

A Reply to Conrad Black
By Yvan Allaire, Ph.D., FRSC
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«*As Quebec decays, Toronto seizes greatness*» is the latest epistle of Conrad Black wherein he vents his disdain for Quebec in general and its «separatists» in most virulent particular. (*The National Post*, October 6th 2012)

The affront pains coming from a man of Black's experience, indeed a man who suffered the lashes of unjust accusations and the «monstrosity of bigoted ignorance» (as he describes Judge Posner in the chronicle of his legal ordeal ***A Matter of Principle***).

Yet, his text is most striking indeed for its ignorance, bigoted perhaps, biased certainly. It proposes a musty description of a Quebec where Black last spent time, it seems, in the 1950s. His tirade is of the sort that gets energetic nods of approval from fellow members at plush country clubs, the same setting where the inanities of Romney are embraced with comradely enthusiasm.

Tiresome task it is to compile Black's errors of facts and expletives but let's single out a few juicy ones:

- «*...a demographically dwindling repository of a not overly dynamic French fact and which by its addiction to transfer payments from English Canada has become a white collar secular clerisy that contributes little economic added value to anything.* That's a bit much even by Black's standard of tactlessness, verisimilitude and lack of balance. All provinces receive federal transfer payments (Ontario, \$19.3 billion in 2012-2013; Quebec, \$17.3 billion; Alberta, \$3.3 billion, etc.). Black's outrage must be driven by «equalization payments». It might come as a surprise to Black that Ontario also receives equalization payments (\$3.3 billion in 2012-2013) and Quebec's \$7.8 billion for equalization represents a mere 12% of the Quebec government's budget. The per capita level of equalization payment ranges from \$249 for Ontario, \$943 for Quebec, \$1368 for Manitoba, \$1992 for New Brunswick. «English Canada» does support other parts of «English Canada» too; so *the white collar clerisy* must be a Canadian phenomenon
- *Electricity, over-unionized base metals and forest products industries, and a scattering of high tech and financial services are all that generate any earned income for Quebec now..*; perhaps nostalgic for the Duplessis era when French-Canadians were kept in their proper place, Black has not yet heard of CAE, Bombardier, Pratt and Whitney, CGI, Le Cirque du Soleil, Alimentation Couche Tard, Garda, SNC-Lavalin, Canadian National Railways, or perhaps Polytron, Talented Frogs Studio, etc..

- «... Quebec is placing further strictures on the teaching of English in the state school system, a terrible disservice to the province...; here he goes again; perhaps, the most eloquent rebuttal to this charge is the following notice on the web site of the Ministère de l'éducation du Québec :

«Come and teach English in Québec»

Would you like to have the experience of teaching English to young francophones?

Between now and the 2015-2016 school year, all grade 6 students in Québec

will be required to take an intensive English language course.

*More specifically, **half of their school year will be devoted to learning the language of Shakespeare.***

In a context of openness to the world, it goes without saying that knowledge of a second language is a major asset»

- Two referendums on sovereignty were held in Quebec; both times, French-speaking federalists from Quebec (I among them) were on the front lines defending Canada; apart from a few ugly instances during the 1980 referendum, ever since, no French-speaking federalist is called a «vendu» or a sell-out; both sides have learned to conduct this debate with maturity and respect.
- Greater Toronto is made out as a haven for diversity while Greater Montreal appears, in Black's jaundiced opinion, as an exclusionary society; again, let's check this out. Black states that about one fifth of the people who live in Greater Toronto are non-whites, and over 30% speak a language other than English or French at home, «*the exactly opposite policy to the desperate and restrictive cultivation of French in Quebec*»; well, for the Greater Montreal, 16.5 % of the people are visible minorities and 23% speak a language other than French or English at home; in fact, 35% speak a language other than French at home. Not so different from Greater Toronto!
- *Compared to the relative welcome that Toronto has given external immigration (unlike Québécois, who are generally hostile to immigration and none too accommodating to ostensibly francophone immigrants who don't speak like Québécois and aren't too preoccupied with Quebec nationalism)...; this is the kind of baseless, unsupported charge that deprived Conrad Black of his freedom; yet, he stoops to the practice; here are some facts: Quebec received some 106,000 immigrants in 2010-2011, some 70% of whom were non-whites (or visible minorities). Over the years 2007-2011, the net balance of international migration has been positive for Quebec (+ 240,292) and Ontario (+ 517,061). The net inter-provincial migration for 2007-2011 has been negative for Quebec (-35,330) and for Ontario (-44,838).*

Tiresome indeed and pointless! No one, certainly not the writer of these lines, would argue that all is perfect in Quebec and no policy is deserving of sharp rebuke; but a prerequisite to this discussion has to be a passing acquaintance with the most recent facts.

May I suggest to Conrad Black that he might acquire a small brochure of facts put out by the Quebec office of statistics, available in English under the title «Quebec Handy Numbers-2012»?

Finally, it is a bit disappointing that Black's screed shows no evidence of the kind of change adumbrated by his moving admission that "*...the experience of being a prisoner conferred on me some generally welcome increased humility and a broader appreciation of the lot of disadvantaged people.*" (***A Matter of Principle***, 9149-56)