

# Politics

By Jim-beau Lieyeah

Jan.20 – What is *gonzo* and why do I use it? These are good questions that need to be addressed. Certainly, it is a character out of the Muppets but it is not the inspiration behind what I try to put together. I guess the originator of the term was Hunter S. Thompson, who used it to describe his journalistic style. I admit to being a fan of Thompson as I find his work engages the reader and provokes a reaction, which often times, in my case anyway, is laughter. When someone is able to do these two things then, regardless of the medium, it becomes art (or at least in my eyes). Do I attempt to do this, yes, but the operational word is “attempt” which is a very difficult goal to attain but as my friend Fish says, “when you reach for the moon, you get the stars.” All cheese aside, I believe that you have to strive for heights; otherwise, you are just going through the motions.

So engaging and provoking a reaction lie at the crux but there is another important element involved. Leo Cheverie, who has a long time association with UPEI newspapers, best, in my mind, described it when he called it, “a stream of consciousness.” This is apt because when I write, it is a reactive process to things around me. I hope to produce a snapshot of perspective on a freeze frame of time. That is why I date my articles as well as the fact that a certain lapse time occurs with the paper that holds the potential of dating my article. So that is, in a sense, what *gonzo* means to me, the writer.

This week one event caught my eye, which I want to take up space on with my own

interpretation. That is the fallout from a defamation suit that Alliance Party leader and Leader of Her Royal Majesties Loyal Opposition Stockwell Day must endure. So without further adieu....

WHAT DOES \$792,000 BUY IN ALBERTA?

Day has survived a libel suit from his days as a member of the Alberta legislature. Basically, the story goes that he wrote a letter to a newspaper in which he vaguely accused a criminal lawyer of sharing the same radical views as the defendant.

The first thing that springs to mind is what the hell is he doing accusing a lawyer of anything in print? This goes beyond a lapse of judgment into the realm of pure stupidity. A criminal lawyer chooses that profession because they either believe in justice for all, love big cash, or enjoy the luxury of turning on and off ones conscious. Which is fine because we all make choices for our own reasons.

But, good morning Mr. Day, it does not matter what kind of lawyer you take a shot at it in press, they will come a calling with some lawsuit that will compensate them for this slur. To think that this slid through his staff and advisors means that they are all libel in a sense and makes you wonder how top notch his team is. But the real stir is this.

In Alberta, they have set up an interesting thing for politicians, which I commend. Basically, it is an insurance fund that politicians have access to

when they are facing some legal action. It is good because it removes the onus on the public servant of raising money to defend oneself for if they had to do this then who knows what kind of deals they would make to raise the necessary legal money. The fund is proactive in that it takes the person out of a possible awkward position, which holds potentials for abuse in check. Day used this parliamentary legal fund, as is his right. But...

Albertans are big on financial accountability. This is reflected in their governments, which tend to be the most conservative (or right of the political center) in how they handle their finances. Alberta, with a lot of help from booming energy revenues (compliments of us, the consumer), was a leader in deficit busting and paying down debt. To highlight this point, the debt, by Alberta law, will be paid off entirely within 25 years (although presently the government has over \$13 billion in assets to cover the total debt of \$12.5 billion thanks to the rainy day Heritage Fund), if things stay relatively the same. So when the bill came in for Day's legal defense of \$792,000 (of which \$474,000 was billed legal expenses) Albertans, both in and out of government, raised their eyebrows then their lips. They aren't happy and believe that, at the very least, Day should choke up some of that dough. But he has been very reluctant. So what does all this mean?

Day is under some serious pressure for failing to make the strategic electoral breakthrough in Ontario. This overshadows the fact that he increased his parties

overall total of the vote and parliamentary representation. But some, in his party, believe that the breakthrough failed because Day's morality scared people away. And they may be right. But you get what you pay for most of the time. He wanted an election and he got it. Though experienced in Alberta politics and a veteran of a national campaign to win a federal party, he was not prepared for the intense spotlight that goes with national electoral politics. He made some mistakes that have been costly but I do not think that he deserves a knife in the back for this.

But if he does not choke up some dough for his legal defense he risks losing some support from his rock solid base in the west. The consequences are serious. It means taking shots from this base which could result in a leadership review (one of the Alliance Party's base foundations is accountability). More seriously, if he holds on, then he could be liable for this down the road at some future election. Either way he loses support and basically becomes a liability for a party that craves power to assert western leadership in national affairs. The only question that remains is whether or not to put the cart before the horse for the Alliance. My sense is that a combination of these things raises a real possibility that Day will not be manning this party for quite as long as he expected back in the glory days of August.

GONZO OUT