

SAYOUT

Est. 2013

Canada and the world

Summer 2020

Ideas, Facts, and Opinions for Today

Coping together

Democratic government exists to benefit all citizens, not just a chosen few. The emergency measures widely implemented to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic have demonstrated how far government can affect our lives in positive ways. People will complain about various intrusions or perceived intrusions on their lives, but in the main they can see positive measures at work on a vast scale.

Massive inequality has been with us for years now, decades. Laissez-faire thinking has encouraged us to believe that as little government interference as possible in the workings of our economy or our society is a good thing and that gradually things always work themselves out. But how would things have turned out if we had stood back and allowed the new coronavirus to have its way?

Would our healthcare system have coped with the resulting massive spread of illnesses and deaths? Would we have built up a 'herd immunity' quickly? Would business have thrived while people fell ill and died on all sides? A hands-off approach would have been disastrous.

What if we thought of widespread inequality as a disease, a *social pandemic*? Could we have dealt with it in a widespread and worthwhile way? Did we have to let it continue at atrocious levels for so long? Government actions during the Covid-19 crisis have demonstrated that large-scale government intervention makes a beneficial difference.

It really wasn't necessary for years on end to allow millions of people to suffer for lack of money and a dismal lack of the social determinants of health. People have suffered. And for what? They didn't have to suffer, and they don't have to suffer in the future. Government can provide the necessary funding to end the suffering brought on by severe income inequality.

The pandemic forces us to deal with harsh life realities. At the same time it shows that we don't have to sit back and allow impersonal forces to have their way and cause widespread distress. We can face up to real threats to society and do something about them. We don't have to sit back and let the uncertain wanderings of an invisible hand do what's needed. We're better than that. We're more humane than that.

Slavery ban in Ontario

In 1793 the Upper Canada (later Ontario) Legislature passed an 'Act Against Slavery'.

It was signed into law by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe. This was the first piece of legislation in the British Empire banning slavery.

In 1833 the 'Slavery Abolition Act' of the British Parliament banned slavery in almost the entire empire. (About three years later the ban became total.)



Robyn Peterson

What will happen as time goes by?

A needed vaccine

In an article in *Maclean's* In July of 2013, Ken MacQueen reported on research being conducted by the *Canadian Medical Association*. A significant finding of that research highlighted the continuing strong link between poverty and illness.

Now that we're experiencing a dangerous pandemic, the link between poverty and illness is more than ever evident. Reports emerge of particularly stricken populations such as street dwellers or people in Aboriginal communities suffering disproportionately.

MacQueen titled his article, '*How to Vaccinate Against Poverty*'. In effect, he was saying that we should use direct poverty relief as a vaccination against poverty to make sure everyone has enough money to live decent and healthy lives. The need for this kind of vaccination is now more than ever obvious.

It shouldn't have taken a widespread medical emergency to underscore the need for poverty vaccination. Healthier incomes do lead to healthier lives.

We've seen how people suddenly deprived of their jobs and incomes have been left scrambling to meet their most basic needs. Thankfully, some financial measures have taken place to help.

We must continue proper poverty vaccination after this pandemic is reasonably controlled. After all, people will still have real costs to meet to live their lives. And they will still need to do their best to keep themselves healthy.

A lasting effect

"Covid-19 won't only have lasting effects on society and people's behaviour. It will also alter the structure of global business."

*'Best in Show', The Economist,
March 28th, 2020.*

Contemplating a universal, guaranteed, and livable basic income

We know that severe inequality has been a problem for some years now. Too many people have been having a hard time making their way financially on the small incomes they're able to make through employment, often precarious employment. And people receiving social assistance or disability support have seen the payments they receive continue at contemptibly low rates.

Over the years, one solution to our basic income needs that's been suggested from time to time is to provide everyone with a basic or guaranteed income. This kind of income would be no mere band-aid solution. It would involve enough money for someone to live on in and of itself.

