

Canada needs a much better CBC

The federal government should appoint serious leadership for the national broadcaster, with a mission and budget to make it a network the country can be proud of; Canada has the talent and the need.

by Conrad Black



Canada has surely outgrown the present CBC. I am a supporter of public broadcasting and think it has an important role to play in building Canadian cultural distinctiveness. It should be adequately funded and efficiently and imaginatively managed. Pierre Juneau was the most capable head of the CBC I have known, and there have been others. My late and talented friend Lister Sinclair was not ultimately a success in an administrative position, but at least the corporation had the vision to give him a try. It intermittently imports high-priced consultants who impose budget reductions that shrink creative areas and preserve the slowly rotting corporate bureaucracy. The CBC was conceived 90 years ago to give the country a national broadcaster and to help Canadian regions understand each other better. It has often lived up to that mandate and in places still does.

But it is an infestation of leftist biases, and is often grossly unprofessional. For decades, despite being almost entirely funded by Canadian taxpayers, it was the principal

house organ of the Quebec separatist movement, to the point that former prime minister Pierre Trudeau, shortly before the 1980 Quebec independence referendum, threatened to shut the French network down; when asked what he would replace it with, he responded with his customary vivacity of wit: "Still pictures of Chinese and Japanese vases, at least they have some cultural value." It is compulsively misanthropic and nasty, and almost always takes a snide leftist view of everything, including foreign affairs. Brexiters were cavemen, U.S. President Donald Trump is a racist, sexist crook and moron, and it is racism and xenophobia to assert that the coronavirus originated in China. Can't we have better and more original insights than this?



The front page of an online version of a special edition of the Epoch Times. The Epoch Times

This brings up the latest CBC outrage I have seen, the report on Wednesday that the Epoch Times, an online and printed newspaper (in which I am a contributor), had conducted a paid trial circulation through the post office that "upset ... some Canadians ... by claims that China was behind the virus." The Epoch Times was described as "a newspaper that has polarized people over its content (that) is coming under fire for advancing a conspiracy theory about the origin of the coronavirus, and (is) having it delivered straight into mailboxes unsolicited." In fact, there is no question that the coronavirus did originate in China, the only question is where it came from. Reputable mainstream outlets have reported on the possibility, not certainty, that it escaped from a viral research centre, and was not propagated by bats in the live animal market of Wuhan. Amid its entirely accurate and comprehensive reporting of the subject, the Epoch Times mentioned that the Chinese have at times announced that they were developing biological weapons. The Epoch Times did not assert that the coronavirus was such a weapon, only that there was one faction of opinion that believed that.

The CBC took it upon itself to announce breezily that "Scientists have repeatedly said the evidence points to the coronavirus having a natural origin." There is "an unbelievably high consensus within the scientific community that there is very close to zero chance that the virus was ever engineered," according to a Winnipeg scientist. That is not exactly true but is in any case not the principal argument about the origin of the virus: that it may have escaped Wuhan's viral research laboratory because of human error, but however it began, that the Chinese government quarantined Wuhan within China, but did nothing to prevent its spread throughout the world and misinformed the World Health Organization and the entire international community about the dangers of the coronavirus, thus causing hundreds of thousands of deaths in scores of countries. There is no responsible consensus that disagrees with this, and the CBC's unctuous blustering about manufacturing the virus as a deliberately deployed biological weapon, is false.

The CBC pounced upon some woman in Kelowna, B.C., who was upset that the post office delivered the paper as she had not asked for it. (Promotions of this kind, starting with free distribution to targeted readers, are commonplace – all metropolitan newspapers and most magazines, including the formerly distinguished Economist, use this tactic frequently.) The Kelowna lady conveniently said "It really feels racist and inflammatory" and "playing on those fears is a very dangerous thing to do at this time." The Epoch Times did not push any theory not embraced by most Western governments. It is a bit rich to suggest the Epoch Times was engaging in Sinophobic racism, since the newspaper was founded and is maintained by Chinese fugitives from the totalitarian oppression of the Chinese government. It carefully distinguished between the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party, and its founders and staff speak from a vivid experience of having been oppressed, imprisoned and often tortured because of their adherence to the Falun Gong, a religious sect whose views are

not controversial in the West or in any sense extreme, but whose existence affronts the official Chinese imposition of atheism. The CBC did quote an academic who said that, "Definitely, there is persecution, and there are violations of human rights." From all accounts, that is a considerable understatement in the case of the Falun Gong, whom the Chinese government has brutally oppressed and subjected to involuntary organ harvesting, facts that have been affirmed and condemned by the United States Congress and the European Parliament. Many governments have expressed the same view as the Epoch Times about the irresponsibility and dishonesty of the government of the People's Republic of China. The initial story even mistakenly reported that the Shen Yun dance group was part of the Epoch media group.



A man reads a book in front of a board with an image of Chinese President Xi Jinping at a book store in Shenyang, China, on April 23. STR/AFP

The CBC went on to imply that while the Epoch Times itself was not alleging any outright falsehoods, it might be saying truthful things in order to induce people to attach more credence to inaccurate accounts it might give. This is the sort of spurious casuistry that totalitarians, like Stalin's prosecutors, engage in. The CBC even dramatically added that it was withholding the name of a letter carrier who had expressed regret at having to deliver the Epoch Times "because he could lose his job at Canada Post." This unnamed but very conscientious and worldly letter carrier is quoted by the CBC as saying: "It makes me feel like humanity is facing an existential crisis, and I'm being forced to hand out weapons in a cage fight." The free distribution of a printed supplement that includes, among many other opinions, the suggestion that coronavirus may have been accidentally released from a lab does not really justify the national public broadcaster highlighting a letter carrier in Kelowna wailing about this aggravating a "systemic crisis" for all mankind. Because its contacts are so deep and numerous in

China, the Epoch Times has frequently led Western media in Chinese matters the regime has tried to suppress, including the early effort to stifle accurate information about the coronavirus.

The federal government should appoint serious leadership for the national broadcaster, with a mission and budget to make it a network the country can be proud of; Canada has the talent and the need. It is sobering to recall that Vincent Massey and his commission to examine Canadian culture, recommended in 1951 that the CBC be the country's sole telecaster. My father, who died many years ago, having heard and disapproved the first CBC broadcasting efforts, said a number of times that, "Some have been more vociferous in their criticism of the CBC than I have, but few have been more consistent." As years pass, in this as in some other matters, I see the wisdom of his perspective.

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