REFLECTING ON GOMERY: POLITICAL SCANDALS AND THE CANADIAN MEMORY

Desmond Morton

Is the sponsorship scandal the worst in Canadian history, as the opposition howls, or is there a lack of memory of our own history? In any spoils system, as renowned historian Desmond Morton points out, what goes around comes around. Who gets the spoils usually depends on who's in power. And from the dawn of Confederation, the spoils have started at the front door of Public Works and Government Services, the historic home of pork and patronage in Canada. "Most of our ancestors took political corruption for granted," Morton writes, adding that "one continuing political reality of Canada is how tolerant of scandal most of us have really been." From the Pacific Scandal of one century, to the furniture scandals of the next, a short but informative history of scandal in Canada.

Le scandale des commandites est-il le pire qu'ait connu le Canada, comme le clame l'opposition, ou avons-nous oublié une partie de notre histoire ? Dans tout système des dépouilles, rappelle l'éminent historien Desmond Morton, tout finit par se payer. Simplement, les profiteurs varient selon les titulaires du pouvoir. Dès les débuts de la Confédération, le favoritisme s'est logé à l'enseigne des ministères chargés des travaux publics et des services gouvernementaux, refuges historiques de l'électoralisme et du népotisme. « La plupart de nos ancêtres tenaient la corruption politique pour acquise », observe l'auteur, ajoutant que la tolérance au scandale de la plupart de nos concitoyens est l'une des grandes constantes de la vie politique de ce pays. D'un siècle à l'autre, voici un bref et fort instructif historique des scandales canadiens.

Life can only be understood backwards, Soren Kierkegard, the Danish philosopher reminded us. Unfortunately, it has to be lived forwards. Last year, for example, I was constantly asked whether the sponsorship scandal was the biggest in Canada's history. By the time Mr. Justice Gomery reports, and certainly by the time the last criminal investigation has enriched its last lawyer, we may be able to agree on its seniority. Or even what constitutes a scandal? Would all Canadians agree that allowing tainted blood into our transfusion system constituted a scandal? Or sending soldiers to war in 1915 armed with the Ross Rifle? Or refusing to admit Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler in 1938? Will sponsorship and its cast of characters fade from memory like most of the scandals I have been invited to dredge up? Or will it give sovereignists the catalyst to vote Yes to sovereignty, as both Jean Chrétien and Gilles Duceppe and possibly even Stephen Harper may believe? After all, what better way to give the Conservatives a built-in majority than by helping the Bloc take Quebec and perhaps even Atlantic Canada out of Confederation?

Honest answers in history, as Kierkegard warned, demand more patience than either the media or opposition politicians are usually willing to concede. So do substantial answers about how to prevent this and other scandals from being the daily fare of political debate. When Harper demands that the Liberal Party pay back what its minions have allegedly extracted from federal coffers, has he ever thought about where the Liberals would ever find the funds? Does he plan to report in detail and in timely fashion the funding sources of his own political party? Surely he remembers the stench in Toryism that drove him to launch his own parliamentary career in the ranks of Preston Manning's Reform Party.

Future historians may also recognize the sponsorship scandal as Jean Chrétien's greatest gift to the sovereignist cause. As the former prime minister explained to the Gomery Inquiry, Canada's profile in Quebec had virtually

vanished as a result of the Mulroney government's privatizations and transfer of powers over immigration to the Quebec government. By trashing the constitutional expectations that Mulroney had raised to persuade Quebecers to accept Pierre Trudeau's Constitution "with honour and enthusiasm," the rest of Canada sent sovereignty support to a record 60 percent, guaranteed the Parti Québécois another turn in power in 1994, and made the second referendum fight in 1995 much tougher for the province's demoralized federalists. When the federalists won by only a whisker, editorial writers denounced Chrétien for inaction. The prime minister responded by peeling $250 million from a shrunken federal budget, handed it to Alfonso Gagliano, his lead Quebec minister, and told him to get cracking. As minister of Ottawa's most patronage-friendly department, Public Works, Gagliano turned instinctively to Chuck Guité, a hold-over from the end of the Mulroney era. Guité knew whom to call and what motivated the seemingly unsavoury gang whose wealth would come from undermining the sovereignist dream. As one of them, Gilles-André Gosselin explained to Mr. Justice Gomery, he would have lost two-thirds of his staff if they had ever figured out that he had hired them out to change Canada's image in Quebec.

