

EDITORIAL

with Frances Niblock

From the desk of the late Hartley Coles, Editor Emeritus

Saturday's reverent and impressive service at the Cenotaph certainly left no doubt how much the people of Acton and area felt about the sacrifice of veterans to preserve the freedom and peace we enjoy as a country.

Canada was once called a "Dominion" which stretched from sea to sea, poetic prose from the Bible. As the sun broke through grey, threatening clouds and the azure sky lit up the scene at the Cenotaph Saturday it illuminated what was probably being reported across the expansive country in all the time zones.

Although we don't seem to have the demonstrative flag waving patriotism of our American neighbours, our love of country and its place in the world is demonstrated by a quiet reserve which shows on occasions such as Remembrance Day services.

There's so much emotion stirred by this annual ceremony to commemorate those killed in both world wars and Korea, that it is often difficult to keep them under control, a Canadian trait. Nevertheless, many of us are still alive who remember and know at least some of those whose names are on the Cenotaph. Some were family, some friends or school mates who joined the army, navy or air force still in their teens, sometimes not fully aware of the conflagration in which they would play a part.

Some worry that as the people die that these annual services would lose their relevance. However, the ceremonies this last week should lessen their anxiety. They are part of Canada's fabric on a worldwide canvass.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Looking Back



Ten Years Ago

• Acton reflected on the meaning of courage, duty and country at solemn Remembrance Day services at the Acton Cenotaph, the second time that ceremonies were held on the Saturday close to November 11, and again on November 11.

• The Town has no money to help the owner of the former YMCA building on Mill Street with plans to develop seven subsidized housing units in the building, vacant for the past 15 years.

• A shotgun and rifle were stolen from the cab of a locked pickup truck parked on Norman Avenue. The owner was charged with unsafe storage of firearms.

Five Years Ago

• Acton's FoodShare food bank is in "reasonable" shape after several Hallowe'en food drives, including one at Robert Little School that generated 515 pounds of non-perishable food.

• Crews began work on the new Acton skateboard facility beside the Acton arena/community centre.

• Halton police asked for the public's help finding a "Peeping Tom" who startled a resident of 22 Side Road by looking through her bathroom window before running away.



SWEET TREATS: Pauline Russell (left) and Bernice Garbett, volunteers at the St. Alban Anglican Church tea and bazaar on Saturday, offered up lots of homemade treats at the bake table. — Frances Niblock photo

What's the biggest challenge in the world? Climate change? Economic disparity? Species extinction? A Western billionaire — maybe a member of the one per cent the Occupy protesters are talking about — will likely say population growth. A lot of well-off people in North America and Europe would agree. But is it true?

It's worth considering, especially in light of the fact that, somewhere in the world, the seven-billionth person was just born. In my lifetime, the human population has more than tripled. (I know I'm guilty of contributing to the boom.) But is overpopulation really the problem it's being made out to be? And if so, what can we do about it?

First, supporting more people on a finite planet with finite resources is a serious challenge. But in a world where hunger and obesity are both epidemic, reproduction rates can't be the main problem. And when we look at issues that are often blamed on overpopulation, we see that overconsumption by the most privileged is a greater factor in rampant environmental destruction and resource depletion.

I once asked the great ecologist E.O. Wilson how many people the planet could sustain indefinitely. He responded, "If you want to live like North Americans, 200 million." North Americans, Europeans, Japanese, and Australians, who make up 20 per cent of the world's population, are consuming more than 80 per cent of the world's resources. We are the major predators and despoilers of the planet, and so we blame the problem on overpopulation. Keep in mind, though, that most environmental devastation is not directly caused by individuals or

Science Matters

By David Suzuki



households, but by corporations driven more by profits than human needs.

The non-profit organization Global Footprint Network calculated the area of land and water the world's human population needs to produce the resources it consumes and to absorb carbon dioxide emissions. If it takes a year or less for nature to regenerate the amount we use in a year, that's sustainable. But they found it takes 1.5 years to replace what we take in a year. That means we are using up our basic biological capital rather than living on the interest, and this has been going on since the 1980s.

As people in developing countries demand more of the bounty and products we take for granted, environmental impacts are bound to increase. The best way to confront these problems is to reduce waste and consumption, find cleaner energy sources, and support other countries in finding ways to develop that are more sustainable than the ways we've employed — to learn from our mistakes. Stabilizing or bringing down population growth will help, but research shows it's not the biggest factor. A United Nations report, *The State of World Population 2011*, concludes that even zero population growth won't have a huge impact on global warming.

But, just as it's absurd to rely on economies based on constant growth on a finite planet, it can't be sustainable to have a human population that continues to increase exponentially. So, is there any good news? Well,

population growth is coming down. According to the UN report, the average number of children per woman has gone from six to 2.5 over the past 60 years. Research shows the best way to stabilize and reduce population growth is through greater protection and respect for women's rights, better access to birth control, widespread education about sex and reproduction, and redistribution of wealth.

But wealthy conservatives who overwhelmingly identify population growth as the biggest problem are often the same people who oppose measures that may slow the rate of growth. This has been especially true in the U.S., where corporate honchos and the politicians who support them fight against environmental protection and against sex education and better access to birth control, not to mention redistribution of wealth.

Population, environmental, and social-justice issues are inextricably linked. Giving women more rights over their own bodies, providing equal opportunity for them to participate in society, and making education and contraception widely available will help stabilize population growth and create numerous other benefits. Reducing economic disparity — between rich and poor individuals and nations — will lead to better allocation of resources. But it also shows that confronting serious environmental problems will take more than just slowing population growth.

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