

# Editorial

## Editorial

### Shooting down the myth of Canadian exceptionalism

As so often is the case when something happens in the United States, Canadians rush to weigh in, empathizing with or (more often than not) gloating about the wacky neighbour to the south.

The horrific massacre of Black people at a grocery store in Buffalo, N.Y., on May 14 kicked the usual cycle into high gear.

An 18-year-old white man was arrested after the shooting, which is being investigated as a racist hate crime, that killed 10 and wounded three others. The suspect had a hate-filled manifesto that echoed much of the ideology espoused by the gunmen who carried out similar crimes in Quebec City and Christchurch, New Zealand.

Despite all of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, there were still some who took to public forums to revel in the myth of Canadian exceptionalism.

"Reading the news today, I'm feeling very fortunate to live in Canada—a diverse and tolerant country that values freedom while respecting human rights. We aren't perfect and building our country is an ongoing project but I wouldn't choose anywhere else," former Liberal cabinet minister Catherine McKenna tweeted on May 15.

An hour later, she added: "I get that we need to do better & more in [Canada] in many ways, including to address discrimination against minorities, advance the recognition of rights & reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, tackle

climate, address inequality. But that doesn't take away from how far we've come."

It's this attitude of "things aren't great, but they're pretty good" that continues to frustrate those who are tired of being told to wait their turn. Those who are relatively comfortable and do not have to look over their shoulders when it comes to racism have the luxury of looking around and saying "at least we're not the U.S."

Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller got a little closer to the real world, telling reporters on May 16 that "white supremacist extreme groups are the biggest domestic terrorist threat in this country and we still make excuses for them. So, I think that's a challenge we need to be focusing on every day."

Now is not the time for "could it happen here?" mental gymnastics. Not when there are prominent figures being given public platforms—like Pat King during the so-called Freedom Convoy occupation in downtown Ottawa this past winter—and home-grown hate groups such as the Proud Boys exporting their violent ideology internationally. Not when there are families who've been destroyed by racist hate while doing no more than taking an evening stroll.

Politicians have been denouncing racist conspiracy theories this week, and that's a good thing. But it can't only happen when blood is shed.

*The Hill Times*

## Letters to the Editor

### Who does Nikola Tesla belong to?

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario has proclaimed July 10 as Nikola Tesla Day, similarly proclaiming Tesla a Serbian-American inventor. While it is a laudable thing to mark the achievements of a person whose genius changed the world, it also reignites a perennial reoccurring question: to whom does Nikola Tesla actually belong?

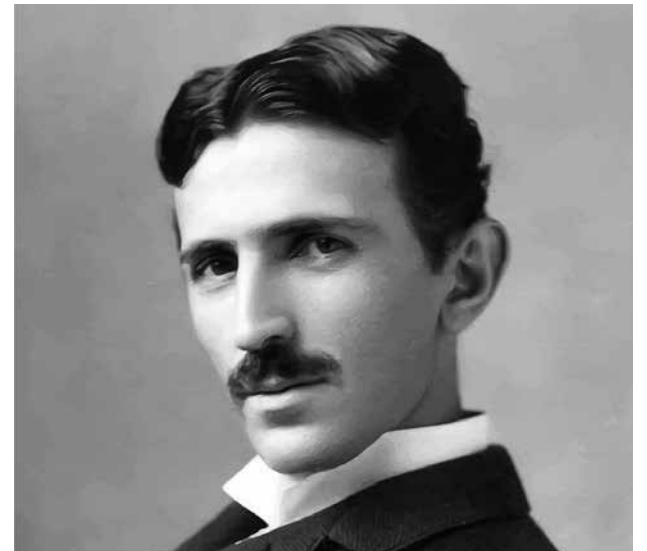
Firstly, a quick reminder of the significance of Tesla and his inventions. He invented the first alternating current (AC) motor and developed AC generation and transmission technology. Amongst other things, he invented electric oscillators and high-voltage transformers, which you know as Tesla coils; experimented with X-ray technology; and demonstrated radio communications two years before Guglielmo Marconi.

None of this is contentious and rightfully needs to be celebrated. What we in Croatia object to, though, is Serbia's unrelenting campaign to divorce any connection Tesla had with his country of birth—namely Croatia.

