

En français, SVP!

Apparently, you can't be funny in English in Quebec



DON
MACPHERSON

commented upon beyond the entertainment pages.

Sugar Sammy brought together an audience of young Montrealers, English-speaking as well as French-speaking, confident enough of their ability to understand the other language to buy tickets to a bilingual show. That audience, I wrote after one of the first shows, provided "a glimpse of a possible brighter future in Quebec."

This week, the nominations for Quebec's Olivier awards for humour in 2012 were announced, and Sugar Sammy received three, including one for the Olivier of the year.

His other two nominations were for best writing and best show — but they weren't for You're Gonna Rire.

Rather, they were for his other show, En français SVP!

This latter show sold fewer tickets for 2012 (19,000, plus about 40,000 more so far for this year), was more conventional and lacked the significance of You're Gonna Rire.

But as its name implies, En français SVP! was in French only. It consisted of essentially the same material as the bilingual Montreal show, with the English translated into French for a tour of the French-speaking regions of the province.

The far more successful and significant bilingual show wasn't eligible for the Oliviers under the rules of the Quebec humour industry professionals' association, APIH, precisely because it was bilingual.

Or rather, You're Gonna Rire was ineligible because it was in English in addition to French.

Had the show been in gibberish, sign language or mime as well as French, there would have been no problem. Olivier Rule 5.21 restricts



JOHN KENNEY/THE GAZETTE FILES
Sugar Sammy is nominated for three Olivier awards.

eligibility to "products funded and created in Canada and having been presented in the French language or in a language that is invented or consists of visual effects including no words, or very few."

So, at least as far as the humour professionals are concerned, you can't be funny in English in Quebec.

The rule isn't necessary to protect Quebecers against competition from a big-time

touring standup comic such as Chris Rock or Louis C.K.; Rule 5.20 restricts eligibility to Canadian citizens or residents, although they don't have to live in Quebec.

And other entertainment awards recognize that there can be such a thing as Quebec culture in English.

For example, the recording industry association, ADISQ, gives one of its Félix awards for the English-language album of the year.

Sugar Sammy's nomination for the Olivier of the year may be tacit recognition of the significance of You're Gonna Rire.

The humour association's board of directors also has the discretionary power to award him an "exceptional Olivier."

But that award has been given out only twice in the 15-year-old history of the Oliviers, to mark the 30th year of touring for the stage comedy Broue and the 20th anniversary of the École nationale de l'humour.

"QUEBEC'S WAR ON ENGLISH" IN TIME MAGAZINE

— and it's not only about Pastagate. See The Don Macpherson Quebec Angle at montrealgazette.com/donmacpherson

(Yes, we have a publicly funded comedy college. No, Sugar Sammy isn't a graduate.)

"So, maybe, in 15 years, we can take a look," laughed Francine Dubois, the director general of the association. "But (right now) it's a bit premature."

Funny, that's what some people said about a bilingual standup comedy show in Montreal in 2012.

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Volunteers make the world a better place

BEATA LEVINE

I have always believed, as St. Francis of Assisi said, that "it is in giving of oneself that one receives."

In fact, these are words that I live by.

At 66 years young, I can say I have lived a wonderful life of privilege. I have my health and have had a supportive husband, Joe, for 45 years. I have children, grandchildren, incredible friends and good fortune. Yet there is another dimension to my life that fulfils me in a different way. And that is my life as a volunteer.

Ever since I was 15 years old, volunteerism has been a part of my life. I began as a candy striper, or someone who volunteers for non-medical tasks, at St. Mary's Hospital. Over the years, I have volunteered in a wide variety of organizations. Volunteer work has always been about self-fulfillment and helping the broader community. The two have always gone hand-in-hand, and this stands true even today as I find myself halfway across the world volunteering yearly deep in the African savannah.

My volunteer life grew with leadership roles in the home and school association at my children's school, and as an animator for seniors' groups. I continue to work as a Vcop, or volunteer citizen on patrol, in the city of Côte-St-Luc. And I have travelled



Beata Levine volunteers in Zimbabwe. The 66-year-old Côte-St-Luc resident has been volunteering since she was 15.

abroad to Israel to work on an army base through the Sar-El program.

With numerous other volunteer positions under my

belt, I realize that nothing has touched me in quite the same way as my past three years of volunteer experience in Africa.

There is something unique about the hands-on experiences I have had in Africa, connecting with its people, land and magical wildlife. I

feel as though I am making a remarkable difference in the projects I work on — both in Africa and here in Montreal.

At the present time, I am

advocating for Basecamp Maasai Brand, which empowers disadvantaged women's groups. Among other things, I make connections with local fair-trade retailers here in Montreal who can sell their crafts. I have also co-ordinated a very exciting pen pal project between Olesere School in Kenya and Akiva School in Westmount. I will be going to Africa again later this year to embark upon a new project, the Victoria Falls Lion Conservation Volunteer Project, at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. I can hardly wait!