In 2015, Bryan Hyndman, PhD and Lisa Simon, M.D. of the *Association of Local Public Health Agencies* and *The Ontario Public Health Association* wrote in support of a good basic income guarantee. They saw a guaranteed income being provided to all citizens in Canada and being sufficient to allow someone, "... to meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of work status."

One of the measures our governments are now taking to meet the catastrophic financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is to come up with vari-

ous income plans to allow people to meet their essential needs despite being out of work as a result of so many businesses being shut down.

At present government is paying out vast sums of money. In effect, we have a new and large-scale experiment by government in directly providing people with incomes. This gives us some indication of how a guaranteed income plan could work. Such a plan would be universal. And, as is now being demonstrated, it actually can be done.

A guaranteed, universal, and livable income programme would be transformative for our society. It would directly address income inequality. It would diminish and possibly eliminate poverty once and for all.

As Robert Reich, former Labor Secretary of the United States and a supporter of the basic income concept, has said, "*History is on the side of positive social change.*" Perhaps, as we work our way out of the current crisis, we can look forward to such a beneficial change.

Positive social change is right and it's fit for our times. It would mean something truly worthwhile coming out of our current pandemic emergency. We can get rid of the political band-aids and go for real social change. That would be a worthy outcome for all.

Encourage our future

"Unless we destroy ourselves utterly, the future belongs to those societies that, while not ignoring the reptilian and mammalian parts of our being, enable the characteristically human components of our nature to flourish; to those societies that encourage diversity rather than conformity; to those societies willing to invest resources in a variety of social, political, economic and cultural experiments, and prepared to sacrifice short-term advantage for long-term benefit; to those societies that treat new ideas as delicate, fragile and immensely valuable pathways to the future."

Carl Sagan,
Dragons of Eden, 1977.

Mind how you go

The Mayo Clinic tells us: "Mindfulness is a type of meditation in which you focus on being intensely aware of what you're sensing and feeling in the moment, without interpretation or judgment."

Different exercises help with achieving the mindfulness state. A simple one is to sit and breathe deeply, right down into your abdominal area. Taking a few deep breaths can be calming, and as you calm yourself you can use all your senses truly to experience the moment.

These days we can use different ways of keeping ourselves in good spirits. Just remember to mind how you go.

Grim teaching matter

Enemy states or fanatical factions may now be studying the exact impact of the Covid-19 virus on North America and other strategic parts of the world. They may learn some grim lessons about the usefulness of biological warfare.

A biological attack can obviously be devastating.

Continental defences have turned out to be much weaker than might have been expected. Why resort to nuclear attack when a biological attack might achieve the results you're looking for?

Let's hope that hostile powers are not thinking along these lines. Otherwise, we face unpleasant future possibilities.



Robyn Peterson

Now which boat is yours?

Growing inequality

In the past thirty or so years, inequality in our society has become worse, much worse. What will we do about it?

Sayout

Sayout gives voice to those concerned about where we are in today's world and where we're headed.

What is really happening, and what do we need to do? Ask questions of those in power, demand action where it's needed, and don't be misled by saccharine promises or golden phrases meant to soothe but nothing more.

This newsletter is free in its e-version form. And we don't make our mailing lists available to any outside parties.

Contact Robyn Peterson at:
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Are you well masked?

Sarah Shrigley

Watching the many and varied methods of wearing a mask has been entertaining and sometimes frustrating.

All masks are designed to filter the air coming into and exhaled by both the mouth and nose. Seeing people walk around with their mask covering just the mouth makes a cranky old person like me want to go up to them and pull the mask over their nose and remind them that germs can enter and leave by the nose as well as the mouth.

Remember, you are trying to eliminate the ingestion/exhalation of harmful airborne microbes, and the nose is one vector of transmission, so covering it with filtering material is necessary to accomplish this task

It's not just your own health that depends on proper compliance, but the health of all those with whom you interact while wearing your mask.

The little metal piece on many masks should fit over the bridge of your nose. Adjust it as needed to avoid having outside air bypass the filtering material of your mask.

