

CONVERGENCE

Around the World



March Issue

MY EXPERIENCE IN FRANCE: PART 2

FERRARI ZHANG
STAFF REPORTER

Hopefully you are not as unlucky as me, because going to school on Friday, then going on an eight-hour flight with a six hour time difference, and then going to school again in another country on Monday is truly abominable.

The day I arrived, Louis, my French exchange partner, decided “wisely,” to take me on a walk to school. It’s a non-stop 4-kilometer walk!

To make matters worse it was a blistering 35 degrees celsius. Adding to the injury, most French things are old, random, and sometimes beautiful, which likewise applies to the streets of Meudon.

As a result, the walk to school consisted of climbing up a hill and then back down, all under the scorching sun, intense jetlag, and no water bottle.

It’s no wonder I was so tired when I got to school.

My classmates were surprised when, during my first biology class, one of the students

was slapping himself on the face repeatedly to stay awake. Turns out, that student was me, and I could barely keep my eyes open even though it was only 11 in the morning.

Having Lunch

Lunch is cooked in situ by a culinary team at school. This might be a bit of a luxury to you uncultured Canadiens (it is). Particularly when you bear in mind that the main provider of school lunches in France is not Aramark but Sodexo.

Therefore, from a personal point of view, it is more likely that the food will be dégoûté and cause food strikes, because exactly that happened in my previous school. But that is a story for another time.

Anyway, back to this story. Lunchtime arrived, and everyone scrambled to the tables, each seating five or six. A boy at my table decided to take half of the appetizers.

Another boy then decided that was improper so he raided the first boy’s plate and, as a result, food started flying around like Voldemort when he died.

Things calmed down a bit when Louis brought in the plat principal and it was

steak and mashed potatoes: one steak per person! “What?” I thought to myself, “Isn’t this school lunch?” When dessert came,



each person got a slice from an entire pie of tarte au citron. I devoured the slice, which was as large as a slice of pie can be, and then dropped my jaw in astonishment as Gabriel (Michael’s correspondent), who sat on another table, told me that he had eaten three slices of the tart, which is half of the entire tart.

And so with a full stomach and a new assessment of French gluttony, I walked out of the cafeteria. I realized, finally, why the school was so small. I looked at my stomach.

The Louvre

Being in France for five weeks, I obviously had to visit the Louvre. The Louvre being the Louvre, of course I went to see the Egyptology and Islamic art section, where despite being less famous than other exhibits, are also two of the best tout le monde, since Napoleon literally coined the word Egyptologie.

Since the Louvre’s Egyptology exhibition itself is large enough to be a museum, I will just say that the Egyptology exhibition in the Sully gallery contains everything you can imagine -- except mummies.

The Islamic art gallery is designed beautifully with a specifically commissioned roof. And despite their record on human rights,



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the government of Azerbaijan is the main sponsor. Still, despite that, the gallery exhibited beautiful pieces of art and poems from every corner of the Islamic world, which I deeply appreciated.

Who can go to the Louvre without seeing the Mona Lisa? Me, but I was tempted by the possibilities of photography of the crowd surrounding La Joconde, and so Mona Lisa I went.

The crowd was insane, and so was I. How can a whole crowd of people mob around a

portrait of a woman in order to take a photo without bothering to check the plaque right behind it explaining its composition and its history? I was truly dumbfounded. Maybe humans aren't that smart after all?

Ping Pong King

At school, there was about an hour or more of recess every day, and during that time we played a ping-pong variation called "King".

The rules are simple. There are two sides of the court: one side is the king; the other has a player trying to defeat the king in order to become king. That side has a line of people waiting for their chance to defeat the king.

If the king cannot return your return, you are King and you have the right of wildly celebrating before immediately getting dethroned.

If you cannot return the other person's shot or double fault, you lose a life. If you lose a life twice, you die, and people will

gleefully shout "t'es mort!" and celebrate, while at the same time asking for your racquet.

