



Want the Good Life? Your Neighbours Need It, Too

by Brooke Jarvis

Editor's note: New research shows that, among developed countries, the healthiest and happiest aren't those with the highest incomes but those with the most equality. Epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson discusses why in this article and interview by Brooke Jarvis.

We live in a world of deep inequality, and the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. We in the rich world generally agree that this is a problem we ought to help fix—but that the real beneficiaries will be the billions of people living in poverty. After all, inequality has little impact on the lives of those who find themselves on top of the pile. Right?

Not exactly, says British epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson.

For decades, Wilkinson has studied why some societies are healthier than others. He found that what the healthiest societies have in common is not that they have more—more income, more education, or more wealth—but that what they have is more equitably shared.

In fact, it turns out that not only disease, but a whole host of social problems ranging from mental illness to drug use are worse in unequal societies. In his latest book, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, co-written with Kate Pickett, Wilkinson details the pernicious effects that inequality has on societies: eroding trust, increasing anxiety and illness, encouraging excessive consumption.

The good news is that increased equality has the opposite effect: statistics show that communities without large gaps between rich and poor are more resilient and their members live longer, happier lives.

I sat down with Richard Wilkinson to discuss the surprising importance of equality—and the best ways to build it.

Brooke: You've studied the impact of inequality on public health for a long time. Did any of your recent findings surprise you?

Richard: Oh, all of them. In fact, the relationship is weaker for health than for many other problems—we looked at life expectancy, mental illness, teen birthrates, violence, the percent of populations in prison, and drug use. They were all not just a little bit

worse, but much worse, in more unequal countries. If I'd known how strong those connections would be, I would have looked for them a decade earlier. In fact, I'm still surprised that no one did look at them earlier.

In fact, in more unequal societies, these problems aren't higher by ten or twenty percent. There are perhaps eight times the number of teenage births per capita, ten times the homicide rate, three times the rate of mental illness. Huge differences. If social mobility were a perfect sorting system and everyone was sorted by ability, that wouldn't make the number of problems in the society greater. It wouldn't change the overall IQ of the population; it would just change the social distribution of IQ. We know

from the findings that it's the status divisions themselves that create the problems. We're not making a great leap to say that this is causal. We, I think, show that it's almost impossible to find any other consistent explanation. It's only the gaps between us that matter now.



Richard Wilkinson, epidemiologist and author.

Inside this Issue:

The History of CUSJ Part I.
The problem with thinking charitably.
Micro banking: Putting our principles into action.
...and more.

And that's really quite a striking thing to learn about ourselves and the effects of the social structure on us.

Brooke: Your findings related to crime and imprisonment rates seem to be particularly illustrative of the way inequality can lead to social corrosion.

Richard: We quote a prison psychiatrist who spent 25 years talking to really violent men, and he says he has yet to see an act of violence which was not caused by people feeling disrespected, humiliated, or like they've lost face. Those are the triggers to violence, and they're more intense in more unequal societies, where status competition is intensified.

We also found very big differences in the proportion of the population that's in prison in different countries and American states. But the differences aren't driven by the amount of crime they've committed, they're driven by the fact that people in unequal societies have more punitive attitudes about crime. It may have to do with fear across classes, lack of trust, and lack of involvement in community life. If you've got to go to prison, go to prison in Japan or one of the Scandinavian countries. You might get some rehabilitation. If you go to prison in some of the more unequal countries, you are very likely to come out a good deal worse than you went in.

Brooke: What psychological impact does living in an unequal society have on people who are at the top of the scale?

Richard: Status competition causes problems all the way up; we're all very sensitive to how we're judged. If you grow up in an unequal society, your actual experience of human relationships is different. Your idea of human nature changes. If you grow up in a consumerist society, you think of human beings as self-interested. In fact, consumerism is so powerful because we're so highly social. It's not that we actually have an overwhelming desire to accumulate property, it's

that we're concerned with how we're seen all the time. So actually, we're misunderstanding consumerism. We experience ourselves through each other's eyes—and that's the reason for the labels and the clothes and the cars.



Outside a cathedral in Moldova, wedding guests walk by a panhandler. According to Richard Wilkinson's research, inequality within a society erodes mental, physical, and community health. Photo by Stelios Lazakis.

Brooke: What's the effect of inequality on the way we perceive our communities—and how does that perception affect how they function?

