man on a level with brutes. All the coloured population is supplied with schools. My boy Edward, who will be six years next January, is now reading and I intend keeping him at school until he becomes a good scholar.

My wife and self are sitting by a good comfortable fire, happy, knowing that there are none to molest us or make us afraid. God save Queen Victoria.”

As many as 40,000 Canadian volunteers served in the Union Army in the Civil War and Canada was thanked on several occasions by President Lincoln for infiltrating Confederate exile organizations. This was an issue in which all Canadians were united and is a legitimate matter of national pride.

The next major civil rights challenge that Canada had to face was that of the Métis—the mixed white and indigenous people on the Great Plains of Canada. The territory of the natives had been steadily reduced by white settlement and the nutritious content of their diet had been reduced by the heavy depletion of the herds of plains Buffalo. There were also many other grievances and undoubtedly a number of violations of the Indian treaties and of the *Indian Act* and a flamboyant Metis lawyer, Louis Riel, led an uprising on the western plains in 1878. This was eventually suppressed with little violence, as Prime Minister John A. Macdonald dispatched an adequate military force under Field Marshal Garnet Wolseley, Gilbert and Sullivan’s “very model of the modern major general.” Riel fled to the U.S. and the Canadian government made a number of useful concessions to the aggrieved natives. But in 1885, Riel returned and led a rebellion in northwest Saskatchewan. At the same time, the Canadian Pacific Railway ran out of money and was about to flounder into bankruptcy. Macdonald brilliantly sent Canadian forces West on the railway and they surprised and defeated the insurgents and captured Riel. By emphasizing the railway’s role in saving the country (as Riel was making both annexationist and secessionist noises), Macdonald won passage of a bill to finance completion of the railway. Macdonald also gave the natives the right to vote and rewarded his allies among the native leaders. However, he created a lasting grievance by allowing the execution of Riel. Although 15 people died in the uprising, he should have commuted the

sentence for insanity—Louis Riel was delusional.

The claim we now face that, in effect, the white man in Canada has behaved toward a native culture that was equal to their own in the 17th century with no more legality than Hitler and Stalin in their 1939 invasion of Poland, is an outrage. The natives were very skillful, but there were only about 200,000 of them in what is now Canada, they were almost all nomads in a Stone Age civilization, and they constantly conducted horrible wars against each other. With that said, there is no doubt that we have treated the natives shabbily and must do better. The *Indian Act* and the various treaties do not provide adequately for them; the rescission of the Harper government's requirement that the tribes and bands be administered acceptably according to Canadian governmental standards must be restored, and all natives who wish to assimilate to Canadian life must be more tangibly assisted to do so. Those who do not must be grouped in sufficiently large areas that they function as viable social milieus, unlike most reservations, that often reduce their occupants to a demoralized state. There has been a great deal of arbitrary and dishonest government by some of the hereditary regimes within the native tribes and bands.

In promoting the legitimate claims of the native population, we have inflicted a considerable injury on the civil rights of the well-intentioned and fair-minded majority of Canadians. The current federal government has presumed to declare that Canada is guilty of attempting some form of genocide on the natives. Every conceivable grievance, almost none of them intended by white administrators, has been magnified to portray the natives as the subjects of a comprehensive Canadian national program of oppression, if not gradual or at least cultural extinction. The present federal government has engaged in a number of humbling acts of self-proclaimed guilt and shame that have embarrassed all Canadians, such as flying the Canadian flag on federal sites at half-mast everywhere in

the world for months on end. We've made a ludicrous spectacle of ourselves and brought the country into needless disrepute in the world. I put it to you that the incompetence of the present government's doubtless well-intended effort to help the indigenous, has in some measure assaulted the civil right of all Canadians, including the natives, not to be defamed. We will achieve nothing for the indigenous by falsely smearing the principal founder of our country. Even in the time of Palmerston, Lincoln, Disraeli, Gladstone, and Bismarck, John A. Macdonald was seen as a great statesman and it is oppressive of the majority in Canada that officially funded native groups liken Macdonald to Hitler, and that cowardly city councils and university faculties remove Macdonald's statue and erase his name.

