

Ideas, Facts, and Opinions for Today

Pan American Money Maker?

In July of 2015 Toronto and surrounding communities host the Pan American and in August the Parapan American Games. This has generated much excitement and many good predictions for the future of Toronto and Canada as a whole.

Nagging doubts do exist though. We know that many Olympic games events have overrun estimated costs and left their host cities with debt burdens lasting many years.

The original budget for the Toronto games was set at \$1.4-billion. This rose to \$2.5-billion by November of 2014. The spring of 2015 saw it hit over \$3-billion.

Planning and preparation for the games has not been trouble free. In 2014 the original CEO, Ian Troop, was fired. He received over \$530,000 in severance and benefits as a result.

In April of 2015, the Globe and Mail reported that the new CEO, Saad Rafi, had made \$438,718 in 2014 and received \$10,095 in benefits. We can look forward to seeing the results that arise in the future from Rafi's experience and expertise.

The Chair of the Toronto Pan American Games Board of Directors is former Ontario premier, David Peterson. As premier, he had approved

of Sky Dome (now the Rogers Centre) which opened in 1989.

He had predicted great things for Toronto and Ontario from Sky Dome. A few years after it had opened it was sold off as a money loser. The government lost about \$300-million of public funds in the deal. Peterson is now predicting great things for Toronto and Ontario as a result of the Pan American Games.

Many rosy financial predictions do exist for the games, and a lot of private enterprises, such as hotels and restaurants, stand to benefit. It may be that these games will prove the exception and provide wonderful things for the future. Still, doubts linger.

In November of 2014, provincial auditor general, Bonnie Lysyk warned of rising costs. She expressed particular concern about rising security costs. A terrorist scare before the games could skew cost/benefit estimates badly.

Supporters of these games assure us that they're a sound infrastructure investment for the future.

After August of 2015 we'll certainly find out what the economic and social benefits will turn out to be.

What about free public transit?

Every now and then someone comes up with the idea of making public transit free for everyone. This seems madness to some who worry about costs. Still, it might be worth some thought.

Historically, we developed vertical transit in the form of elevators at the same time as we were developing horizontal transit in the form of streetcars, buses and subway trains.



The former were free, but the latter always had a price tag or fare attached. Should we continue to charge for horizontal transport? Or might we copy the vertical transport notion and make all public transportation structures free?

Two years ago, Tallinn in Estonia, began to provide free transit to its residents. This change has proved highly popular and appears to have benefited that city. Should other cities follow suit?

Obviously, free transit would immediately benefit people on low incomes. It would cut down on excess traffic on our streets. It would also benefit our climate by reducing fossil-fuel emissions.

Free public transit might also work to build a better community through increased access to public amenities such as parks or community centres — or to each other!

Maybe free public transit isn't madness after all.

What about those 'talking points'?

If even the public sector broadcasters parrot the talking points of the elite, what hope is there for informed democratic choice?

George Monbiot
The Guardian, Jan 20, 2015

Greenhouse gases

The greenhouse gases (GHGs) that concern us when it comes to climate change are:

- ◆ carbon dioxide [CO₂]
- ◆ methane [CH₄]
- ◆ nitrous oxide (N₂O)
- ◆ water vapour [H₂O]

Extreme heat danger

Extreme heat events, or heat waves, are a leading cause of extreme weather-related deaths in the United States.

The number of heat-related deaths is rising. For example, in 1995, 465 heat-related deaths occurred in Chicago.

From 1999 to 2010, a total of 7,415 people died of heat-related deaths, an average of about 618 deaths a year.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

Who did the British vote for?



With all the talk about David Cameron’s majority government after the recent general election in the United Kingdom, it’s easy to conjure up an image of the British people overwhelmingly going to the polls to favour the Conservatives with their ballots.

This was not exactly the case.

About 36.8% of the vote went to the Conservatives. This represented about 24% of those eligible to vote. Labour picked up 30.5% of the vote. In all, over 63% of the vote went to parties other than the Conservatives. So the large majority of British voters do not seem to have wanted David Cameron and his Conservatives to govern them.

Still, the Conservatives now have 330 seats in the House of Commons – a majority in that 650-seat chamber.

Cameron laid out a platform that included a referendum on EU membership and £12-billion in cuts to social welfare. The “austerity agenda” is alive and well under Cameron, despite widespread popular opposition. It seems that divisive times lie ahead for Britain.



What do you mean it’s 2015? We haven’t dropped our bombs yet!

Psst! Have you got a secret?

Secrecy and security are major issues for the military, the police, and various other government organizations. Most people are aware of that. After all, TV programs and Hollywood productions rely on plot lines that delve into the often murky world of espionage. Where would we be without James Bond or Arnold Schwarzenegger?