Richard: Inequality affects our ability to trust and our sense that we are part of a community. In a way, that is the fundamental mediator between inequality and most of these outcomes, through the damage it does to social relations. For instance, in more equal countries or more equal states, two-thirds of the population may feel they can trust others in general, whereas in the more unequal countries or states, it may drop as low as 15 percent or 25 percent.

Brooke: Once we become aware of the impact of inequality on all of these social ills, what do we do about it?

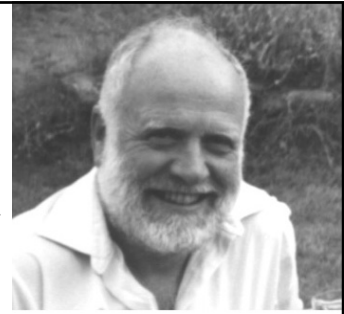
Richard: Countries seem to get their greater equality in quite different ways. Sweden, for example, uses the big government way: there are very big differences in earnings, which are redistributed through taxes and benefits. It has a large welfare state. Japan, on the other hand, has smaller income differences to start with, does much less redistribution, and doesn't have such high social expenditure. But both countries do very well—they're amongst the more equal countries and their health and social outcomes are very good.

What we've learned is that the real quality of life for all of us now depends on improving the social environment, and that we have a policy handle on how to do that. We can't just rely on taxes and benefits to increase equality—the next government can undo them all at a stroke. We've got to get this structure of equality much more deeply embedded in our society. I think that means more economic democracy, or workplace democracy, of every kind.

Continued on p. 3

From the Editor

Last June your CUSJ Board chose to focus on the environment and poverty, particularly homelessness, through 2009-2010. The Winter 2009-2010 issue of *JUSTnews* and the latest *Discussion Paper* (No. 18) covered climate change and the news from the Copenhagen summit on climate change, respectively. The issue of *JUSTnews* in your hands looks again at poverty (the Feb. 2004 issue of *JUSTnews* also focussed on that topic). I apologise for so many stories originating in B.C. in this issue, but that province is currently the epi-centre of poverty in Canada.



JUSTnews attempts to bring you information not only on a specific topic in each issue, but on a range of subjects, including the activities of Unitarian Universalists across Canada. This issue summarizes letters on social justice issues that both the CUSJ and the CUC have sent in recent months. It also includes Part I of how and why CUSJ came about. But is this newsletter doing what it is supposed to?

Recently a fellow Unitarian asked me, “Do we really develop and maintain ‘a vibrant network of social action in Canada and elsewhere?’” She was reading from the back page of *JUSTnews*.

“We try,” I replied hesitantly, wondering what was coming.

“How do we bring social justice issues to the attention of our congregations?” she persisted.

“Well, at First Unitarian Church of Victoria we have H.O.W. projects and an action-of-the-month shelf where there are usually form-letters or petitions to sign.”

“What do other congregations do?” she asked.

I didn’t know. So let’s find out!

What does your social justice committee do to encourage awareness of and action on social justice issues within your congregation? Short descriptions (500 words or less) will be included in future issues of *JUSTnews*, space and interest permitting. Please send articles to the editor, whose address is on the back page. And watch for a future explanation of H.O.W. projects. PEKS

Changing workplaces can have an enormous effect—not only is that where wealth is created, it’s where income from production is initially divided up. It’s also where we’re most subjected to hierarchy and authority. Employee ownership turns a company into a community. The chief executive becomes answerable to employees. You might vote for your boss to have, I don’t know, three times as much income as you—not 300 or 400 times more. Embedding greater equality and more democratic accountability in our institutions does much more than just changing income distribution or wealth distribution. And a number of studies show that if you combine an even partial employee ownership, you get quite reliable increases in productivity. This is about how we work better together. **Brooke: Which is more important than ever, given that solving many of our major problems—global climate change, for example—will require unprecedented levels of cooperation.**

Richard: Global warming, more than almost any other problem you can imagine, involves acting for the common good. It involves public spiritedness. And in more equal societies, where there’s a stronger community life, less violence, and more trust, people give higher priority to the common good.

To test this out, we looked at the proportion of their income that countries give in foreign aid, and it’s

higher in the more equal countries. We looked at the proportion of different waste materials that are recycled, and that’s higher in more equal countries. You don’t do those things for yourself; they both depend on an idea of the greater good. An international survey of business leaders included the question, “How important do you think it is that your government abides by international environmental agreements?” In the more equal countries, business leaders rate that as more important than in the less equal countries. Inequality changes our perceptions—are you out for yourself, or do you recognize that we’re in this together, that we’ve got to do these things for the common good?



