

The new normal



June 2, 2020 By Nate Smelle

‘We are in this together,’ seems to be the message resonating from most political, religious and corporate pulpits these days. Certainly there is some truth to these words considering everything we have experienced over the past five months, we have experienced as a collective. Ironically, for the most part during this time we have been forced to isolate ourselves from others. Since the dawn of social distancing many of the people I have spoken with has identified this time away from our usual routines as a huge opportunity to transform the mindless consumption-based lifestyle destroying our personal and planetary health into a new normal that will allow us and future generations to flourish in harmony with each other and the earth. When protective measures were first enacted to prevent the spread of COVID-19, there were many signs of hope that we might actually have turned around and started walking forward on the path to true progress. People of all ages stepped up to the challenge as individuals by doing what needed, and for that matter still needs to be done to protect their health and the health of others. Political parties of different stripes and governments of all levels began working together and collaborating in a way unlike we have seen in my lifetime at least. Despite fears of an economic collapse, businesses heeded the call, shutting their doors to the public or reducing their unessential services for the sake of survival. While schools closed to protect children, teachers, staff and parents from the outbreak, hospitals and health care professionals immediately adapted their essential service to society to manage the global triage as effectively as possible with the tools their underfunded system provided. There is no doubt some progress has been made. Although to a lesser extent, the collaboration is continuing. Many businesses are carefully adjusting their service model to respect physical distancing. More and more people are frequently sanitizing their hands and wearing protective masks to reduce the risk of potentially transmitting COVID-19 to others. There are restrictions still in place prohibiting large gatherings such as concerts, festivals, and sporting events. Tragically, at the same time there does appear to be a push by the economic-growth-at-all-costs crowd to return to the old way of doing business. The first sign I noticed from this lobby arrived via the radio when I heard a voice telling people that it was ‘time to stop baking bread? time to stop looking out, and start heading out.’ Hearing this ad for the first time on the same day Phase-1 of Ontario’s economic reopening was announced ? prior to the official announcement ? it dawned on me how eager some money-hungry folks must be to bring back the outdated way of doing ‘business-as-usual.’ Pulling over after hearing this advertisement I took a photo of a solar-powered road sign which now already flashed the words ‘STAY 2 METRES APART’ instead of ‘STAY HOME ? PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19.’ I laughed as I pictured one of this elite mob sitting in a rocking chair on his front porch, drinking homemade dandelion wine and reminiscing about what for him was ‘the good ol’ days’ when it was acceptable to pay frontline workers minimum wage. Empathizing with the fear and the horror such individualists must be experiencing, I realized that there was still a long road ahead for us to bring the societal transition underway to fruition. Taking a break from the news over the weekend to get some work done in the garden and prepare for what is hopefully the last frost of the season, I didn’t notice the next sign of the big push backwards until I switched on the news Sunday. The broadcast grabbed my attention immediately as my eyes focused on images of burning police cars and massive crowds marching in the streets throughout

the U.S., Canada, and around the world. Discovering what had caused the worldwide mobilization against racism ? a video of the death of George Floyd, another unarmed African American killed by police in the U.S. ? it hit home how for some, ?the good ol' days? was a time when racially motivated violence and the segregation of people because of the colour of their skin was acceptable. To anyone who still considers this shameful chapter in our history ?the good ol' days? ? a chapter that is still sadly and disgustingly being written ? I say step aside and let the rest of us ? the majority ? design the new normal.