

Social Cohesion and Volunteerism: How Canada will conquer the COVID -19 Virus and its aftermath.



By Robert Hicks – Opinion

Yes, we are somewhere new – a deadly pandemic has brought a worrisome range of troubles into our lives and we do not know what the solutions might be. We are at a moment in time when basic human solidarity is needed.

This situation has created a sense of community like nothing we have seen before. In the light of this pandemic our human differences have faded, our collective similarities now seem more evident, and our conflicts feel less urgent. We are at a rare moment in time when we are all together.

I have been thinking a lot about the importance of social cohesion since the COVID -19 first hit the news and I am now convinced that Canada will conquer the COVID -19 virus and its aftermath because of our strong, multicultural, resilient and cohesive Canadian society.

Social (or community) cohesion is the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper. Willingness to cooperate means they freely choose to form partnerships that have a reasonable chance of realizing goals, because others are willing to cooperate and share the fruits of their endeavours equitably.

Social cohesion is characterized by resilient social relations, a positive emotional connectedness between people and the community and a shared focus on the common good. In short it is the bond or 'glue' that binds people together.

Social or community cohesion has been defined in many complex ways. I suggest a new, and more simple, way of framing this perhaps philosophical issue:

A healthy, resilient and cohesive society is a society that wakes up every morning and asks itself - is today a day I ask help for help - or a day I offer help – and then decides, every day, to do both.

In some ways societal cohesion and volunteerism are similar. Volunteering is a way of life for many Canadians. The spirit of volunteerism is rooted in the traditions and values of the pioneers who built this country, and it is inspired by the concept of mutual help and co-operation that lies at the heart of our Indigenous societies. When added together, the day-to-

day efforts of Canadian volunteers over the years have met countless human and social needs. They show what can be accomplished through the active involvement of ordinary citizens.

Throughout Canada's history, movements lead by volunteers have had a tremendous impact on society's attitudes and public policy. Canadians now accept everyone's right as a citizen to expect the assistance of society in times of need, whether by way of government action or through a voluntary organization.

Every level of Canadian government will now need to deliver economic and social assistance across a wide range of areas to help those in need and to help people get back to work as soon as possible. To do this they will need to refresh, renew and perhaps in some ways invent, what I would call, a new "Eccommodating Economy" to accommodate the urgent needs of millions of people. Luckily our governments will be able to rely on our strong Canadian societal cohesion, and our strong Canadian volunteerism to help them succeed.

With Canada's present levels of social cohesion and volunteerism we are ready, willing and able to conquer the COVID -19 virus and the many problems that we will experience in its aftermath. At this time when your country needs you, whatever your skill please show the will and become a volunteer in any area that you can. The entire world will be watching us. Let's show them how to do this.

Robert Hicks is retired and lives in Niagara Falls. He has for many years been a world peace and environmental activist and for the past two years is one of approximately 800 Niagara Health volunteers.