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G2G JOURNAL

IDEAS THAT LEAD

**Post-Coronavirus
Let's Put Canada First**

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Thinking Clearly in a
Time of Panic

Thailand Diary: Living Joyfully
in a Time of Disease

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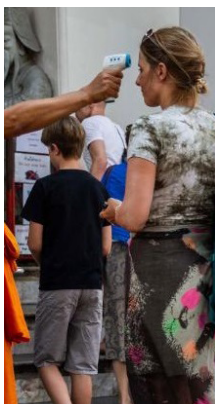
George Koch

How should the conservative mind respond to the coronavirus pandemic? Panic and despair are in ample supply, and the urge to succumb appears widespread. Others have steered, via deliberate ignorance, to fatalism, though the walls are closing in on such rebels. Both extremes are beneath thoughtful conservatives. C2C Editor-in-Chief George Koch counsels that however dark today might appear, the eternal search for objective truth – the foundation for all conservative thought – is the first necessary step along the path to seeing humankind through to brighter days.

Post-Coronavirus Let's Put Canada First **PAGE 3**

Anthony Furey

The isolation imposed by the lengthy pandemic makes it both tempting and understandable for us to look inward, focused mainly on our own survival concerns and those of our immediate circle. Politics can wait. But the so-called progressive side won't rest. It has remained busy, taking only weeks to begin redefining issue after issue through the lens of the coronavirus. More government, more regulation and less capitalism are its answers. They always are. But is this our inevitable future? Anthony Furey mounts a clear and powerful alternative case for Canada based on the national interest and equality for all.



Thailand Diary: Living Joyfully in a Time of Disease **PAGE 9**

Patrick Keeney

Canadians have been hectored into essentially hunkering down in their homes. Nearly all of us at least *have* a home. But what if you found yourself halfway around the world, with nowhere to live, the situation changing almost hourly, and lacking even the legal rights of a local citizen? Patrick Keeney not only maintained his equanimity but found time on the fly to explain how one man adapted to the life of an expatriate vagabond. Keeney shares his observations about the pandemic's impact on a vulnerable culture and shows us all how, amidst the many exigencies, it's possible to continue finding joy.

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Thinking Clearly in a Time of Panic

By George Koch



...The animal in whom the light of reason shines, and who looks at us from eyes which tell of freedom.

– Sir Roger Scruton

These are confusing times. Not solely concerning how many people might still die, as important as that is. Will the world go the way of Italy, where some 600-800 per day are succumbing? (The numbers vary continually, as you can appreciate. All current figures in this article are from late March.) Or might certain (so far) more fortunate Canadian provinces become a model for well-run jurisdictions? Alberta, for example, has a reported stock of nearly 700 ventilators – and at last count just 18 people hospitalized for COVID-19, with mercifully just one death. Nor does our confusion mainly concern whether Canadian Tire or Costco might next join other retailers in closing, or whether outdoor exercise is good (as most officials in my province are still saying) or bad (as in Halifax, where as of Sunday setting foot in a city park, beach or playground can get you a massive fine).

The confusion goes far beyond that, right

to how we should think, feel and respond to the coronavirus and the surrounding social, economic and political upheaval. What does it mean to be a conservative in these times? I do not mean in terms of evaluating policies and government actions. It is more basic than that. I mean in terms of how conservatism – be that a fully formed political philosophy or, more commonly, a looser collection of views, instincts and ways of acting – might help guide our individual inner lives. For these are what this crisis threatens to upend.

I'm not here to tell you what to think or who to believe. There's too much of that already. Instead, a few thoughts on being a conservative in these times.

First of all, a conservative does not *panic*. We endure. There are several reasons for that. We believe in the fundamental validity of Western Civilization, and it has been around for a rather long time – over 2,600 years if we take the laws of ancient Greece as the starting point, and another 800 if we go by our very wellspring, the Book of Genesis.

We know that human beings are innately flawed and that the human story has an irreducibly tragic element (if not exactly being a “march of folly” as some have called it). And yet we are still here, and our

own era is in many respects the pinnacle of human achievement. So we can be confident we will get through this. Remind yourself of that often; that alone should help quell the urge to panic.

As conservatives, we know something of history and we value it – not just its lessons but its mere existence. We respect what our ancestors endured and achieved and, therefore, we continue to believe in the future. We don't just “live in the moment”. So we know that humanity has been through far worse – unimaginably worse, innumerable times and in innumerable forms.

Great Britain did not manage to continue fighting the entire Axis group of powers – *all* of global fascism – alone and virtually unaided, for 18 months out of the nearly-six-year Second World War because her people panicked. Nor because her leaders and others who should know better *fomented* panic.