Some folks might say that the mask makes them feel uncomfortable, claustrophobic, etc., but my only answer is "Suck it up and deal with it".

Evidence can be seen in communities where the spread of Covid-19 has been quickly knocked down, such as New Zealand. There, the government quickly took control of the situation, and didn't give out confusing messages and, as a result, the numbers of those infected dropped quite quickly. A second wave of infections will no doubt prove the wisdom of getting control of, and lessening the severity of, this pandemic.

Mask wearing has been an essential part of lessening the impact of the new coronavirus. It's better to over protect yourself than not to do enough and later wish you had.

Sarah worked successfully as an independent professional electrologist over many years. She chaired the committee that set infection control standards for both Canada and Ontario, regarding the electrolysis profession, and at the Ontario Government's request, detailed provincial health inspectors on inspecting electrologists offices for compliance.

The shadow of that earlier pandemic

Today, as we continue to deal with the ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic, we often hear references to the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-20. That pandemic was indeed a massively disruptive and deadly catastrophe for the world.

The Spanish Flu probably infected one-third of the world's population. somewhere between 20-million and 50-million people died worldwide.

The hope now is that the bitter lessons learned from the Spanish Flu pandemic will help us in the current Covid-19 pandemic. With careful attention to such things as social distancing, wearing masks, and frequently washing our hands, we may avoid the worst of the effects of that earlier pandemic, along with its terrible death toll. Let us hope that does turn out to be the case.

Conventional Wisdom?

Conventional wisdom provides us with a powerful store of thinking. Because it's shared widely and acknowledged by many, if not most, people, it gives us a large base of thought we can dip into whenever we wish. Further, it helps to reassure us that we're 'in the know'.

Working within the precepts of conventional wisdom can be comfortable and reassuring. Everyone around us thinks the same way, so we must be right!

Unfortunately, conventional wisdom can be wrong. It may rest on faulty premises or depend on inaccurate information. Those who rely on conventional wisdom may, in time, find themselves conventionally wide of the mark.

Unless it's tested with good evidence, conventional wisdom can lead us badly astray. Thinking things through yourself, can repay dividends, even though it may put you on a different path from the ones followed by those around you.

Money from where?

Emergencies cost money, and the Covid-19 emergency is a whopper. The federal government is borrowing heavily to raise the money. To some extent, the Bank of Canada is also creating money by fiat.

Such monetary measures remain vital for the wellbeing of our society.



Robyn Peterson

Let's go for a nice drive in the country!

Early warning

A 2017 report for the Northern Command of the U.S. military warned of a possible pandemic in the future that could have dire effects. It noted that the most likely disease would be a respiratory one such as a coronavirus.

Northern Command includes Alaska and quietly takes in Canada (without necessarily including formal Canadian commitment).

The question this raises, of course, is why weren't we better prepared to deal with a pandemic, especially since other sources had stated that one was overdue.

We prepare for possible nuclear attack with training and an enormous stockpile in the United States of nuclear-tipped missiles -- thousands. And all those missiles don't come cheap.

But when it came to a biological attack (natural or human made), we were apparently not prepared. Was that because a biological threat was seen as a lesser kind of threat? Stockpiling of necessary medical equipment was shockingly inadequate. And training to deal with a biological event was insufficient or lacking altogether.

Serious questions need answering once the current crisis is behind us. When warnings are clear and well founded, they cannot just be ignored. Serious threats demand serious actions.

What a difference!

"Analysis of the chimpanzee shows that we differ by approximately 4 percent of our DNA."

Michio Kaku

The Future of Humanity, 2018.

Ah, for critical thinking!

Thinking critically is, in effect, an open and objective exploration. The critical thinker is guided by the facts and keeps a tight focus on those facts, being careful not to disregard or throw away inconvenient facts.

You keep preconceptions, opinions, or ideologies strictly at bay. Importantly, you take into account the implications of all uncovered facts.

