

# FINANCIAL POST

Thursday, March 13, 2008

## Black begins serving prison term

Theresa Tedesco and Bal Brach, **National Post**



Nathan Denette/National Post

PALM BEACH, Fla. -- Conrad Black, the disgraced former newspaper baron, noted historian and British peer who began serving his prison sentence Monday in Florida, could be feeding convicts or fixing their toilets.

Lord Black went through a regular screening at the Coleman Federal Correction Complex, before he was handed an inmate guidebook and began serving a six-and-a-half-year sentence for

fraud and obstruction of justice.

There is a compulsory work call at 7 a.m.

"We have a lot of different places to work here at the prison," said Charles Ratledge, executive assistant at the complex located near Orlando, Fla. "All inmates are required to work and they are assigned to work based on the institutional need."

That means Lord Black could be working as a cook, or cleaning toilets.

"We have jobs here such as food service workers, orderlies, plumbers, painters, warehouse workers, landscaping..."

The unit team at the facility will decide what job Lord Black will be assigned to in the coming few days, and Mr. Ratledge said the pay scale ranges from 12 cents to 40 cents an hour.

But when asked, during a lengthy telephone interview Sunday night with the *National Post*, what jobs he hopes to be assigned, Lord Black said he'd take what was given by the administration.

However, he added: "I'd rather do something bookish than physical labour. I wouldn't be the best guy they could have out mowing the lawn but I could do not badly teaching French or something like that."

Lord Black, inmate number 18330-424, will also live in dormitory style housing with bunk beds and a cellmate.

He will be the newest inmate alongside 2000 others at the facility, most of whom have committed drug related crimes.

Lord Black left his Palm Beach, Fla. mansion at 9 a.m. ET on Monday for the four-hour long drive to the prison.

Sitting with his wife, Barbara Amiel, in the back of a teal green Cadillac Escalade, Lord Black did not speak to anyone as the chauffeur pulled away from his home.

During the telephone interview, the 63-year-old, Canadian-born Lord Black insisted he is prepared to continue to "fight the good cause" and conceded that although the prospect of going to jail "is not great, it's not the end of the world."

Lord Black was upbeat, philosophical and full of the bombast Canadians have come to expect during the interview.

Of his accusers, Lord Black quoted Winston Churchill as saying: "They will have their fleeting moment of brutish triumph" as he enters the largest penitentiary in the United States.

However, he said, "It's no real triumph for them; it's a complete travesty of justice. It doesn't bother me because it won't last long."

Lord Black is hopeful his convictions on three counts of mail and wire fraud and one on obstruction of justice will be overturned on appeal.

His case is expected to be heard in June.

Until then, he said, he's prepared to do the time.

"It's not the least bit stigmatizing," he said, when asked about his thoughts as he prepares to begin serving his sentence. "This bourgeois theory that it's a frightful blotting of the ledger is a lot of nonsense. It didn't happen to Martha Stewart. And besides, I am innocent. If I'd actually done anything illegal, I wouldn't contest it, I would repent it."

He scoffs at those who say he's in denial or delusional.

"People in my condition, no matter how denigrated they are for being supposedly in denial, have a duty to pursue and protest their innocence and that's what I'm doing. "

On a lighter note he added, "It's a hell of a way to lose weight, but I'll lose weight."

The accomplished author is hoping to arrange to have books delivered to him once he is settled into a routine.

Lord Black has been unwavering in his belief that he will be vindicated, and likely garnered some hope from an appeals court ruling last Friday. In denying his request for bail pending appeal, the court noted that "substantial questions" were raised about some of the fraud convictions.

The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, Eastern Division, ruled that issues related to a fraud count and Lord Black's obstruction of justice conviction were "less clear."

Lord Black's lawyers are expected to file their appeal on Thursday and the case should be heard by June. That means the former newspaper proprietor will have to spend at least three months in prison, even if any of his convictions are overturned. If his appeal is unsuccessful, Lord Black will be required to serve to at least 85% of his sentence before parole.

"A moron who actually seriously looks at this case sees that it is a crock and I expect it will ultimately be determined to be so," he said. "But to the extent that it isn't so determined, it will seem to be an injustice and victims of injustice are not normally despised people."

He said his personal and business affairs are "pretty well set up" for when he is in prison and he expects to be vindicated no matter what happens with his appeal.

"This is the last phase. When I come out of this place, this whole God damned nightmare is over. I'm not that old; I'm not poor and I'm still serviceable, so it's not the end of the world," he told the Post.

"And, I am not a disgraced person," he said, alluding to Martha Stewart and Mike Milken, the former Wall Street financier who served 22 months in a U.S. penitentiary for fraud.

Lord Black said he has been "seriously moved by the volume, variety and the quality of the support" he has received from various religious orders in British Columbia and central Italy, who remember him during daily prayer sessions, as well as former school mates, ex-girlfriends and current friends, who "have really gone out of their way to say supportive and encouraging things. And so, we fight on."

-- *With files from Canwest News Service*

---

© 2010 The National Post Company. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.