

Elections 2008: Restoring the Health of the Nation

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“You have done your worst. Now we will do our best.”

Sir Winston Churchill, following the Nazi bombing of London in WWII

On September 10 the Canadian Charter of Health Freedom was launched by lawyer Shawn Buckley, president and co-founder of the Natural Health Products Protection Association which coordinated the national resistance to the Harper government's proposed bills C-51 and C-52. Buckley has successfully defeated Health Canada in court several times on issues of patients' rights and natural health products. He said: “This Charter is an initiative to bring regulatory sanity back to the natural health products industry... [it] lists a bunch of rights that we already have ... like sovereignty of our own bodies. Health Canada has basically taken those rights away.” The Charter was launched with simultaneous rallies held in Vancouver, Kelowna, Penticton, Vernon, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Toronto. The NHPPA is now coordinating efforts to collect about 3 million signatures in order to make this Charter the basis of the Ministry of Wellness – as opposed to the current Ministry of Sickness, aka Health Canada with its record of passing dubious, deceptive and deadly drugs.

Actually, this happened once before – in the US, when people had enough of the FDA corruption and its resultant body count and overwhelming public demand created their national law known as DESHA under which nutritional supplements are foods, not drugs, and regulated appropriate to their essential nature. Canada's Natural Health Products Directorate treats all nutritional supplements as drugs and its regulations require clinical trials no ethics committee would sanction (e.g. in order to justify a health claim for a natural product a control group of people would be deprived of vitamin C and then die of scurvy). Hence the slow and inexorable disappearance of many totally safe products since 2004. Buckley flatly describes this as “just insane.” Unlike Health Canada's regulations, Buckley's Charter uses the definitions of the World Health Organization.

Had C-51 and C-52 become law, even with the cosmetic and totally meaningless amendments proposed by Health Minister Tony Clement and forcefully criticized as such by his Conservative colleague MP James Lunney, the Harper government would have succeeded in doing its absolute worst – which they are still determined to do and for which they want an enabling majority. They tried hard to rule as if they had a majority, primarily through their now no longer secret book of dirty tricks, “a 200-page manual which was given to Conservative [MPs] instructing them on ways to obstruct the work of the parliamentary committees”, as political journalist Geoffrey Stevens and others reported. These instructions destroyed the justice committee, the ethics committee investigating the Mulroney/Schreiber scandal, and derailed the illegal campaign funding tricks the Conservatives used two

years ago to get their current minority government. Imagine what would have happened to the health committee discussing C-51 and C-52! No Liberal or NDP member would have got a word in edgewise to question the assault those bills represented to medical science and Charter rights.

On September 6, I was dumfounded when attending the 30th anniversary of our Orangeville's organic supermarket, Harmony Whole Foods. Prime Minister Harper actually sent a congratulatory letter to its owner-founder Jennifer Grant. Her success in sustaining the health of so many through food that supports health would face a mightily challenged future if his policies are allowed to prevail in agriculture and for natural health products. May I never become so jaded as to lose the ability to be outraged by such hypocrisy; the message was clearly a plug for the Conservatives under the assumption that organic food retailers and customers are stupid enough to support policies that would reduce and maybe even destroy the availability of such products.

For decades, Health Canada, instead of upholding the Food and Drugs Act, gave priority to the industries' wishes, blatantly ignored mandatory safety requirements, and supported the political priorities of several prime ministers, none of whom cared for safe foods and drugs. This recklessness with public health has made Canada's food supply possibly the most contaminated among industrialized countries, says Dr. Shiv Chopra, who in his "memoirs of a Health Canada whistleblower", now hot off the press, describes how this came about.

Harper's predecessors left a horrendous legacy of unfolding epidemic sickness steadily increasing through an equally sick environment. Had C-51 become law, this process would have been enshrined in law for food and medicine. Had C-52 become law the same would have happened for the environment on which our survival depends. Now the Harper Conservatives tell Canadians (as one of their campaign slogans intones – actually stolen from the NDP which used it in the 1996 BC election) - that [we are] "On Your Side".

Our side is crowded with people whose bodies are directly and painfully affected by those neocon policies of deregulation and privatization policies: every second person may expect to develop cancer, totally untreatable Mad Cow Disease has come to stay, once rare chronic diseases are becoming epidemic, antibiotic-resistant bacteria have made our hospitals the most dangerous places to go (bungee cord jumping is far safer, and not a single death has occurred in Canada from a natural health product in 141 years of recording), and neurological and psychiatric disorders in our children are exponentially increasing every decade.

All of these population-wide unfolding health disasters, involving millions of victims, are wholly avoidable, though very profitable for a few. All are caused or promoted by nutrient-empty processed food laced with pesticides and hormones and an increasingly toxic environment. Also the creeping bankruptcy of Medicare, due to Big Pharma profits, which dictate nearly every budgetary consideration, are entirely the responsibility of successive governments that supported Big Business-oriented food and drug policies, forced upon us through science-perverting trickery and double-speak which were also the very essence of bills C-51 and C-52.