And so today we also know that when an elected politician or corporate leader, sweat beading on their brow and naked animal fear in their glazed eyes, declares this an “unprecedented” situation, they are speaking nonsense. As well as revealing a fevered state of mind and probably indicating something of the quality of their

thinking.

This latest viral eruption out of China is unprecedented only if you were hatched from an egg in the last decade, fully formed but with a mind containing not an iota of knowledge about the past. Obviously, if Canada or any of its provinces replicated the epidemiological track of northern Italy, our health care system – and much besides – would be overwhelmed. But we are a long way from that, and there's evidence that Italy's situation is unique.

Which is not to say we should feel

can agree on: Burkean and Lockean, as well as the more modern U.S. schools and, most important, the great mass of us who don't wear political science labels.

Accordingly, we understand and assert the central importance of the human being's faculty of reason. This is also the basis of science. This and our moral sense are what truly separate us from animals. In these times of uncontrolled emotion, they are more relevant than ever. They will be of life and death importance.

Our therapeutic era, of course,

In times of intense crisis, the very act of counselling reason, the refusal to share their despair, drives the apocalyptically-minded into a rage. Another tough but necessary task for conservatives, for the willingness to confront fear, danger and intimidation – including the unchecked passions of the emotionally unhinged, and numerous they can be – is the Classical form of courage.

Some of you might be thinking this is leading to a call for a renewal of religious faith. It isn't. I know what I believe. But

We conservatives understand and assert the central importance of the human being's faculty of reason. This is also the basis of science. This and our moral sense are what truly separate us from animals. In these times of uncontrolled emotion, they are more relevant than ever. They will be of life and death importance.

indifferent, succumb to cynicism or act recklessly. Far from it. The imperative of responsibility, our moral duty to our fellow human and our very belief in preserving civilization all counsel against that. But our choices are not binary: unchecked fear (leading to abject submission) or recklessness. (Although here again, loud voices are implying that it is binary.) Both of those states are fundamentally mindless. Both are the enemies of sound judgment, including the ability to absorb and interpret scientific information.

There is a third state and approach that is inimitably, beautifully conservative: prudence. It appears in short supply; we need more of it. Prudence is, above all, shaped and steered by *mindfulness*. Indeed, the worse things get, the more urgent the need not to panic, to see clearly and to follow the truth, including the findings of scientific observation and testing, wherever it may lead.

For conservatives believe in the existence of objective truth and that this truth is discoverable. Even if we don't worship the Enlightenment, we greatly appreciate its contribution and legacy. This is something conservatives of all stripes

emphasizes how we feel about things, and regards our *intentions* ("commitments") as decisive in expressing our virtue and establishing our moral worth. A trend that goes back several decades, it has struck conservative thinkers as deeply worrisome if not sinister.

This mindset – often mixed bizarrely with unreflective exhortations to "listen to what the science says", reducing the scientific method and the good it can bring to political sloganeering – currently appears to dominate in many (though, thankfully, by no means all) quarters. If unchecked, it would seem capable of unhinging our entire governing apparatus and, perhaps, society itself. That is what most concerns me.

Conservatives through the ages have resisted two extremes of human politics and psychology: the siren song of utopianism and the self-destructive bleakness of despair. Accordingly, when times are good and seem on an unending upward flight, we can appear boringly cautious or strangely unimaginative. When times are bad and spiralling downward without apparent end, we can seem weirdly optimistic.

this piece is about something we should all be able to agree on: reason. I will say this is the time to turn to family and friends, to draw strength from one another and, insofar as you are able, to help one another.

You might also note that I haven't touched on government policy nor ventured any predictions. This isn't about what I think. This is about all of us guarding our ability to think for ourselves and, accordingly, to preserve our moral freedom.

In times such as these, it's more important than ever that we live in truth.

C2C JOURNAL
IDEAS THAT LEAD

Post-Coronavirus Let's Put Canada First

By Anthony Furey



We are living in unprecedented times. Although the death toll from the COVID-19 virus remains low by the standards of historical plagues – and particularly low in parts of Canada – the government response spanning dozens of countries has been like nothing seen before. A large swath of humanity is facing some form of government-enforced lockdown, told to keep to themselves and stay at home as the main means of battling a potentially deadly virus. Surveillance of individuals, largely using technology not even invented 15 years ago, is of a kind previously contemplated only in dystopian futuristic novels and academic papers.

Even if this virus is beaten back within a month or two, and even if the death toll proves milder than most models predict (which so far it appears it will), the novel coronavirus will have wrought profound changes to our lives, changes that go beyond immediate health concerns.

