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Sun News, the PQ and Pierre Karl Peladeau

THEO CALDWELL
REBEL COMMENTATOR

Newly minted Parti Quebecois leader Pierre Karl Peladeau has pronounced his animating ambition: to “make Quebec a country.” In this, he will fail – not just due to polls or because the window for separatism has closed, but because it is



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not in Peladeau's nature to succeed.

Politics is an excellent way for businesses to rid themselves of irksome executives. While corporate courtesy permits departing senior staff to claim they are simply itching for a new challenge or yearning to spend more time with their family, it is often the truth that the person was a disaster in need of defenestration. Peladeau, the erstwhile head of family-controlled Quebecor Inc., provides an object lesson in this principle.

Much has been made of Peladeau's tempestuous conduct and bizarre outbursts as CEO, including laying hands upon insufficiently loyal underlings. Add to this a negligible growth in real-dollar share value with very little dividend during his tenure – not to mention, spendy purchases of print publications just when the writing was on the wall for that industry – and it was time for Mr. Toad to find a new mania.

In short, you can't be this bad at your job and hold onto it, no matter how many shares your family owns.

And so, having caused sufficient damage in the private sector, Peladeau waddled into politics.

Peladeau also personifies an axiom of the careful investor: Never do business with rich kids. Having extraordinary capital of their own, they are often reckless with that of others. Moreover, they are so unaccustomed to being challenged that even the most benign discussion reverts to a quarrel akin to Francis demanding Pee-Wee Herman's bike for his birthday.

Many in professional life will be familiar with this type: the pampered, spoiled lightweight who imagines himself a tough guy for his ability to cow those whose paycheques he signs.

And Peladeau's corporate entourage consisted of precisely the sort who surround such men: dreadful little wretches in corduroy suits, scuttling along behind him, bragging to female colleagues about their access, utterly benighted to the emasculating nature of their role.

Remove a pretender like Peladeau from this comfort zone and he simply does not know how to behave. Consequently, while his captaincy of the PQ may prove entertaining, it will not, by his definition, be successful.



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LAUREN SOUTHERN

My personal experience with Peladeau comes by way of a professional detour on which I have not commented publicly until the writing of this paragraph. For a brief and misbegotten period some years ago, I was a Senior Anchor on Peladeau's nascent Sun News Network.

I have heretofore refrained from comment for a number of reasons. First, several of my colleagues there were and are friends. Further, a lot of good people watched and supported Sun, many of whom have stayed in touch with me and followed me to my radio program. Finally, not for nothing, I wasn't proud of my work there.

That is not to say I was not proud of my effort or that I compromised my principles; just that **the finished product was lousy television, even by Canadian standards.**

(http://www.therebel.media/canadian_tv_teachers_trains_more).

My role at Sun was to anchor a live, two-hour program during the afternoon, the first hour of which was re-broadcast during primetime. For those counting along at home, that means viewers were subjected to my mug for three hours every day.

As the last anchor hired, within weeks of Sun's scheduled launch, it was made clear to me, implicitly and explicitly, that I was invited on board because they had huge programming gaps to fill and needed someone who could talk as long as the red light stayed on.

This is precisely what I did, live, without writers or a script, often without guests, and without even a few seconds' delay, let alone editing, to cover any slips. For hours without respite, I was obliged to report and opine off the top of my head on matters ranging from the Middle East to financial markets to sports, politics, local news, etc.

Whether people enjoyed, or even remember, my contribution to Sun – not everyone can do that.

The challenge was compounded by ubiquitous opprobrium directed at the network in general, and in particular at those of us on the air. Nevertheless, I strove to make the most of the opportunity, reminding myself that the Beatles became what they were by performing 7-hour sets in unfriendly Hamburg bars before they even knew how to play their instruments.

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ANDREW LAWTON

Sun News, the PQ and Pierre Karl Peladeau

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DAVID MENZIES

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Moreover, I made it my business to stick up for my colleagues and the rest of the station, figuring we were all in this together. Demonstrably, Peladeau and his coterie of homunculi did not feel the same way.

Much as I would prefer to say my differences with Sun were high-minded matters of principle, pertaining to editorial direction and such, our chief squabble came about because they didn't pay me.

