

“Revolution is About Critical Mass”

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What Would It Take For Me to Join a Revolution?

“Revolution is about critical mass”. As I personally embark on my own journey towards understanding revolution this comment triggered many things for me as I thought about its meaning and I wanted to share with you what I’ve discovered.

“Critical mass”, I thought to myself, “what does it mean?”

My mind wandered back to high school chemistry class as we combined different liquids together into a test-tube and there was, at a certain point or with a certain catalyst, a crystallization effect that occurred spontaneously within the test-tube, liquid to solid, instantly.

Spontaneous combustion. Put enough oily, gassy rags together in a confined space, warm the space up enough and poof, you get fire.

Earthquakes. Plate forces build up over time in certain specific locations and then bam, movement. Big movement.

Forest fires. One strategically located lightening strike with dry timber and good wind can light up the side of a mountain in a flash.

So it seems that in nature there can be these occurrences, rare yes, but occurrences nonetheless, where certain specific combinations of elements and factors come together that somehow triggers a breathtakingly fast, powerful and significant transformation within the immediate environment. Everything changes and fast. Well, human beings are part of nature. Can this critical mass idea be applied to people as well? Can we use this concept to better understand what really triggers revolution for an oppressed people, collectively and/or individually?

But wait, why is this important anyway?

Because in our own countries, the US and Canada, I don’t see masses of people storming the White House or our parliament buildings right now to demand change, that’s why. With everything that strong investigative journalists like David DeGraw, Mike Whitney and Michel Chossudovsky and many others are telling us, it’s a no brainer right? Our countries are being sacked right in front of us, the evidence is clear. So where is everyone? Why doesn’t anyone care? What’s going on?

What would actually cause us all to put down our tax return and bank statement for a moment, turn off the TV, walk out onto the street, make a fist and yell, “Hell no, I’m not

taking this anymore!"? What makes people actually commit and start or join a protest for revolution?

Well for me I think it's about pain. As long as I have enough insulation around me to protect me from the pain that others are feeling then I'm ok, it's ok. But, if you were to remove my surrounding 'anti-pain insulation', then it comes down to how much tolerance to the pain could I endure before I will take action? What is my tipping point? How much am I personally willing to suffer before I take action?

Well, I've always felt a little pain when I saw images between commercials on news TV of oppressed people being exploited, used and abused in other countries. But these events were taking place so far away from me and besides, I could easily wait the few seconds it took for the news clip to finish and the next round of commercials to appear that would console me and make me laugh and help me forget what I just experienced moments ago. But then, it wasn't just what I saw on TV anymore that began to bother me. I started noticing other things going on, trivial at first, then annoying and then alarming because there seemed to be no end to it. Prices of things mostly, gas, food, utilities, telephone and cable and internet, school fees, prescriptions, insurance, one after the other they all seem to be going up, up and up. "But I can handle it" I told myself. But then I remembered I was unemployed and living off my wife's income and there wasn't any more room to spare in our budget. Who was I kidding?

Thankfully it's stopped there for me, that is, as long as my wife can hang on to her job. But for others, it sounds like its only getting worse. I cringe as I imagine what some of their comments might be as they are smashed by those who oppress them. "What do you mean I can't live here in my house anymore, that I can't afford to buy basic groceries for my family and that we can no longer get sick because we can't afford the resulting medical expenses? What do you mean that I need to calm down, each some chips and watch more TV commercials while I witness our health fail, my marriage break down, my family fall apart and our whole damn future go down the drain because of all the stress we have, financial and otherwise, ultimately caused by you asshole criminals who rule us, are stealing us blind and who don't give a shit about us?"

So sure, I feel pain now, more than I ever have, but what can I do by myself? I am just one man. I can just see the news clip tonight on the CBC news, "Lone man protests for revolution in front of Ottawa parliament building as people drive by, laugh and throw tomatoes at him." Up here, nobody would care. They'd just laugh and think I was a crazy man.

But, I think to myself, what if I were seventy million strong, representing the workers and other oppressed people of North America, coming together in solidarity, surrounding these same government buildings containing these same criminal rulers in every capital city on this continent to boldly proclaim our noble and just demands? Nobody would be laughing then.

So, how do we reach critical mass for revolution, both collectively and on the individual level? Maybe it all just comes down to the old slogan, "no pain, no gain". Or, in this case, no revolution.

Collectively, it seems we don't care about what's going on. Last time I checked parliament

hill in Ottawa I didn't see too many hordes there torching giant posters of the prime minister, chanting the national anthem and setting up camp. But now I've come to believe that perhaps the apathy in my society for political justice is just a symptom of a deeper apathy artificially planted within each of us when we were just kids and then reinforced throughout our lives by the masters that rule us. "Don't worry, be happy. Spend. Obey." Now as adults, cocooned within our own personal wealth and our various denial mechanisms, we are oblivious as they fleece us and exploit us over and over again, we are content to wait for and watch the next round of TV commercials and mindless content so we can laugh it off. Bottom line is I believe that as individuals we just haven't suffered enough, at least enough to move us to take action in solidarity with others and in the numbers that are needed for real revolution.

I am reminded of the current Egyptian struggle and how some of the Egyptian protesters have been reported as saying that they now feel different somehow since joining the protests, that there's no turning back, that things will never be the same for them. Could it be that the radical revolutionary transformation of that country that we are now seeing, symbolized with the tens of thousands of protesters standing their ground in Tahrir square, is also occurring simultaneously within each of them as individuals? As these proud and noble people struggle to shake off the shackles of oppression in return for emancipation perhaps an internal paradigm shift is also occurring within them, a critical mass having been reached. Even with none of their demands yet having being met and with hundreds of peaceful protestors having been killed all around them by their oppressors, maybe these brave people, by joining the revolution, are finding a way through their own pain and suffering into peace, freedom and a space into which real healing can occur.

Personally, I admit that I have no real experience in an actual revolution. In fact, I'm ashamed to admit that I've never participated in any movement or protest, big or small, ever, in my life. But you see, I never had any need to, or at least I didn't know I had a need to. Today, as I struggle to make ends meet and to try to prevent my life, my family and my family's future from going all to hell, I have started to feel the pain and it's not going away. And for all of you hardcore veteran activists and protesters out there in the vanguard wondering where the hell the masses are that are needed for your revolution, I think I can tell you. They've been here with me, hiding out, safe and sound in our 'other' world. But times are changing and struggle is occurring and I and many, many others are starting to feel the pain and it's not going away. So please hang on and hold your ground. We're coming.

Kelly Coote is an ex-working class Canadian citizen struggling to live a decent life with his wife and two children in rural northern Ontario. This is his first published article.

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