

The subject who is truly loyal to the chief magistrate will neither advise nor submit to arbitrary measures - Junius

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# The necessary pain of ending the TFW dodge

If the postings on the government of Canada’s job bank site are to be believed, hardly anyone in this country wants to work, whatever the wage. Never mind rising unemployment, particularly among young Canadians. Good help, it seems, remains impossible to find.

Companies seeking permission to hire a temporary foreign worker must first prove that they could not find a Canadian willing to do that work. As of Thursday, there were 4,594 positions listed. The type of positions, and pay, vary wildly, everything from a psychiatrist position in Ottawa paying (at least) \$450,000 a year to a slew of minimum-wage jobs in agriculture and food service.

What they all have in common is the official claim by a business that no one in Canada wants the job. On such assertions rests the entire edifice (and artifice) of the temporary foreign worker program.

But the question must be asked: Might those businesses look a little harder for a Canadian to hire were the temporary worker program not an option? Some of the 456,000 Canadians aged 15 to 24 who couldn’t find a job in August may have a thought or two.

Businesses might up the odds of success by offering more than minimum wage. Or they could be a bit more flexible on qualifications; does the manager of a fast-food restaurant really need a university degree? Perhaps those businesses would take the evidently extraordinary step of hiring a Canadian teen and provide some on-the-job training. Or perhaps firms would find it more profitable to invest in technology.

Instead, they can opt for subsidies, in the form of (relatively) cheap imported labour. It is true that the rules of the program require firms to pay the median prevailing wage in a region. But that does not mean companies aren’t still receiving a hidden subsidy.

First, the obvious: An employee brought in under the temporary foreign worker program is legally tethered to that business. The guarantee of a stable work force is valuable to a business; that’s why they are willing to bear the considerable costs of the TFW program.

Then, there is the not quite as obvious point that the TFW program reduces labour market competition before and after an overseas worker arrives. Beforehand, companies can avoid the expense of increasing the wage on offer until it is high enough to attract desirable candidates. Afterward, wages don’t need to rise to keep workers.

Unsurprisingly, unemployment among youth (who might otherwise fill the entry-level jobs occupied by temporary workers) has been soaring. This summer, the unemployment rate for workers aged 15 to 24 planning to return to school hit a 17-year high (excluding the pandemic spike), rising to 16.9 per cent – nearly triple the 6.1-per-cent unemployment rate for workers aged 25 to 54.

That is generational economic scarring in the making, as young Canadians miss out on the experience of a first job during high school, or gainful employment to pay for post-secondary education.

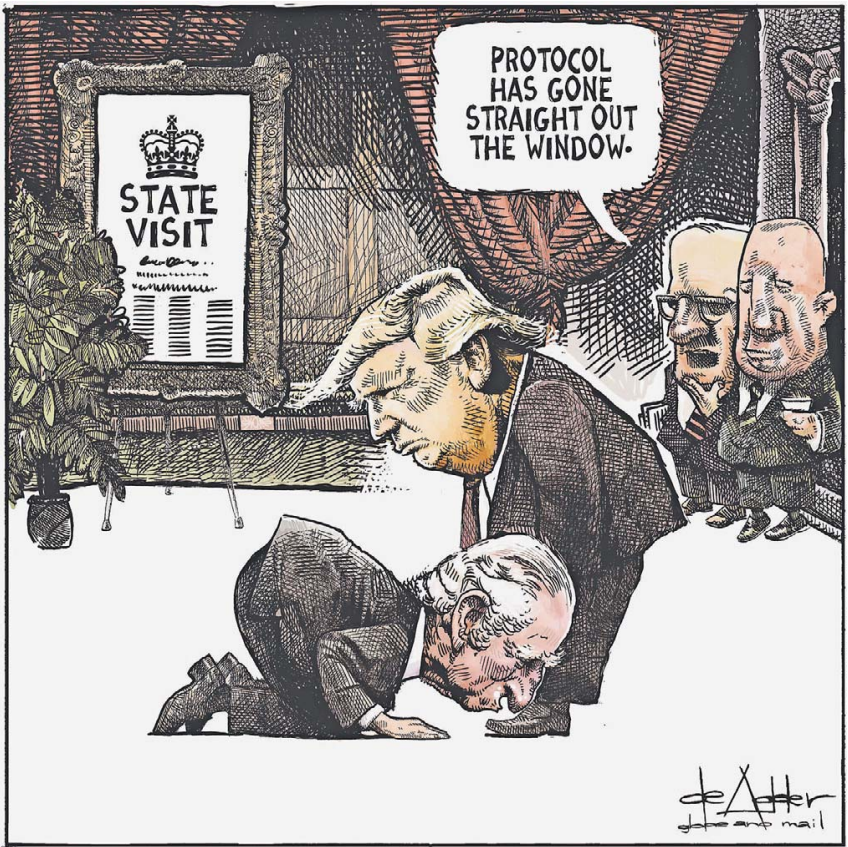
Simple fairness is one reason to start rolling back the TFW program. If the concerns of Canadian youth aren’t convincing enough, then the silent damage to the Canadian economy should be. Every temporary worker hired eases the pressure on Canadian businesses to innovate and to invest.