A quarter-billion dollars buys a lot of change, though it is only a quarter of the billion dollars that allegedly vanished into the Liberals' gun registry program, and even smaller than the original claims of alleged misspending by Human Resources and Development Canada. The sordid parade of evasive and forgetful executives and disgruntled Liberal operatives before the cameras in Judge Gomery's hearing room have provided a vast Quebec audience with months of delicious indignation and righteousness. In pubs and kitchens across Quebec, sovereignists have waxed indignant that their federal taxes funded the scoundrels whose tawdry schemes undermined their dreams of a Quebec independent of the clowns who run the federal government.

Chrétien's explanation for the sponsorship scandal has a long association with the dirty deeds in Canadian public life. Making the dangerously false analogy that politics is war, particularly when conducted against people with troublesome ideas, isn't anything fair? Aren't those who protest, like Auditor General Sheila Fraser or Mr. Justice Gomery, doing the enemy's work? In *Honest Politics*, their book on Canadian political corruption, Ian Greene and David Shugarman, two specialists in political ethics at York University, refer to the "dirty hands" argument. Yes, sponsorship might seem a bizarre way of spending taxpayers' dollars, but didn't those same taxpayers want something done to counter Quebec separatists? Greene and Shugarman recall another classic "dirty hands" example, the series of criminal acts attributed to the RCMP Security Services after they had failed to foresee or forestall the October Crisis of 1970. A royal commission amassed plenty of evidence of police break-ins, unauthorized wiretaps of MPs, and even a barn-burning, but no minister ever resigned. National security is an easy alibi when governments break the law, and the argument has had an especially heavy workout on both sides of the Canada-US border since 9/11.

Both Macdonald and Allan knew that Canadian elections were not won by prayers but by cash. Driven by poverty, opportunism and greed, many voters were "loose fish" or "shaky fellows," who unashamedly sold their votes for money, a mickey or a paycheque. Party organizers took a cut, just like some of Gomery's witnesses. A Senate seat was a reward for successful money collectors. Not only was it a royal flush as a patronage benefit, the salary would keep collectors from skimming more than a little for themselves.

It is not new. After Sir John A. Macdonald's partner in Confederation, Sir George-Étienne Cartier, foolishly promised delegates from British Columbia a railway from Montreal to the Pacific, when they might easily have settled for a wagon road through the Rockies, getting the impossibly expensive project completed became a matter of national urgency. When Montreal's Sir Hugh Allan apparently found the capital for the Pacific Railway, was it Cartier's folly, the young Dominion's existence, or merely the Tory party that was saved? Thanks to the late Pierre Berton, most living Canadians know which version they have been taught. Still, Sir John A. had to get himself re-elected. The fact that Allan and a syndicate of American backers stood to make a lot of money was no voter's business until somebody burgled the office of Allan's solicitor, J.J. Abbott. Among the loot was a telegram to Allan from Macdonald that most historians can recite from memory: "I must have another ten thousand. Will be the last time of calling; do not fail me; answer today." Nestled beside it was Allan's prompt agreement.

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Most of our ancestors took political corruption for granted. "Responsible Government," the great symbol of our liberation from bossy British governors is a lot easier to understand if you realize that the real issue was who gave out government jobs in pre-Confederation Canada, appointed governors and their pals or real live elected Canadian politicians. Aren't we raised to cheer for the Canadians and their solemn right to fill the Post Office with their dim-bulb relatives instead of those of the Family Compact or the Chateau Clique? It also explains why the British view of Canada's freedom struggle often seems so huffy and self-righteous. How dare they protect us from our traditional duty to hand over our taxes to self-regarding fixers?

One continuing political reality of Canada is how tolerant of scandal most of us have really been. Yes, in 1991 British Columbians dumped Social Credit after a torrent of conflict-of-interest charges, and Saskatchewan voters rid themselves of Grant Devine's after learning how every Tory MLA had agreed to divert public funds to their own pockets. Two years later, the stink of sleaze helped cut Canada's historic Progressive Conservative party to a mere two seats in Parliament. In all three cases, acute economic problems are as good an explanation as an electorate with a conscience. So does the advent of ethics commissioners, conflict-of-interest codes and other long-sought and righteous reforms that provide political opponents and scandal-hounds with bench marks and loads of material to fling as charges. B.C. still holds the record as the only regime in the Commonwealth to send a serving minister to jail for corruption, though his party kept his seat at the next election. So has Ralph Klein, through a succession of personal scandals that would have terminated a lesser figure. One obvious reason was provincial prosperity. If Santa Claus is generous to everyone, who cares if he keeps a few gifts under the seat of his sleigh? On the other hand, appointing the austere Ted Hughes to preside over B.C. political ethics soon turned out to be the death of Social Credit in the province.

