

# Canada proves it can adapt and deliver



**SYLVAIN CHARLEBOIS**  
OPINION

Five years ago, many Canadians feared the country was running out of food. Police officers were stationed at grocery stores to manage traffic, as panicked consumers flooded aisles with uncertainty about when they might next have access to essential goods. The fear of an unfamiliar and deadly virus compounded the situation and led to unprecedented levels of panic buying. Store shelves were emptied at a pace never before witnessed in a country as agriculturally abundant as Canada. Of course, Canada was never truly at risk of running out of food. The chaos of early 2020 revealed the limits of just-in-time inventory systems but also reinforced the resilience of our food supply chains. While trust in an invisible system is difficult, most Canadians have since come to appreciate its reliability — even in the face of immense disruption. Since that turbulent period, we have faced our share of supply chain challenges. Shortages, once unthinkable, have become a manageable inconvenience rather than a crisis. The 2022 dispute between Frito-Lay and Loblaw, which left snack aisles bare for weeks, was met with public indifference — an indication of how attitudes have evolved. The supply chain disruptions of the pandemic's early years were far more severe, yet the most significant economic shock came with Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. This geopolitical event triggered a spike in commodity prices and drove up food costs globally and strained household budgets in Canada and beyond. The ripple effects of that crisis continue to be felt today. Interestingly, between 2020 and 2024, trade disruptions such as tariffs and embargoes — once staples of global geopolitics — were momentarily sidelined as most governments and industries focused on pandemic recovery and economic stability. Even major players like China and Russia operated with relative restraint during this period, which allowed food supply chains some room to recalibrate. Despite these challenges, Canada's food system has remained remarkably robust. A strong agricultural foundation ensures the country produces more than enough food to sustain itself, with vast arable land and advanced farming techniques supporting both domestic consumption and export markets. Canada's diversified trade relationships also serve as a buffer and reduce dependency on any single country and allow for flexibility when geopolitical conflicts or economic shocks arise. Beyond trade, Canada's grocery and food distribution networks have proven highly adaptable. Major retailers have developed sophisticated inventory management systems and allow them to adjust sourcing strategies and respond swiftly to demand fluctuations. Government policies and regulatory oversight have also played a role in maintaining stability. They ensure food safety and support key industry players through crises. Meanwhile, innovation in food production has helped mitigate risks associated with labour shortages and supply chain disruptions. Investments in automation, precision agriculture and digital supply chain tracking have made the industry more resilient. Perhaps one of the most significant pillars of Canada's food security is its close economic integration with the United States. The Canada-U.S. agricultural trade relationship is one of the strongest in the world and ensures the smooth movement of food across borders. However, this critical pillar is now being tested under President Donald Trump. The return of trade instability, which include tariff threats and renewed protectionism, places additional pressure on an already strained supply chain. The cost implications of such disruptions could force Canada's food industry to seek alternative sources and distribution strategies and increase prices for consumers. If Trump had remained in office beyond his first term, one can only speculate how his administration might have navigated both the latter years of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine — potentially treating the global economy as little more than a high-stakes game of Monopoly. Despite these ongoing disruptions, one fact remains clear: Canada's food industry has demonstrated its ability to withstand crises. Farmers, truckers, processors, manufacturers, grocers, restaurant owners and front-line retail workers have endured five years of extraordinary volatility. Their efforts have ensured Canadians continue to have access to safe, reliable food, even in the face of global uncertainty. If there is one lesson to take away from the empty shelves of March 2020, it is our food supply chains are built to withstand adversity. While no system is infallible, Canada's agri-food sector has proven its ability to adapt and deliver — no matter the challenge. For that, we should be grateful. SYLVAIN CHARLEBOIS IS A SENIOR DIRECTOR FOR THE AGRI-FOOD ANALYTICS LAB AT DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY.



DAVID GOLDMAN THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

The more we learn about the dangers of repeated COVID-19 infections, it seems that without better protections, workers' rights to safe work and students' rights to safe learning spaces are being ignored to maintain the status quo, Andrew Wilkin writes.

## Worker and student rights being ignored

ANDREW WILKIN

The COVID-19 pandemic officially began five years ago. For the first few months, we were reminded about how important front-line workers like grocery store employees, health-care professionals and emergency responders are to our economy. By the time the "Freedom Convoy" took over Ottawa in early 2022, this mood had ended for many, including elected officials, who declared the pandemic over despite a lot of science saying it wasn't. In public education systems, workers and students went back into schools with minimal protections and an ethos of "you do you." The problem with this approach is that it's ignorant of the fact that a person's actions influence others. Trying to avoid COVID is seen as a personal choice, despite it being a public health threat for everyone. The more we learn about the dangers of repeated COVID infections, it seems that without better protections, workers' rights to safe work and students' rights to safe learning spaces are being ignored to maintain the status quo. Schools are among the most susceptible workplaces for COVID infections. Without ways of knowing COVID-19 levels in a classroom, it looks like education workers are being denied the right to know about unsafe workspaces. Protections such as air monitors, HEPA filters, masking, paid sick days, class sizes that allow distancing, more online learning options and secure contracts with sick leave benefits for all workers are desperately needed if the long-term health of educators, students and democratic society is sincerely valued by policymakers. COVID-19 is not the flu or common cold, it's a multi-organ vascular disease impacting individuals in different ways. After more infections, this can be life-altering. Some people might notice complications

