

SAYOUT

Canada and the world

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Ideas, Facts, and Opinions for Today

Grow, grow, grow forever!

When politicians or economists talk about building a healthy economy, they almost invariably talk about growth. 'Grow the economy' becomes a mantra. We must have growth on top of growth.

Fundamental questions come in here. For how long can you have growth? Can growth truly last forever?

Producing more and more goods along with the inevitable piles of garbage, including toxic waste, obviously has limits. After all, our planet is fixed in size. Producing more and more stuff could end up crowding everyone out.

Richard Douthwaite has warned: "The pathology that endangers our future is uncontrolled, undifferentiated, aggregate growth in economic output and consumption." (The Growth Illusion, 1999) If growth truly has become a pathology of our times, those who continue to insist upon ever more growth are urging us to engage in a pathological pursuit. Is it wise to keep insisting on this kind of pursuit?

More and more growth could mean more and more urban sprawl. It could mean destroying more and more good agricultural land. It could also mean producing more and more pollution of different kinds. Would that kind of growth be good? Is that kind of growth necessary to our very survival?

As Tim Jackson has noted (Prosperity Without Growth, 2009): "An economy predicated on the perpetual expansion of debt-driven materialistic consumption is unsustainable ecologically." If our continuing insistence on growth of the traditional kind is unsustainable, and if we really want to support positive measures to limit climate change,

shouldn't we at least contemplate some changes in our concept of what growth actually means?

We could think about growth that would actually nourish our society. We could have growth in leisure and health improvements and in personal possibilities. Brain pursuits not brawn pursuits could expand. But that kind of growth might not increase GDP simply because GDP might not include it. So it might not be seen 'officially' as growth at all. But growth that does not involve producing ever more stuff might just have unlimited and beneficial possibilities. It might actually be good for us.

We might want healthy growth as opposed to unhealthy growth, but if healthy growth is not recognized as being economic growth, we're unlikely to get it. This means that unhealthy growth with its consequent toxicity could continue to plague us for some time to come.

Unhealthy growth may mean profits for investors. But the unhealthy and profitable growth might mean the poisoning of land and water for the sake of a new structure such as a mine. Does that matter? It does for the people living near that new mine or pipeline. Their lives could be badly damaged.

If we don't see, hear or feel the distress of people suffering from the imposition of unhealthy growth, does that distress really register with us? Or does it remain reassuringly hidden from us by politicians and the media?

Growth can be good. It can also be bad. Which do we really want? Do we want to grow in health or grow in stuff? Let's choose well. It's our future after all.

The peril of constant growth

"An economic system that requires constant growth, while bucking almost all serious attempts at environmental regulation, generates a steady stream of disasters all on its own, whether military, ecological or financial."

Naomi Klein
The Shock Doctrine, 2007

Are you selfish?

Most people aren't keen to be labelled "selfish". They know it's not considered to be polite. Still, what if marketers and investors believe that people are mostly selfish? Will they seek to appeal to our supposed selfish natures?

Do people respond to the idea that they can have certain things that are denied to others? Is this an aspect of individualism that shouldn't be discussed in polite company?

Perhaps you can be lured by the idea that you can have something that's available to few others because you're so special.

The next time you read an advertisement or see a commercial, decide if it's appealing to something selfish in your nature. If it does, are you pleased or offended? Your reaction may reveal whether or not you enjoy being selfish.



Who's ready for a swim?

Gas under pressure? – approved!

Back in the fall, the Trudeau government gave its approval for an LNG pipeline to an LNG facility near Port Edward on the northern part of British Columbia's coastline. This approval had conditions attached, which mainly involved approval by the affected First Nations communities.



The initialism LNG stands for "liquefied natural gas". Natural gas is liquefied by subjecting it to extremely low temperature (below -150°C) and keeping it under high pressure. It cannot be handled like normal oil or gasoline. In its liquid state, LNG is not flammable. But in its gaseous state it certainly is. Leaking gas can form a vapour cloud, which can be very dangerous because it is highly flammable and can freeze living things. Such a cloud can hug the ground or sea surface and spread over a great distance. If a small flame touches it, the cloud can erupt in an enormous fiery explosion.

Given its nature, techniques and equipment have evolved over the years to handle LNG as safely as possible. Some accidents have occurred, and people have died, but generally the safety record of LNG has been quite good.

World markets for natural gas have expanded enormously in recent years. Bringing that natural gas to willing buyers using LNG ships and other forms of transportation promises hefty financial returns to the exporting nations such as Russia and Canada.

Expanding markets, however, mean LNG proliferation. Herein lies a potential hazard. Will the past safety record continue to apply with ever more LNG coursing through pipelines or carried on large ships? We have no absolute guarantees. Terrible accidents can occur as shown by the Deepwater Horizon and Fukushima disasters.

The coast of British Columbia is prone to earthquakes. It is due for

a major earthquake fairly soon. What would a severe earthquake do to LNG storage facilities or to LNG pipelines? Would they leak? Would large vapour clouds, toxic

in confined areas, threaten the lives of people living in nearby communities? This seems to be a real danger.

