



The Earth is Hiring

By Paul Hawken

Commencement Address to the Class of 2009, University of Portland, May 3rd, 2009

When I was invited to give this speech, I was asked if I could give a simple short talk that was “direct, naked, taut, honest, passionate, lean, shivering, startling, and graceful.” Boy, no pressure there.

But let’s begin with the startling part. Hey, Class of 2009: you are going to have to figure out what it means to be a human being on earth at a time when every living system is declining, and the rate of decline is accelerating. Kind of a mind-boggling situation but not one peer-reviewed paper published in the last thirty years can refute that statement. Basically, the earth needs a new operating system, you are the programmers, and we need it within a few decades.

This planet came with a set of operating instructions, but we seem to have misplaced them. Important rules like don’t poison the water, soil, or air, and don’t let the earth get overcrowded, and don’t touch the thermostat have been broken. Buckminster Fuller said that spaceship earth was so ingeniously designed that no one has a clue that we are on one, flying through the universe at a million miles per hour, with no need for seatbelts, lots of room in coach, and really good food—but all that is changing.

There is invisible writing on the back of the diploma you will receive, and in case you didn’t bring lemon juice to decode it, I can tell you what it says: **YOU ARE BRILLIANT, AND THE EARTH IS HIRING.** The earth couldn’t afford to send any recruiters or limos to your school. It sent you rain, sunsets, ripe cherries, night blooming jasmine, and that unbelievably cute person you are dating. Take the hint. And here’s the deal: forget that this task of planet-saving is not possible in the time required. Don’t be put off by people who know what is not possible. Do what needs to be done, and check to see if it was impossible only after you are done.

When asked if I am pessimistic or optimistic about the future, my answer is always the same: if you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren’t pessimistic, you don’t understand data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren’t optimistic, you haven’t got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in

order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world. The poet Adrienne Rich wrote, “So much has been destroyed I have cast my lot with those who, age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.”

There could be no better description. Humanity is coalescing. It is reconstituting the world, and the action is taking place in schoolrooms, farms, jungles, villages, campuses, companies, refugee camps, deserts, fisheries, and slums.

You join a multitude of caring people. No one knows how many groups and organizations are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. This is the largest movement the world has ever seen. Rather than control, it seeks connection. Rather than dominance, it strives to disperse concentrations of power. Like Mercy Corps, it works behind the scenes and gets the job done. Large as it is, no one knows the true size of this movement. It provides hope, support, and meaning to billions of people in the world. Its clout resides in ideas, not in force. It is made up of teachers, children, peasants, businesspeople, rappers, organic farmers, nuns, artists, government workers, fisherfolk, engineers, students, incorrigible writers, weeping Muslims, concerned mothers, poets, doctors without borders, grieving Christians, street musicians, the President of the United States of America, and as the writer David James Duncan would say, the Creator, the One who loves us all in such a huge way.

There is a rabbinical teaching that says if the world is ending and the Messiah arrives, first plant a tree, and then see if the story is true. Inspiration is not garnered from the litanies of what may befall us; it resides in humanity’s willingness to restore, redress, reform, rebuild, recover, re-imagine, and reconsider. “One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began, though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice,” is Mary Oliver’s description of moving away from the



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CUSJ Looks Again to the Future

While almost all of you have been going about your daily business this past year confident that all is well with the CUSJ leadership, should CUSJ have crossed your mind, it has, in fact, been without a president and a secretary. The role of president in the CUSJ is of key importance to its operation. The rest of the board looked, without success, for a new president and then, fearing that our previous level of activity was not now sustainable, began to explore new modes of operation. This exploration was brought to the Annual General meeting in Thunder Bay on May 15, 2009. Then the Sun came out. We now have a president and a secretary. And now a feasible path to our future has become more apparent.

The annual meeting was therefore a new beginning. First of all, we assessed where we are. For example, our treasurer, Bob Staveley, reviewed our work over the past year from a financial perspective. Last year our income allowed us to produce and distribute two issues of JUSTnews and one discussion paper. Philip Symons, the hard-working editor of JUSTnews, would have preferred to have produced more issues but even he is confined to 24 hours per day. In any event, our finances were insufficient to cover another issue.

Our income has been declining and our current bank balance, increased owing to recent membership renewals, will cover only one more issue of JUSTnews. However, with the Sun now shining on us, we expect a surge of membership renewals will soon replenish our treasury. Make Philip happy—renew now!

You are probably unaware that CUSJ now has a common fixed membership year, namely April 01 to the following March 31. We therefore ask all of you who have not renewed your membership since April 1 to do so as soon as possible. You too can be part of the reinvigoration of CUSJ.

Your new president is Katharine Im-Jenkins who hails from the Hamilton congregation and your new secretary is the Rev. Frances Deverell of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa. The chair (pro tem) during the past year, Don McDiarmid, has taken over the membership secretary position. He hopes to simplify the membership management process during the coming year.

The new president and secretary plus the previous Board members are now beginning to plan for an active year. They will, for instance, explore the possibility of electronic circulation of JUSTnews and discussion papers to those who are able to receive them and also

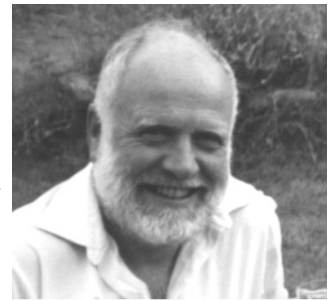
explore the benefits of concentrating their attention each year to a limited number of social issues. In addition, a more synergistic relationship with the CUC will be explored. Your new Board has an exciting year ahead of it.

Don McDiarmid

(The Board and CUSJ could not have functioned over this past year without the diligent work of Don McDiarmid. We are indebted. Ed.)