For ordinary people the priorities of our security services may have more meaning and impact than they realize. You never know when someone working for a government agency might take a direct interest in you and your activities. As Edward Snowden has revealed, ordinary citizens are not immune from sophisticated eavesdropping.

Your cellphone or smart phone could be broadcasting all sorts of information about you and what you’re up to, including where you are. Even when it’s turned off, your cellphone can be used as a listening device by people with the right hardware and software. They can listen in on you and your friends from a good distance, and you would never know it. Similarly, people with the right devices can find out what’s in your wallet simply by walking near you. And, of course, those emails you send and receive are virtually open to the world, unless you have sophisticated encryption.

Is there a file on you somewhere in the security apparatus? Quite possibly. If you have participated in some sort of public activity or your name is on a list somewhere of an organization deemed to be opposed to the existing order of things, you could easily have your own file – and this file might be shared with allies such as the Americans or the British.

Should we be paranoid? Well, as the saying goes, “Just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean someone isn’t out to get you.” These days, perhaps a touch of paranoia isn’t a bad thing.



How would you like to be sailing?

Who prints money?

The Bank of Canada and the chartered private banks in Canada for the most part don’t actually ‘print’ money. They create new money in the form of entries on their computer systems.

No need for federal balancing

“It is not true that the federal government needs to balance its books now or in the future. It is not even true that it could if it wanted to.”

*James Galbraith
The End of Normal, 2014*

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..

E-versions of this newsletter are available for free. You just have to ask. No selling, no hassles!

Contact Robyn Peterson at:
petersonwrite@hotmail.com

What about the bureaucrats?

In many cases nowadays the word "bureaucrat" has become a synonym for someone who gets in the way, someone who will bind you up in red tape at the drop of a hat. The word "bureaucracy" is also virtually a synonym for "government".

The cry goes up from some who call themselves free enterprisers or libertarians that all would be well in the marketplace if only they could get rid of bureaucracy. Less bureaucracy, more enterprise, more wealth, more joy in the land!

As we think about bureaucrats, we should remember that large corporations have bureaucrats too, although they may not be called such. Corporate administration manuals provide legal codes within the operating context of the corporation. Corporate bureaucrats are expected to ensure that employees adhere to the rules and provisions in these manuals. At times, the adherence process can be just as annoying for entrepreneurs or managers when applied by corporate bureaucrats as when applied by government bureaucrats.

What about the concept of the good bureaucrat? Is this a contradiction in terms? Are bureaucrats always nuisances to be fought tooth and nail or avoided if possible?

We can start with a couple of points. Laws and administrative provisions exist in the first place to deal with specific types of issues or cases

in as effective and standardized a manner as possible. So bureaucrats are tasked with policing the system. Ideally, by doing so they'll ensure that a level playing field exists for all. They also can keep entrepreneurs or entire corporations out of legal trouble. In short, bureaucrats are needed.

But we know that bureaucrats can be obstructionist or enabling. Ideally, we want the enablers.

Good bureaucrats are those who can help managers and others "navigate the system". They point out bureaucratic issues ahead of time and suggest good ways to deal with them. Ideally, they can map out strategies for ensuring that bureaucratic requirements for different operations or projects are satisfied from beginning to end. This way, possible impediments can be dealt with in advance.

Good bureaucrats can only come into the picture in a fully productive way if they have involvement early on. If they're suddenly confronted with dilemmas, they may not be able to act quickly enough to avoid delays or expensive disruptions. So an element of trust must exist.

Bureaucrats should not be impediments to success. They should not automatically look for ways to block things. Ideally, they should be enablers of success. The important thing is to involve them in the right way, a positive way, from the start. That way, everyone can win.



Does anyone have a paddle?

Can you see CETA?

A major trade deal with Europe is being negotiated secretly at the highest levels. This trade deal (Canada-European Union Trade Agreement) will have significant implications for all Canadians, yet those implications are not being discussed openly with ordinary people.

Linda McQuaig reported last fall (Rabble.ca Oct 2, 2014) "... the trade deal is, above all, a kind of constitution that enshrines corporate rights above the reach of national laws, that is, above the reach of democratically elected governments." If this is so, does this represent what most Canadians want?

One pernicious aspect of the negotiations so far seems to be a plan to providing significant power to international tribunals. These would mainly be made up of corporate appointees. These tribunals would have the right to arbitrate lawsuits launched by private corporations against any level of Canadian government that involved corporate objections to government actions seen as impeding private profit making. Who knows what perceived actions could come under legal scrutiny here? Governments could end up being fined hundreds of millions of dollars.

"Private makes right" is to be written into law and deliberately set beyond normal democratic processes.