What happens if a large LNG ship founders on a rocky shore? Would its double hull be penetrated? Would it produce an enormous vapour cloud with the potential to explode like a fiery nuclear bomb?

We also must be concerned about terrorism. Could terrorists attack an LNG terminal with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) or armour-piercing ammunition? Could terrorists attack an LNG ship, possibly with a speedboat loaded with explosives? What then?

Sufficient security would mean added costs. Those costs should be considered as part of the cost of developing an increased LNG export capability.

Serious damage or loss to local fisheries is a real possibility. Such fisheries involve the livelihoods of many people. Should their concerns not be taken into account?

Does Canada's approval of a new LNG pipeline and terminal facilities square with our commitments of December, 2015 to the Paris Agreement on reducing our greenhouse gas emissions? After all, LNG consists mainly of methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas.

The Trudeau government's approval of a major LNG project in British Columbia may be in line with the previous Harper government's zeal for developing and exporting more and more fossil fuels. But is it in line with what most Canadians want? We have a serious issue here, with significant implications for our future. More careful thought definitely seems to be needed. This is not just another issue to be decided by politics alone.

What's that?

"Prig n. self-righteous figure who professes superior culture, morality, etc."

Collins Canadian English Dictionary

What the people didn't want

"In 1987, Mulroney negotiated a free trade agreement with the US, which was the main issue of the 1988 federal election. The Liberals and NDP both opposed the deal and received between them the most votes, but the Conservatives won a majority of seats under the 'first past the post' electoral system."

Mzx Fodor
in *Tax is Not a Four-Letter Word*, 2013



Robyn Peterson

Do they have snow burgers?

Sayout

Sayout gives voice to those concerned about where we are in today's world and where we're headed. Here we can talk about issues affecting us right now—in Canada and around the world.

Agree or disagree, but think. 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.

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It appears that ...

Many people think of science as being a done deal. If something is proved scientifically, that's it, a phenomenon is explained for all time. But this general belief is not true. Science is a process of exploration and findings. It relies heavily on theories. These theories are tested in various ways by observation mathematical modelling, or experiment. Some theories stand up over time and become well established, possibly becoming laws. Other theories don't make it through various kinds of tests and so are discarded.

In the nineteenth century, scientists talked about ether. This was a substance believed to fill the universe. So radio waves were said to go out over the ether. Then scientific opinion shifted to the idea of space being a complete vacuum. Nowadays we have talk of dark matter and dark energy spread throughout the universe. Theories do evolve over time. They don't tend to become fixed. And a crucial part of the scientific method is to remain open to newer theories that may supersede old ones.

The scientific process leads to a careful kind of language. In their written work or public statements, scientists don't tend to deal in absolutes. Few of their statements are set in stone. Instead, they tend to deal with possibilities and observations. When they advance theories, they do so in a somewhat cautious way. So conditional phrases may come to the fore: "It would appear that ..."; "It seems that ..."; and so forth.

Politicians like easy statements. They'll flatly declare certain things to be true or not true. Tentative or conditional wording can seem too wishy washy in public speaking. "Lowering taxes will lead to an improved economy!" "Democracy will be served by getting rid of these people!" Straight-forward declarations such as these can put things across to people in strident and confident terms. And they don't even have to be true. Falsehoods stated in firm and positive ways can

take on the aura of truth, whilst remaining false.

Political speech can be anathema to scientists. If a political statement does not stand up to scientific scrutiny, scientists may struggle to explain the faultiness to the public at large. What do you believe? A firmly and convincingly phrased declaration or a conditionally phrased rebuttal? Public belief can stay with the unscientific statement despite the best of scientific explanations, especially if a significant proportion of the public are scientifically illiterate.

The current situation with climate change or global warming is a good example of the explanation problem. Powerful and wealthy interests have a stake in sowing doubt or confusion about the reality of climate change. They can seize on the tentative or conditional statements put out by scientists and say something like: "See, they're not 100% sure"; or "But there might be other explanations." Doubt can be inferred from statements of possibility rather than statements of indisputable fact.

Language is important in our world. We know this, yet we can remain subject to the clever traps of confusion laid for us by those who choose to engage in scenarios of their own design, as opposed to findings or possibilities based on clear evidence. Too often people don't have to be right in what they say; they just have to sound as though they're right.

We're bombarded every day with claims for this or that. In truth, we live in a cacophonous world, a world that's interpreted for us by those who claim to "know". Figuring out what's true and what's not true is hard. It takes work and some knowledge. If we don't do the work and we don't build up our knowledge, however, we leave ourselves open and vulnerable to those who would use us as mere tools in their continued machinations. Are we happy to be tools? Or do we seek something better, more truthful?

Finance triumphant

"In response to their declining industrial position for thirty years, the most advanced countries (and especially the United States) have been undergoing financialization. The large banks have grown to over half of all banking; and banking at its peak earned 10 percent of all wages and 40 percent of all profits."

James Galbraith,
The End of Normal, 2014

More and more cruisers!

