

The Lumpen Intelligentsia's Road to the New Normal

Gilles Paquet

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Matthew Crawford (2017)

Introduction

The “lumpen intelligentsia” is a term connoting pseudo-intellectuals. “Lumpen” means miscreant. It refers to a caste of self-selected mountebanks who pretend to have a more profound and gnostic understanding of society and democracy, whose prose is more ideological than scientific or literary, but who are living, as it were, in a pneumopathological world – a fantasy world of self-righteousness (Sibley 2013). This caste claims to know *le sens de l’histoire*: it is robustly doctrinaire, it sermonizes and reprimands in the name of their *fausses lumières*, and does not tolerate contradiction. Indeed, any narrative trying to insure that the caste’s views will prevail is based on the rule that the end justifies the means: this caste has been responsible for introducing *la canaille* into the world of public policy – dishonesty, pharisaism, etc. Despicable scelerateness is the trademark of that sect.

The impact of the “lumpen intelligentsia” has become immensely more toxic in the last half-century as it has found refuge in a number of universities where they have seemingly sought and found the protection of a new generation of less discriminating deans and presidents, mainly in arts and social sciences faculties, whom they have intimidated into submission to their diktats, less as a result of intellectual persuasiveness and more by threats of vicious denunciation as ideological simpletons.

From these *ateliers protégés*, members of the lumpen intelligentsia have propagated their venom with immunity, and have been allowed to commit any exaction and intimidation against those tempted to challenge their position. In recent decades, the prevailing gospel around which the lumpen intelligentsia has crystallized has been “progressivism” – a viral ideology that has gangrened many of our organizations and institutions, and has contributed to significant distortions in our social order. I have made this point forcefully in “The Perils of the Politics of Guilt” (Paquet 2017 a) and “*Le virus de progressisme*” (Paquet 2017b).

Members of this caste, previously corralled in various leftist tribes, have recently rebranded themselves as ‘progressivists’, have sermonized the citizenry in the name of ‘historical

necessity', and have appointed themselves as the only group capable of decoding the sense of history properly. They have also cursed, with ever greater impatience, the learning disabilities of those who refuse to join the parade of believers in the progressivist gospel. They have found it more and more painful and aggravating to put up with such resistance, and have begun to argue in favour of more expedient means to beat them into submission. Indeed, they have found it not only legitimate but morally defensible “*de prendre les grands moyens pour mettre au pas les retardataires*”.

All this contamination has occurred under the radar. It is only recently that progressivists have been the target of a modicum of criticism. In a recent book, Ryszard Legutko has exposed their more recent toxic push: their action to withdraw the guarantee of freedom of speech for those whose actions and interests are said to be hostile to what ‘true democrats’ (like themselves) contort as “the cause of freedom” (Legutko 2016: 20). This is a view permeated by a totalitarian fervour.

In a book review of Legutko’s volume, Matthew Crawford has perceptively concluded that “Legutko’s book will appeal to people who can point to no overt political oppression but who feel that the standards of acceptable discourse increasingly require them to lie, and to accept the humiliation of doing so” (Crawford 2017).

The silent surrender

The silent surrender of the public forum to the self-righteous intimidation by the progressivists may be characterized as an intellectual *déravage* of the narrative in good currency – from genuine third-party humanitarian concerns to the effluvia of totalitarianism. This has evolved in two phases – all this unfolding without much effective opposition because of the ‘deafening effect of political correctness’ which has degenerated into a congenital failure to confront intellectual fraud, and even to indulge in any critical examination of progressivists’ own unfounded assumptions.

The intellectual delinquency of the political debates in Canada may be said to have proceeded in two stages: Phase I corresponds to the drift from casualty to indignation, and Phase II the drift from envy to totalitarianism.

Phase I: the rise of indignation: victimhood, categorical victimizers, self-righteousness, entitlement, indignation

There was a time when the status of “casualty” was not sought after as a badge of honour: it was grieved as a curse, and fought as much as possible by citizens in difficulty.

