

## The Dogger Bank Affair

On a foggy morning late in October of 1904 a fleet of fishing boats returned to their home port of Kingston-upon-Hull, England. The boats presented a sorry picture to the townspeople who gathered to welcome the fleet back. Masts and spars were damaged and damage showed up on the boats' hulls. And some of the fishers were bandaged. Worse, it soon became evident that a couple of fishers had died. What on earth had happened?

The story soon emerged. The fleet had been fishing on the Dogger Bank in the North Sea, not far from Denmark. Suddenly, they had been attacked by a dark fleet of warships. Powerful naval guns had roared through misty darkness, their heavy projectiles hurled at the fishing boats. Thankfully, most of the shots missed. But enough hit home to do real damage and wound some of the fishers, even killing two of them immediately. One fisher died of his wounds later.

It turned out that the fishing fleet had come under attack from the Baltic Fleet of the Imperial Russian Navy. Lookouts and officers aboard the Russian ships had decided that the fishing boats were Japanese torpedo boats and had set about engaging them in a wild and one-sided battle.

Some Russian ships even fired on each other, killing two of their own people. The Russians had been extra jumpy and with reason.

Some months earlier the Japanese had launched a surprise attack on the Russian Pacific fleet based in Port Arthur (today's Lushunkou) on the Chinese coast. This attack involved torpedoes launched by destroyers and

torpedo boats. It had resulted in some damage to Russian battleships and, subsequently, the Japanese had besieged the port. This attack was the start of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war.

The Russian high command decided to reinforce its Pacific fleet with the Baltic Sea fleet. This meant a major movement of warships around the world. Further, it involved moving those warships in the face of British hostility.

The British, who had signed a treaty with Japan in 1902, refused Russian access to British colonial coaling stations. So the Russian ships set sail heavily burdened with coal piled up wherever it could be stowed. Their ships had dangerously low freeboard as a result and were not easy to handle.

After the attack on the British fishing fleet, crowds gathered in London and other British cities demanding that Britain declare war on Russia. Tempers ran very high. Still, cool-headedness won through and the whole affair was reviewed and settled by an international commission.

Unfortunately for the Russians, after sailing over 30,000 kilometres, their ships were sunk by the Japanese in a remarkable sea battle in the Straits of Tsushima.

Flashpoint incidents continue to occur in this old world of ours. Sometimes these incidents bring strong emotional responses. In a dangerous world, though, keeping our emotions in check and looking for cool ways to solve things usually provides us with the path of reason and wisdom. Thinking back to the Dogger Bank affair may help us in shaping and applying the thoughtful coolness we need today.

## GDP rules – what?

Whenever anyone wishes to discuss the health of our economy, GDP (Gross Domestic Product) regularly comes into the conversation. Is it up or is it down?

Given its prominence in our discourse, one would think that GDP is a fail-safe measure of real economic health. But it is not, far from it.

Economist after economist has shown that GDP is deeply flawed as a measure of economic health. It tends to value destruction over conservation, for instance. And it doesn't reflect the well-being of society as a whole.

The Stiglitz Commission in France reported that *"Too much emphasis on GDP as the unique benchmark can lead to misleading indications about how well-off people are and run the risk of leading to the wrong policy decisions."*

President Sarkozy of France had appointed Joseph E. Stiglitz in 2008 to head the commission. Sarkozy hoped that its work might help in finding another measure for an economy's health.

Despite its serious flaws, GDP continues to be used as a key measure for making important economic decisions for our society.

It is high time other measures were given prominence in the councils of our exalted leaders – inequality for instance.

The next time you hear a politician invoking GDP for some new policy, be sceptical, very sceptical. GDP is a flawed economic measure, and, for most of us, it leads to flawed government actions.