From the Editor

Without question the best news in this issue is the revitalization—the reinvigoration, as Don McDiarmid has said—of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (see CUSJ Looks Again to the Future).



Last year CUSJ hit a nadir in its 13 years of existence (it was formed in 1996). The organization had no president and no secretary. The vice-president had become the president of her church, and was unable to assume the additional responsibilities of the presidency of CUSJ. The Nominations Committee also lacked leadership, and was inactive.

After CUSJ's AGM in May 2008, Don McDiarmid pulled Board meetings together once every other month with Executive meetings most intervening months. This kept CUSJ from falling apart altogether, but the future looked grim. At its meetings this past spring, the Board discussed the possibility of closing CUSJ down.

Other organizations seem to have been having similar problems. The increase in greed and immorality in our society under neo-conservative governments at both the provincial and federal level, despite attempts by many non-governmental organizations' struggles against this, seemed to be wearing people down. Workers for social justice were getting older, burned out, despondent. Few in the Baby Boomer generation were interested in social responsibility; younger generations had some fine leaders, but, understandably, their main focus was on the environment.

But then this past May, as Don McDiarmid has written, the Sun came out. CUSJ lives again! The articles in this issue of JUSTnews, will, I hope, reflect this rejuvenation. The lead article, "The Earth is Hiring," Paul Hawken's commencement address to the class of 2009 at the University of Portland, was circulated on the internet (including on the CUSJ list), and it certainly reflects this feeling of spiritual rejuvenation. Letters from JUSTnews readers and several of the articles in this issue urge us to take stock and reflect. The economic crisis brought on by the greed and immorality of the past decades provides a new opportunity to make a difference. We may not be out of the dark woods, but we can see ahead the light between the trees.

The CUSJ Board for 2009-2010

Here is your new slate of CUSJ Board of Directors for 2009-2010.

Katharine Im-Jenkins (ON) President, First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa & Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa.

The Rev. Frances Deverell (ON) Secretary, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa.

Bob Stavely (ON) Treasurer, First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa.

Don McDiarmid (ON) Membership, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa.

Debra Mair (ON) First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, Executive Member.

Pauliine Heinonen (ON) First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa, Executive Member.

Margaret Rao (ON) First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, Executive Member.

Adina Lyon (AB) Unitarian Church of Calgary.

Rosemary Falconer (AB).

Philip Symons (BC) JUSTnews Editor, First Unitarian Church of Victoria.

Bob Manson (ON) Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship.

Christina Duvander (PQ) Unitarian Church of Montreal.

Ruth di Giovanni (PQ) Unitarian Church of Montreal.

Sharon Flatt (NB) Unitarian Universalist Church of Saint John.

While it is with great relief that we once again have a president and secretary, there are still several regional gaps on our Board. According to our bylaws, the number of members in each region should be: Ontario 4, BC 4, Prairie Provinces 2, Quebec 2, the Maritimes and Newfoundland 2. The current numbers of members from each region are: Ontario 8 (including Executive members), BC 1, Prairie Provinces 2, Quebec 2, Maritimes and Newfoundland 1.

If any CUSJ member would like to be on the Nominating Committee, or would like to represent their region on the Board where that region is short membership, please identify yourself to the President; "the Board may appoint a Director to fill such a position until the position is filled by election at the next annual meeting" (article 8.6).



Julia Varga October 3, 1943 - April 4, 2009

Our Vice-President, Julia Varga, died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack on April 4th.

Julia was an indefatigable fighter for women's rights, and human rights in general. She had been on the Board of CUSJ since 2005 and her penetrating mind and sharp memory won her the position of "Parliamentarian" at several CUSJ annual general meetings.

Julia's interests and concerns for human rights often led her to take on more work than there were sufficient hours in the day to get that work done. In 2008, she accepted the presidency of First Unitarian Church of Victoria which meant that when CUSJ couldn't fill the position of president at its 2008 AGM, Julia was unable to step into the position as acting president. Her presence on the Board was, and will be, sorely missed.

Julia was born in Ontario where she taught for 25 years before moving to Victoria. She and Joop Schuyff teamed up for what Joop has described as "three magical years." We will all miss her magic at a time in human history when magic is sorely needed. PEKS

Photo courtesy of Mary Cramer, First Unitarian Church of Victoria

CUSJ Membership Renewal

Last year CUSJ changed its membership renewal policy to make membership renewable on April 1st of every year instead of on the anniversary of each member's joining.

Therefore, if you have not donated or paid membership dues since April 1st 2009, you are in arrears. Please send a cheque or money order to CUSJ Membership, c/o Bob Stavely, P.O. Box 40011, Ottawa, ON, K1V 0W8.

CUSJ has no set membership fee so that no one will feel constrained from joining because of impecuniousness. The annual cost to CUSJ per household membership (the printing and mailing of JUSTnews is the single biggest cost) is about \$50. We ask those who can afford a little more to help those who find this amount beyond their budget.

If you are applying for membership, please provide the information requested on the final page of this issue of JUSTnews.

Letters

UU's Inconvenient Truths

I give the CUSJ group full credit for good intentions, a position that reflects the general stand of the denomination. But the question for the CUSJ and for the denomination is: are good intentions good enough? Or, put another way: have we the courage and insight to face UU Inconvenient Truths?

The First Inconvenient Truth is that currently in our democracy proclaiming truth about what needs to be done to save the environment, end wars, end poverty and the like is not a vote-getting position to take. It needs more people, including us, to educate and convince the public to prepare to make some of the sacrifices and changes in life styles needed to move toward the ideals listed above.