My own baptism in politics, the 1963 Ontario election, remains an object lesson. Outsiders might imagine that corruption would be an issue, after several Tory ministers had been tarred with insider deals that allegedly extended to organized crime. John Wintermeyer, the austere Liberal leader, thought so. So might the NDP, whose leader, Donald C. MacDonald, had tagged Tory after Tory at Queen's Park. Instead, after they read the few polls their party could afford, NDP managers banned even a word on the

J.W. Bengough from Montreal Gazette archives

In this famous political cartoon by J.W. Bengough, Sir John A. Macdonald cheerfully admits taking the famous $10,000 from Sir Hugh Allan, financier of the Canadian Pacific Railway, for his re-election campaign. "Both Macdonald and Allan knew that elections were not won by prayers, but by cash," writes Desmond Morton.

subject. MacDonald's reward, for a month of ill-concealed frustration, was a two-seat boost in support. Wintermeyer was personally driven from public life for being so mean and negative. Canadians don't like corruption or seeing their taxes squandered, but they can be as cynical about crusaders as they are about the corrupt. Ontarians hadn't forgotten the wild Liberal days of Mitch Hepburn.

That may be common sense. After all, is one gang really any better than the other? After the business-brokered deals that created the new Conservative Party, why would Harper Tories be purer than Chrétien or Martin Liberals? After the Pacific Railway Scandal helped drive Macdonald's Liberal-Conservatives out of office in 1874, we got Alexander Mackenzie's Liberals. The new prime minister exuded a starchy righteousness. He personally took up the Public Works portfolio, then as now, associated with slush, graft and patronage. Mackenzie even designed and built a special staircase in the Parliament Buildings so he could get to and from his office without being mobbed by job- and favour-seeking Liberals. Still, they were there because jobs and contracts went to Liberal Party loyalists as they had under the Conservatives. If there was less to give, was it frugality, honesty or a worldwide economic crisis that also closed down any and all Pacific Railway schemes and, by 1878, killed Sandy Mackenzie's government far more certainly than the Pacific Scandal defeated Macdonald?

When Sir John A. returned in 1878, he had a whole new shop of favours to offer party loyalists. Under his new National Policy, high tariffs favoured businesses that negotiated protection for their products and jobs for their workers. Notoriously, deals were made in the Red Parlour at Toronto's Queen's Hotel (now occupied by the Royal York) whenever Macdonald's ministers were in town. True, Macdonald showed more devotion to political purity. His customs minister, the future prime minister Mackenzie Bowell, Macdonald praised as being too stupid to be crooked.

Railways had been a source of political temptation since the first tracks were laid. Whatever their limitless benefit to the folks wherever they passed, building a roadbed and laying track cost money. Legislatures listened to favoured applicants and granted subsidies by the mile. Those ignored by a passing line could add to the clamour until, at added public cost, they were included on the line even if the resulting railway twisted a lot. Promoters also demanded land which would soar in value once the line was complete, yielding an added profit. Both Parliament and provincial legislatures competed to satisfy influential promoters and their political agents.

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Tom McGreevy was the son of a Quebec City blacksmith. Building the local customs house made Tom rich enough to hobnob with Macdonald's other Quebec lieutenant, Sir Hector Langevin. Soon, he belonged to the syndicate that quadrupled the cost of Canada's original Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. One of McGreevy's rewards was a lovely house in Quebec, built in the same yellow sandstone of the original Centre Block. Next, Tom became the MP for Quebec West and the Tories' Quebec treasurer. Contracting work was left to his brother, Robert. After they took in Robert as a partner, multi-million-dollar federal dredging contracts in Quebec City invariably went to the Larkin Connolly Company. Meanwhile, a public-spirited Tom set out to link Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec by a railway along the north shore of the St. Lawrence. It seemed a great idea, but quarrelsome politicians and municipalities added enormously to the cost.