We are already witnessing in real time disruptions and changes to the economy and society at large that could mark a historical inflection point. The government-led response to the pandemic has been so unusual and profound that politics itself is likely to change at all levels, ranging from what we expect of municipal services to the way superpowers manoeuvre and,

perhaps, clash for regional and global dominance. In future decades, the “post-coronavirus era” (or some cleverer, catchier variant) is likely to be a term employed in the same way successive generations referred to the post-WWII era, one that denotes a paradigm shift in world affairs.

What cannot be said with confidence though is what this new era will look like and how Canada will fare in it. Anything is possible. We are caught up in something akin to the fog of war and the first draft of our future history is only beginning to be written.

One camp, however, is already organizing to do just that: progressives and socialists. They were quick to recognize the opportunities lying amidst the wreckage of the economic shutdown, the new powers exercised by governments and, not least, the meekness with which voting publics accepted it all. From climate change to taxation to what we eat and how we live, they believe now is their time to strike and advance aspects of their agenda that to date have been rejected by the public as too extreme, costly or plain unappealing.

Examples abound in Canada and



We all know about the shutdown. But what comes after?

abroad. Left-wing economist and *Toronto Star* columnist Jim Stanford [argued](#) that we need “to develop and advance a progressive vision for a massive, public-led reconstruction agenda.” Local tenant activists in Toronto launched a [campaign](#) declaring, “Tenants keep your rent, landlords keep your distance”. In B.C., the government happily obliged, enacting a [total ban on all evictions](#), not just ones that might be triggered due to job loss during the current crisis.

If hard leftists have their way, however, there won't be so many ways to enjoy all that money we save from not paying rent. The radical animal rights group PETA is implying that not eating meat would reduce our risk of COVID-19 infection. “PETA



The new dictators: Young Canadian climate activists participating in Powershift (above) and (below) pro-vegan protesters. No mere pandemic will stop them.

has long warned about the health risks associated with eating meat,” the group declared [in a recent article](#) that attempted to get the reader to believe the virus came from a North American burger joint.

On the economic front, meanwhile, the pandemic has revived calls for some form of universal basic income. None other than [Pope Francis weighed in on this](#) decidedly earthly subject in his Easter Sunday address. Here in Canada, federal NDP Leader [Jagmeet Singh has been at the forefront of these voices](#), posting to social media that the government needs to be “sending \$2,000 with an additional \$250 per child directly to all Canadians (Universal Basic Income).” While it seems everyone across the political spectrum

agrees on providing temporary government support to those affected, those calling for a universal income don’t seem to want it to be temporary.

What’s most interesting about the above examples is that they’re things these sources would have been pushing even without COVID-19. Those who always wished to expand the state now have a convenient and superficially plausible pretext to rehash their ideology. They are not proposing sunset clauses for these ideas or a wind-down when the virus is eradicated. Instead, they want to seize the moment to permanently remake the economy and the citizen’s relationship with the state.

Some of the loudest voices for seizing

the moment and turning crisis into opportunity have been climate alarmists. The CBC in early April [interviewed](#) one such voice in environmental author Tom Rand. The reporter served up a leading question ready-made for climate activists: “Are there any lessons to take from governmental responses to coronavirus that could be applied to climate?”

Rand’s response was telling. “When you can articulate a risk appropriately, people will make a sacrifice for the common good,” he replied. “Humans are fundamentally caring and decent. No one wants to unleash destabilizing forces that bring economic ruin. Only a sociopath would deny the need to address climate risk, just as only a sociopath wouldn’t endorse behaviours like physical isolation that reduce coronavirus risk.”

Imposing widespread restrictions on human activity in the name of fighting climate change is not a new idea. It has been advocated by many prominent voices, including Naomi Klein, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Greta Thunberg. “This is much more like a wartime effort than it is anything one can imagine in a peacetime economy,” Green Party Leader Elizabeth May said last September, during the federal election campaign.

The reasonable middle-ground Canadian’s impulse at the time may well have been to laugh off these calls to action. But to downplay them now is to guarantee progressives have the last laugh.

There needs to be a viable alternative presented to the public. It must go beyond specific policies, although those will certainly play a role. To have any hope of success, the alternative will need to be a vision of Canada itself, one of a united nation that crafts its values and determines its policies with the wellbeing and strength of its citizens as the primary objective.

Canada had a missed opportunity to do this in 2017, the year we celebrated the 150th anniversary of our nation’s formal creation. Any meaningful talk of a Canadian identity, however, consisted of regurgitating platitudes about how “diversity is our strength” and that we are the country of hockey and Tim Hortons.



Mark of shame? Canada 150 was a crossroads at which our ruling elite expressed open contempt for the country.

The occasion lacked discussion about keeping Canada secure and prosperous for the next 150 years.

The opposite, in fact, for *Canada 150* brought forth perhaps the first widespread denunciations of Canada itself. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau used what should have been an entirely celebratory Canada

a sudden changed.