Wilfrid Laurier followed Macdonald and was a statesman of approximately equivalent stature. Laurier put the secular rights of Canadians ahead of ecclesiastical attachments in the setting up of western schools, which caused him some problems with conservative Québec clerics but promoted a spirit of liberality in the country. He was always reliable in the defence of minorities and when the Salvation Army proposed to lead parades that would go through very unilingual and almost ultra-Montanist Catholic communities, he dealt with the protesters by saying that he would, if necessary, lead the parades himself because of the right of all law-abiding groups to enjoy the benefits of freedom of expression and assembly. Laurier's greatest service was as leader of the opposition in 1917 in responding to the widespread English-Canadian demand for the imposition of conscription for the Great War on French-Canadians, as they were not volunteering in the same numbers as English-Canadians.

Québec was not inspired by any loyalty to the mother country, having been abandoned by France and dismissed by Voltaire as "a few acres of snow." Laurier warned the prime minister, Robert Borden, that if he simply used his parliamentary

majority to conscript French Canadians, he, Laurier, would lose the leadership of the French Canadians to Papineau's fiery grandson, Henri Bourassa, and Québec would be waiting to secede. He said that if Borden held an election or referendum on the issue, he would win it but it would be enough of a democratic process for Laurier to sustain Québec's faith in federalism. As he also predicted, in the ensuing 40 years, the Liberals won seven elections and drew one, and lost only one. The Conservative Party has still not recovered from the avoidable disaster of conscription.

In World War II, Mackenzie King gave a pledge of no conscription for overseas service and held to it despite a repetition of the agitation of many English Canadians and the senior military to impose conscription. King famously said, with his customary ambiguity: "Conscription if necessary but not necessarily conscription." He held a referendum in 1942, asking to be released from his pledge to avoid conscription; 66 percent of Canadians supported him, 80 percent of English-Canadians, but 90 percent of French-Canadians, who provided 40 percent of King's MPs, voted against. The division could not have been more stark. These English-French rights disputes have haunted us more recently.

In January 1942, in the most disreputable form of imitation of poor American public policy, 27,000 Japanese-Canadians in British Columbia were subjected to seizure of their assets and forced removal to internment camps at least 100 miles inland from the Pacific coast, with grating restrictions on movement and activities. The trustee of alien assets, who was supposed to conserve and restore them, instead sold them in 1943 at knockdown prices. Some restitution was made shortly after the war but not until Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, in 1993, was the matter put to rights, with \$21,000 for each surviving detainee, restoration of citizenship to anyone deprived of it, and \$36 million for Japanese Canadian institutions. It was a disgraceful episode, but no one was killed, injured, fined, or

fully incarcerated, and after an unconscionable passage of time, there was substantial reparation.

The principal civil rights abuses in Canada since World War II have all been traceable to the culturally ingrained difference in the approach to civil and human rights of the British and French traditions. The British concept defines rights as reposing with each individual, especially opposite governments and other powerful organizations. The French have proclaimed the rights of whole peoples; when Rousseau famously wrote that "Man is born free but is everywhere in chains," he was referring to mankind, not each man. In the French conception, the rights of individuals are automatically superseded by a collective imperative, an eminent domain for the general security and interests of the people as a whole. In Canada, the susceptibility to this form of reasoning is increased by the historic fear of French Canadians that they could be assimilated, deprived of their culture by the English-speaking majority in Canada and by the vast ocean of English-speaking people generally, in North America. To the French and French-Canadians, it is perfectly reasonable to apply undemocratic methods to curb anti-democratic political movements.

This was the issue with the notorious Padlock Law of 1937, that finally drifted up to the Supreme Court of Canada twenty years later. The Padlock Law authorized the shutting down of buildings where communist propaganda was allegedly produced and the seizure of offensive printed propaganda. This law led to no incarcerations or significant fines. Of course, the Padlock Law was an outrageous measure but it was essentially a publicity stunt and it had minimal impact on individuals. There was just a seizure of some pamphlets and minor inconvenience. An English-speaking appeal judge dissented that the law was *ultra vires* to the legislature of Québec because communism was not defined and there was an absence of due process, and that it trespassed in the federal domain of criminal law and was a contravention of the *Canada Elections*

Act. This was sustained at the Supreme Court by the English majority over the traditional Québec view of collective rights taking precedence over individual rights, and that it was in the provincial constitutional jurisdiction of property and civil rights. (It was not really a criminal statute).