By 1890, poor Tom had lost a million dollars in the line and made enemies of such rising Quebec Tories as, J.A. Chapleau and J. Israel Tarte, not to mention his ungrateful brother Bob. Desperate, McGreevy turned to Honoré Mercier's new National Liberal government for help. Success: they would vote him $800,000, if McGreevy would leave $300,000 in Mercier's coffers. Armed with McGreevy money and other graft, Mercier won the 1890 election; Macdonald's Tories won a fourth term in 1891. So did McGreevy and so did Tarte, but journalists noted the little black bag that never left his side. In May, 1891, he opened its flaps and revealed all the documents about railways and dredging and double-dealing that Liberal media needed to blow up Tarte's enemies in the Quebec Conservative party. By 1893, McGreevy had lost his seat, his fortune, even his freedom. Though a Liberal, Sir Richard Cartwright, insisted that McGreevy was "the most honest one of the bunch," Tom became one of the rare corrupt Canadian politicians to do jail time. Sir Hector, his patron and accomplice, merely resigned. Quebec West voters

returned Tom McGreevy to Parliament but he did not survive the Laurier landslide in 1896 and he died penniless.

Macdonald believed that gratitude was the only foundation for the strong party discipline traditional parliamentary government requires. Parties based on ideology had brought rebellions in 1837. Macdonald might deplore American politics, but hadn't Andrew Jackson, the first Democratic president, preached and practiced the principle that "To the victors belong the spoils"? If people wanted judgeships, post offices or a railway, they knew where to come and what arguments made a difference. If MPs. preferred their independence to caucus decisions, their constituents could reward their virtue at a price. If Nova Scotians resented Confederation even after Joseph Howe was brought to Ottawa, given better terms and a cabinet portfolio, lots of other federal patronage would bring them around, whether it was jobs on the federally owned Intercolonial Railway, or repairs to Halifax's Royal Navy dockyard. The precedent would be cited again for Quebec in the 1990s.

When Laurier brought the Liberals to power in 1896, prosperity was the most obvious reason why his government lasted until 1911, but so was a rigorous and thorough grasp of the same patronage game the Conservatives had played. Mackenzie's puritanism was not resurrected, if only because the obvious hypocrisy would have added to opposition fire. Liberals had learned patronage was part of the Canadian political system. True, Canada was part of an English-speaking world that periodically fell prey to strange moral enthusiasms like temperance or honesty in government. The so-called McGreevy Scandal had been exposed in part by a refugee from Tammany Hall who had exploited his skill by dipping into Ottawa's coffers. He earned so much that he went home, paid what New York authorities demanded and gained fresh fame by publicizing Canada's shame. The British press, naturally, copied with their own observations on colonial self-abuse.

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After three hungry terms in opposition. the Tories devoted the 1908 election to exposing a generous inventory of Laurier-era scandals. They included a Railways minister who doubled as a prominent Baptist layman, found in a Montreal hotel room with an "improper person," and Laurier's rollicking Minister of Militia, Sir Fred Borden, had played his fiddle at military mess dinners and did not always come home sober. The 1907 Tory "Halifax Program" talked of a civil service commission to end patronage, fighting greedy monopolies by nationalizing telegraph and telephone companies, and banning corporate political donations. Following contemporary muckraking styles in the United States, the Conservatives cited plenty of Liberal graft, extravagance and gross favouritism. The Liberals, of course, charged right back, including a Tory candidate who distributed whiskey under the label of "choice tomatoes."

For all the stink, the Liberals lost only three seats in 1908 and gained four in a bigger House. Frankly, voters liked Laurier better than his opponent, largely because they associated him with the longest period of prosperity most Canadians could then remember. "Work, Work, Work, Work" sang the Liberals, "Let Laurier finish his work!" Shades of the present, Quebecers identified attacks on corruption with attacks on them and on their first-ever prime minister. Laurier's Liberals swept the province.

The Conservatives' turn came in 1911. As eager as Mackenzie to clean up government, Robert Borden arrived from Halifax to find a mob of Tory office-seekers at the Ottawa station. They took the horses out of his carriage and joyously hauled him up to Parliament Hill to remind him who had brought him there. In the new cabinet, Borden found his colleagues as eager for the fleshpots as any Liberal. The Halifax reforms were forgotten as ministers set out to cleanse their departments of partisan Grits.