The cruise industry has experienced much growth in recent years. People love to get away on floating hotels and visit exotic locations, all the while being pampered in as many ways as possible.



But cruising may not be all fun and games. All those big cruise ships are like cities loose on the high seas that aren't always careful about how they dispose of waste on those seas, including human waste.

The Florida Caribbean Cruise Association reported in 2015 that cruising was growing at a fast rate and was expected to grow at a high rate well into the future.

Over 200 large cruise liners now exist, with more being built. Each of these ships is powered by the cheapest fuel available with few, if any, emission controls. In effect, cruise ships are an environmental hazard all on their own. According to some experts, one cruise ship may produce more pollution in one day than 13-million cars.

Writing in *The Observer* on January 8, Tracy McVeigh noted, "Not only do the giant cruise liners churn out pollutants at sea, they also keep their engines running when they are docked ..." So ports of call for cruise ships can find their air pollution rises, often beyond official limits.

The ship cruise industry is slated to grow at a rapid pace over the next few years. This growth will increase with the arrival of "mega" cruise liners. Can we accept this kind of growth?

What about the 49th?

Many writers and commentators use the “49th Parallel” as a reference term for the border between Canada and the United States. It’s easy, convenient, and wrong. Geographically, the 49th Parallel forms the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan and the United States, and it forms most of the border between British Columbia and the United States. But it is not the border between all of Canada and the United States. Cities such as Victoria, Toronto, Montreal, and Halifax are south of the 49th Parallel. Toronto, for instance, lies near the mid-point between the 43rd Parallel and the 44th Parallel.

We can note also that the state of Alaska lies well north of the 49th Parallel and is definitely not part of Canada.

Using the 49th Parallel as the reference may be convenient for different people. But those same people may claim to stand for accuracy in other areas. Why would they not stand for accuracy on the question of Canada’s border with the United States, a border that was hard won over the centuries?

Do you feel the ((resonance))?

What resonates with you? Do you more or less remain aware of the world around you? Or do you close yourself off? Are you attentive to your surroundings or do you become absorbed in your own thoughts, your own needs, and wants. Perhaps you’re swallowed up in your smart phone.

When we relate only to our own feelings and wants, we can become self-absorbed and fundamentally unaware of the larger world. In some cases, though, we can become too concerned about the world around us and lose ourselves. We need a good balance of inner and outer awareness to live our lives fully.

The things that need our attention are the things that give us an inner feeling of resonance. We can relate to them at a deeper level. Peripheral matters are really so much noise in our lives. But those things that resonate with us are our means of becoming fully alive. They deserve our attention.

An expensive export business

“A 2013 International Monetary Fund report estimated that Canada annually subsidizes the energy industry at a staggering \$34 billion.”

Gabriel Yiu
The Huffington Post Canada, Aug 31, 2015

Why do we owe what we owe?

A *debt audit* is a careful process of examining all the debts owed by an organization or a nation to determine the exact total of those debts, their nature, their authenticity, and how well they’re being managed.

Proper debt audits can uncover surprising facts. They might, for instance, determine that a certain debt has already been paid in full, but it’s still shown on the books as a result of a classification or input error.

A debt audit might disclose that a certain item or event was improperly billed because it had already been paid for in another context.

Debt audits might also discover cases of outright fraud. In fact, the issues that debt audits might reveal make it a matter of good management for any organization, including a nation or a city, to conduct them from time to time.

Given the fact that politicians regularly cite public debts as reasons not to take needed actions, public debt audits may be particularly important.

Such audits could show clearly who the creditors were and exactly why they’re owed the sums claimed. In some cases this could actually show that some claimed debts are illegitimate.

Further, proper and open public debt audits would clearly set out the reasons for debts, thereby bolstering or undermining political claims from various parties. Mechanical errors can creep in. The placement of a decimal point can make quite a difference in stating a dollar amount.

In the end, one wonders why managers of any strip would not institute debt audits from time to time. There’s much to be gained.

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Thanks for your interest.

Do we have prejudice against the poor?

Many people harbour deep suspicions about those who are less well off. They often find it easy to blame the poor themselves for their circumstances.

Looking at the dictionary (Collins Canadian English Dictionary), we find this definition for the word ‘poor’:

“having little money, unproductive, inadequate, insignificant, needy, miserable, pitiable, feeble, not fertile.”

Whew! Not much in the way of complimentary meanings there. Perhaps we should stop using the word altogether when we wish to talk about people with low incomes or no incomes at all. Certainly, the history of our society leaves little doubt that less than desirable connotations exist on all sides when it comes to thinking about the poor, let alone doing anything meaningful to be of genuine help to them.

As long as people of inadequate means are treated with disrespect, meanness, and outright prejudice, we cannot advance as a society. Disparaging or looking down on the “other” may make the smug and self-righteous feel more comfortable with themselves, but it reflects a tawdry moral position. You might even say it reflects a poverty of the soul.

When a large part of society looks down on or doesn’t really care about another large part of society, you have a recipe for unrest. That unrest may show itself in many different ways. History teaches us that some of those ways could be nasty. Do we really need to allow things to get to that point?