

SAYOUT

Canada and the world

Spring 2016

Ideas, Facts, and Opinions for Today

Eat and be modified

We've got used to the idea of connecting our food with our health. Food is essential to life itself. And the right kinds of food can certainly be good for us.

Given the critical importance of food to our lives, our food must be handled, grown, transported, packaged, and displayed carefully on store shelves. Agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States provide laboratory testing and assurances to our health care system and the public in general. But slip-ups can occur. Listeria, E-coli, or salmonella may slip through at times causing illness and sometimes death. Serious problems do occur.

In his 2015 book, "Altered Genes, Twisted Truth", Steven M. Druker raises serious questions about the safety of GM foods. Druker is an American lawyer and executive director of the *Alliance for Bio-Integrity*. He is suing the US Food and Drug Administration for the way it went about approving GM food. He asserts that the FDA has committed fraud in its past approvals and continues to support GM foods based on false premises.

Some farmers are told by large corporations such as Monsanto that they must buy correct and patented GMO seeds every year instead of saving seeds from one year to the next. Farmers see their expenses rise sharply. Many face financial problems as a result.

Druker tells us that the recombinant DNA process that produces GMOs is unlike traditional breeding methods for developing new strains of crops or better livestock. The genetic engineering process is not within the centuries-old tradition of breeding, Druker ex-

plains carefully why this is so.

Consumer Reports (Feb, 2016) noted that, "The vast majority of corn, soy, canola, and sugar beets grown in the U.S. are now genetically engineered, and are often used as ingredients in processed foods."

The David Suzuki Foundation states, "The safety of GMO foods is unproven and a growing body of research connects these foods with health concerns and environmental damage." (accessed Feb 6, 2016.)

Druker notes that genetic engineering transfers "regulatory elements" along with any transferred genes. Regulatory elements include 'promoters' and 'terminators' which directly impact on how an organism receiving a foreign gene will behave. It's not as simple as inserting a different style of brick into a wall. These "bricks" have characteristics of their own and act differently in new settings from how they acted in previous settings.

GM crops are supposed to reduce pesticide use. But pesticide use with these GM crops has been increasing. New "super weeds" are resistant to pesticides that worked before. Nature has adapted and seems to have lashed back.

When we eat GM food, we're introducing different genetic material into our bodies than our bodies have traditionally dealt with. No one knows the full implications. In effect we're being experimented on in ways that could prove disastrous in the future. By what authority are we being subjected to a massive genetic experiment without our permission?

We need and deserve much better answers than we've been getting. Our health and our lives depend on it.

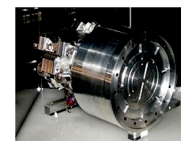


Robyn Peterson

Spring brings us flowers

Flywheels for power

Flywheels have been known and used for thousands of years. The pottery wheel, for instance, is basically a flywheel.



Applying outside power to flywheels turns them into useful energy storage systems – rivaling batteries.

Flywheels have been used to power trains in Texas and England, and buses in other countries, such as Switzerland.

They are competitive with other forms of energy storage and power.

They do not add, in themselves, to greenhouse gas emissions.

Modern flywheels have advanced to the point where they're worth serious consideration in dealing with our energy needs. Shouldn't we be hearing more about them?

A failure of privatization

"Privatisation promised to turn the UK into an island of small shareholders. It failed: the faceless state bureaucrats have been replaced by faceless (better-paid) private bureaucrats – and big foreign corporations."

James Meek

The Guardian, August 22, 2014

What about the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Early in 1947 a remarkable discovery occurred near the Dead Sea in Palestine after a curious young Bedouin goat herder ventured into an opening in a cliff and found clay pots containing strange and ancient scrolls. As this discovery became known, it resulted in some curiosity and a lot of confusion.



When religious and archeological professionals heard about it, they went to see the discoveries for themselves. Astonishment arose as it was thought that the scrolls had been written by a certain early religious sect prior to 200 BCE. Later studies seemed to show that they included writings from the first century CE. They related directly to books of the Bible, traditional Jewish teachings, and early Christian teachings.

As violence and upheaval continued with the formation of the state of Israel, the Dead Sea Scrolls became embroiled in quarrels about jurisdiction and ownership. Complicating things further was an active black market involving illegal traders and unscrupulous dealers in antiquities. Sorting out the genuine from the fake was a continuing challenge. Additional complications arose from a lively industry that grew up to produce counterfeit copies of the scrolls.

In 1952 about eight hundred more

scrolls were discovered in another cave. This produced worldwide astonishment and caused many to wonder what impact all the scrolls might have on traditional religious teachings. Potential implications exist for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Over a period of almost seventy years, the existence and interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls has produced many publications, public declarations, and much controversy.