The Second Inconvenient Truth is that some form of socialism will have to be put in play before the noble ideas expressed in the JUSTnews come to fruit. One example is in the front page story on economic growth (JUSTnews Spring 2008). The reality is that capitalism depends on growth to survive. If you follow the business news at all you will know that the business community becomes very disturbed when growth is under 3%, and a 0% or less would be regarded as a major disaster.

The Third Inconvenient Truth is that while some form of socialism is required in order to make the major changes needed (my personal ideal is the "war socialism" practiced in Britain during World War 2) socialism currently has no advocates, and no one to my knowledge has studied why socialism in its many guises failed in the 20th Century. Self-proclaimed socialist magazines such as Monthly Review out of New York and Canadian Dimension out of Winnipeg seem to consider "socialist" activity to be exposing the crimes and follies of capitalism without giving any serious attention to what the alternative is.

The Fourth Inconvenient Truth is that Unitarian Universalists have little or no experience at facing Inconvenient Truths. At a meeting of the Sunday Services Committee in, I think, February I proposed that we spend some Sundays giving our Principles a one by one careful examination. All present, including our interim minister, turned the idea down flat. Why? Subsequently I realized that in my 47 years as a UU I have never been present when such an examination took place.

The only possible reason I can comprehend is that there is an unacknowledged fear that such an examination might disclose an Inconvenient Truth. An obvious candidate is our official Sources. If you turn to a dictionary you will see that the twin denominations, Unitarians and Universalists, are quite properly identified by their theological sources. And, if you look up statements of Enlightenment Liberalism, the American Way, and the American Civil Religion all will be found to bear a striking resemblance to our Principles. Are our true Sources an Inconvenient Truth to be covered up?

The Fifth Inconvenient Truth is that to deal effectively with the concerns outlined in the JUSTNews requires

political action that could easily drag the denomination into a partisan political commitment of the type exercised by the Religious Right in the United States. Also, aggressive political action is resisted by our membership.

The Sixth Inconvenient Truth is that we are too small and lack a presence in too many communities to be an effective voice for the causes the CUSJ promotes.

This leads to a Seventh Inconvenient Truth—the denomination to my knowledge has never had a bold, no-holds-barred discussion of why it is stalled in growth on both sides of the border. In my opinion the key to this problem is the failure of the denomination to produce a brief, defining, and prophetic answer to the question: what is a UU?

May I suggest three practical paths for the CUSJ and the denomination in the future?

1. Continue at the current level of education and action on the issues promoted by the CUSJ.

2. Give ourselves experience at dealing with Inconvenient Truths by beginning with the difficulties we obviously face in dealing critically with our Principles, our Sources, and the reasons the denomination is not growing, or is growing very slowly.

3. Encourage the denomination to take its Moral Leadership obligations more seriously especially in arenas of action where UUs most clearly belong. One obvious one is to be committed to Truth and to be critical of public lying. Another would be support for responsible living and especially citizenship with special attention to that irresponsible stand: "My country (or my gang) right or wrong." A third would be a critically evaluated effort on the toleration front.

Ken Morrison

Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship

Environmental degradation, poverty and aboriginal/metis

The matter I want to bring to your attention is our reckless exploitation of "our" biosphere and its disastrous impact, particularly on the poor, world-wide, and on aboriginals/metis in Canada.

Perhaps an example will clarify why I, and others, feel so strongly about why charity must begin at home.

In an attempt to raise the status of aboriginals, I invited two Junior High School students for overnight so they could take part in a debate society in the next county.

My wife made a huge platter of sandwiches (after supper) and the boys repaired to the lower level to watch TV and browse my library—I had told them they could each have a book of their choice.

Within twenty minutes the platter was empty and another was made.

These young men were not greedy, they were hungry, and had come from regular, considerate, non-alcoholic homes where one's uncle was the chief, and the other's

older brother scored the highest marks I ever recorded on the Differential Aptitude Test (he later became chief).

My point is that this was a “good” tribe, reasonably well run, very conscious and proud of its strong history.

The Cree Tribe “next door” was not so fortunate. Two elementary school boys to whom I gave a ride (they were hitchhiking on the main highway) knew that their parents were not going to vote for the chief because of “irregularities” (their word). Also, that tribe, since then, has lost its lake coastline to a railroad oil spill.

My view is that until Canada (and the USA) can present an acceptable, viable plan that has led to success of aboriginal/metis collective and individual development, we should not attempt to exploit, piecemeal, feel-good projects. Poverty and crime are inextricably linked. Prisons are overflowing with native people; lock-ups cost ten times that of remediation.

In summary:

1. Internationally all our focus must be in reversing the ecological disaster now begun.
2. Parochially and regionally the focus has to be on an *integrated* approach to prevention or remediation of catastrophic and long-term disasters already ongoing worldwide.
3. The whole notion of unlimited expansion and growth—the hyper-expansion (HE) thesis—has to be curtailed and replaced with “Sane, Heal and Ecological (SHE) balance.”

Jim Lavers, M.Ed.,
Edmonton, Alberta



“Conspiracy theory” allegations have quashed many questions following the 9/11 disaster. For instance, why did the nine story Building 5 (in the background on the left) remain standing even though completely engulfed in flames while the 47 story Building 7 (right background) with limited fire collapse? Neither was hit by a plane.

Conspiracy Theory—a Paranoid shift

By Michael Hasty

January 10, 2004, just before his death, James Jesus Angleton, the legendary chief of counterintelligence at the Central Intelligence Agency, was a bitter man. He felt betrayed by the people he had worked for all his life. In the end, he had come to realize that they were never really interested in American ideals of “freedom” and “democracy.” They really only wanted “absolute power.”