Only an unbearable state of misery and squalor would lead citizens to throw their fate at the feet of other citizens for their survival – extended family, communities, churches, or civic arrangements of mutual aid created to deal collectively with such moments of difficulty. All families were expected to experience problems at one time or another during the life cycle as a result of disasters, big or small, and to imaginatively and courageously cope with them.

These situations were experienced by my grandparents, and despite setbacks and occasional mini-dramas, they and their *prochains* invented improved collaborative arrangements of mutualisation to help them cope even with crises, either reactively through redistribution of resources amongst groups, or proactively through empowering their governments to run compensatory and precautionary policies.

Progressivists have redefined this sort of world by imposing on it a sort of newspeak: there are no casualties any longer but only *victims*. This has constituted a dramatic cultural change: the invention of a new moral contract of a sort between the various minorities likely to suffer casualties and the rest of society. This came about as a result of experiences that showed that, if such minorities were regarded as victims of the rest of the population, it would ease the democratic conversations designed to trigger special treatment or transfers of all sorts from the rest of the population to them once they are identified as legitimate victims. This sleight of hand was meant to get the non-victim population to agree to being regarded as “implicit categorical victimizers”, and to accept such a role (Gottfried 2002: 15; Paquet 2017a: 187).

The dual stratagem of transforming casualties into victims, and of bestowing responsibility for guilt and compensation from the rest of the population as implicit categorical victimizers has led to a dramatic increase of persons trying to qualify as ‘victims’, given the relatively great ease of access to compensation, since implicit categorical victimizers were eager to serve.

However, in order for the new discourse of ‘victimhood’ to take root in the culture, this status had to be claimed with “an appropriate degree of self-righteousness”, and the pursuance of reparation had to be regarded as a matter of “entitlement” in societal circles. The whole situation had to be culturally reframed: from one where a person was regarded as a victim of circumstances, to one where a person is regarded as the victim of a victimizer who should be charged and asked to compensate the victims. This means that the victim is no longer asking for an act of kindness, but for an act of reparation for the violation of a right – a sort of legal entitlement.

This latter portion of phase I took a fair amount of time to crystallize. It was only later in the last century that the language of rights took hold of the culture (Ignatieff 2000, 2001), and later still when some citizens began to claim with a certain degree of vehemence their entitlement to reparation for the violation of these rights/entitlements. The epiphany of Phase I was the “indignation movement” when the so-called ‘victims’ came to openly take to the streets when progressively-minded governments failed to deliver on these claims of entitlements that they themselves had conspired to plant in the citizens’ imagination. This was a broad explosion worldwide (Indignés/Occupy).

Phase II: the drift to totalitarianism: envy, contempt, disingenuity, spite, totalitarianism

In part, the “*indignés* movement”, despite the decibel and annoyance levels, remained a protest against situations of victimhood which were not met with the promised atonement and

reparation. But it signaled a ratcheting up and a change in-kind of the toxicity of phase I forces into something different: it no longer fed recrimination ‘against situations only’, but recrimination ‘against specific persons and groups’ whose so-called unwarranted privileges were regarded as the cause of the whole painful situation. The lumpen intelligentsia injected into the souls of the *indignés* a “profound resentment” and “corrosive envy”. It was no longer simple jealousy or zeal to protect what one possessed, but discontent at another persons’ success, reputation, possessions, happiness, and for others’ successes to come to be regarded as the source of their own misery (Scheler 1958; Laurent and Paquet 1991).

In fact, the concurrent growth of dogmatic radical egalitarianism focused attention away from poverty, and shifted it toward inequality. By another sleight of hand, inequality became synonymous with injustice, and this happened at a time when the realities of the modern world did not necessarily generate the equability generally desired – the elimination of unacceptable inequalities (Paquet 2013).

