

What Kind of Canada Do You Want?



I've never claimed to be a political pundit, but I am a student of history, and lately I find myself deeply worried about the values and attitudes that are undermining what I believe this country has always aspired to be – a nation known for its compassion.

Now, admittedly, we've not always succeeded at that. From the perspective of Canada's indigenous and black communities - or any member of a visible minority - many would say we've failed. Miserably.

But I don't think we've given up trying to be a better, more just and compassionate society.

Otherwise, why would we maintain such neighbour-loving social programs as employment insurance, disability benefits, Canada Pension, and last but not least, income support for those who find themselves tossed out of the job market for years or, more recently, those without income during pandemic lockdowns.

And that doesn't even take into account a national health care system which ensures that no cancer patient will ever have to sell their house or go bankrupt paying for treatment. And no one with a chronic illness will ever be denied health insurance.

Our national sense of compassion even stretches into foreign affairs with peacekeeping efforts and a foreign aid budget which, admittedly, may not be enough but is better than many countries given that we rank 6th in total development spending.

In fact in 2022 Canada was chosen as the second most thoughtful country in the world after the Netherlands. Thoughtful being defined as respectful and compassionate.

So, if that's true, why am I seeing so much anger, disrespect and fear mongering these days? So much so, that Canadians are now flocking to the intolerant, some would say "dog whistle" politics of the right wing Poilievre conservatives, in election-winning numbers.

Well, it may have something to do with where we are at the moment. Inflation is down but prices – at the grocery store, in the housing market and elsewhere – are still gob-smackingly high. We've also just barely emerged from a life-threatening pandemic which for many of us meant the devastating loss of family and friends.

Add to that the mounting threats posed by a climate crisis, and you can see why people are anxious and fearful.

But fear, when combined with anger, can be a toxic mix, particularly in a time of perceived scarcity. We start seeing ourselves as victims and look for something or someone to blame. Immigrants - or anyone who looks, believes or acts differently - become the enemy. The unemployed are freeloaders. And the carbon tax becomes a cash grab instead of an effective measure to combat climate change.

And it's precisely that fear, anger and desire to blame that Mr. Poilievre is counting on to get himself and his party elected.



“But wait,” I hear you say. Polivere is just a common sense, free market kind of guy. He just wants to expand our rights and freedoms, cut back on government spending and deregulate to reduce the red tape that holds us back!

Put that way, Poilievre sounds like the would-be king of a small “I” liberal paradise. But just stop for a moment and ask yourself these questions:

Do you want balanced budgets achieved by slashing the social programs your neighbours, friends and even your kids may need to access one day?

Do you really want a government that protects your so-called freedom, by refusing to impose the lockdowns and mask mandates that save lives, while at the same time restricting the rights of LGBTQ kids?

Would you support cutting the “red tape” of environmental controls that keep our water drinkable and our air breathable or a leader who refuses to state his commitment to international climate agreements, and at the same time, is outspoken in his support of oil and gas exploitation, by any and all means?

And finally, do you, as Poilievre suggests, want “to take back ownership of and responsibility for your own future” to such an extent that you’re not only willing to axe the carbon tax but universal health care?

If your answer to any of these questions is “no” then you might want to swallow your anger and ditch your anxiety. Because with a federal election just a year away we need to make a choice. A choice between a respectful and compassionate society or an intolerant and selfish one - one that no longer recognizes that true freedom only comes with social responsibility.

We need to start talking about this critically and civilly with our families, our neighbours and friends, especially those we disagree with. Because the kind of Canada we live in is our choice.

And I sincerely hope we choose wisely.

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