Angleton told author Joseph Trento that the reason he had got the counterintelligence job in the first place was by agreeing not to submit “sixty of Allen Dulles’ closest friends” to a polygraph test concerning their business deals with the Nazis. In his end-of-life despair, Angleton assumed that he would see all his old companions again “in hell.”

The transformation of James Jesus Angleton from an enthusiastic, Ivy League cold warrior, to a bitter old man, is an extreme example of a phenomenon I call a “paranoid shift.” I recognize the phenomenon, because something similar happened to me.

Although I don’t remember ever meeting James Jesus Angleton, I worked at the CIA myself as a low-level clerk when a teenager in the ’60s. This was at the same time I was beginning to question the government’s actions in Vietnam. In fact, my personal “paranoid shift” probably began with the disillusionment I felt when I realized that the story of American foreign policy was, at the very least, more complicated and darker than I had hitherto been led to believe.

But for most of the next 30 years, even though I was a radical, I nevertheless held faith in the basic integrity of a system where power ultimately resided in the people, and whereby if enough people got together and voted, real and fundamental change could happen.

What constitutes my personal paranoid shift is that I no longer believe this to be necessarily true.

In his book, “Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower,” William Blum warns of how the media will make anything that smacks of “conspiracy theory” an immediate “object of ridicule.” This prevents the media from ever having to investigate the many strange interconnections among the ruling class—for example, the relationship between the boards of directors of media giants, and the energy, banking and defence industries. These unmentionable topics are usually treated with what Blum calls “the media’s most effective tool—silence.” But in case somebody’s asking questions, all you have to do is say, “conspiracy theory,” and any allegation instantly becomes too frivolous to merit serious attention.

On the other hand, since my paranoid shift, whenever I hear the words “conspiracy theory” (which seems more often, lately) it usually means someone is getting too close to the truth.

Original source: <http://onlinejournal.org/Commentary/011004Hasty/011004hasty.html>

Michael Hasty is an Online Journal Contributing Writer.

Continued from page 1 profane toward a deep sense of connectedness to the living world.

Millions of people are working on behalf of strangers, even if the evening news is usually about the death of strangers. This kindness of strangers has religious, even mythic origins, and very specific eighteenth-century roots. Abolitionists were the first people to create a national and global movement to defend the rights of those they did not know. Until that time, no group had filed a grievance except on behalf of itself. The founders of this movement, Granville Clark, Thomas Clarkson, Josiah Wedgwood, were largely unknown, and their goal was ridiculous on the face of it: at that time three out of four people in the world were enslaved. Enslaving each other was what human beings had done for ages. And the abolitionist movement was greeted with incredulity. Conservative spokesmen ridiculed the abolitionists as liberals, progressives, do-gooders, meddlers, and activists. They were told they would ruin the economy and drive England into poverty. But for the first time in history a group of people organized themselves to help people they would never know, from whom they would never receive direct or indirect benefit. And today tens of millions of people do this every day. It is called the world of non-profits, civil society, schools, social entrepreneurship, and non-governmental organizations, of companies who place social and environmental justice at the top of their strategic goals. The scope and scale of this effort is unparalleled in history.

The living world is not “out there” somewhere, but in your heart. What do we know about life? In the words of biologist Janine Benyus, life creates the conditions that are conducive to life. I can think of no better motto for a future economy. We have tens of thousands of abandoned homes without people and tens of thousands of abandoned people without homes. We have failed bankers advising failed regulators on how to save failed assets. Think about this: we are the only species on this planet without full employment. Brilliant. We have an economy that tells us that it is cheaper to destroy earth in real time than to renew, restore, and sustain it. You can print money to bail out a bank but you can't print life to bail out a planet. At present we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it gross domestic product. We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it. We can either create assets for the future or take the assets of the future. One is called restoration and the other exploitation. And whenever we exploit the earth we exploit people and cause untold suffering. Working for the earth is not a way to get rich, it is a way to be rich.

The first living cell came into being nearly 40 million centuries ago, and its direct descendants are in all of our bloodstreams. Literally you are breathing molecules this very second that were inhaled by Moses, Mother Teresa,

and Bono. We are vastly interconnected. Our fates are inseparable. We are here because the dream of every cell is to become two cells. In each of you are one quadrillion cells, 90 percent of which are not human cells. Your body is a community, and without those other microorganisms you would perish in hours. Each human cell has 400 billion molecules conducting millions of processes between trillions of atoms. The total cellular activity in one human body is staggering: one septillion actions at any one moment, a one with twenty-four zeros after it. In a millisecond, our body has undergone ten times more processes than there are stars in the universe—exactly what Charles Darwin foretold when he said science would discover that each living creature was a “little universe, formed of a host of self-propagating organisms, inconceivably minute and as numerous as the stars of heaven.”

So I have two questions for you all: first, can you feel your body? Stop for a moment. Feel your body. One septillion activities going on simultaneously, and your body does this so well you are free to ignore it, and wonder instead when this speech will end. Second question: who is in charge of your body? Who is managing those molecules? Hopefully not a political party. Life is creating the conditions that are conducive to life inside you, just as in all of nature. What I want you to imagine is that collectively humanity is evincing a deep innate wisdom in coming together to heal the wounds and insults of the past.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. The world would become religious overnight. We would be ecstatic, delirious, made rapturous by the glory of God. Instead the stars come out every night, and we watch television. This extraordinary time when we are globally aware of each other and the multiple dangers that threaten civilization has never happened, not in a thousand years, not in ten thousand years. Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe. We have done great things and we have gone way off course in terms of honouring creation. You are graduating to the most amazing, challenging, stupefying challenge ever bequested to any generation. The generations before you failed. They didn't stay up all night. They got distracted and lost sight of the fact that life is a miracle every moment of your existence. Nature beckons you to be on her side. You couldn't ask for a better boss. The most unrealistic person in the world is the cynic, not the dreamer. Hopefulness only makes sense when it doesn't make sense to be hopeful. This is your century. Take it and run as if your life depends on it.