It seems that CETA is now being negotiated on behalf of major corporations and the top 10% of the population. Further, it is deliberately being designed to thwart democratically-based popular initiatives.

Do Canadians actually want this?

Is your information complete?

"The traditional trade theory of comparative advantage starts off from a baseline assumption of perfect markets, with all sides having complete information about what they are buying and selling, and where economies can rapidly adjust to producing new goods in response to new trading opportunities."

Alan Beattie,
False Economy, 2009



Can't I have more?

Chinese pollution

"About 75% of Chinese lakes, and almost all coastal seas, are polluted."

Jaared Diamond

Collapse. How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed, 2005

The 4-step method of instructing

A classic approach to instructing someone, especially in the work setting, is called the 4-Step method. This probably originated during the First World War when there was an urgent need to be able to train workers quickly (including women) to work in war industries. Here are the steps:

1. Prepare people.

- ◆ Make sure they're at ease.
- ◆ Describe the task or operation and find out what they already know about it.
- ◆ Build their interest.
- ◆ Make sure they're positioned properly to carry out the task or operation.

2. Present the task or operation.

- ◆ Clearly state and demonstrate one important step at a time.
- ◆ Note the key points, including reasons for doing them as shown.
- ◆ Don't rush — keep instructions clear and complete — be patient.
- ◆ Repeat the demonstration and ask questions as you do so.

3. Let them do it.

- ◆ Have them do the job on their own — correcting errors (considerately).
- ◆ Have them repeat their performance.
- ◆ Use questions to make sure they understand.
- ◆ Continue with job activity until you're sure they've "got it".

4. Follow-up

- ◆ Let people work at the job on their own — make sure they know who they can go to for help.
- ◆ Check with them from time to time as they work, encouraging questions.
- ◆ Hand over to the on-the-job supervisor when they seem ready.

Keep this method in mind any time you need to instruct people. It's been proved out over many years, so you can be comfortable in working with it.

It's your fault!

A couple went on a lovely holiday to Hawaii. Unexpectedly, baby decided to arrive extra early. Not to worry, American health facilities are excellent. Mother and preemie would be well looked after.

The couple was surprised by the unexpected birth, but they were not concerned about the prospect of hospital bills. After all, they had taken out travel insurance before they left Canada.

Unfortunately, the insurance company informed them that they would not be covered for the premature birth and after care because the woman had a pre-existing health condition. She had been ill a couple of months earlier, but had gotten over that illness. She had not reported the fact of her illness on the insurance application. The fact that she had been ill was declared to be a pre-existing, undisclosed condition, and that was that as far as the insurance company was concerned.

In the end, the couple was presented with a hospital bill for one-million dollars, which they were expected to pay in full.

For some people one-million may be chump change. For most people, however, it's a staggering amount. The couple faced bankruptcy.

How does such a thing happen? Travel industry experts say it's a matter of reading the fine print. But they don't mention that the fine print has been made deliberately difficult to read and comprehend.

In the consume, consume world we live in, we're confronted by fine print issues on all sides. Quick, did you carefully read the licensing agreement the last time you bought and installed software? Did you fully read and comprehend the bank's document when you last took out a loan? What about the agreement terms for your credit cards? Typically, we trust the people who sell us things to include what's fair in their contract documents. Seemingly, that trust may be misplaced. And that misplaced trust could cost us big time.

About twenty years ago plain language advocates were heard from in a wide range of government and corporate areas. Governments, such as the Alberta government, passed legislation supporting plain language. Legal associations passed resolutions. Osgoode Hall, the law hub in Toronto, declared its support for plain language legal documents. Banks and insurance companies joined the cause. The Royal Bank of Canada regularly published a newsletter supporting plain language.

What happened to all that "sincere" talk about plain language? Was it nothing but hogwash all the time, a naive hope for the public? Perhaps it was just one more marketing gimmick.

In a free-enterprise world we're supposed to have well informed people pursuing goods and services in a competitive marketplace. But what if the consumers aren't well informed? In fact, what if they're deliberately misled or confounded by obscure and tangled language? And what if the competition is rigged so that monopolies or near-monopolies dominate? Is that still a free enterprise system as economists would define it? Is it even capitalism?

It's all very well to blame consumers if they don't understand fully what they're getting into with their purchases. *Caveat emptor*, buyer beware, is a well worn concept. But is this really a fair concept to fall back on if buyers are deliberately misled by tangled verbiage designed to obscure rather than clarify?

For those who delight in making their profits using deliberate methods of language manipulation and obfuscation it may be a fair game. For consumers, however, it is anything but. What kind of a society are we building when this kind of manipulation is engaged in without hesitation? Is it too much to call this deliberate manipulation fraud?

Do we now live in a society that condones fraud? If we do condone fraud, is that our own fault?