## The banks wanted big money

*"Since 2008 the U.S. Federal Reserve has monetized \$4 trillion in Quantitative Easing Credit to banks."*

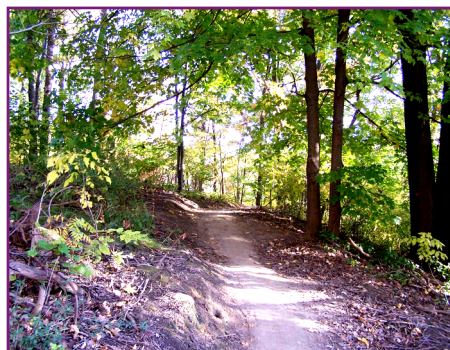
Michael Hudson  
*Killing the Host, 2015*

### Urgency of the business world

*"The whole urgency of the modern business world is towards speeding up, greater efficiency, more intense international competition, when it ought to be towards more ease, less hurry, and combination to produce goods for use rather than profit."*

*"Competition, since the industrial revolution, is an anachronism, leading inevitably to all the evils of the modern world."*

Bertrand Russell with Dora Russell,  
*The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*, 1970 (orig. 1923)



Robyn Peterson

Do we see signs of healthy growth?

### Laundering money for 'clean' profits

Hundreds of billions of dollars of shady money are crashing around the world at any given moment.

Banks, even the most respectable ones, can be quite accommodating to those with sufficiently large amounts of cash, even if it's illegal cash. (More than a few property purchases in North America occur on a cash basis.)

Much of the shady money is downright dirty. This means it needs to be laundered so investigators might believe it's clean money. Investments in various legitimate businesses, including property development, can do the trick.

Money laundering and other forms of dirty money handling is an immense international financial activity. The profits from drug trafficking alone form a large part of the money being spent every single day. The amount is easily into the hundreds of billions of dollars.

Unfortunately, money laundering is just part of the shady or downright illegal financial dealings that go on in world commerce. Shady money of different kinds is splashed around in enormous profusion.

Increasingly, a lot of this kind of money finds its way into cybercurrencies such as Bitcoin or Ethereum, so confounding authorities even more as they try to track sources and destinations on 'block chains'.

Any legitimate business can potentially end up with dirty money. Over time, however, the money may well become clean through regular business activities.

So just how clean is *your* money?

### Saying it with empathy

Empathy means relating deeply to another human being. It involves relating to things from another person's perspective, truly understanding why they feel the way they do and connecting with their feelings. You walk in someone else's shoes

When it comes to communicating in writing or speech, you can inject an element of empathy into what you say by using personal pronouns. It sounds simplistic, but it does inject a *human touch* in what you have to say.

When you make good use of the pronouns 'you' and 'yours' in what you say and write, you increase the empathy in your communicating.

In the world of advertising you may hear of the 'empathy index'. This index focuses on the number of times you use a 'you reference' as opposed to other kinds of personal references such as 'their' or 'them'. If your use of second person pronouns is higher than your use of first or third personal pronouns, you have a positive empathy index in your communication.

Having a positive empathy index in what you have to say will not make you fully empathetic with others. But it will set you on that path, and it just might make what you say more effective with real human beings.

### But how does it fit?

In different fields of inquiry, researchers may discover things, objects or mysterious writings, or strange phenomena perhaps, that don't fit into existing theories. What to do?

Generally, researchers in different fields from physics to biology like to be able to categorize their findings. In fact, grant provisions and other inducements may encourage them to do so.

Sometimes an object or phenomenon may be forced to fit an approved theory. Other times, it may just be put aside and forgotten. Perhaps it was the result of an error. Sometimes, though, it might just be a disregarded breakthrough in knowledge.

In his remarkable 2017 book *The River of Consciousness*, Oliver Sacks tells us, "Theory ... can be a great enemy of honest observation and thought, especially when it hardens into unstated, perhaps unconscious, dogma or assumption."

Early discoveries of the phantom limb syndrome (1864), DNA (1944), the reality of colour blindness (1919), and more were dismissed at the time of their announcements because they didn't fit with existing knowledge. The real worth of these discoveries only came to be recognized years later.

All of this leaves us with an interesting, even disturbing, question: *What discoveries have now been made that we don't hear about or have been discarded because they don't fit with existing theories?*

People in the future may look back upon our time in wonder at the discoveries we ignored or threw away.

### 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.**

**Contact Robyn Peterson at:  
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### A solution for conflict

*"With empathy we have a resource to resolve conflict, increase community cohesion, and dissolve another person's pain."*

Simon Baron-Cohen,  
*The Science of Evil*. 2011

### Did they really hear you?

When you need to communicate with someone, it's important to ensure they understand what you mean in the way you intended. So using some means to confirm that you've come across to them correctly makes good sense.

