

The New Criterion

Books May 2009

The redcoats are coming

by Conrad Black

Review of *Shakedown: How Our Government is Undermining Democracy in the Name of Human Rights* by Ezra

BOOKS IN THIS ARTICLE



Ezra Levant

Shakedown: How Our Government is Undermining Democracy in the Name of Human Rights

McClelland & Stewart, 240 pages, \$15.95



Royal Canadian Mounted Police

In recent months, Canada has added a cubit to its stature, as a country that has performed well economically and where no banks and very few large companies have failed. It has not been running suicidal current account deficits as the United States has, nor is it whip-lashed between a self-hating Left and a Left-hating Right. It is a rich and peaceful country. As Mark Steyn writes in his foreword, Americans may think Canada is a long “chorus of Barney the Dinosaur singing ‘Caring is Sharing.’” But Ezra Levant introduces us very quickly to Canadian notions of Orwell’s “thoughtcrime,” in a wildly perverse laundry-list of abuses in the human rights industry.

There is the male hair-stylist who successfully filed a human rights complaint because female co-workers called him a “loser,” and a male-to-female transsexual who demanded the right to counsel female rape victims, who found this deeply disturbing. There is the woman whose skin condition made it uncomfortable for her to wash her hands sufficiently to meet the hygiene standards for people handling food at McDonald’s—that is, all of the employees. McDonald’s proved a generous and indulgent employer and paid her scores of thousands of dollars in disability pay. Nevertheless, the company was condemned for discrimination when it finally had to let her go because whatever she did would have infringed public health standards.

But Ezra Levant introduces us
very quickly to Canadian notions

of Orwell's "thoughtcrime," in a wildly perverse laundry-list of abuses in the human rights industry.

There is the failed candidate for the much-fabled, red-tunicked Royal Canadian Mounted Police who claimed he had been starved on his rations (although he gained weight while eating them), and that he was the butt of racist comment because he had been "shouted at" by the drill sergeant (like all cadets in uniformed forces). He was a wash-out in all respects, whom even the human rights commissioner regarded as "evasive and implausible," yet he was awarded \$531,000 from the elite federal police.

In one case, a website denounced another website, and the counsel for one of them complained. The Canadian Human Rights Commission hurled its whole apparatus into a video-conferenced inquiry between Ottawa and Calgary and other centers, but no one appeared for the principals. The panel chairman in Ottawa was reduced to asking building personnel in Calgary to scout around the lobbies and corridors looking for anyone who might fit an imaginary description of the esoterically named websites, made flesh.

There are other astounding and disturbing examples of how the human rights commissions functioned. People were routinely convicted without facts or demonstration of intent. There was no need for harm or damage, only the notional possibility of future harm: in terms of cash penalties, a de facto criminalization of unstated, imputed thoughts that could be acted upon by a biased interrogator, unchecked by any balanced fact-finding process. It is enough that a randomly selected commissioner perceive a "likelihood" that something undesirable might have happened, arriving at that conclusion by abusing untrammelled powers in the name of nonexistent rights that can only be exercised at the expense of real rights that generations of brave people fought for in Canadian courts and Canadian uniforms, on foreign battlefields, and in contested skies and oceans.

Just as the achievement of ancient rights—to fair and equal treatment in justice and freedom of expression, association, belief, and practice—finally came into reach, Canada (which in these matters is a canary in the mineshaft for countries not as far along, including the United States) shifted official focus to human rights: not to be offended, disappointed, or unsuccessful. Authentic warriors for civil rights were shouldered aside and now look with uniform horror on what has been wrought. The right not to be oppressed by society gave way to a right not to be inconvenienced by one's own shortcomings. Such shortcomings are not traceable to the unkindness of others, but from the unfair distribution of talents and aptitudes: God, Him, Her, or Itself is the real "target."

Canada's great natural wealth, spread over a well-educated population living in a law-abiding tradition, was to redress naturally inflicted imbalances such as low intelligence or "any desire, entitlement, or grievance, dressed up as a right." It became "lawfare." Needless to add, some especially outrageous cases were taken, violating what the author calls

the separation of mosque and state... . A taxpayer-funded secular institution created to further the goals of multiculturalism and tolerance was co-opted to prosecute blasphemy suits against radical Islam's critics and satirists. Muslim radicals outsourced their soft Jihad to the Canadian government.