Now, as COVID-19 rages, it is a more viable argument. Canadians are asking foundational questions: Will the economy evaporate? Is the food supply chain secure? Do we rely too much on other countries for vital goods? Do border and immigration policies actually serve our

From climate change to taxation to what we eat and how we live, progressives and socialists believe now is their time to advance aspects of their agenda that to date have been rejected by the public as too extreme, costly or plain unappealing.

Day speech to highlight the negative. “While many of us celebrate *Canada 150*, others do not,” [he intoned](#). “As a society, we must acknowledge and apologize for past wrongs, and chart a path forward.” So why hold celebrations at all?

At the time of *Canada 150*, the nation was already facing existential threats that risked eroding our sovereignty, national identity, and standing in the world. But these were issues that crept up on us slowly. They were not vividly felt in the daily lives of regular Canadians. To suggest our foundations were at risk of crumbling would have seemed foolish. That has all of

interests? The Canadian public want to have these conversations and may be open to fresh ideas that don’t adhere to previous assumptions.

This suggests there’s an opening for an alternative to the Liberal-progressive vision of ever-greater government control, ever-weaker borders and ever-eroding personal freedoms. It is the case for Canada as a united country with a strong national identity. It would start by attacking the left’s abstract issues as luxuries Canada can’t afford now that more basic concerns are at the front of the line. Instead, Canada needs solutions that put Canada and Canadians

first – before global agendas and special interests.

Legitimate economic concerns underscore why Canada’s natural resources sector is a blessing to be celebrated. This is an economic and security advantage that countries without such a bounty of resources can only dream of. We also have the Canadian talent and largely home-grown technology to make the most of them, exporting our energy and energy-producing technology worldwide and supporting our own prosperity from coast to coast.

When it comes to trade, the alternative would advocate a mindset that free trade agreements will work for us only insofar as they are with similar-minded, pro-free-market countries and only apply to imports that do not undermine domestic production of vital goods. As countries argue over the shipment of medical supplies and worry about food security, it has become clear how the global supply chain is in and of itself a national security concern. What if the current chilly relationship between an increasing number of the world’s countries and China [degenerates into a cold war](#) or even erupts into a hot war? What Canadian supplies will be threatened? At that point, our Liberal government’s river of platitudes about the Chinese regime’s cooperativeness, transparency and good



Eco-author Tom Rand conflates his anti-fossil-fuel agenda with the coronavirus.

faith will count for naught.

Free-market mantras carried the most force when the world functioned under the postwar rules set by the United States and its allies. Now that China is slowly rewriting these rules, Canada must adjust accordingly. We will need to enact policies that identify those goods and services that are needed for the survival of the economy and enact protective measures, including tariffs, against foreign goods that threaten our vital domestic markets.

As for China, it is no understatement to say that the rising global power is a threat to our way of life and the future of our nation. The Chinese oligarchy wishes to buy or steal the natural resources, land, strategic businesses and intellectual property of Western countries out from under us. Canada is most certainly included in this. The leadership elite in Beijing are ruthless but often clear-headed Communist authoritarians who are shamelessly but methodically working to bring the world more under their influence and away from that of the United States.

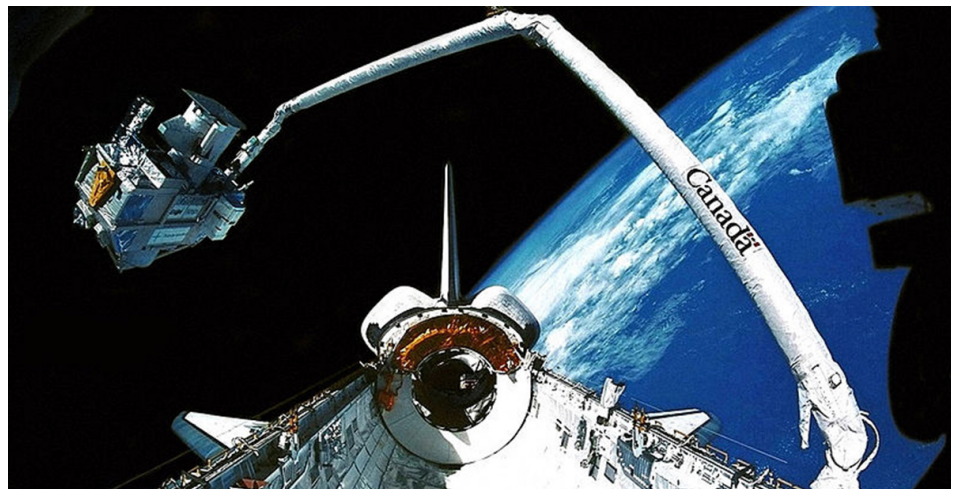
It has become obvious to everyone except blind apologists that China lied about the coronavirus and tried to cover it up. A condensed list along with brief descriptions of China's misinformation can be [read in this article](#). It is a lengthy article. Canadians had already grown increasingly skeptical of China in the past few years, [according to pollsters](#). Now they are even more so. With the right federal Conservative leader, backed by key premiers, the next federal election could perhaps even be framed as a referendum on China, on whether we want to be their servants or to break free.