Crucially, you need to give yourself sufficient time to think. Too little time spent on careful thinking can lead to your overlooking important facts or discounting them too quickly. If you don't take enough time, you may also slip into accepting convenient explanations or solutions instead of allowing facts to speak for themselves..

Critical thinking can lead to unusual or uncomfortable conclusions, but those conclusions could be vital and they could open up new and better pathways into the future.

People in positions of power and authority don't always think critically, and they do not always encourage others, to think critically. They may even punish those who do not support their chosen way of thinking and acting. They may well distort and force fit facts into their existing perceptions and biases, rather than dealing with them on their own merits.

Critical thinking is a carefully considered process, and it may require deliberately avoiding what others think or want. Critical thinking focuses on the merits of a given issue, the realities of that issue and not the concepts or con-

clusions that may be imposed upon it. You must see what is actually there, not what you might be rewarded and praised for seeing.

Reflection is an important aspect of critical thinking. You think about the real implications of the things you find and carefully consider all aspects of those implications. You go with what your reflection tells you and not what you had thought you would find.

Thinking in terms of systems at work serves critical thinking well. Events don't just occur in isolation. They have causes and those causes will likely have causes of their own. Systems thinking encourages thinking in wholes, not in isolated segments. You look for all the linkages between and among events.

The critical thinker is an open-minded sceptic. So you take in information and let it lead your thinking without any attempt to impose other considerations.

Credible sources for any available information are essential. Simply picking up on opinions given at large is not good enough, even if such opinions are expressed in an authoritative tone or in impressive surroundings.

When you think critically, you open yourself up to new possibilities and new avenues to explore. You cast light into the shadows. You go beyond justifying existing 'truths' or existing policies and give yourself the chance to discover new realms of thought and action.

Critical thinking expands your reality and your possibilities. It unveils pathways into a better future. Think critically and see what is really there.

Use our articles?

Sometimes people want to know about using articles from Sayout in other publications.

The quick answer is: please feel free to do so.

The only thing we ask is that you attach an attribution. If the articles are unsigned, they're written by Robyn Peterson.

Thanks for your interest.

The economic cost of slavery

"The experience of all ages and nations, I believe, demonstrates that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any."

Adam Smith
The Wealth of Nations, 1776

GHGs in our cities

An article in the Spring 2020 issue of the *University of Toronto Magazine* noted (*Sensing Our Way to Better Buildings*) the following major sources of greenhouse gases in the city of Toronto:

- ◆ Buildings 52%
- ◆ Personal vehicles 30%
- ◆ Commercial vehicles 8%
- ◆ Waste/Garbage 10%

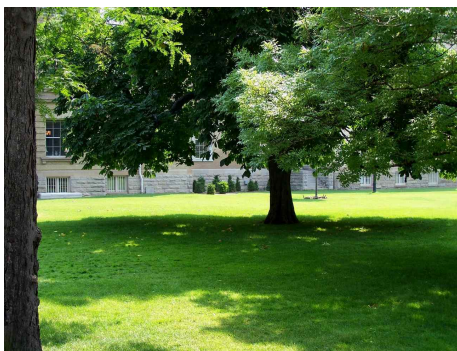
Research by the university's *Department of Civil and Mineral Engineering* had come up with these percentages. The numbers showed clearly the importance of dealing with the gas emissions in buildings through various means. Not incidentally, they also showed the significant role of personal vehicles in emitting greenhouse gases.

Once the current pandemic crisis comes under better control, perhaps we will see some beneficial changes in the design and functioning of our cities.

Harmless rubber things?

Early types of rubber bullets from about fifty years ago were steel balls covered by thin rubber coatings. They were not little rubber balls as the name suggests.

Now they might be more cylindrical in shape, but they still have thin rubber coatings over hard inner cores, including steel. They are dangerous.



Robyn Peterson

Now there's a shady spot!

Letters?

If you wish to send us a letter, please feel free to do so. We can accept letters of up to 80 words in length.

We can't guarantee to publish all that we may receive, but we'll certainly be glad to print some. Write away!

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