

*Gatineau Monde lecture series***Richard Le Hir opposes shale gas and immigration****Reuel S. Amdur**

Richard Le Hir says that there are two kinds of entrepreneurs, builders and predators. Builders, he explained, create, add value. He lists himself among the builders and Robert Desmarais, Charles Sirois, and Henri-Paul Rousseau among the latter group. He has written books about them to "prove" his point.

Le Hir has had a career as a lawyer and corporate official, especially in the energy sector. From 1989 to 1994, he was President-Director General of the Quebec Manufacturers Association. He served in Jacques Parizeau's cabinet.

On March 5, in a wide-ranging talk, he addressed Gatineau Monde on the topic "The Confrontation between the Common Good and Private Interests."

While Le Hir happily attacked Desmarais, Sirois, and Rousseau, he said that the question of integrity is institutional rather than individual. He called on institutions, including corporations, to be socially responsible. He noted that corporations are not prepared to invest in decontamination of the soil, presumably not corporations with which he has been associated either. In passing, he observed that the Caisse Desjardins is losing its role in promoting social solidarity.

Le Hir is a protectionist who claimed that mondialization is on the wane. As an example of the evils of mondialization, he gave an example from his personal experience. As a lawyer, he was instructed by a New York clothing manufacturer to negotiate a collective agreement with a union in the Beauce, with remuneration to be for piecework. He told his client that such an arrangement would not be acceptable to a union here, but they told him to try. When as

expected there was no acceptance, he asked for further instructions. The answer: never mind, we'll go to Malaysia.

Mondialization brings in big corporations and destroys local enterprises, he argued. In NAFTA, the US decides and Canada goes along. Instead of mondialization, he favors controls on trade to favor development and sustainability of national commerce.

Richard Nadeau pointed to the massive exports to the United States, making us heavily dependent. How, he asked, could Canada go it alone? Le Hir reiterated what he said about the invasion of American enterprise.

With working experience in the energy sector, Le Hir opposes shale gas exploration and horizontal drilling. With a conventional vertical oil well, if something goes seriously wrong the consequences are relatively local. Not so with horizontal processes, which entail serious environmental risk. He is specifically against Pauline Marois' plans for exploration on Anticosti Island.

Le Hir asserted that there is too much immigration today. In the 1960's, he said, immigration was a plus. Today, it is a burden, as this current bunch of immigrants is not assimilable. Rather than contributing to society, they go on welfare. How, then, can Quebec meet the demographic challenge of an aging population? "Have more babies," he said.

Richard Le Hir at Gatineau Monde

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