

AFTER COVID 19 – DO WE WANT TO RETURN TO WHAT WAS NORMAL BEFORE THE VIRUS ??

Gord Wilson, April 21, 2020

I don't look forward to going back to the old Normal – because in so many ways – NORMAL WAS THE PROBLEM – Why, you might ask?

During this current unprecedented Crisis, we have learned that we can best survive by working together in common purpose. We have remembered why Health Care is such a valuable commodity in sustaining us; That the economy thrives when all are given the opportunity to participate as producers and consumers. We have learned that we all should have the chance to own our home, have access to stable rental accommodation, financial assistance when required, and have control over the goods and services that Canadians enjoy. In short we have learned during this crisis that Canadian mutuality of purpose and togetherness is a more rewarding path to follow than dog eats dog competitiveness. We have bonded each to the other for survival and the question to be asked is that if that is what we can accomplish in the interest of health, why then can we not do the same in the interest of sharing prosperity?

I find it interesting that in this time of crisis, even avowed Capitalists are sounding like Socialists. A few months ago Emmanuel Macron of France to the delight of Capitalists and Multi-National's was proclaiming his plan to decisively weaken the welfare state as he heralded a business-friendly nation priority objective of his Government. Today this Capitalist Leader is gravely proclaiming that free health care and the welfare state are precious resources. Sound familiar within Ontario, re Health Care cuts.

There are a number of essential social priorities that should never have to be subject to competitiveness, and the often proclaimed and self-serving Capital objective of maximizing profit over the needs of the broader population. We learned that lesson when Canada instituted our National Health Care Plan and we should now maintain that principal and apply it to other needs of our population.

Long Term Care for our aged must be based on quality of service not profit. In Ontario, 58% of homes for the aged are privately run. 24% are run by non-profit Charities and 17% by Municipalities. What we are painfully learning is that cuts to funding for these facilities has led to cuts for Health Care and wages for Health Care Workers, most of whom work part time at 2 or 3 facilities that pay minimum wages, in order for these workers to make a living and support their families. As for Care for Residents, we have found that these workers are allowed 6 MINUTES per Resident to shower, clean teeth, undress and redress. They do not have proper PPE to protect them. ALL in the interest of the private operators maintaining their profitability. Case in point, the ONA filing an action with an Ontario Supreme Court Judge against RYKKA CARE CENTRES for breaching (read ignoring) ONTARIO DIRECTIVES established to provide adequate protection for Seniors and the Staff who serve them, all in the interest of maintaining profit. There are three Centers involved in this action against RYKKA. Additionally the SEIU is requesting the Ontario Government to bring Privately owned Senior facilities under

Government control and operation. In short substitute private profitability with that of Seniors' wellbeing.

During this crisis we have seen unprecedented care established for the homeless. On the horizon are stricter rules for the operation of slaughterhouses, again, placing public Health above profitability.

In light of the U.S. President's attempt to block Masks made by 3M entering Canada, we have seen, applaud and admire, the capability of Canadian manufacturers to quickly shift production to meet the problem at hand. We have not seen an effort like this since WW2. In this Canadians have clearly demonstrated that we can respond quickly and effectively to Canadian objectives without depending upon other external jurisdictions and their priorities. We have demonstrated we have the capacity to act independently from the demands of International Trade advocates. Of course some commodities we need to import but Canada need not go back to that of "drawers of water and Hewers of wood". Why would we build a pipeline to ship Canadian Crude to America for refinement and create thousands of American jobs and not Canadian jobs other than in the short run building a pipeline? Why do we witness the Trump administration directing American Corporations to manufacture various equipment including ventilators in the fight to erase Covid 19? Why do we not advise General Motors that Canada is commandeering the Oshawa facility for production of equipment required in Canada? We have the workers, engineering and technical skills to do this. We need not permanently seize the facility but rather take it over until our needs are met. If we could commandeer property during WW2 to establish military facilities on the shore of Lake Huron, we can do the same in Oshawa.