The action items on the China file are many. Barring Huawei from the coming 5G system. Exiting the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is advancing China's plan to remake global finance on its own terms. Prohibiting Chinese state-owned enterprises from making purchases in Canada, and repurchasing those over which they have gained control, among them several major oil and natural gas producers. Recognizing democratic Taiwan on the world stage. (Taiwan's defence

against the coronavirus has been among the world's finest, and its mistreatment by the World Health Organization, among others, was outrageous and withheld critical information that could have saved lives in many countries.) Scaling back the reliance our universities and research facilities have on Chinese foreign student enrolment and funding from Chinese-affiliated bodies. Exposing, scaling back

and that Canada is "the first post-national state". He is far from the lead author of this, though.

Trudeau is only a follower of a mood that has been allowed to fester across Canadian society for quite some time. It has thoroughly infected the federal government and can be seen almost daily in the federal Health Minister's increasingly bizarre defences of the Chinese regime –



Canada's abundance of tech and resource talent should be fully valued and harnessed to support our own prosperity.

and, where necessary, expelling the "Confucius Institutes".

It is not just China that Canada needs to back away from, though. We need to shed the entire "post-national-state" agenda. This agenda is very dear to Trudeau. It was exemplified when he famously [told The New York Times Magazine](#) that "there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada"

as when she dismissed a reporter who had referenced the official U.S. intelligence assessment of China's dishonesty concerning the Wuhan virus as "[feeding conspiracy theories](#)". Old habits die hard; indeed, they may be incurable.

The post-national state is a lazy and poorly thought-out agenda that argues that because Canadian society is not



Love of country: A Canada-first agenda would promote common values and opportunity for all to benefit.

homogeneous in a racial, ethnic and religious sense, we have no unifying culture and instead must let the values of other countries and cultures determine Canada's actions. It is rarely put in such clear terms, for any objective reader can then see it is a gigantic *non-sequitur*.

More important, it is a drive towards national suicide by cultural relativism. The sad irony is that, aside from being

are escaping.

Accordingly, the post-COVID-19 era calls out for a political leader advocating a Canada that is finally defined by what it is, rather than what it is not. This includes an acknowledgement that freedom, family, national security, economic prosperity and the natural resources sector are all integral to a successful nation.

Progressivism, the post-national state

wish to destroy our resource-producing and exporting sector.

The key to articulating a national identity is to highlight how our similarities matter more than our differences. A strong Canada-first agenda is the most inclusive agenda possible. It is the opposite of divisive; it is unifying. Anybody who agrees with its fundamental tenets, from any walk of life, is welcome to join and share in the

We are living in an age of acceleration, where concerns that seemed mild and far away weeks ago have suddenly become urgent. While the coronavirus may be beaten back within a short while, the problems it has exposed will not. Standing still is not an option for anyone, least of all conservatives, for it is guaranteed that progressives will not.

ruinous to the tens of millions of good-faith Canadians who continue to believe in this country, the agenda is most unfair to the many new immigrants who come to Canada from all corners of the world because of their vision of a strong Canada that is superior to the troubled lands they

and identity politics do not foster national unity. They splinter us into ever-smaller groups fixated not on "justice" as claimed but on selfish and essentially petty concerns. This leaves us most open to exploitation by outside interests, whether it is China or foreign-funded activists who

positive vision, its liberating way of thinking and its many concrete benefits. There is a place at the table for everyone.

We will also need to pivot in our approach to borders and immigration. We can no longer be signatory to [international agreements](#) that undermine our exclusive

right to set the rules for who enters our country and how and when they do it. The worst part of the Roxham Road [illegal border crossings](#) is not so much the relatively modest volume of people, but the fact that these are self-selected individuals who are crossing at the time and place of their choosing. We have no say in it, which was never how refugee policy was supposed to work.

We are living in an age of acceleration, where concerns that seemed mild and far away only months or even weeks ago have suddenly become urgent. While the coronavirus may be beaten back within a short while, the problems it has exposed will not. Standing still is not an option for anyone, least of all conservatives, for it is guaranteed that progressives will not.

Canada mustn't return to the same naïve progressivist path it stumbled along for the past few years. There is a case for Canada to be made – now. It is the case for an inclusive national identity that rallies people around a strong nation, one that forges policies for the benefit of its own people and their wellbeing.

