

COMOX VALLEY CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLES (15)

The Men on the Moon

In the last two chronicles we talked about the need for a different kind of economy. In this chronicle we will discuss the need for a different kind of government. And we'll start with a story about the men on the moon.

In the early days of NASA, when the Americans were in a moon race with the Russians, a conflict arose between NASA and the astronauts. The administration, with the urging of the engineers, did not want to let the astronauts have any internal control over the spacecraft. "Leave the driving to us."

The astronauts, many of whom were former test pilots, wanted some internal flight control. Given the huge distance to the moon even slight adjustments in flight could have a significant impact. Fortunately, as the Apollo 13 announcement demonstrated—"Houston, we have a problem"—good thing the astronauts won the argument.

There is one thing the race to the moon and our race to find a way of dealing with climate change have in common. There is no past experience to call upon. No one had ever been to the moon before. And our species has never had the experience of dealing with a climate that is changing everything and creating irreversible transformations to Earth and its species. The problem is a design problem. Our governments are designed to deal with the world the way it is, not with the world the way it is becoming.

Like the astronauts struggled with the NASA administration, large numbers of Canadian have seen the need to wrestle some of the power away from political parties.

Most politicians that we elect are good people who intend to do well for their constituents. But as soon as they get into power they must adopt the political culture of their respective party. The key rule built into that culture is "Stay in power."

While running during the last federal election campaign Prime Minister Trudeau promised to introduce some form of proportional representation. He set up a three-party parliamentary committee to consider the matter. They came back with the recommendation to adopt a proportional representation type of government and suggested a plebiscite. But the Liberal members of the committee rejected any change and Trudeau abandoned the recommendations of the committee and his promise.

But there is a more recent threat to our form of government –the Trump presidency. When Pierre Trudeau, Justin’s father, was prime minister he reflected on our relationship with the U.S. He said, “When a mouse lies down with an elephant, it always goes badly for the mouse, even when the elephant’s intentions are honourable.”

Our concern is not only with the erratic behavior of Trump. It is with the abuse of power: the huge quantities of money from corporations, the millions of dollars multinationals spend on lobbyists, the development of an economy that benefits the wealthy and discriminates against the poor, the pumping of carbon into the atmosphere, the dissolution of environmental laws, and on and on.

We Canadians are not totally free of these same problems. It is essential that we examine our government structures and policies and even revisit some of the other alternatives including proportional representation. We are not seeking a political system based upon the context of the past and the present. We need to evaluate our government within the new context of our journey into a climate changing world.

All of this, of course, requires a changing perspective—an ability to see the world and Earth with different eyes and to become aware of our responsibility as earthlings to care for it.

I have always been attracted by the intimate statements of the astronauts reflecting on their views of Earth from space.

From Alan Shepard: “If somebody said before the flight ‘Are you going to get carried away looking at the earth from the moon I would say, No! No way. But yet, when I stood on the moon and first looked back at Earth, I cried”

And from Scott Carpenter, Mercury 7 astronaut “This planet is not terra firma. It is a delicate flower and it must be cared for. It’s lonely. It’s isolated and there is no resupply. And we are mistreating it. Clearly the highest loyalty we should have is not to our own country, or our own religion, or our hometown, or even to ourselves. It should be, number two the family of man, and number one the planet at large. This is our home, and this is all we’ve got”

“Earth, we have a problem!”

**Mike Bell,
Comox Valley Climate Change Network.**