Prime Minister Harper, when he was the president of the National Citizens' Coalition expressed his wholehearted support for the ideology of deregulation in

favor of Big Business interests “*until government will be reduced to the point where it can be drowned in a bathtub.*” The recent dismantling of the food inspection authority (in Harper doublespeak it was a “safety overhaul” which Liberal MP Bonnie Brown called outright “deceit”) gave many Canadians a deadly taste of deregulation when some Maple Leaf Foods products caused a listeria outbreak . The Canadian Medical Association is now calling for a full-scale public inquiry stating that the independent investigation Harper promised “will be inferior to every epidemic inquiry in recent Canadian history [because it] would be closed to public participation ... the investigators won’t have the power to subpoena witnesses or documents... no public hearings are planned ... [no] public report [will be] published, and ... no commitment [exists] that the report will be made public or even given to parliament.” The CMA also condemned the Harper government’s lack of action on “bad animal feed containing recycled animal tissue [which] led to the outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalitis” (Mad Cow Disease), a deregulation disaster he inherited and chose to ignore.

More of the same was waiting to happen when parliament shut down for the federal elections. Among the many deregulation bills which went comatose on the order papers, now awaiting resuscitation if the Conservatives get back into power, was one designed to deregulate the aviation industry. When India tried that some years ago, their domestic airlines quickly became known as “flying coffins”, because that is what they were. India was forced to recognize that deregulation is a deadly ideology.

The effort to establish freedom of choice in health care as a basic right in a democratically sustained government department through the Charter of Health Freedom could also be seen as the commencement of a civilized divorce proceeding from Health Canada and its sickness industry promotion policies. Most divorces are the result of one partner waking up and realizing that this relationship is based on abuse or neglect and has ceased to serve the needs of both partners. Divorces are may sometimes be creative forces towards change and enlightenment for both partners. The NHPPA’s proposed Ministry of Wellness would force Health Canada to lose its control-freak claim to allow only what suits Big Pharma and learn the painful and useful lesson that Schedule A of the Food and Drugs Act is a violation of human rights. Just who does Health Canada think it is when it insists on maintaining that list on which just about every major disease may only be treated with toxic chemicals or surgery?

Nobody knows what government we will wake up to on October 15. Will it be the same nightmare of arrogant patronization with which the Harper government presumed to tell us what is good for us? Will it be a somewhat more reasonable and contrite Liberal government that learned from the public health messes initiated by the Chretien and Martin administrations? Or will it be a government that actually has respect for constitutional rights and finally demonstrates realism and humanity through environmentally sound programs and policies such as proposed by the NDP and the Greens? Anybody but the Harperites can give Canadians a chance at physical, emotional, fiscal, and environmental recovery. Santa, is it too much to ask this Christmas to be given a government that actually works for people?

Regardless of what we will face October 15th, we must take our cue from Churchill who after all did not know with any degree of certainty that he would win WWII when the bombs rained onto London. That cue is that it is absolutely vital to stop *re-acting* to destructive government policies and start *acting* constructively in order to take charge of our bodies, our country, and our government and bring about what we know to be positive change. True, it was necessary to react to the potentially disastrous bills C-51 and C-52 and stop the attempt at legitimizing the anti-science and pro-Big Business policies in the food and medical sectors.

“Doing our best” means stopping to complain about the darkness and lighting a candle; starting the construction of what is in the public interest regardless of government corruption; using one’s creative imagination “to build a better world”, for which according to Tommy Douglas it is never too late. This Charter of Health Freedom is the first step towards putting human safety and unbiased science back into center stage and forcing greed to step back.

The timing is astounding. This summer the World Trade Organization talks collapsed primarily because India refused to have its agriculture taken over by the US, Canada and the EU. At the heart of that successful resistance is largely the red hot fight over GMOs which Indian’s farmers are not prepared to have forced upon them. Simultaneously, the ratification of the EU Constitution was scuttled by Ireland whose people voted against it primarily because they opposed “regulatory convergence” with the rest of Europe on food and natural health products; this is now likely to become a major issue in the upcoming elections for the European Parliament. The currently ongoing US federal election put their Senate bill S1082 on hold, which is virtually identical to our defunct C-51. This summer the Australian government was found guilty of breaking the law when trying to destroy health freedom there. Now New Zealanders have stopped the harmonization process of natural health product regulations with Australia and made this into an election issue. There is change in the air, and it just might clean up the air as well as the food supply and medicine. Maybe, just maybe, health and ecological sanity will become slowly but surely more important than profits from death and sickness.

What can you do? Call CBC radio and television and provide the moderators with questions to be put the political candidates about rejecting a return of C-51 and C-52, requesting their support of the Charter of Health Freedom, demanding they will stop giving Big Pharma the benefit of the doubt, committing them to reform Health Canada, and voice whatever else makes you mad. You might want to write to your MP and ask him or her the same questions and politely, but firmly demand a precise reply and save everybody the embarrassment of a puerile canned response. Most important of all: get out there and vote, take all eligible family members with you. Apathy and despair are as unhealthy for your body as they are for the body politic. Take Shawn Buckley’s advice when faced with an MP: “Learn to ignore what they say and look at what they do.”

Resources:

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