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Thailand Diary: Living Joyfully in a Time of Disease

By Patrick Keeney

In Thailand, as elsewhere, what I call the “CPC” virus has turned the country upside-down. The economy is effectively shut down, and basically only grocery stores, pharmacies and sellers of other necessities remain open. The rumour mill abounds, and one is hard-pressed to know what to believe. Multiple “unconfirmed reports” about this or that swirl about on social media: the entire nation is about to go into lockdown; the government is easing all restrictions; all foreigners will need to report to quarantine hotels. I’ve learned to ignore the paranoid postings on Facebook. Uncertainty is the order of the day. The only thing we know for sure is that things are changing rapidly.

In late March, I left the northern city of Chiang Mai to escape the seasonal smoke that typically afflicts that area, little anticipating the developments the COVID-19 virus had in store. I work at Chiang Mai University, which in concert with other Thai universities closed its doors early that month to help slow the spread of the virus and mitigate its



effects. My already minimal on-campus duties disappeared. I was scheduled to return to my hometown of Kelowna on April 24, so before I left, I thought I should take advantage of the campus closure to escape the city’s awful smoke.

The smoke is the product of an ancient agricultural practice. The farmers in the northern region of Thailand (as well as in neighbouring Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar) burn the stubble and thatch in their fields to prepare for planting and to encourage the growth of a valuable mushroom, which they sell to China, providing a much-needed cash crop. The practice has been going on since time immemorial. Still, it worsens the region’s air pollution, particularly with the recent introduction of a new crop, corn, with its enormous amount of organic waste.

When I first arrived in 2016, the smoke was annoying, but tolerable, and lasted about six weeks. Now, from mid-January through late April, Chiang Mai has some of the world’s worst air quality. Above all else, it is a health hazard and those who can get out of town.

This is a great pity, for as anyone who has visited Chiang Mai will tell you, it is a magical place. The modern nation of Thailand was formed under [King Chulalongkorn](#) who, like [Garibaldi in Italy](#) or [Bismarck in Germany](#), assembled Thailand by consolidating autonomous kingdoms – Siam, Lanna and Sukothai –

into a centrally-governed national state. Chiang Mai was the historical capital of the Lanna Kingdom and has remained the educational, cultural and economic centre of northern Thailand.

In the “Land of Smiles,” the people of the North stand out as exceptionally friendly. Even in the time of the virus, their unflappable good nature shines through. They do have an uneasy relationship with the Chinese, however. It’s somewhat analogous to many Canadians’ attitude towards Americans. Chinese tourism and investment have become critical to Thailand’s economy, intermarriage is common, and innumerable Chinese families have brought their children to northern Thailand to attend English-language schools. The northern regions felt overwhelmed by the influx. Land ownership in Thailand by foreigners, including Chinese, was prohibited – a welcome intervention that has prevented Thais from becoming tenants in their own land.

As the old story teaches us, every Edenic Garden has a snake. And so I decided to flee the smoke by heading to Krabi, a southern resort town on the Andaman Sea, and visit with two Australian friends who live there.

Before I left, I went to the night market in Chiang Mai. It was a sad sight. Most of the stands were closed, and “For Rent” signs were everywhere. Also gone were

the once-ubiquitous ladyboy skills, a uniquely Thai melange of young transsexuals, transvestites and feminine males (the Thais' equanimity towards nearly all things sexual is legendary, even though they are socially very conservative in most other ways). You could see the looks of panicked desperation on the faces of the remaining vendors. It was heartbreaking. There is no safety net in Thailand, and it's difficult to know how these poor people are going to survive. We in the West glibly talk of having six weeks of supplies to wait out the quarantine. People here are fortunate if they can put rice in the bowl for three days.

Thailand shut down the massage parlours and girlie bars, what is euphemistically called the "entertainment" industry.

There was a photo in the *Bangkok Post* of hundreds of entertainment workers catching the buses from Bangkok to Issan, the country's most impoverished region, entirely reliant on agriculture. A friend of mine in Chiang Mai is a medical doctor who did his practicum in Issan. The



Essential services remain open in Thailand, such as this pharmacy (above) and Tuk's fruit stand (below), both in the city of Hua Hin.

and the usual run of afflictions that affect farmers everywhere.

That is why so many of the country's prostitutes and bar-girls come from the region. As dutiful Thai women, they send most of their earnings home to support their family – including children and aged

the most. Workers in the tourism and night-time industries mostly work for Thailand's minimum daily wage, which is 300 Baht (about \$12 Canadian) for a 12-hour working day. Workers are also expected to put in a six-day week, typically having Sunday off.