The process continues until the final, which is a best-of-five points game.

There are some common tactics that make the game interesting to watch and end quicker.

There is what I would call the chien, which involves serving to the right of the king, where there's the line.

One generally cannot call interference in this game, so you dethrone the king. There is also the haut, which involves serving easy to the king, who smashes the ball against the next person in line.

There are also some informal rules: 1. When you feel like it, scream hysterically. The king will be enraged and lose control of the next shot. 2. When you feel like it, rage like a true red-blooded Frenchman: run away with the ping pong ball and put it in a trash can. Sound fun?



WILL BONNIE CROMBIE SAVE ONTARIO'S LIBERALS?

CEDRIC FURMAN
OPINION EDITOR

When Hazel McCallion, Mississauga's longest-serving mayor of nearly 36 years retired, she gave way to an emergent player in Ontario's political scene. Her successor was newcomer Bonnie Crombie, a Toronto native and career politician who was previously elected as a Federal Liberal MP s2011. Despite this, with McCallion's endorsement, Crombie won the 2014 Mississauga Election with 63% of the vote. Since then, Crombie's persuasive speech and forward policies have advanced her into the political mainstream, and have led to her successive re-elections in 2018 and 2022, both with over 75% of the city's popular vote.

Many of us within Toronto's city limits only began to hear of Crombie for the first time when her plans to de-amalgamate the Peel municipality materialized in Queens Park this May. Much like the former Metropolitan Municipality of Toronto, which had sub-municipalities in present-day neighbourhoods like Etobicoke and Scarborough, Mississauga is a constituent city of the Regional Municipality of Peel, along with Brampton and Caledon.

Crombie has long critiqued Mississauga two-tier governance, noting that her municipality makes up more than half of Peel's 1,400,000 residents and provides 45% of its tax revenue. She noted an independent Mississauga could provide the city control of its "destiny," with streamlined services and \$1 billion in savings over the coming decade. In lieu of her ostensible success, on May 23, 2023, Crombie opportunistically announced her consideration for Ontario Liberal Party leadership, only five days after the Peel-peeling Hazel McCallion Act was passed by the province.

For his part, Doug Ford has led a political fiasco in the past year. Southern Ontario's Greenbelt is a rare occurrence among North America's large cities, with 2 million acres of preserved land. Despite this, after his re-election as Premier of Ontario, Ford promised to combat Toronto's housing bubble by redeveloping 7,500 acres of



key Greenbelt farmland in the outskirts of Scarborough. Although such a decision already gathered significant detractors from environmentalists, it was the alleged corruption surrounding redevelopment and developer auctions that weakened Ford's political support.

Rumours reported that a developer had purchased key land before the swap and that key Ontario developers were present at private Ford family events, but the premier dismissed such claims. Yet, by August this year, the provincial Auditor General ruled there was "seriously flawed" favouritism and environmental negligence in planned Greenbelt redevelopment, which led to Housing Minister Steve Clark's eventual resignation, and Ford's reversal of his original 2022 plans, with a looming RCMP criminal investigation.

Additionally, Ford came under further fire for his plans to interfere even more in Torontonians zoning by privatizing Ontario Place and relocating the Ontario Science Centre (OSC). In April, without public consultation, Ford decided the "run-down" facility of the OSC should be demolished and redeveloped, moving into his continued Ontario Place reforms, which include providing public land to build a private Therme spa.

With my long electoral prelude out of the way, on December 2nd, Crombie proved successful in her leadership campaign for the provincial Liberals, with a solid 17% between her and second place, thus resigning from her important mayoral duties.

Later that week, in response to this "slap in the face to the residents," Ford decided to reverse the de-amalgamation of Peel since it would "lead to higher taxes," leaving Crombie's already short legacy in apparent shambles.