Luckily, there is growing awareness of the problem. Both Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and BC NDP Premier David Eby have called for changes. Unfortunately, the Liberals still defend the program as it exists, with Prime Minister Mark Carney recently saying it was the No. 2 concern for businesses he talked to, second only to tariffs.

The Liberals, it’s true, have tightened the rules of the program by reversing some of the worst changes they made to it. It was bizarre to have ever scrapped the rule that disallowed TFW applications from areas of high unemployment.

But tinkering won’t suffice. Outside of agriculture, the TFW program should be wound down. Existing workers should be allowed to work the time allotted on permits, giving their employers some runway to adjust their business model. At the same time, Ottawa should sharply restrict the scope of permitted work for international students.

Of course, that will create transitional pain for businesses that have grown dependent on indentured labour. The pain is the point – a prod to firms to innovate rather than lean on government.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### MOMENT IN TIME

Re “The moment that the Liberals must meet” (Editorial, Sept. 13): Mark Carney and the Liberals certainly have their work cut out. But above all else, Canadians need an end to magical thinking.

We need politicians to stop kidding us that taxes can forever be cut while government spending keeps growing. Mr. Carney seems to substitute the word “investment” when he means “spending.” I don’t think anyone is fooled by this.

It’s magical thinking to believe that a trade deal with Donald Trump is possible despite his insistence that he gets everything while we get nothing. It’s magical thinking to believe we can improve productivity and increase R&D when so many of the corporations that operate here are foreign-owned.

Many of us understand tough times are ahead, or are already here. The last thing we need is politicians who believe in magic.  
■ Steve Soloman Toronto

You omit one problem that John Diefenbaker wanted to overcome nearly 70 years ago. To “get Canada’s resources to new markets” would be totally insufficient, leaving us as the hewers of wood and drawers of water while others add value.

Unless we get serious about processing resources and adding value, we shall likely continue to see our relative productivity and standard of living decline against other developed and developing countries. Is that what we really want?

Governments should support the sometimes dirty work of adding value. Why, for instance, does final purification of Saskatchewan’s helium extraction occur in the United States?

Will new critical-minerals joint ventures with the United States have processing or refining here, where we would get a value-added premium, or in the U.S.?  
■ Roger Love Saanich, B.C.

### MIND YOUR HEALTH

Re “When mental-health diagnoses become brands, the real drivers of our psychic pain are hidden” (Opinion, Sept. 13): Thanks to contributor Sami Timimi for his lovely article on the pandemic of mental-health diagnoses, medications and therapies spreading through society.

However, I wish the doctor had focused more on how anxiety and depression and related disorders have increased in the past 10 years or more, almost in tandem with the increase in corrosive, harmful politics in the world and the massive degree of unease that spreads along with it.

With talk of possible world war, I am not surprised that contagious, lethal emotions of fear, cynicism and many others, which

constitute the bulk of what people experience with anxiety and depression, are increasing. I have no doubt they filter from society and politics into people’s daily lives and relationships.