after one infection. For others, it might not be until infection number four or five. COVID-19 can damage your immune system and cause heart problems, kidney damage, pneumonia, cancers, brain complications, gut health issues, cognitive issues and a list of other illnesses. Silent organ damage from COVID-19 is a "real problem." One cardiologist reports that before the pandemic, they saw around 20 patients with POTS (postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome) a year; now they see that on an average day. Without better protections, some insurance companies report that excess deaths from COVID and COVID-related issues will remain high for at least the next decade. For education systems that are supposed to care about the learning potential for students and the cognitive abilities of their workers, allowing a disease — one that with one infection leaves 20 to 30 per cent of people experiencing brain fog for up to three months — to be airborne without best practice protections is short-sighted, and should be seen as a violation of workplace safety and student learning rights. COVID-19 may not be the cause of every health issue that students and education workers are experiencing or other challenges schools are facing. Before the pandemic, schools were already in a state of crisis due to decades of neo-liberal austerity policies. However, a critical thinker seeking greater social equity might consider that discussing teacher absenteeism, increased student violence or learning loss should include the topic of COVID-19, which can impact every organ of the body, including the brain. Not protecting students and workers may one day be looked back upon as a violation of their rights to safe work and safe learning conditions. Policymakers that care about student success, worker health and well-being and democratic society should take actions now to address the significant possibility that students' and workers' rights are being violated in schools. "Every time you get infected (with COVID), it does harm to the body in some way," says Avindra Nath, a neurologist at the National Institutes of Health. ANDREW WILKIN, PHD, LIVES IN HAMILTON. HIS RESEARCH EXPLORES PRECARIOUS TEACHING AND EDUCATIONAL LABOUR CONDITIONS IN A POLYCRISIS. HE CAN BE FOUND ON X AT @TEACHRPRECARITY AND BLUESKY AT @TEACHRPRECARITY.BSKY.SOCIAL.

## Liars can lead us down dark paths



**THOMAS FROESE**  
OPINION

Apologies, but today's offering is on Adolf Hitler. Eighty-six years ago, on March 15, 1939, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. The Second World War started soon after when he couldn't resist bombing Poland. Nobody knew what to do with the fire that was the German Führer. His March 15 invasion broke the Munich Pact. He'd promised Great Britain, France and Italy that, with their appeasement gift of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland, he'd disregard the rest of that nation. Turns out Hitler was a liar. Then again, Hitler operated on what he called the "Big Lie." That's the notion that the bigger the lie, the more believable it is, especially if people think that they'll somehow benefit. Billy Joel, still rocking at 75 (although he had to cancel, for medical reasons, a Toronto show tonight) knows about this. That is, Joel's Jewish family knew all about Hitler's lies. I've been reading about it. Billy's grandfather, Karl Joel, had his German textile industry fortune stolen by the Nazis. In Billy Joel's words, written by his biographer Fred Schruer, "My relatives were hounded out of Germany at an absurd price — a parade

of the economic casualties during the Nazi takeover." He adds, "There's a long history of antisemitism that was simmering for generations. Hitler tapped into it. He knew how to exploit popular culture." Seeing war coming, in 1938 Karl Joel managed to get his family, including his wife, Meta, and son, Helmut (Billy's father), out of Germany. In 1942 they reached New York City, where Billy was later born. Karl's brother Leon wasn't so lucky. In 1939, with 934 others, Leon Joel, his wife Joanna and son Guenter, escaped Germany on the ocean liner St. Louis. After reaching Cuba, nobody, including the U.S., accepted the Jewish passengers. So the ship turned back to Europe and disembarked. Eventually more than 200 of those passengers were murdered by the Nazis, including Leon and Joanna, killed in the Auschwitz death camp. Leon's son, Guenter, escaped and eventually immigrated to the U.S. where he lived a full, but scarred, life. While alive, my own father, also Guenter, could have told you about war scars. As a boy in war-torn Germany he made the coffin for a cousin who starved herself to death. The story of the Joel family is just one story. Multiply it by 10. Multiply that by 100. Multiply that by 1,000. Multiply that a few times to get close to the several million Jews and other so-called disposables killed by the Nazis. I've personally seen the ovens in Dachau. Things never start out that way. These ecosystems take time to form. First, you simply can't sit on a park bench. Then you can't use a public pool. Then you can't vote. Then you're sent packing from home and business. You'd never imagine one day you'd be squeezed into a boxcar, like cattle, now going where? Before Hitler put a bullet in his own head, he proved that lies — "alternate facts" to use today's political jargon — have consequences. Alternate facts become alternate realities. As the expression goes, "You can build castles in the sky. The problem comes when you try to live in them." Which is to say, the best way to deal with a liar is to remind them that lies are weak. This also relates to today's White House presidential Lord of the Lies, Donald Trump. Not that Trump, the pathological liar, is Hitler, the pathological liar. He's not. They're different men from different times. But neither would have risen to power without certain political and cultural ecosystems supporting them. Hitler's "Make Germany Great Again" rhetoric developed when, after First World War reparations, Germans had a crisis of identity. Hyperinflation was wild. Hitler made Germans feel especially victimized by others, before restoring Germany's economy through rearmament. Jews were the scapegoats because scapegoats are needed. Also needed were people willing to fight, fight, fight. Peace, on the other hand, thrives on truth. In disorienting times, it's our best compass. FIND THOMAS FROESE AT THOMASFROESE.COM AND THOMASFROESE.SUBSTACK.COM.