For the conquest of such a brave new world, the human rights movement—which, in Canada, has never failed in the prosecution of a charge of "hate speech"—has no organized procedural rules, no threshold for the plausibility of complaints. There is no penalty for frivolous complaint, and no recognition of that endangered rarity—successful defense—not even a costs award.

Notorious activists have been put in charge of the human rights machinery. Heavy fines and legal costs are imposed on "targets" and frequently insane verdicts are cranked out.

In their zeal for self-preservation and crusading belligerence, the human rights inspectorate infiltrates suspect and target organizations. Thus, crypto-Nazi and white supremacist organizations are first bloated with disguised official infiltrators and then decried as having achieved worrisome dimensions. Search and seizure can be conducted without a warrant or even notice after the fact; breaking and entering, theft, and vandalism are immune to sanction. Completely innocent and uninvolved people are set up by official computer-hacking as conduits to targets and infiltrators. The frontiers of the sting have been extended beyond the horizon.

Notorious activists have been put
in charge of the human rights
machinery.

This could be a cautionary tale for Americans, whose legal system and constitutional protections for real rights have rotted and decomposed far beyond anything that has afflicted Canada. The Fifth-, Sixth-, and Eighth-Amendment guarantees of due process, the grand jury as protection against capricious prosecution, the assurance of no seizure of property without just compensation, speedy justice, access to counsel, an impartial jury, and reasonable bail are all unattainable relics of a gentler and more officially honest time. If the enormities described could descend on the pure snow-maiden of the North, Americans should get ready to exercise the right to bear arms outside the paint-ball park. The redcoats approaching are not Canadian Mounties—don't worry about the whites of their eyes or winning hearts and minds. The apotheosis of this tale came when *Levant* published the famous Danish cartoons of Mohammed in

his western Canadian magazine. A notorious charlatan imam in Calgary, who had been demanding that all Canada be subjected to Sharia, laid siege to the Calgary police and insisted that Levant be arrested, a week before the offending copy had even appeared.

When his hearing occurred two years later, Levant put it all on YouTube, declined to shake hands with the head of the Alberta Human Rights Commission, gave a fierce opening statement, and turned every question into an antagonistic harangue of his questioner. It was a lively performance and quickly became one of the most frequently watched items on the internet. Levant's tactics raised the heavy dough of the Canadians, and there was a volcanic outpouring of rage. The imam abandoned his complaint and fled his "little mosque that was crumbling under lawsuits and investigations and unanswered questions about the physical violence that had befallen two of his fiercest critics."

It was a refreshing phenomenon. Canada suddenly noticed what was happening. Previously mute politicians rose up like Siegfried and smote the human rights monster. Levant could have made more of the fact that the human rights decisions are subject to appeal in real courts. Civil rights are a provincial and not federal matter in Canada. Thus, there was relatively little of this nonsense in Quebec, which, however frequently it thought of restricting non-French wording on commercial signs, made minimal concessions to this Anglo-liberal death wish.

There is no doubt that Ezra Levant and Mark Steyn—who was dragged through a similar procedure to the same outcome, over his hugely successful book *America Alone*—have shrunk and maimed, if not slain the dragon. This noble service is portrayed here without self-importance or stridency. The story might even set some Americans to wondering why their country has become a prosecutocracy based on the infamous plea bargain, where immunity is traded for inculpatory perjury, over 90 percent of prosecutions are successful, and it has ten times as many prisoners per capita as it had thirty-five years ago and eight to twelve times as many as other advanced democracies do. The prison industry is a giant Frankenstein monster; as a society of laws, the United States is no longer among the world's twenty-five most respected countries. Canada, being Canada, had a problem the world, including most Canadians, did not notice and then corrected it. The United States has problems it has largely failed to notice, but which appall the world. It needs its own Ezra Levants and Mark Steyns, not more Eliot Spitzers and Patrick Fitzgeralds.

Conrad Black is a financier and columnist and the author, most recently, of *The Canandian Manifesto* (Sutherland House Books).

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 27 Number 9 , on page 67

Copyright © 2024 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<https://newcriterion.com/issues/2009/5/the-redcoats-are-coming>