

LET SIXTEEN YEAR-OLDS VOTE

Looking back on the year 2019 there were many happenings related to climate change. But the one that really struck home for me were the demonstrations inspired by Greta Thunberg. Students piled out of their schools and took to the streets to show their concerns.

I thought of this over the Christmas we spent with our grandchildren and their parents. Our grandchildren are young women aged 16 and 14. I wondered what they thought about climate change and how it would affect their lives. I think they were wondering about the same thing.

As impressive as the demonstrations were, the students are relatively powerless to change things. They are depending on many of the same people who are causing the climate change problems. But what would happen if they had some real power? What would happen if sixteen year-olds had the right to vote and run for office?

Here is my case for giving them this right.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. A Defining moment. Scientists tell us that 2030 is a defining moment in terms of dealing with Climate Change. It might actually be 2035 or 2045, or something else. But given what we know about climate change, I think there will be a defining moment—a time when it might be very difficult to turn back the clock.

2. Responsibility. The responsibility for dealing with the impacts of global warming will fall to the younger generation—the sixteen year-olds to the twenty somethings. In ten years' time our grand-daughters will be 26 and 24, right in the middle of it all.

3. Causes. The causes of Global Warming are not fossil fuels. They are us—we humans. In effect, through the systems we have developed, we have taken over from Earth the process of evolution. Our only hope is to recognize what we have been doing and change our whole relationship to a living Earth.

4. Useless Strategy. Trying to fix the present systems is a useless task. Trying to continually discuss the political right and left, far right and far left and so forth is a waste of time. Trying to go back to our democratic constitutions is also not helpful. The Canadian and American constitutions say nothing to indicate or protect our relationship with Earth, nor do they say a word about Earth-related rights.

5. A Different and Successful Strategy We need a new and a different strategy to develop different kinds of systems. We need to understand that we have entered a different kind of world. To get a bit poetic, we need to redefine our relationship with Earth and develop living systems that can exist within a living Earth. And we need to develop the tools we need to make the transitions. This will be the primary responsibility of the younger generation. It is inheriting the problems we have handed over to them.

CHANGING THE VOTING AGE TO 16

Why. No matter how you think about it, the younger generation is powerless. The systems, including the political systems, are controlled by their elders, especially the wealthy elders who run and control the economic, political and legal systems. They are making all the key decisions. We tell younger people they are not old enough or experienced enough to be responsible for what is happening in the world. This attitude is based upon the mistaken premise that we elect people to give them power. Actually we elect people to give us power. But that is often not happening, especially in terms of the climate concerns of younger people. So let's look more closely.

The Counter Argument. I think young people look at the older generations and say, "We might not have the life experience you have but your life experience has led you to develop and support systems that are the primary cause of climate change. We need a different kind of experience at the political level. Saying we are not old enough or experienced enough is "bullshit".

"You are the ones that have gotten us into this mess and many of you are the ones who are often still refusing to listen to us. You need us, we need you and we also need the vote. We need to be able to elect some younger folks who have a better understanding of climate change and can help deal with it. As things are now, many of you are causing the problems you are leaving to us and our children to deal with."

TRANSITION

Extending the right to vote among citizens is not a new experience for Canadians. We (men) only gave women the right to vote in 1918.

First Nation peoples who inhabited this land centuries before the rest of us finally arrived here only got the right to vote in the 1960s. So changing the rules about voting is not something new.

Interestingly, we don't seem to have a problem giving sixteen year olds the right to drive. When we do this we assume that they have the maturity to drive in a way that will protect themselves, the people in the car with them and the other people driving on the road and/or pedestrians. But before getting a driver's license they must pass a driving test, which leads me to a final point.

We need to insure that before we give sixteen year olds the right to vote and run for office they must receive some kind of training about the changing world in which they exist. But, this raises another issue. If the sixteen year olds need special training to vote and run for office why don't we have some kind of training requirements for anyone running for office--something more significant than just campaigning, raising money and trying to convince people out on the hustings . But that leads to a whole other issue and many more beyond the scope of this chronicle.

Just a final note:

I've written an earlier chronicle where I discussed an imaginary (2024) climate change training program for high schools students. It is available on my [website.](#) '

I welcome your insights on this important subject.

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