

*Sunday March 25, 2012*

## **Mad as hell but they don't know it**

By Jim Taylor

Does no one connect the dots any more? Last weekend, the city of London, Ontario, erupted into a riot. Students of Fanshawe College celebrating St. Patrick's Day went on a rampage.

As riots go, it was relatively small. A thousand or so students did about \$100,000 property damage. No one was killed.

But video of the Fanshawe riot looked indistinguishable from the student riots in Montreal earlier the same week. Or the race riots in London last summer. Or the Stanley Cup playoff riot in Vancouver, just under a year ago.

The Fanshawe revelers overturned a CTV news van and set it on fire. They piled on furniture, fences, mattresses, anything flammable, while pelting firefighters and police with bricks, beer bottles, and tires.

"They kept feeding it," said district fire chief Jim Holmes. "They brought a 60-inch TV from the basement of a house and threw it on. They uprooted some trees, threw them on... At one point someone threw a 20-pound propane tank into the fire...."

London's police chief, Brad Duncan, issued a predictable denunciation, against "the illusion that they can engage in unlawful behavior; that they can commit serious criminal offences with impunity, and that they can reject the lawful authority of police and emergency services personnel."

## **Irrational reactions**

Appeals to law and order, to legitimate authority, assume that the rioters are rational. They aren't.

No rational person would destroy property, loot stores, or assault police – all sacred cows of our culture – while dancing in front of video cameras. No rational person would commit crimes and then brag about them on Twitter and Facebook.

Nope. Alcohol – and probably some other substances – numbed the inhibitions that normally keep the lid screwed tight on a pressure cooker. Pop that lid, and suddenly you have peas all over the ceiling. Or flames all over the streets.

The same scenes played out in each riot. Young people. Drunk. Smashing things. Burning things. Scorning authority. And taking pictures of themselves doing it. Clearly exulting in their rebellion, against – well, that's the question, isn't it? Against what?

In Montreal, it was supposed to be against higher tuition fees. In England, against racism and poverty. In Vancouver, against losing a Stanley Cup hockey final.

I still haven't heard the pundits assign a reason for last weekend's riot.

Two of the riots were preceded by protest demonstrations. The demonstrations certainly had a purpose. The demonstrations were peaceful. The riots were neither.

## **Not why but who**

But looking for causes misses the point. The common factor in all these events seems glaringly obvious. It's not *why*, but *who*.

How many gray-haired geezers did you see heaping fuel on the flames? How many middle-aged matrons dancing for the video cameras? Short answer – none!

It was all young people.

As soon as I say that, someone will accuse me of prejudice against young people. Because if I blamed any other identifiable group – Jews, blacks, women – I could be hauled before a Human Rights Commission. Maybe so. But deliberately ignoring the common factor seems to me equally prejudiced.

Remember the 1976 movie *Network*, where Peter Finch leaned out a window and yelled, “I’m mad as hell and not going to take it any more”? I think the rioters are mad as hell, even if most of them don’t know it.

And what are they mad at? At us. And they know how to hurt us – by destroying property. Individual property – stores, cars, buildings... Collective property – buses, news cameras, police cars ...

Interestingly, their tactics are the direct opposite of the Occupy movements around the world. The Occupy movements have carefully avoided violence, avoided destroying property.

If the powers-that-be had any sense, they would welcome the Occupy movements rather than treat them as subversive terrorists. The Occupy movements may target the elite, but they respect the implicit values of the 99 per cent.

## Afraid for the future

I cannot find in my own youth any experiences corresponding to the nihilism that erupts in these riots. But then, I grew up in a much more optimistic time.

I do find something in my daughter’s experience. She attended university while the superpowers kept a finger poised over the nuclear retaliation button. She and her friends, she told me, were convinced none of them would live long enough to become adults.

Today, I suspect, young people fear that they *will* live long enough, long enough to inherit the world we have set up for them.

A world with as many retirees as workers. A world after peak oil. A world racked by climate extremes. A world based on religious bigotry. A world where the fabulously rich live in isolation from the miserable poor.

At my age, I tell myself, I won’t be around to see all this happen.

But they will be around. Their future is being stolen from them. Frankly, if I were them, I’d be tempted to erupt too.

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## YOUR TURN

In some ways, last week’s column about World Water Day was an exercise in nostalgia for me, enabling me to bring back some powerful memories. But fortunately, you found relevance in it.

Isabel Gibson wrote, “Your piece was timely for me today. We are in the desert, watching much-needed rain (the first here since December) drip off the leaves and puddle on the pool cover of our rental accommodation. Even right here - in a place that is in the midst of what some say is a drought of 20-year proportions - there is enough potable water to fill endless swimming pools. What are we doing to the water table? Yikes!”

And this from Charles Hill: “Your insightful article on water has huge spiritual implications. Water is the primary metaphor for existence and birth. “Waters are the source of all potentialities in existence; the source and grave of all

things in the universe....." (An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, J. C. Cooper) Jesus used it with the Samaritan woman to describe his words as truth and spiritual survival. Each human life began in a container of water. If we, indeed, have a spiritual well in addition to physical source of life sustaining water, how do we obtain the life-sustaining spiritual "water" to keep us spiritually alive and connected? Is there only one source of water flowing from only one spiritual lake? Are we utilizing our source of spiritual water? What happens to an individual or society that ignores its' source of spiritual water or pollutes the spiritual water with human ego?"

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## ABOUT MY BOOKS, ETC.

Sorry, I have no more copies of "Seeing the mystery" available any more. Please do not send any more cheques.

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## QUESTION FOR YOU

A couple of weeks hardly makes a scientific survey, but the results are fairly definitive. Sixteen letters came in about including psalm paraphrases. Fourteen were in favour; one opposed; one maybe....

So I will start including a paraphrase for the coming Sunday with my Soft Edges column, on Wednesdays. Why not on Sunday, you ask? Well, partly because psalms seem to me to fit better with the general mood of Soft Edges, which is more likely to deal directly with faith-related matters than these Sharp Edges columns. And partly because Soft Edges is about 250 words shorter than Sharp Edges, and so including the paraphrase on Wednesday won't make the e-mailing quite as long

That does have an implication, though. If you want to receive the paraphrase, and are not on the Soft Edges mailing list, you'll need to subscribe. No charge, just send me a message, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or you can subscribe automatically by sending a blank e-mail to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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## TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to [softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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## PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca). Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslieGod" page, [www.seemsliegod.org](http://www.seemsliegod.org);
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com](mailto:isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Wayne Irwin's "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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