

Letters

National Post

Tuesday, August 13, 2002

Andrew Coyne asserts that I have changed my position regarding the federal Progressive Conservatives since the leadership race (The Three Faces of Steve, Aug. 12). This is simply incorrect.

First, I ran for the leadership of the Canadian Alliance because I believe our party is viable, strong and capable of moving forward with or without the Tories. In fact, we continue to regain strength and are preparing for the next election. It is this position of strength and confidence that allows us to reach out to the PCs in the wider interests of conservatism and the country.

Second, I said that we should not repeat the United Alternative exercise, an energy- and time-consuming process that, at the end, still leaves us with two parties on the ballot. The proposals I have made to the PCs require both parties to commit to the goal and to act decisively and successfully.

Finally, I said that because any amalgamation of the parties approved by grassroots members would invariably create a genuine conservative party, the only real resistance would come from left-of-centre ideologues within the federal Tory party. Now that the opportunity presents itself, we will see whether such resistance within that party can ever be overcome.

Stephen Harper, Leader, Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance.

Throwing more public money at legal aid might improve the wages of some lawyers but it is unlikely to improve the "access to justice" problem experienced by the majority of Canadians (Lawyers Sue For Additional Legal Aid, Aug. 12). Legal aid is available only to the destitute. Most people who represent themselves are not eligible.

Though lawyers prefer to deflect responsibility elsewhere, the "access to justice" problem is rooted primarily in the practices of the legal profession where hourly rates and billable minutes have become an obsession.

The legal profession has effectively sold itself to the highest bidders and in my view there is no reward for efficiency. The ultimate cost of litigation is unforeseeable and potentially ruinous. Canadians of modest means can ill-afford to risk becoming trapped in an arrangement where they have no control over expenses.

The situation is particularly grave where a person of modest means faces a legally-aided litigant. The legally-aided have nothing to lose by intransigence and they have no incentive to accept a reasonable offer to settle because they are effectively immune from any order for costs that might be made against them.

If "access to justice" is a fundamental right for everyone, then lawyers need to work to reduce the elitism within the profession and guarantee that truly affordable representation is available to all Canadians, including the vast majority stuck in the middle between the destitute and the rich.

Elisabeth Beattie, Ottawa.

Re: How to Pick Judges, editorial, Aug. 10.

Vic Toews' idea that Supreme Court nominees should pass the scrutiny of a parliamentary committee

is a good one. But even then, the party in power could manipulate committees. A committee system would do much to improve transparency but only a little to curb prime ministerial power.

Look to the provinces to safeguard against a prime minister stacking the bench. We have nine justices and five regions (Quebec, Ontario, B.C., Atlantic Canada and the Prairie provinces). Allow each region to select one justice and the federal government to select the other four. No single man could ever appoint a majority of justices.

Peter Enns, Victoria, B.C.

Re: U of T Profs Attack Israel for 'Atrocities,' Aug. 10.

Your article suggests that Professor Sherene Razack, director of the Centre for Integrative Anti-Racism Studies at OISE/University of Toronto, was speaking on behalf of the University of Toronto in a letter circulated with a pro-Palestinian resolution. In fact, Ms. Razack was not writing as an official U of T representative. Her letter, which was misquoted in the article, read: "In the context of the current atrocities perpetrated against the Palestinians by the Israeli state and army, we, Canadian scholars meeting at the First National Conference on Critical Race Scholarship and the University, find it imperative to stand up and denounce these crimes against humanity and to call for action from our colleagues and professional organizations."

The university is committed to academic freedom for all scholars and that commitment is exemplified in a letter the president has written to the Canadian Jewish Congress with regard to another issue raised in your article: the petition for a boycott of Israeli Scholars. President Robert Birgeneau's letter states that the university will not support a boycott of Israeli or any other scholars.

Shirley Neuman, Acting President, Vice-President (Academic) and Provost, University of Toronto.

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