

The politics of fear and the fear of politics

To the Editor,

A May 2015 article from Global News entitled, *Breaking the silence: Government scientist speaks about culture of fear*, outlines how one scientist feels about working under the Harper Conservatives and how they have created a "culture of fear" within the federal scientific community. I would argue that this scientist is correct and that the culture of fear, which predates the Harper Conservatives, has become worse under this regime and has spread throughout the scientific community and through all levels of government and subsequently through all government funded agencies as well. Its impacts have been obvious: the stifling of dissenting opinion. For many Canadians the term "culture of fear" is a relatively new concept and needs to be defined. So what exactly is a culture of fear and how does it work? Let's start with fear itself. Fear is a natural feeling and a survival mechanism that we employ when faced with imminent danger, it's what would be called a base feeling, but constant unwarranted fear is poison. It can lead to anxiety, depression, and a feeling of overwhelming dread. Many people around the world have this feeling of fear, leading to many of them looking for alternative remedies such as this delta 9 weed in order to manage it. Of course, there are many different examples of this that can be seen in the form of medication, therapy, or even mindfulness meditation practices to help them manage their symptoms. Sadly, some take the recourse of smoking cigarettes to battle their mental demons. Instead, choosing a less harmful substitute like vaping or tobacco-based gums would prove more useful (all things considered). Devices like Mighty vaporiser and Zeus arc are small compared to the traditional chamber sized electric vapes and offer powerful, quality vape, with automatic switch-off function. Also known as diffuser sticks, these vape pens may help people achieve a feeling of relaxation and happiness. Yet others might consider, options like essential oils and herbal remedies such as red malay kratom to combat their growing anxiety.

In his book, *The Gift of Fear*, Gavin De Becker states the following, "Real fear is a signal intended to be very brief, a mere servant of intuition. But though few would argue that extended, unanswered fear is destructive, millions choose to stay there. They may have forgotten or never learned that fear is not an emotion like sadness or happiness, either of which might last a long while. It is not a state, like anxiety. True fear is a survival signal that sounds only in the presence of danger, yet unwarranted fear has assumed a power over us that it holds over no other creature on earth. [...] it need not be this way."

It need not be this way indeed, but as it stands, it is this way for many people. De Becker gives us a very good measuring stick concerning real fear and unwarranted fear. He says that if you feel fear and there is not imminent danger it is unwarranted and will result in anxiety and worry, whereas real fear activates your fight or flight instinct and adrenaline into overdrive and requires immediate action. Although there are many catalysts that contribute to unwarranted fear especially the media, I want to focus on the culture of fear in politics and how it can impact decisions of our political leaders and allow undemocratic policies and legislation to pass without opposition.

William H. Hastie said of democracy that "It is becoming rather than being. It is easily lost, but never fully won. Its essence is eternal struggle." We currently have a Federal government that has shown a clear disdain for democratic processes from election fraud to contempt of Parliament to the suppression of factual scientific information and the handing out and implementation of a handbook on how to paralyze parliament's democratic processes. If we, as leaders, fail to speak up when our democracy is being undermined, that, in my mind at least, makes us just as complicit as those who do the undermining. As Miguel du Unamuno stated, "Sometimes to be silent is to lie, since silence can be interpreted as ascent."

I believe this is how the current culture of fear in Canadian society has come about: our federal government is arguably the most pro-austerity government in the history of our country and they have done some deep cutting to transfer payments to provinces and to non-profit organizations. These cuts have resulted in job losses and a lot of anxiety and fear of further job losses. This fear and anxiety manifests itself in a kind of protectionist attitude whereby people will do anything, including keeping quiet and encouraging others to keep quiet when anti-democratic policies and legislation are passed, in the faint hope of not further incurring the austerity wrath. The problem is that the austerity mindset is the policy of this government and further cuts are coming whether we are quiet or not. This is the genius behind the creation of a culture of fear: it becomes self-perpetuating and like panic in a large crowd, it spreads rapidly and takes on a life of its own. All the government has to do is keep feeding the fear occasionally and it will take care of itself.

Those who buy into this culture of fear will claim to be looking out for the best interests of the employees or the corporation or whomever, but in reality it becomes silent consent as the cuts continue and the fear spreads. Thus, those who choose to be silent will

be in a lose-lose situation since cuts will still happen and their silence will give the impression that there is no dissenting opinion concerning controversial policies and legislation. Anyone who has worked in a company where rumours of layoffs are rampant and has felt the sword of Damocles hanging just above their head knows how fear and anxiety can turn people and subsequently the workplace into one large emotional and physical wreck. If fear can poison a workplace it certainly will have the same impact on society as a whole.

Constant fear and anxiety upsets sleeping patterns, impacts people's ability to concentrate, to socialize, and to think. As David Ropeik, the director of risk communication at the Harvard Center for Risk Analysis, has observed, "We are hard-wired in our brains to fear first, think second." It is then safe to say that when fear is constantly present we do not make the best decisions socially or politically. One definition I found of 'Culture of fear' outlines this nicely, "Culture of fear is a term that refers to a perceived prevalence of fear and anxiety in public discourse and relationships, and how this may affect the way people interact with one another as individuals and as democratic agents." Now this definition says "may affect" but we know that constant fear is very unhealthy for workers and subsequently businesses too as profits will suffer because people will be off sick or on stress leave far more often. Ultimately the big losers within a culture of fear are our democracy and society as a whole.

I believe that the austerity measures taken by the Harper government have helped fuel a culture of fear throughout Canadian society and I also believe that this constant fear is poisoning parliament, public discourse, workplaces, and families alike. One of the easiest ways to counteract fear is to educate ourselves about it and learn when and where fear is appropriate and when it is not. As U.S. president Franklin Delano Roosevelt stated in his Inaugural address in 1933, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." What does not eliminate fear is silence and silence also subsequently changes nothing. As the Great civil rights leader Martin Luther King once stated, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." The culture of fear matters for all of us because it negatively impacts all of us either directly or indirectly, but if we are to eliminate it we must begin to understand it and how it manifests itself, but before we do that we must have the courage to break the silence it has created.

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