A traditional Thai greeting translates as, "Have you eaten yet?" A Thai friend once told me, "If an event doesn't involve food, we aren't interested." There's good reason Thai food is popular worldwide. Thais are obsessive about it, and it's one of the joys of living here. Yet the economic losses in the food industry will be staggering. Even in the best of times, people in the industry exist on the precipice of poverty. What will happen when cooks, servers, and street-food

vendors can't even feed their families? It's horrifying to contemplate. Poverty here is a matter of life and death. My problems centre on a bit of anxiety and uncertainty.

Krabi is a [beautiful seaside town](#), and the jumping-off point to many of the islands shown in Thailand's tourist brochures,

There is no safety net in Thailand, and it's difficult to know how these poor people are going to survive. We in the West glibly talk of having six weeks of supplies to wait out the quarantine. People here are fortunate if they can put rice in the bowl for three days.

people of Issan lead lives of impoverished desperation and one of Thailand's dirty secrets, he said, is the region's suicide rate. People are driven to despair by crop failures, droughts, low commodity prices

parents. It's heartbreaking to think of what will happen when that source of revenue disappears. So many people here live day-to-day, hand-to-mouth. The poor and economically defenceless will suffer

including [James Bond Island](#) (made famous in 1974's *"The Man with the Golden Gun"*). But the streets are quiet now, and most of the businesses shuttered. We're not on lockdown, but it's ghostly still and a



Losing their livelihoods: Entertainment workers and others wait to leave Bangkok at the jam-packed Mor Chit bus terminal.

bit spooky, given the place's normal gaiety and vibrancy. Still, the beaches remain open, and our daily routine is to go to a local beach that's a bit off the beaten track. The water is beautiful, the sun is dazzling – the temperature hovers around 30° C – and we hang out for a couple of hours of socializing. My Aussie friends have taught me how to use “mate” in virtually every sentence, as well as some more colourful expressions.

As beautiful as Krabi is, and as much as I enjoy the Aussies' camaraderie, I fear the Thai authorities will soon forbid interprovincial travel. I don't want to be stranded here. I have booked a flight to Bangkok, where I will take a taxi from Suvarnabhumi Airport to Hua Hin, a

seaside city two hours' drive south. I think this is a prudent manoeuvre, as I want to be near Suvarnabhumi (BKK), from where I'm scheduled to fly back to Canada on April 24.

Uncertainty looms, however. I'm scheduled to transfer through Taipei on a Taiwanese carrier, Eva Air. But Taiwan has prohibited all transit flights until April 15, and there are good odds the closure will extend to month-end. As well, Air Asia and other regional carriers just announced they would stop all domestic flights as of April 1. Fortunately, I'm flying Bangkok Airlines, or at least I think I am. Things are changing by the hour, and I'm half-expecting to be informed that they, too, have grounded their fleet. My *alma mater* Simon Fraser

University's motto, *Nous Sommes Prets*, has served me well. Indeed. Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst. Or as Mel Brooks once put it, “Life is a play and we are all unrehearsed.”

I had a long chat with Sharon Dunk, the head of *Mercy International*, an Australian charity that operates three children's homes in Thailand and cares for over 200 young souls. She informs me that the kids are in lockdown but all are healthy. I play Santa Claus every year at Ban Maeta (“House of Mercy” in Thai), their centre in the city of Phrae. Dunk tells me that Ban Maeta has cancelled its beach trip to Hua Hin at the end of April and, naturally, that the kids are disappointed. It's their summer vacation and one of the highlights of their year. I had wanted to visit the kids before returning to Canada. Alas...

Upon entering the terminal at Krabi airport on April 1, I have my temperature taken and am given alcohol lotion to wash my hands, a routine repeated when I go through security. The flight to Bangkok is half-full at best, so we're all able to keep our social distance. I had asked the driver to greet me inside the arrivals terminal, but he wisely chooses to wait for me in his car. He insists I wear a mask in the taxi, as the police have set up roadblocks to check that all car passengers are wearing masks. These sensible practises were widely implemented in a “developing”



Escape to Krabi.



Way ahead of Canada: Masks in Thailand are ubiquitous, plentiful, cheap and even fun. The cherry motif reminds the author of home in B.C.'s Okanagan.



country a week or more before Canadian federal public health officials would even acknowledge the efficacy of people wearing masks.

Unlike in Canada, the Thais have been wearing masks for the past month whenever they go out in public. The smoke in Chiang Mai makes masks a seasonal necessity. Over here, masks are plentiful and cheap. The Tops supermarket chain is offering them at a promotional discount of about 40 cents with the purchase of groceries. You can even get designer masks: Mickey Mouse, Snoopy and, of course, the ubiquitous Hello Kitty are favourites, particularly with young girls. Looking for something dignified and age-appropriate I decide on a mask decorated with red cherries. It reminds me of the Okanagan.