We do not live in a vacuum. Psychiatric medications and therapies are not going to stop these distressing emotions in a time of crisis.

■ Bruce Hutchison Clinical psychologist (retired), Ottawa

There should be clearer distinction between severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, and depression, generalized anxiety disorders, ADHD and the like. They are at opposite ends of the mental-health spectrum.

Conflating the two does a serious disservice to those suffering from severe mental illness and their caregivers. These mental illnesses are not believed to be psychologically based. Researchers have found that such diseases are rooted in a complex mix of genetics, brain chemistry and environment.

It is asserted that lack of services and underfunding are not the real problems, but this is certainly not the case where severe mental illness is concerned. For decades, successive federal and provincial governments have short-changed this sector.

The result is the deplorable state of affairs we have today, where services for the severely mentally ill, such as supportive housing and psychiatric beds, are woefully inadequate.

■ Mike Theilmann Family Alliance on Severe Mental Illnesses, Ottawa

As a group of physicians who routinely conduct autism assessments, we find the advice for parents to “fight” referrals for assessment “every step of the way” both illogical and clinically irresponsible. Plainly put, we call it bad advice.

While we agree that autism is complex, lacking defined biomarkers and having complex underlying biologies, timely access to expert assessors is essential. Clinicians with deep expertise in child development are best equipped to determine whether a child’s struggles fall within typical development or warrant formal identification.

We worry that parents who read this article may avoid seeking assessment, risking their children missing out on publicly funded, evidence-informed therapies and supports available only with a diagnosis. Parents should know that our goal is to reach a shared understanding about their children.

For adolescents or adults questioning their neurodevelopmental profiles: They deserve answers. To the broader autistic community: Their identities and diagnoses matter.

■ Melanie Penner Developmental pediatrician, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital; Toronto

Wise cautions about the expanding medicalization of our mental health. Among the growing number of disorders, which now includes gambling and tobacco use disorder and lower thresholds for inclusion, bereaved individuals can be diagnosed with complex grief, meaning more people will likely come under the diagnostic umbrella.

Ironically, the medical model, beneficial in removing blame and stigma from mental-health issues, can also recast autonomous individuals as powerless victims less capable and less inclined to adaptive problem-solving.

Canadian philosopher Ian Hacking proposed the “looping effect” to describe how classifications ascribed to people by the human sciences influence their behaviour and, indeed, become key to their identities. The result may be an ever-evolving, and possibly expanding, number of disorders and perhaps the accelerated societal erosion of personal agency.

■ Chester Fedoruk Toronto

### FINISH LINE

Re “This year, I retraced Terry Fox’s Marathon of Hope. It rekindled my love of Canada” (Opinion, Sept. 13): The Marathon of Hope reflects the best of who we are as Canadians. Terry Fox’s run continues to inspire us to “finish it” – the quest for remedies, treatments and prevention strategies.

Each year, folks of all ages and abilities come together, volunteer and run or walk to fund vital cancer research. In small towns, big cities and at schools, people are united in this common project.

Invariably, the mood is positive and joyful. Runners and walkers honour their loved ones, both those living with cancer and those mourned, with dedications that begin: “I’m finishing it for ...”

Good on contributor Morgan Cameron Ross and his four-year-old for celebrating Terry’s spirit and courage.

■ Cam Kilgour Toronto

### GOLDEN AGE

Re “Income inequality goes more than skin deep” (Opinion, Sept. 13): As Norah Ephron wrote about in her essay “I feel bad about my neck,” the wattles show, the hands are veiny and hidden by gloves by some, the whiskers appear where there once was none. Men lose their hair; women, too.

Celebrities can afford the fixes. We elders can go to the new *Downton Abbey* movie and appreciate those who look like us: heavier or gaunt, thoroughly and openly wrinkled, grey or white – it doesn’t matter.

These actors let themselves go to be who they are. Good on ‘em.

■ Gail Benjafield St. Catharines, Ont.