A new language of denunciation, with a very personal twist that reeked of anger and contempt for the opposition, was brought forth. The lumpen intelligentsia used attacks that marshalled much sophistry and ‘disingenuous’ arguments like the attack on the 1% at the top of the income and wealth distribution, and marshalled the “new truthiness” that all inequalities are injustices. These sophistries led soon after to truly ‘spiteful’ and offensive personal attacks (Dupuy 1985; Paquet 2017b).

Indeed, the new language of squadrons of progressivists triggered a new form of class war, and a course of escalating blind violence against neighbours as anticipated so aptly in Norman McLaren’s 1952 short film, *Neighbours*, where toxic envy generates escalating violence between equals, leading to their mutual total self-annihilation.

More recently, progressivist language has gone one step further toward not only the legitimization of the use of destructive tactics in normal practice, but the dissemination and normalization of such activities. Universities have been the scene of most abominable attacks on free speech by self-righteous progressivists: the lumpen intelligentsia has been caught red handed not only harbouring and promoting totalitarian discourses but indulging in “totalitarian practices”, abuse of power, and acts of sabotage of free speech (Paquet 2017a, c).

The most depressing dimension of this process is the speed with which this contamination by the progressivist virus is spreading through the societal fabric. This is ascribable to two shameful betrayals of their burden of office by persons in authority and by the citizenry. In both cases, it is as a result of growing irresponsibility. In the first case, there has been a deplorable failure of those in authority to defend the sanctity of freedom of speech instead of submitting to the progressivist protection of the intimidators through systematic petit-Eichmanism. In the second case, there is the inertia of the citizen who has come to sheepishly accept the authoritarian edicts as a matter of willful blindness, learned helplessness, disinterest in the face of perspectives difficult to understand, and latent fear.

More significantly maybe, the toxic message of the lumpen intelligentsia has not only contaminated the universities, but it is already in the process of gangrening the political

discourse and political practices in contiguous public spaces at the local level. Here, the virus works by contagion and spreads through the media (Paquet 2017b). Indeed, this state of affairs is becoming the new normal.

The mustaches of political correctness and self-righteousness

The ten words we used to benchmark the ladder of the evolving *modus operandi* of the lumpen intelligentsia in carrying the progressivism debates from important third-party concerns to totalitarianism connotes a terrible success story to the extent that over the last 60 years:

- a doctrinaire ideology has succeeded in distorting the common public culture, while neutering any corrective or critical counter-balancing action;
- with the use of political correctness as a constable to sanitize the public discourse; and
- to prevent a number of key questionable notions from being critically probed, and certain toxic mechanisms from being exposed.

In phase I, the central subterfuge has been the progressivist invention of the new notions of victim and implicit categorical victimizer to harness the imaginary entitlements epidemic created by egalitarianism in our rights society. By defining *le prochain* as victim, and persuading the rest of society that they are guilty victimizers, the lumpen intelligentsia has legitimized the emergence of a “nation of self-righteous takers” and “a parallel nation of would-be righteous sinners, injected with apprehended guilt, who are willing to ‘make a show of good conscience by apologizing for collective sins and exhorting the state to enact compulsory penance’” (Eberstadt 2012; Gottfried 2002: 95; Paquet 2014: 141).

The unintended consequence of this unbounded entitlements and rights epidemic, and of the erasure of any scintilla of responsibility in the victims for their own fate, has led to:

- the toxic impact of the virus of egalitarianism and progressivism (Paquet 2017b);
- the undue confusion of inequality and injustice;
- the displacement of the more reasonable concerns for equability (Paquet 2013); and
- the occlusion of the central concern for poverty by the theatrics of inequality in the public policy discourse.

