

Jordan Peterson and Mark Steyn – Canada's warriors for freedom



by Conrad Black

This past week, I have been somewhat engrossed by the travails of two distinguished friends, the world-famous Jordan Peterson – psychologist, philosopher and social scientist – and the brilliant writer and critic, Mark Steyn. Both are facing the oppressive vagaries of justice. In a contemptible abdication from the obligation and purpose of the courts to sort out facts and law and render justice as the authors of the relevant legislation had intended, a panel of the Ontario Divisional Court ruled that the College of Psychologists of

Ontario had the authority to require Peterson to submit to instruction on public communications. Peterson has revealed that he will do so, despite the fact that he is by a very wide margin the most accomplished and admired lecturer and speaker in the history of Canada. His live lectures draw large crowds and his videos have been viewed by millions of people around the world. That some factotums of the (in all respects) provincial college of psychologists would be so transported by envy, hate and the malice of mediocrity that they would inflict such an impudence, vividly demonstrates what depths such people scrape when beset by spiteful jealousy.

Contrary to what had been widely expected, Jordan Peterson will attend these sessions and will require that they be filmed, and he intends to expose these ludicrous proceedings as the mockery of a quasi-judicial procedure that they are. At some point, our courts are going to have to deal with the clash between the individual right of self-expression and the right and duty of the learned professions to self-regulate. In principle, it is certainly preferable for the professions to regulate themselves, but they must also recognize the rights of individual citizens to freedom of expression, thought and conscience. Jordan Peterson is a better and more authoritative person to judge what he may say than the college is.

This contest between collective and individual rights has been a long and contentious issue in Canada, aggravated by the differences between the French and English traditions. The French advocates of liberty, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, spoke about how "Man is born free but everywhere is in chains," and that it was mankind that required liberation, not any particular individual. This translated itself in the law of Quebec into the right of society not to be challenged and aggravated by individuals. To the French and French-Canadian legal mind, nothing could be more absurd than allowing communists and others devoted to the overthrow of democracy to abuse the liberalities of democracy to advocate for its

extermination.

This French tradition gives the self-regulators the ability to override individual rights, and in the name of the profession, to ride roughshod over the individual. Obviously, the basis of Anglo-Saxon law is the rights of every individual. Group rights, as defined by a small clique granted authority over a large number of people in a profession or occupation, provide no reliable rights at all for individuals. Jordan Peterson is not now very active as a psychologist and has already been offered instant membership in several psychological associations in other jurisdictions. Peterson's opponents seem to have manoeuvred themselves into a cul-de-sac.

This and other related issues were rummaged through pretty thoroughly on Tuesday and Wednesday in Calgary and Edmonton, in rumbustious sessions culminating in an exchange that I moderated with Jordan Peterson and the prominent American commentator Tucker Carlson. We torqued each other up, especially in front of a crowd of 8,000 in Edmonton, to some rather peppy pronouncements and virtual calls to arms over a number of issues. Where Peterson is an extremely perceptive and learned professor and a very articulate advocate of his positions, Tucker Carlson is a charming and capable journalist who specializes in unorthodox and provocative opinions. At times as moderator, I felt and acted on the need to discourage his portrayal of our finance minister, Chrystia Freeland, as a Nazi. I also gently took issue with his objection to our levels of immigration, especially as Carlson repeatedly emphasized that we only have 40-million people in the second-largest country in the world. He's an amusing reactionary who responded to the idea of a proposed American wall on its northern border by saying that we must have it to prevent more talented Canadians from moving to the United States (essentially the rationale for the Berlin Wall). He also advised us to move away from the American border and enjoy our glorious country, as if the northern interior of Canada was

Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond – we should endure economic dislocation to enjoy the mountains and rivers. Given his tendency to shock, be an engaging gadfly, and Peterson's extraordinary forensic talents at explaining the full intensity of his feelings on a number of these issues, it was a rollicking occasion and seemed to go over well. The crowd's uproarious torrent of brickbats whenever the CBC was mentioned was particularly uplifting. Tucker invited the CBC to interview him and was declined.

Mark Steyn is facing a different problem. In the United States, freedom of expression has been judicially interpreted as meaning that public figures have no practical way of alleging defamation. The only way to succeed in a defamation action is to prove a premeditated intent to defame, which is almost impossible, or to drag it out through the courts at such length and detail that the defendant runs out of money. This was the technique resorted to by Michael Mann, the frenzied climate change fear-monger who helped invent the "hockey stick" graph of global temperatures: like a hockey stick laid on a level surface with its blade upwards, temperatures stay relatively steady and then suddenly surge upwards on a 45-degree angle. Mann exploited the bias of the left to attack capitalism from another direction in the name of saving the planet and stirred the credulous masses of the world who wanted to believe this, or at least to discommode the capitalists by claiming it.

Mark Steyn unleashed the full subtlety and vitriol upon Mann that his admirers have long appreciated; he portrayed his opponent as someone who was almost always on social media, "harassing and bullying anybody who disagrees with him... He is one of the most vicious blowhards on Twitter." In his pleadings in his trial in Washington, D.C., Mark Steyn has given Michael Mann a terrible debunking; the notion that Mann was libelled at any point in his decades of climate fables is hilarious. The American love of litigation and the

considerable support Mann has raised from the climate change industry and the left-wing venue of the trial (Washington, D.C.) all pose a possible vulnerability for Steyn, but on the facts, he will finally unmask this egregious charlatan, who has been a pestilential international nuisance for decades.

These two outstanding Canadians deserve the support of all of us; they are warriors for freedom and do honour to this country.

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