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Scary times

by SAM ODROWSKI

The rhetoric is getting increasingly scary surrounding those who decline or are choosing to wait before receiving a COVID-19 vaccine.

More than one in four Canadians support jail time for the unvaccinated, according to a poll from Maru Public Opinion published last week. In the poll, which has a margin of error +/- 2.5 per cent 19 times out of 20, a shocking 27 per cent of respondents said it would be okay to jail unvaccinated people for up to five days.

While an authoritarian move such as this is unlikely, statements coming from politicians, including our own Prime Minister, fuel the hatred and anger many Canadians feel towards those who haven't yet recieved a COVID-19 vaccine.

Justin Trudeau was quoted last fall saying anti-vaxxers are often racists and women-haters. It's plainly ironic considering approximately half of all anti-vaxxers are women and a large majority of those who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine in Canada are Indigenous or Black.

Nearly half of Toronto's Indigenous population remained unvaccinated, and can anybody really blame them?

Indigenous Canadians have every reason not to trust our government.

Forced sterilization of Indigenous women was happening as recently as 2017. Sixty Indigenous women sued the provincial government in Saskatchewan, claiming they had been forcibly sterilized in order to see their newborn babies.

When Trudeau vilifies unvaccinated individuals without opposition, it allows hatred to fester and grow for people who are already marginalized at large.

In November, as the first wave of Canadians lost their jobs to vaccine mandates, an Angus Reid Institute Poll showed 70 per cent of respondents were happy to see them terminated.

In the past month I've seen several op-eds written calling for unvaccinated people to be denied healthcare, while 60 per cent of Canadians are in favour of a punitive tax for the unvaccinated, according to another Maru Public Opinion Poll. We're now seeing this come into effect in Quebec.

Following Quebec Premiere François Legault's announcement that unvaccinated Quebecers would have to pay a ?contribution tax?, some frontline doctors have spoke out against the policy.

La Presse, a French-language digital newspaper in Quebec, was told by two physicians that many of the unvaccinated patients they treated for COVID-19 had severe mental health issues, live without access to internet, and some didn't speak English or French.

Marie-Michelle Bellon, a Montreal physician said it scares her when she reads that they should be denied healthcare, because it ?stigmatizes people who are already severely disadvantaged.?

And the amount of people Canadians are willing to stigmatize or marginalize isn't a small number.

There are still roughly 3.7 million eligible Canadians who have not yet been vaccinated against COVID-19, despite the country having one of the highest vaccination rates in the world with over 90 per cent of people over 12 fully or partially vaccinated.

I don't think that the 27 per cent of Canadians who said yes to imprisoning unvaccinated people in the Maru Poll realize the costs associated with putting close to four million people in jail. Not only financially, but societally speaking ? it would polarize, divide, and dehumanize people to the point of no return.

It's also noted in the Maru Poll that 33 per cent of respondents believe it would be acceptable to not allow people who are unvaccinated to renew their driver's license.

This type of thinking is likely well understood by Justin Trudeau, who's government recently imposed a COVID-19 vaccine mandate on the trucking industry, resulting in up to 32,000 or 20 per cent of the 160,000 Canadian and American cross border truckers being taken off the roads, according to the Canadian Trucker Alliance.

It makes little sense as this is an industry that has limited contact with the public and is already shut out of public spaces through vaccine passports.

The mandate also comes at a time when the country faces significant supply chain issues, and removing trained truck drivers will only make matters worse.

The full extent of this policy remains to be seen, but we're already seeing bare shelves at grocery stores across Canada, since it went into effect on Jan. 15. Rising prices and fuel inflation are sure to follow.

This leads me to believe that this policy isn't about Public Health and is purely punitive or political. It's coming at a time when Canada, which can't grow food in the winter, is dependent on trucked goods from southern regions of the United States.

Historically speaking, when countries put politics and policies ahead of ensuring a consistent supply of food for their people, millions die.

As a direct result of inept policies in China from 1958-1962, Mao Zedong caused the deadliest famine the worlds ever seen, with an estimated 15-55 million deaths. The starvation was a direct result of policies from the Great Leap Forward, which created the inefficient distribution of food ? sound familiar?

Fortunately, we live in a developed country and supply chains are more resilient now, however it is likely that the issue of bare shelves at grocers is only going to worsen.

In light of the federal government's wrongheaded approach, a nationwide protest has been organized, that's expected to see tens of thousands of trucks convey from British Columbia to the west and Nova Scotia to the east, arriving at Ottawa this weekend. A southern convey is going to meet there as well, travelling up from Windsor, Ont. The convoys are already well on their way across the country and will meet at Parliament Hill to protest this Saturday (Jan. 29).

Over $5.5 million has been raised through a GoFundMe Page that's financing the cost of fuel, food, and shelter if needed, for the truckers who are participating in the protest.

The demonstration is being called ?Freedom Convoy 2022? and many Canadians are putting their money where their mouth is, with well over 70,000 donors making up the more than $5.5 million, as of press time.

While the convoy was created in response to the federal vaccine mandate for truckers, the organizer of the GoFundMe for the Freedom Convoy noted that it's for all Canadians.

?To our Fellow Canadians, the time for political overreach is over. Our current government is implementing rules and mandates that are destroying the foundation of our businesses, industries and livelihoods,? wrote Tamara Lich, organizer of the GoFundMe page for the convoy.

?We are taking our fight to the doorsteps of our Federal Government and demanding that they cease all mandates against its people. Small businesses are being destroyed, homes are being destroyed, and people are being mistreated and denied fundamental necessities to survive.?

Organizers are estimating a massive turnout at Parliament Hill when the west, east, and southern convoys arrive on Jan. 29, anticipating it to be a historic event.

I'm hoping at the very least, this massive and arguably historical protest sends a clear message to the federal government to leave our truckers alone.