



Red Coalition puts teeth into fight against racial profiling

OPINION

« The battle is real, the victims are real, and it takes key people in the right place...»



The justice system is skewed in favor of wearing down victims of racial profiling seeking justice, says Mastromonaco (right) with Cosimo La Rosa, RC director of racial profiling Alain Babineau and DeBellefeuille.

BY JOEL CEAUSU THE SUBURBAN

The Red Coalition has bolstered its toolbox of community resources and added voices to its team fighting the scourge of racial profiling. The anti-racism group’s new Lawyers Against Racial Profiling (L.A.R.P) program will serve as a go-to hub for members well-versed in the complicated landscape of racial profiling. Attorneys are often victims’ first line of defense, and L.A.R.P will recruit practicing attorneys in Quebec, offering membership across Canada. “The battle is real, the victims are real, and it takes key people in the right place,” says RC executive director Joel DeBellefeuille.



Red Coalition puts teeth into fight... Continued

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To that end, the Coalition has added prominent Montreal legal voices to its team, with criminal lawyer Ralph Mastromonaco and court bailiff and professor Cosimo La Rosa joining the board of the anti-racism advocacy group. DeBellefeuille told The Suburban at an event also attended by representatives of the West Island Black Community Association and attorneys from Montreal firm Grey Casgrain, that the Coalition is often asked for lawyer referrals by victims of racial profiling and discrimination, a regrettably burgeoning sector of practice that requires a full court press by the legal community.

He says many accuse victims of using the “race card” and to “just let police do their job” not understanding that pride, self-worth, and dignity play a role in people’s actions and responses.

Mastromonaco agrees, saying from the moment racialized persons are intercepted by police in the street, a clear power imbalance prevails and continues into courts as police and police departments benefit from well-funded legal representation. “Our justice system is complicated, slow, and expensive. It is skewed in favour of wearing down victims of racial profiling seeking justice.” He says attorneys too often enter “guilty plea after guilty plea” for quick, profitable resolution. “Lawyers don’t just need to find racists, they need to prove racism, and it’s a big difference. Fighting racism and discrimination? You can’t make money in that...But we’re telling young lawyers ‘Don’t listen to the prosecution, only the judge can tell you you’re wrong.’” He says LARP can embolden young attorneys, “to file cases, walk into court, fierce, to defend their client.”

The Red Coalition will offer continuing legal education courses recognized by the Barreau du Québec counting towards obligatory training hours, of particular interest to lawyers adhering in the LARP project working systemic racism or racial profiling files. “The government is out to lunch,” said Mastromonaco. “All we hear from politicians are hollow high-minded words... Fight the cases,” he said. “Win in court.” DeBellefeuille reminded that “the provincial government had one job to do, protecting each person equally and respectfully, no matter their faith, colour, creed, gender, or ethnicity.”

Instead, multiple roadblocks have arisen: No movement on the Montreal administration’s three-year-old pledge on police body cameras (a week after the slaying of George Floyd); the Legault government appealing the October 2022 Luamba decision invalidating Section 636 of the Highway Safety Code providing legal cover for stopping drivers without reasonable and probable cause; and most recently, Montreal Police Director Fady Dagher rejecting the central, crucial recommendation of the SPVM’s commissioned report – for an immediate street check moratorium – accompanied by near-silent obeisance by the civic authority.

That confirms Mastromonaco’s contention that politics gets in the way of justice “and law lags behind the society it is intended to serve.”

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