Christian groups, in particular, have been anxious to show that the scrolls reinforce in all respects their traditional teachings. Others have maintained that those teachings are directly challenged by what the scrolls reveal, including clearer definitions of what the term "messiah" means and whether Jesus was truly divine. Some go so far as to claim that the scrolls do not support the assertion that Jesus was crucified.

The Dead Sea Scrolls offer us a unique glimpse into the history of the Middle East in ancient times. But their contents appear to raise important questions that have yet to be answered in a fully satisfactory way. As more unbiased research occurs, we are likely to pick up more intriguing pearls of knowledge along the way.

That added knowledge may challenge existing orthodoxies, but it may also open up new vistas of thought and belief for all of us.



Robyn Peterson

What lies beyond?

An American science problem

"The network of right-wing foundations, the corporations that fund them, and the journalists who echo their claims have created a tremendous problem for American science."

*Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway,
Merchants of Doubt, 2010*

Oops!

In our previous (Winter) edition, we stated that the euro came into existence in 1992.

The euro actually came into being on January 1, 1999. The member states of the Eurozone have since used the euro for their key financial dealings.

We apologize for our error.

Are you an ataraxic?

The word "ataraxia" describes a state of mental peace and calmness, even bliss. This state of mind can arise from meditation. Some people can stay in this state for extended periods of time.

Given all the stressors and upheavals that surround us every day, seeking to achieve an ataraxic state is well worth while. Calmness amidst noise and confusion is a valuable prize to seek.

Live with peace and calmness. Be an ataraxic.

Three women?



Can you see three women in Einstein's face?

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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Basel in the Background

Every now and then we hear about something called the Basel Accords. If we do hear about them, we may then shrug: So what?

Well, the Basel Accords are fundamental to the way we bank.

In 1929 the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) was set up to handle German war reparations as required by the 1919 Versailles Treaty.

Initially the bank occupied unassuming quarters in Basel, Switzerland. In the 1970s the bank moved to newer and bigger quarters, sometimes called "The Tower of Basel".

The central bankers of about six major nations essentially run the BIS. These include Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan.

Roughly sixty nations follow the guidelines of the BIS, including Canada.

The BIS now provides the ground rules for how the world's big banks should operate. These ground rules are the Basel Accords.

The BIS is not subject to government control or oversight and exists to preserve and enhance private banking throughout the world.

In 1988 the BIS issued Basel I designed to ensure stability in the world banking system.

In the fall of 2013 Basel Accord III was announced. This accord was meant to strengthen the position of banks in the face of financial uncertainties. It called for increased bank reserves and better provisions for liquidity.

Many people became concerned about provisions for bail-ins. In Cyprus, a year or so earlier, bail-ins by the banking system had involved dipping into people's savings accounts. Mark Carney, then governor of the Bank of Canada provided public assurances that nothing of the sort would happen in Canada.

But, in line with Basel III, it might just be possible in this country too.

The financial world we live in remains murky and more than a little intimidating for the ordinary person. Where it will take us — who really knows? But it could cost us.

Living values

Are we nurturing the right values to take us successfully and sustainably into a good future? If selfishness and greed remain dominant, the answer to this question is obvious. The personal gains for the few will receive emphasis even though the many may suffer from increasing deprivation.

If our values come to emphasize genuine compassion for others, we encourage a different kind of society, a more humane society. In such a society, widespread and wilful destruction of the surrounding environment becomes much less acceptable. This kind of society would also avoid stigmatizing people for being poor or disabled or of the wrong religion or colour.

The truly compassionate society would emphasize real sustainability, not just the tokenism of arranging different bins for different kinds of waste. Our values connect strongly with our environment.

If active measures were taken to make our activities in the world more sustainable and climate friendly, many more jobs could be created. But they would be different jobs from the ones we're used to, and their existence might not create quite so many opportunities for a few people to become super rich through massively destructive activities such as careless open-pit mining or the clear-cutting of mature forests in the developing world.

The world climate agreement of December, 2015 contained many good promises. It falls short, however, in the area of specific objectives and of legally binding commitments. Good words with little real action are definitely not enough.

Our values guide our lives and build entire societies. When we work to give life to worthy values, we move ourselves in the direction of a better world — for everyone.

When the United Nations came into being right after the Second World War, the dream of a better world was very much to the fore in people's minds. Was theirs a forlorn and hopeless dream?

Or is it something we can bring into life together? What do we really value most?

Ferengis in our midst?

In the various Star Trek series we sometimes encountered the Ferengi.



These were a strange species whose central theme as a society was that of "acquisition". Every Ferengi was expected continually to look for things to acquire. In particular, Ferengis wanted to build up good stores of latinum, their favoured form of money.

