

# Canada: Our politicians have failed us – through lockdowns and a lack of vaccines

by Conrad Black



**Canada's response to the coronavirus** has been a disaster. There was never any justifiable argument for the extent of the lockdowns this country (among many) has endured, and the explanation for it lies in the overflow of panic generated for political reasons in the United States by the anti-Trump media in an election year. Donald Trump had the election in the bag until the onset of the pandemic. The opportunity arose to promote terrible economic hardship as a matter of apparent public health necessity and then to blame the inevitable economic consequences on Trump. The then-president put immense and effective pressure on the pharmaceutical industry to produce a vaccine, which it did 18 months ahead of the most

optimistic expectations, but his public-relations effort oscillated between optimism that was easily ridiculed and caution that appeared to be both inconsistent and unconvincing.

The corrupt American teachers' unions (and Canadians should not imagine that the analogous unions in this country are significantly more admirable), have been tenacious in their rejection of any arguments to reopen schools. They contributed \$44 million to the Democratic presidential campaign and they are exacting their pound of flesh by defying even the U.S. Centres for Disease Control in demanding an outright bribe from the federal government of over \$100 billion, on top of radical improvements in working conditions and the year-long paid holiday they have enjoyed.

In the United States, as in Canada, we have our teachers chiefly to thank for the steadily deteriorating standard of education in the public school system. The scandalous irresponsibility of the American teachers' unions is surpassed as a national outrage only by the Biden administration's craven surrender to them. Even though the canonized purveyors of "science" stated that teachers would not be in any danger of returning to class after being vaccinated, the White House conspicuously backed down before their spurious refusal to return, even when some of the largest and sleaziest Democratic municipal political machines – such as Chicago, Los Angeles and New York – showed some disposition to challenge the teachers. The effect on Canada of the campaign of the U.S. Democratic party and its almost coextensive Trump-hating national political media has been the customary spillover onto the Canadian media and politicians who, despite affectations of distinctiveness, are only on the rarest occasions seriously resistant to prevailing trends in American popular opinion.

I will not join those who have imputed motives to public office-holders who have been the most demonstrative advocates of the economic and scholastic shutdowns. That policy has

crippled the economy, strained the treasury and done untold damage to the social and educational development of young people in both countries. I would give most of the champions of these insane and redundant shutdowns the benefit of the doubt that they actually believed in what they were doing. But that is no excuse for them – they were never going to accomplish anything except reduce the incidence of infections until the shutdowns ended, whereupon the virus would resume its aggressive expansion.

The initial impulse to shut down was excusable, particularly given the mistaken advice provided by most scientists and public health administrators. But by the late spring of 2020, it was clear that only elderly people and those with other medical vulnerabilities were significantly at risk of death from the coronavirus. For healthy people beneath the age of 65 the recovery rate is well over 99 per cent. The vast majority of those over 65 survive, as well. And most people in all age groups experience minimal or no symptoms. Given these facts, there is no excuse for the almost air-tight enthusiasm for economically and psychologically imperilling the vast majority of people who are in no appreciable danger. We should have protected the small group of people at higher (though hardly high) risk, and let everyone else get on with their lives. This is the difference, in the U.S., between Florida and Texas on one side and, on the other, the shambles in New York and California (where both Democratic governors may be evicted from office mid-term).

If Canada was merely following the politically motivated incitement of hysteria in the United States about the pandemic, it has no such excuse for the federal government's performance as a provider of vaccine. The Trump administration saved millions of lives around the world by asserting constructive pressure and materially incentivizing the development of effective vaccines. It and the succeeding Biden administration have generally done everything reasonably

possible to distribute the vaccine as quickly and fairly as possible to the entire population of the United States. Daily inoculations passed the one million mark in the last week of the Trump presidency and that number has continued to rise. As of the beginning of this week, with 122 countries reporting, there had been approximately 250 million vaccinations performed worldwide, roughly a third of them in the United States (which has five per cent of the world's population), and more than twice as many in the United States as in the entire European Union. (These numbers do not include the claims of Russia and China, which, as with most other subjects, cannot be trusted, and in any case there is considerable doubt about the effectiveness of the vaccines that they have developed.)

Canada's comparative performance has been disgraceful, and the levitation of the government's public approval rating is not a flattering testimony to the political awareness of the Canadian people. Of countries in the world with over four million people, Canada ranks 30th in percentage of population vaccinated. Israel is first (90 per cent), the United Arab Emirates second (62 per cent), the United Kingdom third (31 per cent) and the United States fourth (28 per cent). Israel is small, centralized and scientifically very advanced. The U.A.E. is a rich petro-state. The U.K. and the U.S. are the principal scientific pioneers, and that Canada should trail those four countries is not a surprise. But it is not excusable that our percentage of people vaccinated is barely half of that of Hungary and Poland and Slovakia, less scientifically advanced countries with less than half the per capita income of Canada. More outrageous still is the fact that Chile, Turkey and Morocco, all comparatively remote and underdeveloped countries, have achieved between two and three times as great a percentage of vaccinated people as Canada has. It was just in the last week that Canada struggled up to five per cent of its population having been vaccinated.

hat is the level of approval, on their performances, the Liberals, Conservatives, NDP and the Bloc should now have in the polls. The burning question is: why haven't the Liberal backbenches erupted in revolt at the failure of the government, and why haven't the opposition leaders and the political media exhausted their vocal cords and burned out their word processors exposing and denouncing this colossal failure of public policy? Canada's greatest public health problem is not the coronavirus; it is a psychiatric failure to demand and provide for itself adequate levels of political perception and public administration.

**Note:** Last week I inadvertently wrote Adrien Arcand (a 1930s Quebec minor-party politician), when I meant the eminent filmmaker Denys Arcand (I think they were related). I apologize for my error.

First published in the