

There can be no real justice when everyone is a victim

Margaret Atwood is the latest to have been hit by the tidal wave of political correctness that has inundated Canadian life, sweeping away resisters

by Conrad Black



It is becoming steadily more difficult to maintain morale in the face of the tidal wave of political correctness that inundates Canadian life, drowns resisters, and sweeps away any trace of them. Sen. Lynn Beyak is a perennial lightning rod, and the last bolt to strike detached and evicted her from the Conservative Senate caucus for posting correspondence on her website. The party leader, Andrew Scheer, is a very reasonable and tolerant person, who understands that there are real problems with native affairs policy, and he is not given to flying off the handle. He is as he appears – an affable and

thoughtful and civilized individual. He was a popular speaker of the House of Commons, and though he won the Conservative leadership narrowly over Maxime Bernier, because each constituency had equal weight in the selection process regardless of the likelihood of the Conservatives winning the constituency in a general election or the numbers of paid up Conservative association members in each constituency, he won by a significant margin among those who voted in the leadership process.

Yet he gunned Beyak out of the Senate Conservative caucus with a stern assertion that his party would not abide racism. This is commendable, but Beyak is not a racist. The objection was that her website carried extensive correspondence with acquaintances of hers on the subject of native people and their public policy issues, and that some of it was racist. Beyak's perceived offence was not anything she herself said or wrote, but some of the comments she aired on her site. In an email to me, the Senator described some of these reflections as "a little edgy and opinionated, well researched by ordinary citizens, (and) filled with compassion and valid observations from history."

Beyak has a long and distinguished history of working with native groups in her home region of western Ontario. Her problem arises from her conviction, acquired from experience and observation, not from any ethnic or cultural prejudices, that the core of the native problem is not the past, colonization or residential schools, though they certainly caused problems, but what she calls "the bloated Indian industry in Ottawa," where billions of dollars are thrown out of the windows over the failed programs of the past in the expectation that they would somehow produce improved results. Not only does the status quo cruise majestically on, but it does so on a high tide of confected and orchestrated public guilt about past treatment of the natives, fanned by the fiction that Canada tried to exterminate native culture in an

official campaign of “cultural genocide.” I have written here before that no such concept exists and the phrase is deliberately provocative and in this case thoroughly unjust.

Throughout Canada’s 170 years as an autonomous jurisdiction in domestic matters, official policy was positively intended, even if it was often mistaken, ineffectual, or in a few individual instances, antagonistic and oppressive. What we need is to jettison the phoney guilt complex that the courts and the admittedly creative native leaders have fastened on our heads like a crown of thorns, and devise new methods to tackle these problems co-operatively with responsible native leaders and with reasonable standards of accountability. Beyak has worked with a group of 12 local native leaders to create a development program and they unsuccessfully requested an audience with Scheer. The whole concept of allocating funds to native leaders for 10 years at a time with inadequate procedures to monitor how they are dispensed, and of dealing with all these native groups as quasi-sovereign independent nations, and abiding by the judicial findings that practically half of Canada consists effectively of sacred native burial grounds, should be scrapped. We must be generous, imaginative, and respectful, but not stubbornly retentive of failed policy. (Being turfed out of the Conservative Senate caucus is no great burden – I’m an independent member of the U.K. House of Lords and in an appointed house, the whips are just a nuisance. One of Justin Trudeau’s better moves was to release all the Liberal senators to be independents.)

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The fever of political correctness has assaulted much more challenging targets than Lynn Beyak. The great and redoubtable Margaret Atwood, who has few rivals as the greatest novelist in Canadian history, and has been an impeccable but reasonable feminist all her career, entirely consistent and often

courageous, has been rounded upon as a turncoat for having the temerity to ask for due process before the University of British Columbia condemned and fired professor Steven Galloway for misbehaviour with publicly unspecified women, including a student of Galloway's. The whole process was secretive and gave Galloway very curtailed rights to make his case and the verdict was initially opposed by distinguished native novelist Joseph Boyden, who recruited other writers, including Atwood. The more militant feminist community, forgetting or ignoring the fact that Margaret Atwood had carried water on both shoulders for their cause for nearly 50 years, attacked her as if she was a fellow traveller of male chauvinism, and a critic of no distinction.

Though it does not involve a result that is seriously unjust or such eminent personalities, the controversy over Lindsay Shepherd, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University, illustrates the condition of freedom of expression. As has been amply publicized, Shepherd played a video of a debate between the formidable and politically incorrect academic Jordan Peterson with Professor Nicholas Matte over the obligatory use of gender neutral pronouns at the University of Toronto. She introduced the video, which had been played on TV Ontario, carefully, and was summoned to a meeting where she was told that there had been complaints that she had created a "toxic atmosphere" through an act equivalent to playing a speech of Hitler's without giving context. Shepherd recorded the meeting without advising her interrogators of that, and released the recording and roused the interest of a number of commentators, including me. It soon emerged that there had been no complaints, that Shepherd's conduct was exemplary, and the university and her professor publicly apologized. It ended well and Shepherd became an international personality; there were no apparent sanctions on the conveners of the Star Chamber which she recorded, but the enemies of rigid political correctness don't want vengeance, they want a tolerant community where spontaneity and individualism are encouraged.

Canada is constantly officially apologizing and making reparations in all directions – natives, gays, militant women, trans-gender and sexually ambiguous people. Everyone wants justice but there can be no justice if everyone is a victim. Confession is good for the soul and the mind, when it is sincere and proportionate, but we are running the risk of being the first people in history to induce a state of profound moral complacency by the torment of endless self-accusation. Canada has less to apologize for than almost any other country. We should remember the comment of Dr. Johnson to the man who answered a series of questions: “So I humbly presume.” We “could stand more presumption and less humility.”

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