*Paul Hawken is a renowned entrepreneur, visionary environmental activist, and author of many books, most recently **Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming**. He was presented with an honorary doctorate of humane letters by University president Father Bill Beauchamp, C.S.C., in May, 2009, when he delivered this superb speech.*

The scope and scale of civil society, schools, social entrepreneurship and non-profit organizations today is unparalleled in history.

Canada Should Endorse and Implement the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

By Jennifer Preston

On September 13, 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* by a margin of 144 to 4 (11 abstentions). This marked the end of a struggle that began more than 20 years ago. It also signified the beginning of a new journey—the implementation of the rights affirmed in this historic universal human rights instrument.

There are over 370 million Indigenous people world-wide. Indigenous peoples urgently require international affirmation and protection of their human rights. Their rights are routinely trampled by governments, even when these rights are entrenched in domestic laws. Despite having previously played a positive role in building international support for this human rights instrument, Canada was one of only four states to oppose the *Declaration*.

The *Declaration* is the most comprehensive international instrument to address the rights of Indigenous peoples. It recognizes their distinct identities and cultures, and the rights to lands, territories and natural resources that are critical to their ways of life. The *Declaration* affirms that Indigenous peoples, like all peoples, have the human right of self-determination.

The *Declaration* also explicitly requires that its provisions be balanced with other rights protections. Every provision must be interpreted in accordance with principles of justice, democracy, non-discrimination, good governance and respect for the human rights of all.

The final adoption did not come easily. Many times in the history of the *Declaration* it seemed impossible to produce a text that both States and Indigenous peoples could support. The behaviour of the four states who voted against the *Declaration* served to undermine the international human rights system. Such conduct is inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the *Charter of the United Nations* that require States to “achieve international cooperation ... in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights ... for all without distinction.” Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the United States have politicised the human rights of Indigenous peoples and are increasingly isolating themselves from the world community. In regard to the United States, there is hope that President Barack Obama may fundamentally alter US human rights positions.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Canada accepted the commitment to “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights.” In view of its actions to oppose the *Declaration*, Canada’s commitment to international human rights is being seriously questioned by Indigenous peoples, States, and human rights organizations. Canada’s lack of support has been publicly criticized by the then High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, a former Canadian Supreme Court Justice. Yet the Canadian

government continues to issue erroneous information to mislead Canadians. Several newspapers have run articles containing shocking quotes from the Minister of Indian Affairs, some inciting fear and discrimination.

At international forums, Canada has sought to distance itself from this human rights instrument, declaring that the *Declaration* “has no legal effect in Canada.” This statement is simply not accurate, regardless of whether Canada voted against it. Canadian courts are free to rely upon declarations and other international instruments in interpreting human rights in Canada—and have done so on many occasions. The government’s statement has no precedent in Canada. If states could “opt out” of human rights standards by voting against them, even when the overwhelming majority of the world community has given support, the UN system would be severely undermined. The essential principle of international cooperation would be unjustly impacted.

Human rights declarations become universally applicable, particularly upon their overwhelming adoption by the UN General Assembly and regardless of how individual States vote. To claim that countries should be exempt from principles and standards they vote against flies in the face of six decades of Canadian human rights advocacy at the United Nations. It sets a dangerous example for other countries of the world.

On April 8, 2008 the Canadian House of Commons adopted a Motion to endorse the *UN Declaration*, calling on Parliament and the Government of Canada to “fully implement the standards contained therein.” Unfortunately the current minority government did not support this motion, and has undemocratically ignored it.

In May 2008 an Open Letter was issued, endorsed by more than 100 experts in the fields of Indigenous rights and constitutional and international law. In regard to the *Declaration*, the Letter urges the government of Canada “to cease publicizing its misleading claims and, together with Indigenous peoples, actively implement this new human rights instrument.”¹

It is important for all Canadians to engage with the *Declaration*, and support the human rights of Indigenous peoples. Implementation of the *Declaration* will be an important challenge. The international community would not have invested decades in the development of this essential instrument, if the goal was to endorse the *status quo*.

To engage personally with implementation, I encourage you to read it and inform yourself. Write letters to the editor of your paper. Write to your representatives in government.² Take it to your child’s school. Engage with justice issues—are rights being violated? Hold your government and corporations accountable.

The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is an essential catalyst for achievement and well-being. On a global basis, it is also generating renewed hope.

¹To receive pocket sized copies of the *Declaration* in English or French, please contact qaac@quaker.ca or tel 416.920.5213.

²A template letter for direct use or as a guide for your own letter may be obtained from the Rev. Mac Elrod mac@slc.bc.ca.



Indigenous peoples at the UN

Eugene Forsey debunks “Constitutional Fairy Tales”

from Helen Forsey to Penney Kome *Straight Goods*,
Tuesday, January 27, 2009

The late Senator Eugene Forsey was widely respected as one of Canada’s foremost—and most popular—experts on the Constitution. He was also my father. I grew up in a home where political commentary was the stuff of supper-table conversation. In fact, it wasn’t unusual for a family meal to be interrupted by a phone call from a journalist or a politician asking Dad to explain or resolve some constitutional dispute.

Despite his ability to explain complex questions in lively and accessible language, and the many times he set the record straight, my father’s struggle against political ignorance was unending. “I shall have to spend my declining years,” he used to say, “compiling and debunking a collection of constitutional fairy tales. And it will have to be loose-leaf, because there’s a new one every day.”