Volunteering has always been a great way to meet new friends from different parts of the world and diverse paths of life. Through email and social media, we stay in touch and share our concerns. Through the connections I have made with my fellow volunteers, I have learned that dedication and passion to a cause always makes a difference.

It has been a humbling experience working with the African Impact program for the past three years. I have grown to love so much more than my own small world. Volunteering has given me back so much in return. I have purpose in my life, a great deal of pride and a sense of self-fulfillment.

My only hope is that I can impress upon others how personally enriching it is to look beyond oneself and try, through volunteering, to make this world a better place.

Why the temporary foreign workers controversy is mostly a fraud



ANDREW
COYNE

Reacting to the media firestorm over a Royal Bank subcontractor's use of temporary foreign workers, Immigration Minister Jason Kenney was unequivocal. "The rules are very clear," he said. "You cannot displace Canadians to hire people from abroad."

Yes, indeed. In fact, they're even clearer than that. You can hire people from abroad, even at the cost of Canadian jobs, as long as they stay abroad: It's called outsourcing, and it's a broadly accepted practice. You can also hire people from abroad, if they move here to live. That's called immigration, and is also broadly accepted. If, on the other hand, you hire people who fall between the two — who work

here but live abroad — then it's a scandal. What could be clearer?

But of course, this isn't really about the rules, or Royal Bank, or even temporary foreign workers. The bank itself, as it has been at pains to point out, didn't hire any of the prohibited aliens: iGate, the Indian company to which it outsources much of its back-office work, did. Notwithstanding Kenney's efforts to pile on, it's not clear iGate broke any rules: As it later emerged, it proceeded with the government's approval in the form of a favourable Labour Market Opinion — rightly so, it would seem, since iGate wasn't laying anybody off.

For that matter, it's not even clear RBC is: The bank insists it is trying to find other jobs for the 45 employees to be replaced. Of the 21 workers iGate has on the job, meanwhile, only one is here on a temporary foreign worker

visa — though, confusingly, 13 others are company employees here on other types of visas. But whatever else is unclear about these temporary foreign workers, what is clear is that they are here to do temporary foreign work: preparing for the transfer of IT operations from RBC's Investor Services subsidiary to iGate's facilities in India.

That, surely, is the point. If there is a loss of Canadian jobs here, it lies in the permanent shift of work to India, not the six months of transitional arrangements that preceded it — which would logically be carried out by the recipient operation in any event. If you're upset about the use of temporary foreign workers, you should be at least as upset about outsourcing. Which, one suspects, is in fact what this is about.

But then, if you're upset about outsourcing, you should really be just as opposed to imports generally.

Whether a company pays a foreign supplier for services, or sources its parts abroad, or buys consumer goods for resale here, it's all work that could have been, and often is, performed by Canadians. You're outraged that temporary foreign workers are putting Canadians out of jobs? So are permanently foreign workers.

But it isn't only foreign workers putting Canadians out of jobs. So are other Canadian workers. Every time one company loses market share to another, jobs are lost — if not by layoffs at the declining firm, then by the labour-saving measures of its more successful competitors. All firms in competitive markets try to hire as few, and pay as little, as they possibly can; the fiercer the competition, the more ruthless they will be about it. That's true whether the competition comes from across the ocean, or across the road.

They do so, what is more, with your encouragement. Every time you shop around for a bargain, you contribute to that relentless search for efficiency, and the consequent loss of jobs. Yet even if you chose not to — or were prevented, as by tariffs, from doing so — that still wouldn't stop jobs from being lost. Pay higher prices, willingly or unwillingly, for one thing, and you are left with that much less to spend on others: The jobs saved in one area are jobs destroyed in another.

It would not save jobs, then, if companies were forbidden to lay people off. All it would do is make everyone poorer — as well as discouraging companies from hiring people in the first place. By contrast, what has been the effect of all this rampant downsizing, outsourcing and contracting out? Hundreds of thousands of people are laid off every year in Canada. Yet the proportion of the working age

population in employment, just before the recession, was at its highest level ever. So were real wages.

The temporary foreign workers controversy, in other words, is mostly a fraud. It harnesses crude xenophobia (don't foreign workers have rights, too?) in the service of opposition to outsourcing generally, itself merely a specific expression of a broader protectionism. In every case, the underlying supposition is the same: that some jobs can be saved by preventing others from being created; that jobs can long be preserved because of government fiat, rather than because it is in employers' interest to hire; that jobs, indeed, are a form of property, and not a contract between two willing parties. We may wish they were, but they are not.

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