

## Canadians aren't apathetic, we're just sick of the political status quo

ADAM KINGSMITH, RABBLE.CA

Published on August 14, 2013

*"Canadians don't care about politics."*

Every time some smug, entitled pundit spews out that hollow retort, I cringe.

In my experience, most Canadians do care about politics. They care about social justice, equality, freedom, tolerance -- these are all political goods that are important to every Canadian with whom I've ever had a serious conversation. What we've grown weary of is not so much the politics surrounding justice, self-determination, and good governance, but that same old partisan rhetoric.

You can see it in the numbers. **A recent report on political engagement in Canada** highlights the fact the while 55 per cent of Canadians volunteer regularly, only 10 per cent do so for an election, while 84 per cent of us donate money to a charity or non-profit, only 10 per cent give to political candidates or parties, and while 58 per cent of us are active in a group or association, only 10 per cent are members of a political party.

The majority of Canadians are not apathetic -- we belong to groups and give our time and money to causes which we believe to be important -- what we are, is sick of the petty games our political parties continue to play.

Canadians are sick of the **nauseating Senate scandals**, the **meaningless "Economic Action Plans,"** the **bombastic Trudeau legacy**, the **chronic NDP ambiguity**, the **Green Party hypocrisy**, and the fact that **a party with less than 40 per cent of the popular vote** can win a parliamentary majority -- sick of the juvenile finger pointing, the self-indulgent photo-ops, the rehearsed lies, the name-calling, and the lack of real political alternatives.

We're sick of the fact that no matter which political party gets elected in 2015, we'll still have a mounting surveillance state, an increasing dependence on fossil fuels, a decline in public healthcare and education, and an upsurge in military spending and privatization.

The rich will continue to get richer, the poor, poorer. The skyrocketing costs of post-secondary education will drive youth further into debt. As more jobs are outsourced for increased profit margins, unemployment will continue to rise, the middle class will continue to erode, and the widening disparity gap will continue to precariously expand.

<http://rabble.ca/news/2013/08/canadians-arent-apathectic-were-just-sick-political-status-quo>

One in eight Canadian families now **struggle to put food on the table**, while one in seven Canadians admit they have **debts they'll never be able to pay off**. Since 1990, tuition costs have risen by **three times the annual rate of inflation**, while over the past 30 years, incomes for the top 10 per cent of Canadians have **increased 23 per cent more** than incomes for the bottom 10 per cent. What's more, our **failure to do much of anything to protect the environment** has seriously jeopardised our supposed quality of life in the long-term.

All the while the political parties claiming to represent us, blithely insult us. Look at the futile options recommended to Canadians if we want to have a say in how we are governed.

We can write a strongly worded letter to our resident constituent... and receive a vague, insincere, template of a response. We can collect signatures for a petition... so it can be thrown on some neglected pile in the bowels of Parliament Hill. We can donate money to a political party... so it can be spent on attack ads and luxury travel. We can intern for a local politician... working long hours for little credit and even less compensation. Or we can vote... for essentially the same platform dressed up in three or four different colours.

No wonder Canadians are feeling disenfranchised. All of our "options" are nothing but fake, empty politics -- busy work meant to distract us from the sad truth that our political parties have a vested interest in upholding a flaccid status quo regardless of the economic, social and environmental realities facing this country in the 21st century.

But what those political parties intentionally fail to mention when they tell us to stick to voting, to volunteering, to giving generously, is that politics is greater than they are.

Politics is greater than power-hungry MPs **making six-figure salaries** for **silencing science** and **militarising our historical foundations**; it is greater than pompous press conferences and policy spins skirting the fact that our sovereignty is being sold off in **trade agreements** and **security partnerships**; and it is greater than paperwork, than popularity, than partisanship.

The real political is not about power -- it is about the people.

Democracy -- if understood as freedom and rule by the people -- is a precarious balancing act between legitimate governing authorities and the politically cognisant citizenry that keeps their power in check. Thus people like us -- not some "official opposition" -- are the last line of defence against a political system that has lost touch with the populations it's supposed to represent.

As such, pulling our political parties back down to the realities facing everyday Canadians can at times require the people to act outside the pre-approved courses of political action.

<http://rabble.ca/news/2013/08/canadians-arent-apatetic-were-just-sick-political-status-quo>

What I mean by this, is that Canadians out there like all the ones I've spoken to -- who do care about political goods such as social justice, equality, freedom, and tolerance -- need to boisterously articulate what it is that we want fixed. More middle-class wages, less dependence on fossil fuels, a re-strengthened social safety net, and a more representative electoral system -- these would all be good places to start.

We need to assemble, to voice our collective discontent, to manifest ourselves in public spaces. We need to protest, we need to get angry, and we need to brazenly speak out.

To be clear, this is not a proposition for violent revolt -- in a genuine democracy, engaging in things such as peaceful protest and the occupation of public spaces should be well within our legal right as citizens -- what it is, is a realisation that in order to right the course of politics in this country, we have to be willing push our apathetic political parties beyond the inadequate solutions they are currently offering up.

So as parliament prepares for yet another fruitless legislative session come September, let's get talking, networking, organising and assembling. Let's use our voices and our actions to reclaim politics for the people and in the process, remind all those who claim to represent the citizenry that it is us -- Canadian citizens -- who are responsible for driving discourse and granting our political parties legitimacy and the right to exist, not the other way around.

*Adam Kingsmith has an M.A. in International Relations and his writing and research explores the linkages between technology, culture, and political dissent within a uniquely Canadian context. He currently splits his time between his hometown of Vancouver and Toronto.*