Poor Dad! In the years since his death in 1991, ignorance of Canada’s system of government has proven to be a growth industry, involving the media, various academics and many of the politicians themselves. The result is that much, if not most, of what passes for fact on the subject of Parliament, minority government, prorogation, elections and so on, is actually completely false. Worse yet, much of it is subversive of our Constitution and frankly dangerous to ‘peace, order and good government.’

Now, with Parliament resuming after last December’s inexcusable prorogation, crucial aspects of our democratic future are once again at stake. Understanding our constitutional options will be essential if we are to preserve whatever democracy we still retain. That understanding remains lacking to a frightening degree, and too few truly knowledgeable constitutional voices are being heard.

So since my father is no longer here to do it, I have pulled together an initial collection of ten of those “constitutional fairy tales” [only two provided here] which relate directly to our current precarious situation. I have responded to each one, citing relevant material from my father’s writings. It is my hope that to some extent this will work as an antidote to the poisonous misinformation that is out there.

Fairy tale #1: that the possibility of the House of Commons voting non-confidence and defeating the government creates a “constitutional crisis”.

The only “crisis” is a crisis of ignorance. Canadians need to know that our Constitution explicitly provides for a smooth and democratic transition of power in such a case.

“Parliamentary cabinet government is both responsible and responsive. If the House of Commons votes want of confidence in a Cabinet, that Cabinet must step down and make way for a new government (normally the Official Opposition) or call an election right away so the people can decide which party will govern.” (Eugene Forsey, *How Canadians Govern Themselves*).

Fairy tale #2: that if the Opposition actively opposes the government’s program, Parliament is “not working”, it is “dysfunctional”.

The truth is the exact opposite. It is the Opposition’s democratic duty to oppose and try to stop or change any government measures it believes are not in the best interests of Canadians.

“Parliament is not just a voting place. It is also, pre-eminently, essentially, a talking place, a ‘parlement’... Parliamentary government is not just a matter of counting heads instead of breaking them. It is also a matter of using them. It is government by discussion, not just by majority vote.”

“[Opposition] parties also get public money for research. Why? Because we want criticism, we want watchfulness, we want the possibility of an effective alternative government if we are displeased with the one we have.” (Eugene Forsey, *How Canadians Govern Themselves*).

Helen Forsey, the daughter of the well-known late Senator, drew on his work to explain the role of the Opposition in government.

Penney Kome, author, journalist and Unitarian, Editor, [Straight Goods](http://straightgoods.com) <http://straightgoods.com>, Canada’s leading independent online newsmagazine, as well as other online and book-length publications.



The late Senator Eugene Forsey as a young man.



A flicker of Doubt

This chaos kept alive by penal laws
In time gives even our politicians pause.

Some glimmering concept of a juster state
Begins to trouble him—but just too late.

His whole life work has dug the grave too deep
In which the people’s hopes and fortunes sleep.

Quoted in the CCPA Monitor May 2009.

Think it Possible you may be Mistaken

By Michael Shermer

On this day (Nov. 18, 2008) 30 years ago in the jungles of Guyana, Jim Jones, leader of the *Peoples Temple* cult, ordered the mass suicide or murder of more than 900 of his own followers by inducing them to imbibe cyanide-laced punch or by lethal injection. He had controlled nearly all information coming into the group and warned them daily that “they” (the government, imperialists, greedy capitalists, etc.) were the enemy. So when Rep. Leo Ryan and his investigative team showed up in Guyana, Jones’ followers were primed to believe that “they” were coming to destroy them and had to be stopped. After the congressman and others in his party were killed, Jones told cult members that “they” would now really come down on them, and their only choice was to move on to the next stage of life.

Although some members tried to escape (and were shot), and some members were forced to drink the poison, most got caught up in the contagion of the moment and voluntarily took their own lives and those of their children. You can hear it in the screams and voices of their final moments, captured on tape, as Jones eggs them on:

“Please. For God’s sake, let’s get on with it. . . . We’ve had as much of this world as you’re gonna get. . . . This is a revolutionary suicide. This is not a self-destructive suicide. So they’ll pay for this. They brought this upon us. And they’ll pay for that. Lay down your life with dignity. Don’t lay down with tears and agony. There’s nothing to death. . . . Stop this hysterics. This is not the way for people who are socialists or communists to die... Death is a million times preferable to 10 more days of this life. If you knew what was ahead of you, you’d be glad to be stepping over tonight. . . . Hurry, hurry my children. Hurry.”

Lamentably, Jonestown was not a one-time event. On March 26, 1997, 39 members of the *Heaven’s Gate* cult drank a deadly concoction (and for good measure wrapped plastic bags around their heads for asphyxiation) in order to join the mother ship they believed was on its way to Earth. How can such tragedies happen?

In general, these types of belief systems are coherent and logically consistent when you are inside them. It is not until you step outside the group and gain a different reference point that the coherence and logic vanishes. This is why cults control the movements of their members, and especially their access to outside information and contact with friends and loved ones in the real world. (Jones moved his group to Guyana from San Francisco.) There also are well-known social psychological effects at work in these groups—such as the loss of individuality and the compliance of behaviour and conformity of thought under group pressure, along with the diffusion of individual responsibility and group think.

But there is something deeper going on here that I think touches on cognitive processes in all of us as members of non-cult groups, such as political parties: confirmation bias. This is

when we look for and find evidence to support what we already believe, and ignore or rationalize away evidence that does not. And because we are so tribal by nature, we employ confirmation bias with extra vigour when it comes to defending the groups we belong to. Republicans tend to listen to conservative talk radio, watch Fox News and read the Wall Street Journal, gathering data and noting arguments that support their political beliefs. Democrats [and Unitarian Universalists] are more likely to listen to progressive talk radio and NPR, surf liberal blogs and read the New York Times.

Everyone does it.