To be clear, it wasn't that they didn't pay me enough, or that I had agreed to work pro bono; rather, when everyone else received their paycheques, I did not. This went on for weeks, and then months, with insouciant, vague explanations coming from the management.

It was not a life-changing amount of money, and I had simply accepted the first contract they offered me without negotiation. Even so, as I emaciated myself with effort and sacrificed what little reputation I had to the cause (going from zero to Hitler just by having my name associated with Sun), it honked me off that they could not bestir themselves to pay me the little I was owed.

Ultimately, I was informed that my invoices were still on Peladeau's desk, as he insisted on reviewing every expense personally and deciding which bills would be paid.

Again, only a cosseted twerp like Peladeau would imagine that even after a contract is signed, and a guy is busting his hump to make a project work, you can still withhold payment just to show everyone who's boss.

Peladeau's initial, poorly considered notion was that his flagging newspapers would be aided by a television outlet, supposing that if people could see print reporters, they would be more inclined to pay for their prose.

When this proved untenable, Peladeau switched to Sun's familiar and tiresome "everyone's out to get us" routine, blaming everyone from the CRTC to Stephen Harper's staff to aficionados of interpretive dance for the station's failures.

Further to that last cohort, having determined dyspeptic controversy to be Sun's meal ticket, Peladeau was tickled pink (if the man were capable of being tickled, which I highly doubt and have no desire to discover empirically) by



the unpleasantness that descended upon my colleague, Krista Erickson, after her infamous interview with subsidy-sucking performer, “Swan Hands” Margie Gillis.

As history records (for those who consider the vicissitudes of Canadian specialty cable to be "history"), the interview became contentious and, in the aftermath, the chronically aggrieved and otherwise unoccupied "arts community" mobilized against Krista as though she had canceled *Glee*.

Even as he and the station offered no public defense of Krista, Peladeau enthused to her, “Keep going, we'll get them!"

Whomever "them" meant, Peladeau didn't specify. Indeed, at Sun, there was always a "them" against whom we were to rage. Half the country was Emmanuel Goldstein. It was exhausting, both to broadcast and to behold.

As to the mandatory carriage issue, whereby Sun pleaded with the CRTC to force subscribers across Canada to pay for the channel, it cannot be said often enough that Peladeau et al. took directly opposing positions on this matter as it suited their purposes.

At first, when they imagined the station would be a blockbuster success, they mocked the very idea of mandatory carriage. When it became clear, however, that no amount of Suzuki-bashing and Justin Trudeau prizefights could save the enterprise, they insisted it was unfair not to grant Sun a guaranteed income stream, on the risible basis that CBC and CTV had received similar treatment decades before.

It wasn't honest, and it is astounding that Peladeau and Sun management could undertake such a blatant reversal without a trace of irony.

Simply put, if Sun were good, people would have watched it. The channel was available in 5 million homes, yet garnered only a few thousand viewers.

When we launched, in April of 2011, the news channel appropriated an Over-The-Air (OTA) signal that had previously been granted to SunTV, a largely unwatched outlet for syndicated shows. In this form, we were available all over, on basic cable, cozily nested in the low channel range. Add to this the national press we received, good and bad, with friends and antagonists eagerly awaiting our debut. Despite all that, we attracted perhaps 50,000 viewers at our very best. And even these numbers were suspect.



Early on, I was shown promotional material for prospective sponsors which purported to indicate viewership for Sun's primetime shows. The numbers, however, were considerably higher than the raw figures I had previously seen.

By and by, it became apparent management had added viewers of repeat broadcasts together – for example, the numbers for Ezra Levant's 5pm and 8pm shows were combined to give the impression that all those people had been watching in a single hour. When I asked about this, I was told the goal was to give advertisers "a taste of Ezra" which, besides conjuring images I could have lived without, did nothing to address the shoddy math.

The simple truth is that Sun News was mind-bendingly bad television, and only a dysfunctional crew led by the likes of Peladeau could have thought it would catch on. In the process, Peladeau and his intimates provided an astounding demonstration of thumbless cynicism.

It is much to be expected, and hoped, that Peladeau will bring that same reverse-Midas touch to his new post.

A PQ leader lacking vision, integrity and basic interpersonal skills is nothing new (indeed, these traits seem part of the job description), and it augurs well for the future of this nation.

To wit, those who love Canada should take comfort that those who wish to dismantle the country are led by the guy who brought you Sun News.

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