As we look up at the top floors of the downtown towers of our banks and corporations, is it possible that Ferengi are at work behind those windows? Could they be staring intently at computer screens to see how much they've acquired recently—in dollars, gold, latinum, or Bitcoins? Do they have the Ferengi "Laws of Acquisition" lovingly framed and hanging on their walls?

Could it be?

Is that real?

"Education, building community, honesty, transparency, and sharing are qualities that will see you, as a gross perversion of democracy and morality, voted off a reality show."

*Chris Hedges
Empire of Illusion, 2009*

Authoritative Deceit

We're used to the idea that politicians may deceive us. But what about the 'experts'? Might scientists and technologists deceive us? Could they lead us disastrously astray?

Take care with what you believe.



Robyn Peterson

So where did you want to go?

Who's plotting today?

Not long after he took office in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt brought in his New Deal. This was a major and comprehensive programme designed to lift the United States out of the Depression. It involved restrictions on corporate activities, including those of the big banks. It also meant increased taxes for the wealthier sectors of the economy. Many of the upper classes balked at Roosevelt's actions. Some even regarded him as a "class traitor".

In late November of 1934, retired Marine general, Smedley Darlington Butler, laid out the details of an astonishing plot to the House UnAmerican Activities Committee convened in secret in New York City. Butler told the committee that he'd been approached to lead a heavily financed coup to displace Roosevelt as president. He stated that prominent business leaders had grouped together to support this plot. He spelled out in detail who had approached him, when, and where.

Butler had served in the Marines with distinction for over thirty years. He had even won two Congressional Medals of Honor. After his retirement, however, he had spoken about his military role. He stated publicly that he had, in effect, been a strongman for American corporations in dealing with Latin American countries and China. In effect, he'd served the interests of corporate profits through the use of military force.

Some people had a lot of difficulty in taking Butler's 1934 testimony seriously. Press articles actually lampooned him, and more than a few members of the wealthier classes asserted that Butler had been the victim of a hoax. After all, how seriously could you take a plot that had sought to recruit Butler, a man publicly antagonistic to many corporate goals and a known associate of socialists? The UnAmerican Activities Committee took little further action on Butler's report, and no "conspirators" were pursued or apprehended. It was as though nothing

untoward had happened.

A decade earlier, a man named Adolf Hitler had been lampooned in Germany, especially after his failed Beer Hall Putsch of November, 1923. But Hitler, despite the mockery, had recruited a genuine German hero, General Erich Ludendorff, to his cause. And the general had marched with him in the streets of Munich during the failed putsch.

Despite all the doubts and derision and his ignominious defeat in Munich, Hitler managed to come into power in Germany in 1933, with the significant help of the retired General Hindenburg, then president of Germany. We know what happened after that.

Was General Butler's story truly unbelievable? Most commentators and historians seem to think not. Something was afoot in 1934 in the United States, and it posed a real threat to the Roosevelt administration. We know too that more than a few significant American figures such as Henry Ford, Walt Disney and Colonel Lindbergh were admirers of Hitler and saw much merit in what he was doing in Germany. Canada's own Prime Minister Mackenzie King met Hitler later in the 1930s and pronounced himself pleased with the encounter.

When we consider the realities of today's world, perhaps we should give some thought to the possibilities of extremist designs and activities that may be going on around us. What anxieties and fears is Donald Trump tapping into in the United States at this point? Is he truly a radical, a frightening demagogue? Is he luring millions of people down a treacherous path, a fascist path?

Many people mocked "The Donald" at the beginning of 2016. They thought his campaign for leadership of the Republican Party was a joke. By the spring of 2016, however, the "joke" had disappeared, and reality revealed a person with an astonishing array of support who might credibly win the leadership and even become the next president of the United States. What then? Somewhere, an old and ominous clock is ticking.

Climate change deniers

"Overwhelmingly, climate change deniers are not only conservative but also white and male, a group with higher than average incomes. And they are more likely than other adults to be highly confident in their views, no matter how demonstrably false."

Naomi Klein

This Changes Everything, 2014

A question of money

Early in 2014 the Bank of England in its quarterly bulletin noted: "Whenever a bank makes a loan, it simultaneously creates a matching deposit in the borrower's bank account, thereby creating new money." In essence, the process of borrowing creates money, virtually out of thin air.

For some people the notion of creating money out of thin air seems absurd. Yet, it is true. This is the origin of most of the enormous amounts of money now circulating in the world's financial system.

Government can engage in this kind of money creation if it so chooses. If a government entity lent \$100-million to a given organization, that money could be created automatically as part of the loan. It would not impose added debt on the government's finances.

In many cases government takes on debt it doesn't have to. It could create money in the same way private banks do. In effect, a good deal of government debt is unnecessary debt.

The important element here is the credit worthiness of the borrower. Is the organization good for it? Will the loan be paid back? Sound loans make sound money.



Robyn Peterson

Tranquillity awaits