Although I acknowledge that Ford clearly used his reversal of Crombie's principal goal as a means of undermining the optics of Crombie's new position, she still maintains a strong position for the upcoming campaign period of the next provincial election. With Andrea Horwath no longer leading the provincial NDP, I think that it's possible many progressive voters will still defer to a Liberal party under new strong leadership.

Although Ford has largely been able to recover from his past zoning, healthcare, and educational scandals, with his approval rating back to its 40% baseline according to 338 Canada. Still, the next election is still almost three years away, and such distant polls are only abstract estimates. In that time, I think that Crombie stands a strong chance of developing her policies to appeal to a wider demographic, allowing her to stand a chance of winning urban and suburban voters beyond Mississauga, and throughout the province. Despite this, Ford's future policies and federal and international events are still sure to influence the direction of Crombie's campaign, and the possibility of whether she can save Ontario's embattled Liberal Party from the follies of Kathleen Wynne's former premiership.

REMEMBERING UCC'S ICONIC TALENT SHOW

ARJUN SHAH
OPINION WRITER

Although it is coming to the end of February, I could not help but write about one of the best assemblies I have ever went to.

The 2023 Talent Show was - for lack of a better term - magnificent. The assembly started with recognizing all service tie winners and hearing a few opening words from Mr. Sweetman and Dr. Aitken.

Then, we got to the most important part of the assembly, the talent show.

This talent show was my CAS project, as I was working with a team of volunteers to help plan and judge performances.



It was run by Helping Hands, UCC's biggest club.

It all started with Warren Richmond from Jackson's, who presented a poem. I know, for those not in the assembly, this sounds boring. But Warren came up with a fun twist, worthy of more than just a standing ovation.

You just had to be there to experience the

electricity in the air as Warren unleashed the beast that was his Stitch impression. He even completed the fit with an authentic Stitch costume.

Things only got better from here.

Up next was an electric music performance from John Xu on the guitar. His Japanese style of fingerpicking filled the room with a rich, enchanting melody. His style was a blend of ambience, pop, and Japanese style songs.

Some would say it is by far the best guitar performance the school has ever heard. Rather than just using the strings, John appreciated the whole instrument, even using the back of the guitar as a drum to help out in his piece.

Next, we had yet another musical performance, with Simon Liu on the Guzheng, a Chinese stringed instrument.

In little over a minute, Simon had impressed every student and teacher in Laidlaw with his hyper-fast strumming. I took harp lessons, and I know how difficult a milt-string instrument can be to play.

Our next three performances all capped off the show effectively. While he's not out saving trees, fixing water fountains, or changing A-Day weather, Bill Sun plays the piano.

His ARCT-level performance was pleasant and well-prepared. Half-way through Bill's performance, a huge, exciting turn of events occurred...

William Shi appeared out of thin air, Rubik's cube in hand. He was ready. All of Laidlaw as ready. As Bill finished, and received a huge round of applause, William announced that he would solve his Rubik's cube with his feet!

The crowd exploded in shock and excitement. William's performance was perfected with a saxophone solo from Bill Sun, who went on to play, 'Jingle Bill Rock'.

With 10 seconds left, Bill stopped playing abruptly and William's cube was nearly finished.

The audience started chanting: 'Will Will Will...' and cheering him on, until... he solved it!! Laidlaw jumped up, the crowd was ecstatic!

William hoisted the cube, and left.

But it wasn't over...

Up next, we had a surprise guest, Nathaniel Yoo. He showed up out of nowhere for a heart-warming performance of 'What a Wonderful World' on the big screen. I could tell some audience members were tearing up.



Overall, this talent show was a huge success.

Congrats to William Shi for winning the \$50 Amazon gift card, and thanks to the volunteers and all the performers during assembly.