Simply asking if they've understood you is one possibility. But this runs the risk of someone saying yes just to be polite. There's also the possibility that the person may have understood you in their own way, which may be wide of the mark from your intent.

Another possibility is to ask the person to repeat what you just said in their own words. This can be awkward. Some people might feel insulted and think you're treating them like children.

One could also come up with a follow-up question to test understanding. This could be along the lines of: "Do you think Ahmed would be annoyed if we asked him to prepare that presentation?"

The more important the matter you wish to communicate, the more important it is to test the understanding of your listener. If you don't, you may be horrified at the meanings they could attribute to you in the future.

### Running away to sea

In the old days a young rebel might decide to run away to sea and join some ship or other for life on the ocean waves.

Wealthy people can now run away to a tiny realm somewhere at sea.

The *Seasteading Institute* operates independent nation states that float on the world's oceans. For the right price, the wealthy can become citizens of these bobbing nations. They can float away their troubles. What joy!

Enough of taxes and regulation!



Robyn Peterson

### For whom will this bell toll?

### You're poor? — Get a job!

Our prevailing ideology stresses that jobs are the answer to poverty. This is an almost automatic response to the problem of poverty. It assumes that good jobs are plentiful and that if people are unemployed and poor it must be their own fault.

Are those good jobs available in sufficient numbers? The answer is no. And it's entirely possible that fewer decent jobs will exist in our future. Robots and artificial intelligence may reduce the need for human workers at all levels.

In April of 2017, as she announced an Ontario experiment in 'basic income', Premier Kathleen Wynne of Ontario noted that 70% of the poor in the province had jobs. So most poor people were working yet they couldn't earn enough income from their jobs to meet the costs of living at a modest level. Her statement refuted the common notion that all that's needed to cure poverty is for people to get jobs.

The Premier's statement also countered the too common opinion that the poor are too lazy to work and thereby get themselves out of poverty.

For those excluded from decent jobs for various reasons, including discrimination,, other, much-less-desirable jobs may be available. A growing world of precarious employment beckons. Unfortunately, most precarious jobs are not well paid, nor are they secure. The phenomenon of the working poor exists.

If we want to deal effectively with poverty today, we need to do something much more intelligent and substantial than stigmatizing the poor and yelling "get a job!"

### Dealing with inequality

For many people these days income inequality is a serious problem. It's not something that will take care of itself in time. It is a continuing reality in today's world and may even become worse.

The economist Steve Keen observes: "In fact, the inequality which is so much a characteristic of modern society reflects power rather than justice." (*Debunking Economics*, 2011.) In effect, power begets money in our world. It trumps talent and hard work.

If those with power decide how wealth is distributed, then a fairer distribution of our wealth depends on dealing effectively with the powerful. Given the dominating role of money in our politics, this is not easy.

The powerful can use money and lobbyists to put pressure on politicians and thereby obtain the kinds of laws and regulations that suit them. Among other things, this reality works to perpetuate gross inequality.

Power yields to power. If enough people decide to bring about full-scale change and vote accordingly, the powerful can be shifted — for the better.

Meaningful government measures to reduce inequality are regularly met with the cry from politicians that "We don't have the money". But if a major war broke out, massive amounts of money would soon be found to pay for it.

Government can always raise money if it so chooses. And it doesn't have to raise money by taking out large loans from foreign investors.

Spending on social matters such as public health, public housing, public transportation, or infrastructure is not evil or wrong-headed. Politicians are supposed to be in office to spend money wisely for the wellbeing of those they represent or claim to represent.

Income inequality does not have to continue in its present devastating form. When enough people build the resolve to do something meaningful about it, change can occur.

The challenge is to bring enough people together to wield the kind of social and political power that would achieve an enlightened transformation of our society, a transformation for the better.

## The continuing threat of chemical and biological warfare

We have seen tensions with Russia rise in the past few weeks following the mysterious poisoning of Sergei Skripol and his daughter, Yulia, in Salisbury, England. This, even though no irrefutable evidence has yet been provided to show involvement by the Russian government.