Borden would try again, and keep trying, especially after his 1917 Union government allowed him to unload Manitoba's notorious Bob Rogers and his old-fashioned wing of the Conservative party. Quebec's complex and virulent patronage battles were handed over to its Liberal wartime premier, Sir Lomer Gouin, in return for keeping his province quiet. In wartime, Borden accepted the US Progressive remedy for corruption — give power and responsibility to patriotic businessmen. Leaky boots and decrepit horses disappeared with a War Purchasing Committee; Sir Joseph Flavelle brought polished management skills from meat-packing to the huge and enterprising Imperial Munitions Board. Wartime secrecy and bipartisan responsibility buried the scandal of the Ross Rifle, adopted in 1901 by the Laurier Liberals, and pro-

Canadian Railway Museum, Montreal Gazette archives

In spite of the Pacific Scandal in 1873, Sir John A. Macdonald was returned to power in 1878 and remained in office until his death in 1891. Among other things, he saw the CPR through to its completion. With Lady Macdonald, he inspects the completed railway at Stave River, near Mission, BC, on July 24, 1886.

tected by the half-mad Tory militia expert, Sam Hughes. Civil service reform replaced party fidelity with competitive exams as the prime qualification for joining the public payroll.

None of it saved Borden, the Unionists or Arthur Meighen's Conservatives. By 1921, the Liberals were back under William Lyon Mackenzie King. Party affairs, he stubbornly insisted to the Progressives who kept his government in office, were none of his business. Deniability amid cabinet secrecy became King's best protection against a series of scandals. When Customs Minister Jacques Bureau was accused of allowing huge fortunes to be made as Canadian booze flowed into the Prohibition-bound United States, King hoisted him swiftly to the Senate. Amidst ensuing allegations, Progressive support drained away from the Liberals. King countered with a giveaway budget and an attempted dissolution that would allow his party to control the election machinery. In the famous but bewildering King-Byng affair, the governor-general, Viscount Byng, refused and gave Meighen a chance to govern. In the ensuing screaming match, hapless Progressives changed sides again, Meighen and Byng lost, and King won a new majority by denouncing Byng's meddling and, above all, reaping the benefits of belated postwar prosperity. Once again, scandal had failed to bounce a government.

Once again, of course, the Conservatives got their vengeance, four years later, in 1930. So did the Liberals. Being in power during the worst of the Great Depression kept Tories in the wilderness for twenty-two years. It also saved Mackenzie King from the Beauharnois Scandal, a well-documented case of lavish kickbacks to his party from developers intent on damming the St. Lawrence to generate hydro-electricity in competition with

Sir Herbert Holt's notorious Montreal Light, Heat and Power Co. Deniability saved King again; party managers took the blame. So did the equal involvement of Ontario's Conservative government. The scandal's chief contribution to Canadian memory was businessman R.O. Sweezey's delicate summation to a parliamentary committee of the whole history of political corruption: "... gratefulness was always regarded as an important factor in dealing with democratic governments."

When the Liberals returned to power in 1935, their very long reign coincided with the greatest tranquillizer foes of corruption have so far encountered: a dramatic and almost unbroken period of national prosperity. In a newly affluent Canada, mickeys of rum and ill-paid government jobs mattered to fewer and fewer Canadians in the poorest corners of the country. Few people even voted for the party that most consistently advocated for Canada's postwar welfare state, the CCF. The Liberals were good enough, and, as Reg Whitaker demonstrated in *The Governing Party*, much more obliging than Canada's socialists to the people who really paid for the governing Liberals. In 1957, just as postwar prosperity was starting to slip, voters played another dirty trick on the Tories and gave John Diefenbaker a minority followed by a huge majority in 1958 for promising even more money for the sick and elderly and for rural regions. He actually kept most of those promises but few noticed. When the Liberals returned to power in 1963, with a mere minority and an unexpected range of media-fed scandals, something like our contemporary scandal season played out in Parliament. Now-forgotten Liberal ministers bought bargain furniture; drug dealer Lucien Rivard pulled strings in Lester Pearson's own office, and Walter Gordon recruited Bay Street experts who could share the secrets of his revolutionary new budget. Desperate, the Liberals reported how a German call girl, Gerda Munsinger, had simultaneously serviced a Soviet attaché and Canada's associate minister of national defence, not to mention "Gorgeous George" Hees, Diefenbaker's minister of trade and commerce. Or was the scandal that the Liberals had spread such top-secret gossip?