Brooke Jarvis interviewed Richard Wilkinson for YES! Magazine, a national, non-profit media organization that fuses powerful ideas with practical actions and where the full interview may be found. Brooke is YES! Magazine’s web editor. Posted Mar 04, 2010.

The History of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

Editor's note: In February, 2000, Norman McLeod gave a talk to the Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough on the history of CUSJ to that time. Since the history of CUSJ has not been officially recorded, the editorial board of JUSTnews suggested the talk be edited for publication in JUSTnews. Here, therefore, is the first of four Parts, this one describing why and how CUSJ began. Parts II to IV will be published in future issues.

Part I. The Pre-History of CUSJ Why CUSJ?

By Norman A. McLeod

UU activism at a nadir

Canadian Unitarian Universalists(UUs), with some justification, have always perceived themselves to be in the forefront of the fight for social justice. The degree to which this perception is valid is sometimes open to question, in my view. Our enthusiasm for social justice causes, while having a solid underlying base, seems to ebb and flow with the times. In 1996 when CUSJ was formed it seemed to many of us that we were in an ebbing mode.

Many older Unitarians looked back with nostalgia to the 1950s, '60s and '70s when social action was strong in our denomination. Social justice concerns run through our history. In the Toronto area we recall the days when Unitarians provided leadership in the social justice field. Some felt that by 1996 the level of our denominational involvement had become quite weak. A few would put it more strongly than that.

Over time, one of the indicators was felt to be the low level of coverage of social action issues in the "Canadian Unitarian." Efforts to correct this saw the birth of "Social Action Network News," which was sent out across Canada. Regrettably, this endeavour, though promising, was short-lived and thus social action seemed to languish again denominationally. Note that I am not ascribing this viewpoint to Unitarians in general, but the sentiment was unmistakably there.

The Common Sense revolution spur

This diminished sense of social justice concern was still evident with the implementation of the Ontario Government's *Common Sense Revolution*, which to many of us was revolting indeed. These Common Sense Revolution policies (a brilliant populist title by the way) had begun to activate the faith

community in general. The Catholic Bishops had published an open letter criticizing the policies of the government, which they saw as damaging to society. Other denominations and social justice groups were on the public record opposing policies like the 22% welfare cut. Key church leaders spoke out in strong opposition and got a lot of press.



Mike Harris, Ontario Premier 1995-2002

Many Unitarians who know about CUSJ believe or assume that some Ontario Government policies triggered the formation of CUSJ. Now, I am not one inclined to give too much credit to the Ontario Conservative Government. However, I give it full credit for the assistance it provided in the founding of CUSJ. Their policies were of immense help as were those of the Federal Liberal Government whose policies stimulated membership across Canada.

I would like to underline, however, that in the minds of those who were the catalysts in forming CUSJ, regressive policies were not the only concern. They were concerned that the Unitarians had lost their traditional dedication to social action and this seemed at least as serious as particular external factors. We seemed to be losing our voice and becoming less relevant, even within the faith community. It was felt that we should be making our views known for what they were worth, and be stimulating Unitarians to express themselves as individuals, too. We simply were not doing that in any effective way.

ISARC led the way

In the meantime, ISARC (Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition), a very strong interfaith group, made a strong protest to a legislative committee on Ontario Bill 26 in Dec '95. This was the all-encompassing bill that got the revolution really underway. Their submission concluded with the words:

The conviction of our faith value tells us that where there is no vision, the people

perish. From the perspective of the faith community, we have already gone close enough to the dissolution of a people. We urge this government and this committee to refrain from any more incursions into what makes us a people, a community, and what unravels our life together.

We ask this government and this committee to begin a change of heart with a decision to delay this bill 26 and to ask the people whose life is at stake. There can be no more basic exercise of our democratic society. There can be no greater obligation of government than to work with its citizens to build a society free of poverty, hunger and homelessness.

This presentation was signed by representatives of the United Church of Canada, Citizens for Public Justice, Presbyterian Church of Canada, Toronto Diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada, Chief Rabbi, Holy Blossom Temple, Buddhist Communities of Greater Toronto, Mennonite Central Committee—Ontario. Unitarians were not listed.

Norman McLeod is a founder of CUSJ. He is a member of South Peel congregation, and is a strong supporter of social justice, peace and Kairos.

Time for membership renewal

Membership renewal date is now easy to remember: it is April 1st of every year. Thanks to the 30% of members who renewed their membership during the slightly confusing period last year when we were switching to this single renewal date.

We now start with a clean slate: if you have not donated to CUSJ since April 1st, 2010, your membership is in arrears (unless you have made a special arrangement with the treasurer).