Confirmation bias explains why so many rumours about candidates were eagerly embraced recently. On the left, commentators glommed onto false gossip about Sarah Palin’s ignorance (she doesn’t know that Africa is a continent) and bigotry (she tried to ban books from the public library) because liberals think that conservatives are dumb and dogmatic, and after eight years of George W. Bush’s malapropisms and Palin’s interview fumbles, such rumours merely confirmed what liberals already believed.

On the right, conservatives were primed to process hearsay about Barack Obama being a Muslim or Arab as true, or that his tax plan—indistinguishable from that of most Democratic candidates in recent decades—confirmed that he’s a socialist, even while Republicans were nationalizing the financial industry and running up record debts.

Research on confirmation bias has found that when subjects are presented with evidence that contradicts their deeply held beliefs, they dismiss it as invalid, while other subjects treat the same

information as valuable when it confirms what they believe. In one study, for example, subjects were shown a video of a child taking a test. One group was told that the child was from a high socioeconomic class; the other group was told that the child was from a low socioeconomic class. The subjects were asked to evaluate the academic abilities of the child based on the results of the test. The child believed to be from the high socioeconomic group was rated as above grade level, but the child believed to be from the low socioeconomic group was rated as below grade level. Same data. Same kid. Different interpretations.

The confirmation bias sways us all, especially when it reinforces our inner tribalism. Most of us will never join a cult, but all of us are subject to the pull of believing that the evidence supports our most cherished beliefs. Inside Jonestown, Jim Jones’ daily barrages confirmed to members that their cause was right and that ultimately death would bring about peace and justice.

It is for this reason that we need to look for disconfirmatory evidence, to listen to the arguments of those with whom we disagree, to ask for constructive criticism of our beliefs, and to remember Oliver Cromwell’s words to the Church of Scotland in 1650: “I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken.”

Michael Shermer, publisher of Skeptic magazine, is an adjunct professor in economics at Claremont Graduate University and the author of “The Mind of the Market.”

From the Los Angeles Times, November 18, 2008

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The Happiest Taxes on Earth

By Thomas Kostigen

Northern Europeans are the happiest people on the planet, according to a new survey.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development says people in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands are the most content with their lives. The three ranked first, second and third, respectively, in the OECD's rankings of "life satisfaction," or happiness.

There are myriad reasons, of course, for happiness: health, welfare, prosperity, leisure time, strong family, social connections and so on. But there is another common denominator among this group of happy people: taxes.

Northern Europeans pay some of the highest taxes in the world. Danes pay about two-thirds of their income in taxes. Why be so happy about that? It all comes down to what you get in return.

The Encyclopedia of the Nations notes that Denmark was one of the first countries in the world to establish efficient social services with the introduction of relief for the sick, unemployed and aged.

It says social welfare programs include health insurance, health and hospital services, insurance for occupational injuries, unemployment insurance and employment exchange services. There's also old age and disability pensions, rehabilitation and nursing homes, family welfare subsidies, general public welfare and payments for military accidents. Moreover, maternity benefits are payable up to 52 weeks.

Simply, you pay for what you get. Taxes in the U.S. have taken on a pejorative association because, well, we are never really quite sure of what we get in return for paying them, other than the world's biggest military.

Healthcare and other such social services aren't built into our system. That means we have to worry more about paying for things ourselves. Worrying doesn't equate to happiness.

The U.S. ranked 11th on the OECD list of life satisfaction. In addition to the top three, the US was beaten out by Sweden, Belgium, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland and Norway. To be sure, we were ahead of France, Great Britain, Japan and China, among many others. But we can do better.

With the highest gross domestic product (GDP) in the world, the US is the richest country. On a per capita basis, though, we don't even make the top 10 in per capita GDP. The U.S. ranks 15th in this category, according to the International Monetary Fund. Denmark—maybe because they are happy—ranked fifth. Other, more "satisfied" countries also earn more on an individual income basis. Oh yes, and the average workweek in Scandinavian countries is less than the U.S.'s. We need to take better care of ourselves.

It may not just be taxes, of course, that lead to happiness. There are other factors to consider. But better social services and less worry about having to pay for things

such as medical bills, retirement and education do help with the happiness factor.

Yet, we are so dead set against paying more taxes that it's even spawning nationwide protests. Tea party, anyone? Maybe it's time that we looked at taxes differently. We have to pay them anyway. So they might as well make us happy. If Northern Europe is any benchmark, the more we pay the happier we just may be.

Thomas M. Kostigen is the author of "You Are Here: Exposing the Vital Ink Between What We Do and What That Does to Our Planet" www.readyouarehere.com
MarketWatch SANTA MONICA, Calif. http://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-happiest-places-on-earth-are-heavily-taxed?siteid=nwhpf&sguid=uEkOna2tvkmeV6B4GS_3YQ

Book Review by Bob Stevenson:

Rob Hopkins, "The Transition Handbook—From Oil

Dependency to Local Resilience"

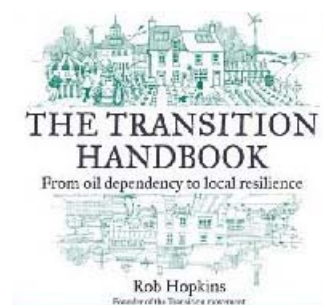
Chelsea Green Publishing,
2008 (about \$28)

While teaching high school geography, I would often make the point that other countries with larger populations and smaller resource bases would be facing environmental problems earlier than Canada. We could

learn from their experiences. This is certainly true in the way that other nations are beginning to cope with the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change.