In phase II, the subterfuge has been to establish the unintended consequences of radical egalitarianism and progressivism as the foundation of the new gospel of entitlement and guilt. Once these reference points have come to be regarded as absolutes, the urge to operationalize and to implement what has been ordained as the only right way has driven the zealots irreversibly into general intolerance for the delays in accepting this new faith. As long as this intolerance materialized only as a reaction to disembodied resistance, and were directed to disembodied entities, it remained a bloodless affair. When the resistance became personalized, we were thrust into the bloody world of Norman McLaren: the world of contempt, disingenuity, spite, and envy-driven destruction and murders.¹

¹ This short film (8mins, 6secs) of Norman McLaren (*Neighbours*) was produced by The National Film Board of Canada in 1952, and won an Oscar. Two men live peacefully in adjacent cardboard houses. When a flower blooms

This is the world in which ideology gets the zealots to rationalize all sorts of infamies, and where *le sens de la mission* completely overshadows and dominates any sense of the burden of office: as when, a moment ago, an editor in chief of an Ottawa daily proudly claimed that he had willfully disinforming for the Montfort cause; a deplorable university officer whimsically ordered the defunding of this journal she did not approve of by declaring it unworthy; a set of other despicable university officers imposed on a younger colleague the slanted version of truthiness she would only be allowed to teach; a prime minister imposed on institutions the requirement to officially declare their support of abortion in order to qualify for the funding of student summer work programs; local government officials connived to get rid of a probing citizen-based ombudsman's office, etc. And nowhere did citizens or other officials made aware of such shenanigans ever rise to denounce those infamies.

The main reasons those infamies remained unchecked is the significant demise of critical thinking over the last while (Paquet 2014):

- first, the sanitization of the public discourse by political correctness, which has been become the major enemy of free speech, according to Judge Sopinka;
- second, and probably more toxic, has been the growth of self-righteousness that has further and more aggressively rigidified social intercourse, and hardened social exchanges in the forum; and
- third, political correctness putting certain words outside the vocabulary in use in the public realm of discussion, while self-righteousness was putting certain issues outside the circle of debatable issues in the forum. This dual form of words and issues prevented from being acknowledged in the public forum has amounted to making certain words and issues out of bounds – out of the realm of discussable matters, thereby immunizing them from any appraisal.

As a result, the 'new' normal in public discourse has become “the use of condemnable means according to Canadian mores” – the very definition of corruption – preventing words from being used, issues from being appraised, and allowing unhealthy situations to proceed unstopably without the mechanics of corruption being explored, without the bad faith of participants being exposed, without the collusions being brought to light. All along this chain of reasoning – from victimhood to terrorism – gangrene has materialized because clear words were not used, and self-righteousness was not frontally challenged.

Conclusion

I have explained elsewhere (Paquet 2017b) the sort of gangrene that ensues for institutions where the new normal is infamy, and I have explained why some vast operation of

between their houses, they fight each other to the death over the ownership of the single small flower. The version of *Neighbours* that ultimately won an Oscar was not the version McLaren originally created. In order to make the film palatable for American and European audiences, McLaren was required to remove a scene in which the two men, fighting over the flower, murdered the other's wife and children. Pablo Picasso called this the greatest film ever made (Wikipedia).

cleansing and decontamination of “these new Augean stables of the mind” are in order. But this is not happening, because critical thinking has come to be so clearly discouraged and defamed that it has become a shadow of what it used to be in earlier times. Those in authority no longer hesitate to indulge in condemnable activities and intimidation tactics, and the citizenry has adopted *la soumission* as a sort of voluntary servitude, *une sorte d’accommodement déraisonnable* – borrowing the *modus operandi* of the three monkeys (see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing) as a recipe for peace of mind.

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The Sena's lumpen behaviour triggered a quick response from the ICC, now headed by Pakistani legend Zaheer Abbas. The ICC withdrew Pakistani umpire Aleem Dar from the ongoing India-South Africa series, citing a threat to Pakistani nationals. Wasim Akram and Shoaib Akhtar dropped out of the commentary team and left India. Abbas also put a question mark over Pakistan's participation in next year's WorldT20 championship in India. Few countries are willing to tour Pakistan due to the violence there. The Sena has allowed the ICC to draw a parallel between Pakistan and India. The Sena's political ba