RENEW NOW! There is no set membership fee, but costs to CUSJ for producing and mailing JUSTnews plus donating to various social justice causes through the year amount to about \$50 per household. We ask those who can afford to pay a little more to do so to cover costs of those who find \$50 is beyond their budget. PEKS

Come to our CUSJ AGM!

Where: Room C112, David Strong Building, University of Victoria, B.C.

When: Friday May 21st, 2010, 10 am to 4 pm, registration at 9:30 am.

Registration: Register on line (www.cusj.org) to give us an idea of numbers, or at the meeting—arrive at 9:30 am. The meeting is free, but you must have paid your 2010 annual dues before you can vote!

These meetings are fun and informative!

- Meet CUSJ's president and many of the Board Members who have been working for social justice and keeping CUSJ functioning this past year.
- Participate at CUSJ's "World Café" (10 am) where you can discuss your vision and role for CUSJ with other CUSJ members and help make CUSJ more effective.
- Add your vote to the choice of new Board Members (1:30 pm), and perhaps even discover you can help CUSJ remain a vibrant organization.
- Hear guest speaker Peggy Wilmot (2:30 pm) of Victoria's *Faith in Action* tell us what happens with the poor and homeless "Down by the Riverside."
- Join us for supper at a nearby restaurant—eating together makes for family.

If you are coming to the CUSJ AGM, you are probably also attending the Canadian Unitarian Council's (CUC's) Annual Conference and Meeting (ACM). Your conference package will contain a map of the U. Vic. campus that will help you find the David Strong Building. There is good bus transportation to the University. Information on billeting, hotels, etc. is available through the CUC's website.

The CUC ACM takes place in the Student Union Building (SUB) to right of ring road in the map below. The CUSJ AGM will be held in the Strong Building, upper left. Cafeteria in Cadboro Commons.



Partial map of University of Victoria Campus showing part of the ring road and relative locations of Student Union Building (SUB) and David Strong Building

Social Justice letters from the CUSJ & CUC

In January, 2010, four letters to politicians were drafted by CUSJ Board members, and signed by CUSJ President Katharine Im-Jenkins.

January 10th, letter to Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan protesting the closure of prison farms. "...your plans to close Canada's prison farms, and to cancel mandatory statutory release and accelerated parole review are happening too quickly without sufficient public consultation," the letter said.

January 11th, letter to Mayor of Toronto David Miller expressing shock at the laying of charges against shopkeeper David Chen, the victim of theft by an acknowledged repeat offender. Mr Chen and his employees caught the thief, tied him up, and called police. Mr Chen was then charged with assault while the thief had his 90-day sentence reduced to 30 days because he agreed to testify against his victim.



"No prorogation" demonstration outside the House of Parliament, Ottawa, with (l to r) the Rev. Frances Deverell, CUSJ Secretary; Katharine Im-Jenkins, CUSJ President; and Don Wilson, CSUJ member.

January 20th, letter to Prime Minister Harper urging the government "to rededicate itself to being an impartial broker in helping the Israelis and Palestinians move towards a society in which they have a stable peace that will allow each to prosper and express their own identity."

January 27th, letter to Prime Minister Harper protesting the prorogation of parliament.

CUC in Action

In addition to CUSJ, the Canadian Unitarian Council occasionally writes to politicians on social justice or environmental issues. The CUC's letters are usually drafted by one of several "Monitoring Groups" that have been set up as a result of study resolutions in past years. Here are two letters the CUC sent in 2009, signed by CUC President Calvin Drake.

September 16th, letter to Minister of Environment Jim Prentice requesting a reply to a letter sent to Prime Minister Harper on July 7th, 2009, which asked what targets the Prime Minister would be promoting at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December, 2009.

October 22nd, letter to Prime Minister Stephen Harper urging the government of Canada to ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions that was adopted on May 30th, 2008.

Can you help?

Bob Van Alstyne has been handling the *JUSTNews*'s distribution list for—well, probably for more than a decade. He would like to hand this job on to someone who is a little younger, or maybe even a lot younger.

The job is not onerous. It requires obtaining an updated mailing list four times a year from CUSJ's membership chair when the *JUSTnews* editor signals that a new issue has gone to press. Then the list needs checking to ensure recent changes of address have been included. The list is then forwarded to Aristos Mail Tech, the distributing company. This can all be done electronically.

If you would like to help—and we can certainly do with some assistance—please contact Bob Van Alstyne by email, vanalstyne@shaw.ca, or telephone, 250 652-2210.