Rob Hopkins teaches us that we live in an oil-dependent world. We have got to this level of dependency in a very short time without thinking to plan ahead for when the supply is not so plentiful. Most of us avoid thinking about what happens when oil runs out (or becomes prohibitively expensive), but the *Transitions Handbook* shows how the inevitable and profound changes can have a positive outcome. These changes can lead to the rebirth of local communities that will grow more of their food, generate their power, and build their own houses using local materials.

There are now over 35 formal Transition Initiatives in the UK with over 500 globally at the earlier stages of launching this process. The growth in interest in the Transition model continues to be exponential. With little proactivity at the government level, communities are taking matters into their own hands and acting locally. Within peak oil and climate change is the potential for the greatest economic, social, and cultural renaissance we have ever seen.



This book should be read by all politicians at all levels. But we can't wait for them. On February 14, 2009 a researcher on "Quirks and Quarks" reported that climate change is happening faster than the predictions of the computer models. This comprehensive guide offers the tools to get started. Visit www.transitiontowns.org to discover which is the first Canadian city to begin the transition.

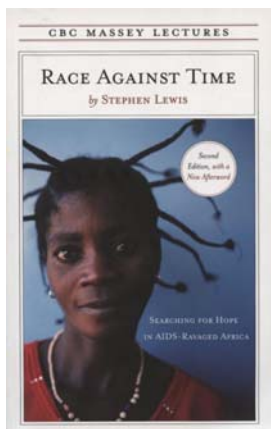
Bob Stevenson stevbob@sympatico.ca is a member of CUSJ and was president from May 2006 to May 2008.

Book Review: Stephen Lewis, "Race Against Time", Anansi Press, 2nd ed., 2006, \$18.95

I am a huge admirer of Stephen Lewis, but it was with some trepidation that I approached this book. I knew something already about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, and it is not a cheerful subject—what more could I learn? I had also heard snippets of these Massey Lectures on the radio, given with Stephen Lewis' passion and vigour: would his written words ring with the same outraged zeal against injustice that made his living words so riveting?

I was not disappointed. "Race Against Time" is not just about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa, but about the successes and failures, frustrations and tribulations of people working at the UN, UNICEF, and other international organizations. It is about the pettiness to the point of stupidity of some countries' delegates. It is about the indomitable spirit of women of Africa, to whom he dedicated this book.

The situation in Africa epitomizes the disregard for the poor by the rich the world over, a disregard that eventually must consume the rich as well as the poor in its consequences, though Lewis did not raise this spectre here. He was more concerned about trying to get rich countries to help, and he did not temper his condemnation. For instance, of Canada's intransigence in failing to give its share of foreign aid he wrote: "And then, finally, there's our own country, Canada. Here, for me, the situation is inexplicable. I have heard what the Prime Minister of Canada [Paul Martin] has said, and he has been good enough to talk with me directly about it. The arguments of [Canada's] financial incapacity are simply not persuasive."



One gets the impression that Stephen Lewis must have been a royal pain in the *gluteus maximus* of many an official and bureaucrat. Indeed, he starts the new "Afterward" in the second edition with this story: "Various international activists were making the argument [during a conference call he was attending] that the disproportionate emphasis on abstinence was serving to diminish the importance of condoms... I didn't have sufficient knowledge to comment. But I did say that the obsessive abstinence policy was driven by right-wing ideology, and would undoubtedly have an overall negative impact.

"The conference call, and my comments in particular, were covered by the New York Times. All hell broke loose. The US Department lodged a formal complaint. A number of members of Congress—Senate and House Representatives—wrote in angry censure to Kofi Anan, and ... Ambassador Randall Tobias, then head of the [US] President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief ... confronted the Secretary General at a social gathering and let him have it, both barrels, angrily demanding my head." Kofi Anan, superb diplomat that he is, settled the issue by "writing a polite letter...in which he mollified the protestors while conceding little in return."

Stephen Lewis is a fine storyteller, and there are only a few points where the book lags. I did feel by the end of it like the little moron in the now socially unacceptable "little moron" jokes of my school days: "Why did the little moron keep bashing his head on the wall?" Answer, "Because it felt so good when he stopped." But Stephen Lewis' compassion, vehemence, and sense of injustice are deserved and appropriate, and he does not neglect to tell the good news with the bad. On occasion I laughed aloud as I read, and several times I had to remove my glasses to wipe the tears from my eyes in order to keep reading.

This book should be read by every social-justice advocate, if only to gain some inkling of what we're up against and what we must do to overcome. We shall overcome; we must overcome. With leaders like Stephen Lewis, we *will* overcome. PEKS

Conservationist Honoured

OSLO—Brazilian senator and former environment minister Marina Silva was awarded Norway's \$100,000 Sophie Prize last month for her work in protecting the Amazon rainforest.

The Sophie Prize is awarded annually for environmental protection and sustainable development.

Silva, who was Brazil's environmental minister from 2003-2008, clamped down on illegal activity in the rainforest and is credited with reducing deforestation by 60%, down to a historical low.

John Acher, Planetar, in CCPA Monitor, May 2009.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The CUSJ purposes are:

- to develop and maintain a vibrant network of Unitarian social action in Canada and elsewhere and to proactively represent Unitarian principles and values in matters of social justice and in particular
- to provide opportunities, including through publication of newsletters, for Unitarians and friends to apply their religious, humanistic and spiritual values to social action aimed at the relief of (1) poverty and economic injustice, (2) discrimination based on religious, racial or other grounds, (3) abuses of human rights whether of individuals or peoples, (4) abuses of democratic process, and
- to promote peace and security, environmental protection, education, and literacy in keeping with the spirit of Unitarian values.

These purposes are an integral part of the Constitution of CUSJ, adopted at the CUSJ Annual Meeting in Mississauga, ON, May 19, 1999, and amended at the 2003 AGM.

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