Serbian authorities are quick to point out that Tesla was ethnically Serb. They argue that in 1856, his place of birth—the town of Smiljan—was then part of the Austrian Empire. They conveniently overlook the fact that even the Austrian Crown, to which Croatia belonged, recognized this area as unquestionably part of Croatia. In comparison, it should be noted that Serbia was under Ottoman jurisdiction until 1878.

What my Serb colleagues also fail to mention is Tesla's intimate relationship with his country of birth and its people. When traveling abroad he would consistently return not to Serbia, but to Croatia (Zagreb, Gospić, Šibenik). During his lifetime he made one solitary transitory visit to Serbia, on route from Zagreb to Budapest, in 1892, for a total of 31 hours. He never had Serbian citizenship, but did take U.S. citizenship in 1891.

On May 24, 1892, Tesla made a proposal to the City of Zagreb, Croatia's capital, to build an alternating current



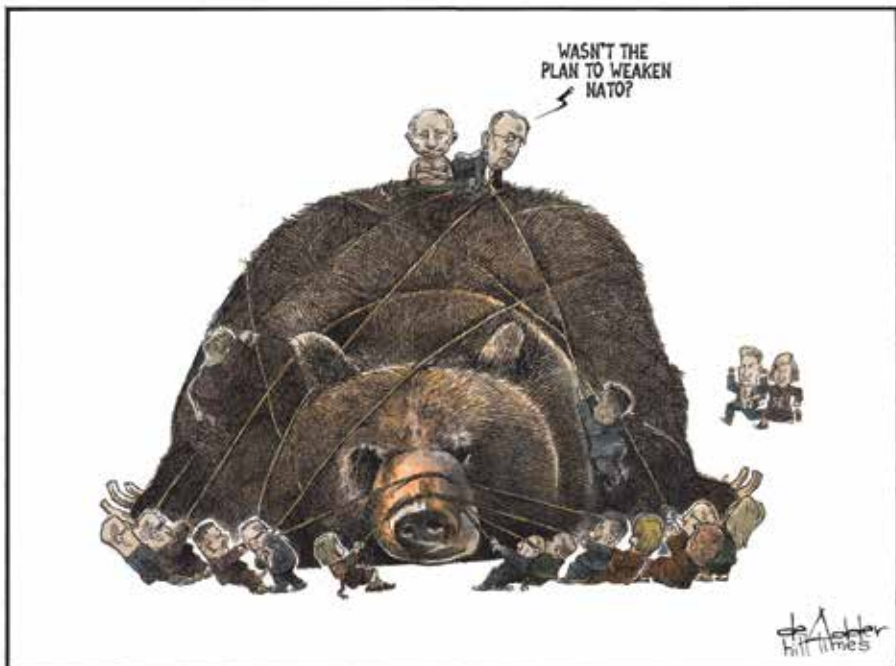
Inventor Nikola Tesla's ties to Croatia should not be overlooked when remembering his legacy, writes Ambassador Vice Skračić. Photograph courtesy of Pixabay

power station. During his speech to the city council, Tesla said: "As a son of this country, I consider it my duty to help the City of Zagreb in every way, either through council or through action." Equally important, on Aug. 28, 1895, the City of Šibenik under Tesla's direction became the first city in the world to have streetlights powered by alternating current.

But perhaps the best illustration of his state of mind was that Tesla spoke of himself as being "equally proud of my Serb origin and my Croat homeland." This historic quote was part of a correspondence Tesla had with the then pre-eminent political leader of Croatia, Vlatko Maček, with whom he often communicated.

Now, despite a wealth of evidence of Tesla's close links to Croatia, we do not in any way claim (exclusive) rights to Tesla, recognizing instead his extraordinary contributions to mankind. Rather than focus on divisive rhetoric, we would instead invite all those interested in learning first-hand about Tesla's life and works to visit the Tesla Memorial Centre located in Smiljan, Croatia. The centre, originally opened in 1956, was restored by the Croatian government after the Homeland War of 1991-1995 and re-opened July 10, 2006, on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tesla's birth.

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