Are the Russians truly guilty, with President Putin wielding a nasty and aggressive covert war against us? Perhaps. The British government has weighed probabilities. Given the old Soviet Union's heavy emphasis on and dominant position in the development of chemical and biological weapons, the finger of suspicion points directly at the Russian Federation. Over twenty countries have fallen in line to support the British accusation. They include Germany and France and Canada.

Could there be other parties guilty of the Salisbury attack? Of course. Criminals or terrorists of various kinds are possibilities. It's also possible that rogue elements within Russia bear responsibility. Perhaps Ukraine was involved. For the time being, however, the Kremlin is receiving the closest attention, although possible Russian motives are hard to fathom.

In the past thirty years lethal gas attacks in conflict areas have been carried out by Iraq, Libya, Syria, Vietnam, Cuba and terrorists. It's also possible that biological attacks have occurred.

Biological attacks are harder to detect because disease might break out from natural origins as well as from deliberate hostile actions.

In 1995 the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan attacked subway passengers in Tokyo with a nerve gas released from punctured balloons in subway cars. Thirteen people died in this attack. The cult had used its own lab facilities to produce the nerve gas, but had not been able to make a gas as potent as the nerve agents that could have been produced in government labs.

Today, criminals or terrorists can

use the internet and the dark web to find specific formulas to use if they wish to mix up batches of toxic chemicals, including nerve agents. This fact confuses things somewhat when seeking to place blame for specific attacks. If gangsters can produce different illegal drugs for street sales, can they produce toxic gases as well?

Might criminals or terrorists get their hands on dangerous bacteria or viruses? The possibilities do exist, and some of them are grim indeed.

What the Salisbury attack brings to the fore is that deadly chemical and biological weaponry is out there and presents us with a continuing threat. And it's not a threat we can dismiss easily.

Delivery systems for chemical or biological agents can vary from simple spray can devices to different kinds of projectiles or missiles. The police, for instance, use different systems for non-lethal chemicals such as tear gas or pepper sprays.

How does the civilian population defend against chemical or biological attack? Right now our main defence resources are our first responders: police, firefighters, and paramedics. They need significant knowledge and skill in dealing with the chemical and biological warfare (CBW) threat. Do they now have sufficient knowledge and skills?

Our healthcare system is critical to our ability to deal with the aftermath of any chemical or biological attack. Shrinking our medical resources too far in the name of supposed financial responsibility could, in fact, be dangerous for our civil defence capabilities. Ill-advised parsimony could lead to tragedy in our future.

The political and diplomatic fallout from the Salisbury attack will continue for some time. But this attack is a reminder that chemical and biological weapons are a continuing threat and they can too easily end up in the wrong hands. Complacency about this threat is a luxury we cannot afford.

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The only thing we ask is that you attach an attribution or byline. If the articles are unsigned, they're written by Robyn Peterson.

Thanks for your interest.

## A healthy life for all

To live a healthy life in our society, people need certain things. These are not frivolities or items of passing fancy. They're real human needs:

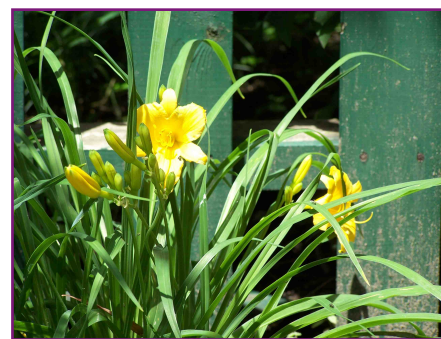
- ◆ healthy food (including good water)
- ◆ decent housing
- ◆ adequate clothing
- ◆ reliable transportation
- ◆ proper child care
- ◆ medical and dental care, plus necessary drugs
- ◆ education and training
- ◆ exercise and recreation

Fair, affordable, and equitable access to these needs builds a good society.

## Modern societies' dependence

*"Modern societies will depend increasingly on being creative, adaptable, inventive, well-informed and flexible communities, able to respond generously to each other and to needs wherever they arise."*

Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett,  
*Spirit Level*, 2009.



Robyn Peterson

A little touch of spring