

## Insanity and the seat of power

By Constance Scrafield

In a conversation over coffee in one of our esteemed coffee bistros, a discussion ensued on how the 16th and 17th Centuries monarchs behaved, how they turned society on its head and then prosecuted those who refused to join in the turning. Prosecuted them so harshly with torture and painful deaths.

The conversation, with this week's elections across the Province, left me thinking about the seat of power, whether inherited by accident of birth, roughly acquired by dint of battle and violence, or honestly, by the trusting hand of the electorate.

The struggle between the power pack of folk at the top of any given assemblage of humanity, those revered as deities or wearing the family crown, has its own lineage. From ancient times, when monarchs or gods ruled ? some absolutely, others agreeable to consulting with peers, who had similar families, just not the ones with the crowns ? there was less work and thinking for the peasants, the lower classes to trouble themselves. Yet, rarely do the history records show that, even on a reasonably secure throne, did its occupant rule with true benevolence and wisdom.

Throughout our history as humans, rulers, people in power ? absolute or otherwise ? have rarely given peace a chance. If they were not pursuing real or, even, imagined villains and traitors to the crown ? that is, those that did not agree with them absolutely ? if they were not the subject of revenge or defence, then history demonstrates over and over, that the inhabitants of the the thrones necessarily felt the need to do battle anyway. Away from home territory, far or not as far; even right next door.

What is this irrepressible, irrational, impulse to inflict pain and real suffering on our fellow species?

As the point of power is lessened by the size of the government from national to provincial to municipal, the permission to be violent is reduced by the greater need for accountability to higher levels of power. Having said which, a provincial or territorial leader will certainly bring in police or other enforcement to quell protests in the streets of people taking umbrage at unreasonable policy-making. Sometimes, quite violently.

Decisions leaders make can be violent, when they go against the common good in favour of the few and this is the most consistent and historical type of violence inflicted on the general populace. Don't diminish it as not really violent even if weapons are not involved.

Power is a weapon, all too frequently brandished to inflict hardship, also the inevitable result of violence and usually the intention but, sometimes, simply the foreseeable consequences.

This can happen on all levels of power, right down to the office or the home.

All violence is born of mental, intellectual or emotional imbalance. To inflict pain or harm on another being is to relinquish sanity, to a greater or lessor degree.

By ?another being? let us include our own tender selves, all the birds, bees, creatures in the air, on the land and under the waters; let us go further and include this very living earth, for, in a growing number of countries, documents, laws and constitutions are being written or changed to grant that Nature is a living element, ?a being,? that must be given rights, like human rights, call them ?being rights.?

Already, the new seat of Ontario's power is occupied by a violent ruler, whose dictums to lead the province backwards in a harmful way, on several platforms, have incensed much of its population. Should they push back too hard, never doubt that he will call in such physical forces as he deems necessary to quell protests.

That election over, all the electoral mistakes having been made, this week's municipal elections were, on the smaller scale, as important as any in the past few years have been.

Orangeville, finally here, got it right, in this writer's opinion. A fiscally minded and qualified mayor ? who needs to go steady with some of his ideas ? an environmentalist on council and other solid citizens. Changes directed at truly governing, pushing the community in some of the right directions.

Still and yet. They are basically inexperienced in dealing with power as government and we hope they will take the power ? an all-corrupting influence on the calmest of souls ? shun the inclination to be too much ?in charge? and listen to the wisdom of the population.

Let there be a new respect for priorities and a diminished regard for the greed of those with big bucks to make from raping the environment. Let this be a council that does not bow to the demands of potential taxpayers whose only interest, in fact, is their own profit.

Let this fine town show the rest of the world that sanity can actually be maintained at the seat of power.