

Jordan Peterson's Case Has Profound Implications for Canadians' Rights and Freedoms



by Conrad Black

It was my privilege and pleasure to participate with perhaps the most eminent contemporary Canadian, Prof. Jordan Peterson, and the prominent American television and internet commentator, Tucker Carlson, in a spontaneous presentation to a live audience of 8,000 in the principal indoor stadium in Edmonton on Jan. 24.

I was ostensibly the moderator, but that consisted in

presenting a topic for discussion which all three of us would then tackle in sequence. It was a rollicking and, speaking for the three of us on the dais, a most enjoyable evening. Tucker Carlson is a charming man personally and publicly, with an excellent sense of humour, and alternates profound statements of principle with the provocative aperçus of an engaging gadfly. Jordan Peterson makes no pretence to being a barrel of laughs but is an eye-wateringly erudite psychological and philosophical scholar. He presents his views in a rolling thunder of brilliant and intense articulation. I just played it down the middle, added a few light touches, and where it seemed appropriate, smoothed some of Tucker's more flamboyant reflections, and helped explicate a few of Jordan's more complex formulations.

The outstanding premier of Alberta, Danielle Smith, introduced us and the ambience throughout was very good-natured. It was a wonderful crowd—emphatically and apparently united in its perspectives and often admirably demonstrative to a degree that was somewhat un-Canadian, as all three of us from different angles forthrightly expressed our reservations about the current state of government in Canada.

There was great applause and verbal expressions of solidarity at many points, punctuated by an intermittent cacophony of boos and catcalls when any of us mentioned the taxpayer-funded public broadcaster, the CBC, which has so far departed from its mission to inform and represent Canadians that it is a widely-hated organization. (Unlike most Canadians with whom I am generally in political agreement, I believe in a public broadcaster and wish the CBC were better funded and more competently managed and given an expanded mandate not only to foster Canadian broadcasting and television expertise but to try to incite the return of some of the many talented Canadians in these fields who have been attracted to other countries.)

Stoical gentleman as he is, Jordan Peterson did not mention

the scandalous and almost totalitarian attempt of Ontario's College of Psychologists to muzzle and humiliate him. Because there were five written complaints about Jordan's alleged incivility in comments he made in podcasts espousing his perfectly reasonable political views and his opposition to some aspects of official policy, the college concluded that their most distinguished member—a man with 5 million internet followers and more than 1 billion views and hits, a best-selling author and very widely viewed podcaster renowned throughout the world, probably the most distinguished living Canadian—would have to attend re-education sessions conducted by anonymous members of the college. None of the five complainants had ever had any contact with Prof. Peterson and some of them were not even Canadian residents.

Since the complainants did not formulate serious objections and their grievances were based entirely upon Dr. Peterson's views—which defamed no one and offended no recognized standards of public decency and in no way departed from the normal bounds of fair comment—it is impossible to view this attempt to gag him under threat of professional disqualification, as anything but the latest and most outrageous assault upon the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the ancient common law rights of all Canadian citizens to freedom of thought and expression. It is fortunate for all of us that Jordan Peterson has been so successful that he can afford to fight this battle, and while he has not been a practising psychologist for six years, he has already been offered membership in the professional association in that field in three other jurisdictions.

Whatever the College of Psychologists of Ontario may inflict upon Jordan Peterson, it will not materially affect his ability to speak his mind and to maintain his income. But the fact that the Divisional Court of Ontario upheld the ability of the college to try to muzzle and intimidate its most distinguished member for the utterance of unexceptionable

personal opinions on the flimsy pretext that they were complained of by a few casual viewers or listeners whose objections had absolutely nothing to do with Dr. Peterson's professional competence, is a huge storm signal fluttering above all of Canada over the limitations of our freedoms.

As in the Orwellian state, the existence and supremacy of rights and freedoms are now subject to extra-legal curtailment and suppression at the whim of anonymous and officious regulators, in whose shredding of our supposedly inviolable rights and freedoms our independent and fearless judiciary cravenly acquiesces.

Jordan Peterson has said he will attend these re-education sessions and insist that they be filmed, and will put them out before the public of the entire world himself. He has warned those who would silence him that they will regret their initiative. The worst that the college can do is revoke Dr. Peterson's licence as a psychologist in Ontario, which as has been mentioned, would be immaterial to him and irrelevant to the status of his income. But it would be an illustration for all to see of the ability and the disposition of the regulatory apparatus of our society—unelected by any representative group and unanswerable to anyone under any criteria—to threaten a learned professional exercising his sacrosanct right of freedom of expression to practice his profession and exercise his right to freedom of expression.

The implications of this are clear and extremely dangerous for every citizen of this country.

When such people, with no practical restriction on their ability to behave irresponsibly and oppressively, can, on utterly spurious pretexts, assault and punish the routine and constitutionally guaranteed right of individuals to self-expression, no one in Canada is safe except that tiny minority of anonymous and unanswerable placemen who operate the levers of this almost totalitarian authority.

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