WHY THE DUTCH ELECTION IS IMPORTANT TO CANADIANS



FERRARI ZHANG
STAFF REPORTER

Today I bring to you solemn news that the Netherlands has become yet another country to succumb to the far-right, with the extreme PVV led by Geert Wilders winning 37 out of 150 seats. Now before you accuse me of being a nerd (you surely would), accuse me of being a sensationalist for writing the first sentence. Why? Not only because the situation is really not that bad, but also because we are all watching as bystanders, and perhaps not watching at all. This election is very important, and things will be bad for us if we don't care!

The background: The Netherlands was originally not that right-wing, with three strong moderate parties: Labor (PvDA), the ideological equivalent of the present NDP, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), an economically right-wing but also liberal party, and the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), a party with conservative views and not-so-conservative economics.

There are also small parties like D66, equivalent to pro-weed US Democrats, various Catholic & Protestant parties (the nuttiest in them, SGP, didn't allow women to run until 2014(2)), and various socialist & green parties. In recent years the CDA have fallen from prominence and D66, PVV, and socialists grew in turn.

When I say strong though I don't really mean it: The best result any party got after WWII was 35% of the popular vote, and in the Dutch system, that meant the same

percentage of seats in parliament.

Therefore, no party has won a majority since 1894. After elections, the parties usually undergo a lengthy negotiation process, with the last one in 2021 having taken almost a year.

During the formation process the parties generally shed part or most of their manifestos to reach a compromise, and there is a caretaker government with almost no meaningful power.

To add to the injury: Since the 2000s, various other parties emerged, so many that 23.5% (hint: the vote percentage that the PVV got) is considered a "domination"(3).

Now you already sort of see why Netherlanders are angry: the political process is very dragged out, leaving lots of power vacuums, most people aren't really getting

what they're voting for, and divvying up cabinet positions often take precedence over real problems.

It is generally known that angry people turn to dumb solutions, and such "solutions" are usually already lurking in the background.

In the Netherlands the case is in climate change and Islamophobia. The first is the first reason why the election is significant for us.

There exists a large group of farmers in the Netherlands who enjoy leisurely lives and wear wooden shoes all day. Not! (6) They are one of the best in the world in terms of productivity (unlike me) and are angry!

They are angry about the people leaving towns for cities, increasing confrontation with green and animal-rights activists, and most importantly the supreme court decision to order a huge reduction in nitrogen emissions, which allegedly would endanger their way of life.

Of course the allegations were much exaggerated and usually outright false. It triggered huge thumbed-up-by-Trump protests from 2019-2023 and led to an arguably far-right party, the BBB, winning 7 seats in this election.

It was not helping that the leader of the PvdA, Frans Timmermans was the European Union's Climate Commissioner and is currently in an alliance with the Green Left, who fiercely supported the rulings. The BBB would be a part of the most likely hypothetical cabinet.



Now, the more contentious one, Islamophobia. You have to understand that there is a huge current of Islamophobia and racism in the Netherlands since large-scale immigration began around the 80s, just hidden behind the veil. In this version of Islamophobia, Islam is considered a regressive bogeyman ideology that spreads terror through its words.

Therefore, Muslims face lots of discrimination in the workplace and in public discourse. Why do so many people believe in this nutcase idea?

It started with two assassinations. In 2002, Islamophobia and climate-scepticism was ready to make its leap with a man named Pim Fortuyn. Then he got killed by a radical environmentalist.

In 2004, another very controversial film criticizing Islam was made by Theo van Gogh, a film director. Then he got killed too, this time by a Moroccan-Dutch serial killer.

You see, due to what they said and who killed them, it sparked a huge wave of backlash in Dutch society. That led to our main character Geert Wilders deserting the VVD to create the PVV.