I've visited Hua Hin in happier times and one of its culinary pleasures is Ogen, a restaurant specializing in Mediterranean food. Eating in restaurants is now forbidden, and most restaurants are shuttered. But some remain open for take-away. I'm delighted to learn that Ogen is among them. Its proprietor is David Lanziano, an ex-Israeli. I ask him how he can afford to keep going under the circumstances. He tells me that keeping the restaurant open is unprofitable but

his Thai employees desperately need the work. "They need to live," he says. "What else could they do?"

My wife, Angela Dereume, is ever the pragmatist. She tells me that in her estimation, I likely won't make it back to Canada until late June or July, so I had better get used to the idea of living as an



Losing money, staying open to help his workers: David Lanziano in front of his restaurant in Hua Hin.

expatriate vagabond. I suspect she's right. She usually is. Though I miss her dearly, there are worse fates.

And I take comfort in knowing that Thailand has a good health care system

and great health care workers. Dr. Pharit Siladech, a physician in Chiang Mai, reports to me on April 3 that, "Thailand currently has over 2,000 COVID-19 patients, some of whom are in serious condition and intubated. But we have only had 20 deaths." Remarkable for a country of 69 million.

Editor's Note: As of April 24 Thailand had 50 deaths, with the death rate levelling off after the first half of April, according to *Our World in Data*.

Siladech expresses confidence in his country's system, saying, "We can help patients as much as any other nation, and with some support from the government, the situation will be under control within two or three months." Two or three months is his optimistic view. Still, his matter-of-fact tone is a welcome contrast to the wide-eyed near-hysteria evinced by many North American politicians and officials, most of whom only seem able to predict things becoming ever-worse. And my wife appears prescient as ever.

Like political leaders everywhere, Thailand's politicians have been severely tested. We receive an official announcement from the governor of Prachuap Khiri Khan province (which includes Hua Hin) that, as of April 5, those caught outdoors not wearing a mask are subject to a fine of 20,000 Baht. That's about Cdn\$860 – about two months' wages for many Thais.

The governor has also declared that all hotels are forbidden to register new guests. Also, foreigners must report their presence to the authorities. I'm undecided whether or not to abide by this new mandate. I don't want to wind up in quarantine, with the dubious pleasure of paying inflated prices at a designated quarantine hotel. I think I'll lie low in Joop's Place in the hills on the outskirts of town. Joop is a gracious and welcoming landlady. She advertises her small hotel as possessing "the comfort of a home with the treatment of a resort", and it's difficult to disagree.

It was bound to happen: the Governors of two southern provinces, including the



Dr. Pharit Siladech is confident in Thailand's health-care system and believes the worst will be over in two to three months.

“We can help patients as much as any other nation.” Dr. Siladech’s matter-of-fact tone is a welcome contrast to the wide-eyed near-hysteria evinced by many North American politicians and officials, most of whom only seem able to predict things becoming ever-worse.

islands of Koh Lanta, Koh Phi Phi, as well as Krabi’s Ao Nang beach, have ordered a lockdown and have closed travel in and out of their provinces. Richard Barrow, a British expat writing in *The Thaiger* newspaper, states, “It would seem that all foreign tourists in Krabi province have to check out of their hotels before April 10, and move to designated hotels.” This lockdown follows the decision of Phuket, which last week sealed off its land-sea borders and closed its airport until April 10. Terry, my Aussie friend, tells me that I have timed my run perfectly.

So far, I’ve avoided lockdowns and have mercifully stayed one step ahead of the authorities. Another Australian friend, Dianne, has chosen to wait out the virus in Chiang Mai. She tells me I’m having an adventure right out of the Boys’ Own Annual. She’s impressed that I have kept ahead of the worst. But of course, one waits with bated breath for the next development. “What fresh hell is

a-coming?” to paraphrase Dorothy Parker.

In the Steven Spielberg movie [“Bridge of Spies”](#), a Soviet spy is captured by the Americans. He faces deportation to the USSR, where there’s a high chance he’ll be shot upon his return. His American handler says to him, “You don’t seem too worried.” The Soviet spy, played by Mark Rylance, replies, “Would it help if I were worried?” Quite.

Whatever other lessons the pandemic might hold in store, it has taught us to appreciate what we have. I just heard from my friend in Bowron Lake, B.C. He informs me that I’m not missing much by staying in Thailand. It’s -21° C outside his cabin and

snowing in Vancouver and Kelowna. I’m watching the sunrise over the Gulf of Siam on the beach in Hua Hin. It is a balmy 27° at 6 am. Virus or not, life is good and I’m grateful for the day.

Editor’s Note: *The author’s April 24 flight home to Canada was, of course cancelled. He remains healthy and safe and walking the beaches of Hua Hin.*

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IDEAS THAT LEAD

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