Somewhat similar issues were raised by what was flamboyantly described in the late 1940s and early 50s as Québec's "War" on the Jehovah's Witnesses, which in fact chiefly consisted of revoking the liquor license of a Montréal restaurateur, Frank Roncarelli, who had posted bail for 393 of his fellow Jehovah's Witnesses. They had been arrested for violating municipal bylaws that prohibited the badgering of members of the public in public places and at their residential front doors, to proselytize on behalf of their religious sect. Again, this issue got to the Supreme Court of Canada after over 10 years. The high court determined that lifting Roncarelli's liquor license was an injustice inflicted on a man who was legally posting bail; over the French view that someone using a permit issued by the province to subsidize and facilitate repetitive civil lawbreaking was himself violating the terms of the license. The civil rights issue remains debatable.

More serious and inextricably tied to the future of Canada is the Québec language legislation that has steadily imposed limitations on all languages in Québec except French. The government of Robert Bourassa in 1974 declared that French was the only official language in Québec, opposed bilingualism in commercial signs, and required that in all signage within commercial establishments such as supermarkets, the lettering in French had to be larger than in any other language. Access to English language instruction was in many cases to be allowed only when pre-school children passed tests indicating a greater aptitude to speak English than French. This last measure caused great resentment as putting pressure on very young children and the concept arose of "language police" and

was much mocked. There were many accounts of tourists, particularly Americans, asking that "language police" be identified.

In 1977, Quebec's first overtly separatist government, led by Premier René Lévesque, further restricted the use of English and the access to English language education in the Québec state school system. The Bourassa and Lévesque bills were both successfully attacked in Ottawa but the relevant Supreme Court rulings were themselves voided by invocation of the Notwithstanding Clause of the 1982 Constitution that can be invoked, in these cases, to conserve the provincial jurisdiction in property and civil rights. This provision severely undermines the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* attached to the 1982 Constitution.

Hundreds of thousands of English-speaking people have departed Québec since the adoption of Bourassa's Bill 22 in 1974, but the secularization of Québec and a declining birth-rate have reduced French Québec's share of the Canadian population. This has been somewhat compensated for by French-speaking immigrants from Haiti, North Africa, and Lebanon. These people tend to be not much interested in Québec nationalism and knew they were moving to a mainly English-speaking continent. The provincial government does not currently speak much of separating but can push its aggressive language agenda.

The latest measure in this sequence is the current Bill 96, which will shrink the number of people attending English-language schools and eliminates English as an official language in the Québec offices and workplaces of the federal government and federally chartered corporations and institutions. This is unconstitutional and it is shaming that all five federal political parties have rolled over like poodles and not uttered a peep of objection. It follows in the spirit of Québec legislation prohibiting the wearing of religious objects or religiously-specialized apparel that is deemed to convey sectarian aggression or makes it impossible

to identify a Muslim woman in public. This measure is justified by a public security requirement that everyone be capable of being identified in public. It also appeases a particular irritation in Québec at Islamic symbolism. But it also seems related to a subtler and more historically profound sentiment of contemporary Québec resentment of the centuries when Québec was very heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church.

That institution has thus gone full circle from the threat it was under at the time of the early British and American revolutionary hostility to it. Nationalist French Québec's antipathy to the organization that secured the cultural survival of the French language for 175 years undoubtedly reveals profound psychological complexities in Québec. In these circumstances, both language and religious liberties are under some threat in Québec.

What we might call administrative and political intrusion on rights is becoming steadily more annoying and worrisome, and not only in Québec. My learned friend Jordan Peterson retired from the University of Toronto because of a controversy in which the administration was ambivalent about whether a minority of students could force him to address them according to a vocabulary that they had applied to themselves in reference to altered sexual self-identification. Of course, this concept violated liberty of expression.

The truckers this past winter had just grievances against the COVID regime and were peaceful protesters. Yet they were suppressed under the *Emergencies Act* on the theory that they were creating a public order emergency. An attempt by some truckers to block traffic at border points had to be stopped by normal police action.