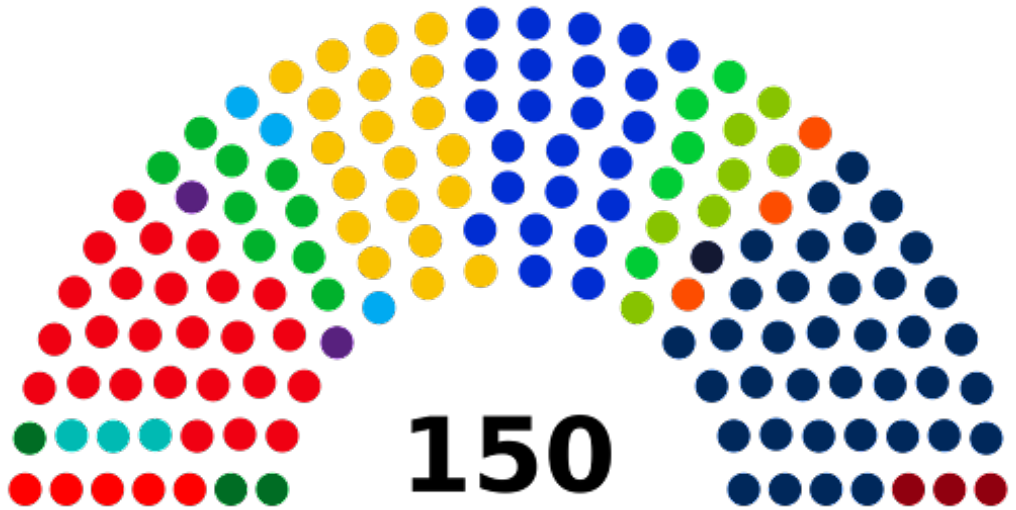


PARTIJ VOOR DE VRIJHEID

Crazy lies and hate are signatures of his politics

The PVV promised to ban all Islamic schools, reject asylum seekers, ban the Quran, excluding asylum seekers from social programs, stop all immigration, and a bunch of other crazy far-right skullduggery with deceptively simple language.

But unfortunately, it paired this with less crazy programs like welfare expansion and minimum wage raises.



These programs are what carried the PVV from nothing in 2004 to supporting the government in 2010. That, combined with the ability to discredit the PvdA as radical left environmentalists, gave PVV the vantage point in campaigning for the 2023 election. That vantage point was increased by the incumbent government falling because of disagreements on myriad topics.

While the PVV already started at an advantage, it was helped by the VVD and the PvdA's decision to again campaign on border control!

The VVD and its less liberal coalition partners wanted to sound tough on migrants and refugees, which unfortunately played right into the PVV's alley, leading people who were originally hesitant to vote for the actual far-right party.

Coupled with the good performance of Wilders in the pre-election debate, he achieved a stellar but wholly unexpected rise through opinion polls (surveys to measure voter choices), and won the election as I mentioned above.

Now the Netherlands is in crisis: the PVV (very dark blue) wants a cabinet with the BBB (grass-green, on the right, 7), the VVD (Dark Blue), and another centrist, anti-corruption party called the NSC (Yellow).

However, the VVD is flip-flopping constantly, while the NSC has already refused a coalition with the far-right Islamophobic party. Therefore, I expect further turmoil

and outbursts of hate, making the Netherlands another victim of hateful politics. In fact, hate crimes against Muslims and other minorities have already increased and have been emboldened by this win.

You might ask me: Why is this important to us?

Well, in case you didn't notice anything at all, Canada is currently in a not-that-dissimilar situation: people have been refused to board Air Canada flights based on the name "Muhammad", antisemitism has risen by more than 1000%, Jewish schools have been vandalized, and racism based on people's ethnicities are not far below the surface, with anti-Asian hate, for example, rising 339%.

All it takes for Canada to drop down to a similar position is if some politician combined rallying against "wokeism" and xenophobia along with a vigorous campaign, which would guarantee him/her lots of power and force major federal parties to do the same thing.

DON'T DO THAT!

In conclusion, when you or other people fall on hard times, try to convince them not to vote for extremists (things will become worse if they do that), convince them not to trust anybody that fearmongers, and keep a clear head. We may use the case in the Netherlands as a cautionary tale on how not to do politics, and make a better society out of it.