

In the face of Omicron, Canada once again cowers in unnecessary fear



It is time for practically every jurisdiction in the western world to acknowledge that they have dismally failed to manage the COVID crisis. We almost all failed to learn promptly from the unfolding facts of the illness. It seems now to be fairly well-established that the Chinese, with the complicity of the World Health Organization on which it has excessive influence, withheld the gravity of coronavirus from the world while allowing it to be exported around the globe, before suppressing it within China in the most authoritarian manner. China gained a great strategic victory as the rest of the world closed down like idiots. In the United States, the wall-to-wall anti-Trump national political media and Democratic

party strategists saw very quickly an opportunity to retrieve an election that, as the coronavirus pandemic began, appeared likely to be won by President Donald Trump.

It was over-hyped and accorded an almost terrorizing quality, slightly resembling the Black Death: no one was safe. A bipartisan impulse to face an unforeseeable crisis from overseas in a spirit of national unity continued for approximately one week before Trump began taking over the daily press briefings that he had assigned to Vice-President Mike Pence, and his media enemies began planting insolent questioners and turning information meetings into undignified baiting sessions. The overwhelming majority of the American national political media that was hostile to Trump was slow to disseminate relevant facts. They assisted Trump's enemies by downplaying the role comorbidities play in coronavirus deaths, largely suppressing the facts that 80 per cent of fatalities had other significant medical problems, that 80 per cent of fatalities occurred among people over the age of 65 and that the disease did not present a huge risk for young, healthy people. Over 99 per cent of people under 65 survive it.

The Democratic strategists quickly saw that the road to electoral victory lay in mounting a deafening campaign against Trump for wilful ignorance and hostility toward science, arguing that he had a moral duty to shut down the schools and the entire economy, thus inducing a recession that they could then hang around his neck. The COVID crisis also provided a splendid opportunity for altering the voting rules in a number of swing states, ostensibly to assure a large vote. These included massive recourse to what Americans call "ballot harvesting," where absentee ballots are collected by third parties, often political campaigns, who drop them off at the post office or a ballot collection centre, and mail-in voting in states that had not previously allowed it and had little to no experience ensuring that their voters' lists were up to date and that the chain of custody of each ballot could be

accounted for. Democrats knew this provided them with a distinct advantage. The drive for a profound lockdown thus became an integral part of the Democratic election strategy. Canada had no such excuse.

It was predicted that it would take several years to produce a vaccine and there is no question that Trump's own interventions as an efficient executive enabled the production of effective vaccines to be radically accelerated. Some of Trump's opponents suggested they would not trust a vaccine developed under his auspices, but once elected they have unsuccessfully attempted to coerce the population into vaccination, a policy that the Supreme Court dealt a substantial blow to on Thursday.

The relevance to Canada of the politicized treatment of the pandemic in the United States was that Canada, as usually occurs, slavishly emulated American practice, oblivious to the context of a fierce electoral battle. Where there was some policy debate in the U.S., much of it clangorous and demagogic, Canada unctuously and robotically shut down and ignored the fact that there was very little danger to healthy young and middle-aged people. There was little media interest in exploring the consequences of such a lockdown for the school population and particularly for the state-operated school systems, where the administrators and teachers generally showed a high state of relief and satisfaction that they were able to be paid to do practically no work and simply conduct what amounted to internet daycare classes.

The teachers' unions were allowed to blackmail the parents and retard the development of their children, even as non-unionized schools demonstrated that children were usually minimally affected or asymptomatic and that schools were not large sources of transmission. Even public parks were closed and some outdoor gatherings were banned, though it became clear early on that the illness was not likely to be transmitted under these conditions. Many office-based

businesses could be conducted virtually. But many other businesses, such as manufacturing and hospitality, had to shut down and while some of their laid-off employees were jubilant about being paid to do nothing, many, and most of their employers, were, if compensated at all, very inadequately so. Much of the private sector became insolvent as our governments indebted us with profligate and sanctimonious enthusiasm. Behind it all was the tocsin sounded from that centre of globalist homogenization and socialist regimentation, the World Economic Forum, in the dismal town of Davos, Switzerland: this was an opportunity for reorienting society that should be seized and imposed.

This gleam was in the eye of the Trudeau government and of many of the provincial governments. Yet Canada lagged throughout in the distribution of vaccines, behind many economically less-developed countries.

If the federal and most of the provincial governments' positions were unimaginative, cynical and incompetent, the cowardice of the federal and most of the provincial oppositions were even more contemptible: the federal Conservatives proposed a commission of inquiry into the response to the coronavirus without seriously criticizing its opponents. As I wrote in this space nine months ago, the official Opposition should not have demanded a commission of inquiry; it should have slathered the government for its failures, particularly for the vaccination fiasco and in not advocating special treatment on behalf of the elderly and other vulnerable groups. The official reaction to the Omicron variant has been exactly the opposite of what should have occurred. Omicron spreads like wildfire but is much less severe and the great majority of people are asymptomatic. Data out of Ontario suggests Omicron infection is less than half as likely to lead to hospitalization or death as Delta and there is growing evidence that recovery from Omicron protects against more dangerous variants. Thus Omicron, if it

supplements full vaccination, leaves almost all healthy people of all ages very unlikely to have serious problems. Shutting everything down again because of Omicron is insane, and postpones a fast ticket to general public immunity and the end of the crisis. Full vaccination reduces the chances of death, small though they are, by upwards of 95 per cent, and Omicron could end the pandemic for the vaccinated population.

Even now, after all we have learned and been through, there is no sign that the various governments of Canada have figured out much of this. At least the Americans have had a fierce, if wildly partisan, public debate and a great deal of litigation. Canada's performance has been quiet, submissive and completely unworthy of a mature and sophisticated political society.

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