Parking trucks in downtown Ottawa does not constitute a public order emergency and could have been alleviated without recourse to draconian legislation. The effective co-prime

minister, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, declared: "It is clear that this is not a protest; it is an act to try to overthrow the government and it is funded by foreign interference and we must stop that flow of foreign interference particularly from the United States...(The convoys are) led by those that claim the superiority of the white bloodline and equate Islam to a disease." Prime Minister Trudeau, when the truckers were still hundreds of miles away said that they were "homophobes, misogynists, and white supremacists." All of these reflections from the highest elected officials in the country were disgraceful, defamatory, unfounded lies. The scandalous detention in isolation for 18 days of Tamara Lich was a grave breach of civil liberty.

In the spurious name of climate change, about which we know very little, economic warfare is conducted against the oil and gas producing regions of the country and that entire economic sector. Higher energy costs, lower income for the fossil fuel industry, since they are not based on real scientific probabilities, are not really acceptable consequences of legitimate public policy positions; they are infringements upon the civil and economic rights of citizens.

Our health care system, of which Canadians remain inexplicably proud, is arbitrarily rationing health care and is stunted by an inadequate number of doctors, much of it due to the persecution of private medicine. And our health care systems are now reduced to the shame and indignity of promoting assisted suicide as death with dignity that incidentally, if widely enough practiced, would bring down healthcare costs along with our life expectancy. Health care systems are supposed to promote life, not death.

Perhaps the greatest irony of recent public policy in this and in all other advanced Western countries is that we spend more and more on education and yet have less and less well-educated graduates at almost every level. It is clear from the irresponsible behavior of our teachers' unions, repeatedly

blackmailing parents with strike-threats, that they have little interest in the welfare of their students. They are largely conducting daycare centers with a sprinkling of rudimentary academic instruction, and extensive surveys reveal a steady decline in the education levels of graduates.

Our university system tyrannizes anyone who is not a proponent of the mass fiction that we live in a racist and inadequately Marxist society. We, and other countries, are impoverishing ourselves graduating an immense horde of university students in fields which cannot possibly generate a survivable income for them. Our universities are dumbed-down infestations of under-challenged students, under-worked and often subversive faculty imparting expertise in esoteric subjects. Jordan Peterson is correct when he says that no subject ending in the word "studies" has any academic standing.

Where the schools are in the hands of the robotic left and focused largely on the study of irrelevant disciplines, we are certain to get, as we have, steadily less responsible and reliable media. Almost all distinction between reporting and comment has been abandoned in our media, and what passes for news more often is simply the leftist Philistinism of unrigorous reporters peddling faddish bile free of any pretense of impartiality. Usually, it isn't very well written or spoken either.

As objective tests of our secondary school graduates reveal steadily lower standards of achievement, so public opinion polling indicates that a steadily smaller percentage of the public trusts the media. Our media are so chronically mediocre and frequently dishonest, that what should in a rich and free country like this be the civil right to a reasonably high standard of media information, is a general denial of that right.

These contemporary threats to civil rights have the unusual characteristic of a civil right denied to the population by

the indifference and insipidity of the population itself. Just as the English language majority in the country seems determined not to be concerned about Québec's attempted strangulation of the English language in that province, it is apparently indifferent to the worthless inadequacy of most of the media that serves it. The public is right to distrust and even despise the media, but that breeds indifference to a free press, which is essential to democracy.

What we are witnessing, if it continues, is the gradual civic suicide of a society of rights. This can be reversed, and usually where there is not excessive physical coercion by the state, it is reversed. That is primarily what The Democracy Fund is trying to assist. If we and other like-minded people and organizations are not successful in this, then Canada's long and distinguished history of upholding civil rights will end in a welter of authoritarian regulations and imposed political bigotry and misinformation.

The civil rights record of Canada from when it first had the slightest influence on its own governance and for the last 260 years, has been one of the most creditable of any country in the world. Such a rich country as this with such a distinguished history and so fortunate in the competence and liberality of its population, will surely avoid the grim fate that is now starting to threaten us.

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