

The right-left-centre divide

By Bill Kilpatrick

There's a saying about the political divide between the right and the left and it goes like this, 'The right wing and the left wing belong to the same bird.' The first time I heard this I thought it was quite profound, but not so much anymore, since both wings have well, flown the nest, to keep the bird analogies coming. And in so doing have left the centre, the body, wingless and paralyzed to do anything. And that's how I think many people feel right now, like a wingless bird, staring and watching things happen, but unable to do anything about it, but as I walked around Bancroft the other day interviewing business owners about why it's important for them to promote diversity, I was filled with more hope than I have felt in a while?but I also realized just how polarized things have become. I consider my political stance left-of centre, but given how far the political pendulum has swung to the right, I'm not even sure of that anymore. When Dick Cheney came out in support of Kamala Harris, I knew that things had really gotten weird in the political world. The Democrats were behaving like the Bush Republicans of 2000 and the Republicans were, well, right off the rails. At a time when we need to be coming together to solve some seriously difficult problems, things seem more complicated and divided than ever. This new political landscape has blurred many of my notions of right and left. What is the political right and left? What defines them? What's the difference between a Democrat, a Republican, and a MAGA Supporter or a Conservative and a Liberal or an NDPer? What differentiates them? Is the divide as large as we think? A May opinion piece in the Ottawa Citizen by Shachi Kurl, talking about the state of federal politics in Canada and how the constant barrage of personal attacks and disparaging remarks between leaders and supporters of the three major parties is leading to more division. Kurl says, 'Neither side likes being disparaged by the other's leadership. The effects have been devastating. Half of Canadians with an opinion about the matter say there is no room for political compromise in the country today. Nearly one-quarter are open to authoritarian leadership instead of elections. Nearly half of 18 to 34 year-olds say mainstream news reportage can't be trusted. A majority do not trust government to act in the best interests of the people.' These are troubling statistics. But are we really as far apart as we are told? What principles does each side believe in? And why is it so hard to find compromise? A quick Google search shows that the divide is not as large as one might think. On the Conservative.ca page it states that some of the conservative principles which are 'A belief in a balance between fiscal responsibility, compassionate social policy that empowers the less fortunate by promoting self-reliance and equality of opportunity, and the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and free associations? A belief in loyalty to a sovereign and united Canada governed in accordance with the Constitution of Canada, the supremacy of democratic parliamentary institutions and the rule of law?'. A belief in the freedom of the individual, including freedom of speech, worship, assembly, and association?'. the freedom of individual Canadians to pursue their enlightened and legitimate self-interest within a free competitive economy?'. The Liberal.ca page states under their principles that, 'A federal Liberal government is dedicated to the protection and enhancement of the lives of all Canadians and is committed to democratic governance, federalism and the rule of law. We are compassionate and responsible fiscal stewards, committed to providing a good and fair balance between the economy and social justice. Based on our values, we work with Canadians to provide equal opportunity and security of the common good to all citizens. We govern with the understanding that we have a responsibility towards the well-being of individuals, families, businesses, industries, and our environment. Therefore, we have a role in ensuring properly regulated fair and free markets and in preserving the Canadian identity in a global society. We value education, learning, creativity and innovation as it leads to evidence-based public policy. We are open-minded, pragmatic and supportive of intellectual curiosity and skepticism.' And here's some of the federal NDP's guiding principles from ndp.ca, 'New Democrats celebrate Canada's diversity and the deep histories, traditions and aspirations of all of its peoples. New Democrats believe in an intercultural integration model based on solidarity and harmonious exchanges among individuals of differing cultures?'. New Democrats believe in freedom and democracy and in a positive role for democratically elected and accountable Parliaments, legislatures, and the governments responsible to them? New Democrats affirm a role for government in helping to create the conditions for sustainable prosperity. We believe in a rules-based economy, nationally and globally, in which governments have the power to address the limitations of the market in addressing the common good by having the power to act in the public interest for social and economic justice, and for the integrity of the environment?'. Looking at these principles it's obvious that all parties believe that they are working for the betterment of all Canadians, but not always in exactly the same fashion. The conservatives want responsible fiscal policy that balances compassionate social policy, and the Liberals say almost the exactly same thing stating that they want to 'provide a good and fair balance between the economy and social justice,' and the NDP say close to the same thing as well having the government act in the public interest to achieve social and economic

justice. If we are going to have social and economic justice, or compassionate social policy, or a balance between the economy and social justice we have to agree on some basic facts. We should all agree that in a fair and just society people need good jobs to make enough money to pay for basic necessities like housing, food, clothing, and have medical care, dental care, child care etcetera and some extra money for leisure. A free market should provide those things, but as we know from the Great Depression it does not always do that and when the market fails to provide those things the government should step in, because historically the private sector has not done so and continues to not do so. These were lessons learned in the '30s and applied in the '50s, '60s and '70s, and it's time to get back to basics. While the rally cry from big business is always low taxes, which is often not too socially detrimental when times are good, but when times get bad, and the system is strained, like right now, with high inflation, low wages, low governmental income and subsequent poor social supports, there needs to be the political will to change that policy and tax the super wealthy to help those in need because the middle and lower classes are at their breaking point. That's what will ensure a balance between fiscal responsibility and compassionate social policy? and a good and fair balance between the economy and social justice? as well as helping to create the conditions for sustainable prosperity? and social and economic justice. All parties claim to want to help Canadians, and we know that low taxes, while it sounds good and often is good when the economy is booming, becomes the social Achilles heel, when the boom goes bust. During the Great Depression, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt, according to a Politico Magazine article, knew that "An etched-in-stone commitment to the [economic] status quo would be an invitation to extremists everywhere. By fulfilling the government's obligation to assist its people, he was instilling confidence in the American system." With confidence in the Canadian government at an all time low, we need our leaders to stop disparaging one another and fulfil the government's obligation to help the Canadian people, and instill confidence back into the system, because the longer the status-quo is maintained by those in power the more extreme and divided we will become.