Did scandals trap Pearson in a renewed minority in 1965? They certainly ruined his party's King-built reputation as an effortless public manager, and they paved the way for Pierre-Elliott Trudeau in 1968. A *Policy Options* study in June 2003 found, on the basis of what Pearson actually accomplished while the media and public were otherwise distracted, that he was the best prime minister we have ever had. His successor, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, may have been one of the worst. He alternately captivated and repelled Canadians. Whatever he meant by "participatory democracy" ended by 1972. Some of his arrogance rubbed off on colleagues like his attorney-general, Otto Lang, who raised a scandal when the air force flew his children's nanny back to Scotland. Convinced by his disastrous 1972 election that politics was not for adults, Trudeau reverted to old-fashioned tricks. He sneered at Bob Stanfield for proposing wage and price controls in 1974, and introduced them himself in 1975. With John Turner's pre-election 1974 budget, Trudeau cut income taxes and sent income transfers soaring, saddling Canadians with a deficit that kept us piling up debt until 1996. Was this electoral corruption? In a democracy where the sole public input is at election time, why not?

R. Macgregor Dawson used to tell his students that political morality in Canada was a regional phenomenon, most clearly demarcated by the Ottawa River. A bigger modern change is the transformation in the role and operations of government at all levels. "Civil service" rules have replaced patronage in filling routine government jobs in most jurisdictions but the expanding managerial and regulatory role of government has led to a vast multiplication of appointed boards, agencies and commissions. Since these reflect government policy as well as their strict statutory functions, agency management reflects the philosophy of the politicians in power as well as meeting familiar representational criteria of race, region, gender, language and age. When conservative governments promise "businesslike" efficiency, they fill boards and commissions with sympathetic business people. When Ed Schreyer's new NDP government took power in Manitoba in 1969, he broke with tradition by appointing lots of young working men and women who had never before played any role in public policy. When postwar prosperity opened Canada to renewed massive immigration, a massive bureaucracy of citizenship court judges and immigration appeal boards became a vast new source of government patronage and, to both critics and bigots, an equally large source of prejudice and incompetence. Was this corrupt or simply democratic?

The history of political corruption in Canada is easy to record and to denounce but only partisans and idealists find it easy to define. Its roots, as Sweezey confessed, rest in

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the admirable human quality of "gratefulness" and the more obnoxious quality of arrogance. Any study of corruption is meaningless or even deceitful, Professor Kenneth Gibbons adds, without serious thought about cures. "Throwing the rascals out" without replacing them with even bigger scoundrels simply encourages the victors to take up bad habits. Would Stephen Harper do a better job than Brian Mulroney in 1984 when he took over a Liberal-bred mess or will he, like Paul Martin, merely be waiting for Judge Gomery's report?

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A survey of Canadian members of parliament in the 1980s revealed that most Liberals and Conservatives had sought election for reasons of personal fulfilment; only the bulk of NDPers were driven by ideological goals. Canadians have consistently favoured non-ideological parties, capable of embracing just about any policy voters demand, particularly if it accords with enough of their wealthy backers to keep funds flowing into party coffers. Only Quebec and Manitoba have absolute bans on political donations from corporations and trade unions, and with Bill C-24, adopted as Chrétien was leaving office in 2003, Ottawa now has severe limits on what both organizations and individuals can give. The price has been growing taxpayer subsidization of political activity, at least for organizations that are judged to be competitive enough. Does that unfairly exclude new-entrants to political competition? They think so, while the established parties think that's fine.

A fashionable solution in the 1990s was a heavy new dose of ethics, imposed by commissioners, codes and ethics educators. In a secular age, this may be the best we can do to re-establish values once taught in Sunday School, but what are the rules? Will we punish public figures who treat them with contempt? Will we recognize innocence? Months after federal immigration minister Judy Sgro was forced to resign by allegations about a Rumanian exotic dancer and a Sikh businessman, those allegations were completely refuted, to the satisfaction of parliamentary ethics commissioner Bernard Shapiro. Was Sgro reinstated? Did she get more than a photo-op from the prime minister who fired her or an apology from the opposition leader and colleagues who had blackened her name? Did the media apologize for joining the lynch mob? No. No. No. And no. Why not? Our history, unrepentently, continues.

Desmond Morton is a professor of history at McGill University, founding director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, and author of 39 books on Canadian political, military and industrial relations history.