What the old normal told us was that Capital must remain supreme. What we have learned is, that economic creed is about self-interest for a few at the expense of the rest of us.

Examples, the eviction of small business as a result of their failure to pay their Landlords rent demands. Who are the majority of these Landlords? They are Corporate entities. Why can't small business pay the rent owing? It is because they have been closed by Government Directive. Why then does Government not challenge Capital ownership by freezing small business rent until the owners and their employees bring their business back to profitability thereby sustaining a considerable amount of employment during an economic recovery?

Why has Government not moved to curtail the windfall to be made by Banks in the process of Mortgage deferment? At the end of the deferment, the interest roll up amount will be greater than had the home owner continued Mortgage payments as per usual, but cannot now as a result of being out of work because of the Virus. Simply put, Banks will make no sacrifice in these troubled times but will in fact profit by the misfortune of Canadian home owners.

The new normal should clearly make the current actions of Landlords and Banks illegal in times of National crisis, Health or otherwise.

In our caring for each other we must insist that future Health Care must include Care for Seniors, Dental, Drug and Vision coverage for all Canadians. We must dismiss the statements by Capital that such programs are not affordable and are impractical as they interfere with the ability of Capital to produce goods and services in a competitive environment, thereby making goods and services cheaper for consumers. The logic is that the weak will fall by the wayside and the winners will make life better for all of us. If this is true, can someone please tell me why tax dollars had to be used to bail out the weak Banks during the financial crisis of a dozen years ago? It seems this Capital theory does not apply to the advocates. And given the current expenditures of both Provincial and Federal Governments to assist Canadians, it would be seen as sound public policy and I believe given broad public support, to establish a Canadian owned Bank to serve Canadians as do the current banking establishments. I wonder what the Banks response to public banking ownership competition would be. Need I say more about self-serving motives?

This virus and the collective response of Canadians to the crisis has shown me there is a better way. The better way is the rejection of all policy designed to serve Corporate pursuits of profits over social good to the detriment of Canadians.

Following this crisis we do not have an adjustment problem making our way back to the old normal. We have and have had for a long time an inequality problem.

What Covid 19 has revealed is that inequality has been robbing many Canadians of security, prosperity, and dignity for decades. The virus has and the subsequent economic fallout has clearly shown us the division between those who are vulnerable and those who are not.

The wealthy remain secure. Workers and small business bear most of the suffering. We have also come to realize others who are not recognized fairly, truck drivers, farmers, grocery employees, health care workers, nurses and doctors, firefighters and police to name a few. Our objective in the wake of Covid 19 is to establish fairness and need as guiding principles.

Canadians have shown compassion and a will to improve the condition of our neighbours and friends, just think of what we can accomplish if we all do it together. As was once said, "Courage, my friend, it's not too late to make the world a better place" (Tommy Douglas).

What I have come to understand about the production of goods and services for purchase within our economy, is that when new rules are established regarding their behaviour and demanding compliance, these entities usually respond with ultimatums somewhat like "if you do we will leave". True, some will. What I have also learned is that when these entities depart, there are always others that will fill the void. What is important is that the decisions of what will be the terms applicable to the economy and the quality of life within our society, must remain the decision of the people through their elected Governments. In the past, accusations of Socialism and Communism has been the rallying cry of those Domestic and International Corporate interests and their wealthy supporters who stand to lose complete economic control to the populace.

Call it what you want, but the virus has shown us what a caring and cooperative future can be if we were to discard the old normal and work towards a new and caring normal.

And in passing, when was the last time we saw our atmosphere as clear as it is worldwide. When do you recall hearing birds and seeing wildlife as we now witness? When do you remember the last time you saw such a high level of public politeness and consideration?

“To each his own”, yes, there may be some pitfalls as we plot a new course. I opt for trying. If nothing else, I will sleep well at night knowing I joined with others trying.

Gord Wilson was the President of the Ontario Federation of Labour from 1986 to 1997