Careful words and dumb thoughts

By Don Vipond

There is what we say and there is what we think. Not always the same. I keep some of the things I think secret. I am not proud of them—but I do think them.

An example: the homeless, all 1,500 of them in my community of Victoria. One of my secret thoughts in the past has been: are every single one of you incapable of getting a job, making yourself a life, becoming a productive citizen?

I read a letter recently which has helped me with that question, not answered it unequivocally but helped me to see the naivety, even stupidity, of that unspoken thought.

Rev. Allen Tysick is executive director of *Our Place*, an inner city drop-in centre downtown, one which shelters and feeds and comforts the lonely and the homeless and the hungry and also provides a limited number of beds.

“The Rev.,” as he is called by those around him, is a living legend in these parts, renowned for his compassion. He likes to write a fresh thank-you letter each month to those who support *Our Place*. Here is what he just wrote:

Dear friends,

Wayne will be back in jail soon. Let’s consider who’s to blame for that. Does Wayne know better? Just what is it that Wayne does know?

His parents, both First Nations, were homeless and addicted to alcohol. They were taken from their parents by the Church and State, spending their early years at the Port Alberni residential school. Years later, they met on the streets of Vancouver, both struggling to survive in the midst of poverty and their addiction.

Wayne was born one cold night in November in an alley. A day later, with parents both passed out, Wayne’s crying attracted attention. The police came. The baby was seized by the white authorities.

Wayne was sickly, spent the next six months in the hospital. Then he began a trek through a long line of foster homes. More than 10 schools by age 12. From that age to 16, he ran away from foster homes. Then the authorities did not chase him any longer. They knew he would be picked up by the police sooner or later.

At 18, he spent his first stretch in a provincial prison for trafficking cocaine. I met him several

years later. He volunteered for the *Open Door*, was in and out of prison. Today he is housed at *Our Place*. I wish I could tell you there is a happy ending to this story, that he turned his life around. But this morning I met him in his addiction on the street. He told me that yesterday he was picked up by the police three times on stolen bicycles. Soon he will be back in prison.

Question: Is this story about Wayne’s weaknesses, his failures? Or is it about his vulnerability, our responsibilities and our failures? Rev. Allen Tysick, *Our Place*.

Who did the failing? I’ve been thinking about how acutely Wayne was short-changed. What could anyone reasonably expect of Wayne the Homeless? Wayne the Addicted? He knew neglect from the day he came into the world. He was shuffled from place to place through those impressionable young years and he gathered impressions, none of them equipping him to the life of a “productive citizen.” And soon he’s off to jail again.

No doubt I will still think dumb, perhaps even racist thoughts, now and again. But I will also think of Wayne.

Don Vipond is an active member of First Unitarian Church of Victoria.



The Rev. Al Tysick greets clients at the Open Door mission in Victoria B.C.

Canada’s top CEOs paid 174 times more than the average worker

“Canada’s top 100 CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) earned 174 times more than the average Canadian wage,” says CCPA (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives) economist Hugh Mackenzie.

“To put that in perspective, Canadians will work full-time throughout the year to earn the national average of \$42,305. The top 100 CEOs pocketed that amount by 1:01 p.m. on January 4—the first working day of the year.”
For the full article, see CCPA Monitor February, 2010, p. 31.

The problem with thinking charitably

By Rob Wipond

What's a good charity?

Malalai Joya gave an interesting answer. Joya is the female politician dubiously ousted from the male-dominated Afghan Parliament in 2007. She was promoting her book, *A Woman Among Warlords*, last November at the University of Victoria, B.C. An audience member asked if a particular Afghan charity was worth supporting. Joya didn't know the charity, but dispensed general advice: examine the charity's political positions.

Essentially, Joya argued, if the charity isn't protesting the NATO military occupation of Afghanistan, then it's likely not empowering ordinary Afghans so much as furthering the agendas of foreign powers. Joya is not alone in recognizing broader political context as crucial to evaluating charitable activities. The World Bank notoriously provides "aid" benefiting multinationals and rich nations more than the poor. And though many donors are unaware, international charities run from political right to left, and often take sides. For example, OXFAM provided aid in Eritrea throughout the region's two-decade independence struggle, while CARE didn't start helping in Eritrea until its 2000 peace accord with Ethiopia.

A local story

I was still pondering this when Canadian media's December outpouring of heartstring-plucking human interest features began. A front-page story in our local daily caught my eye. A family had recently had quadruplets. Then the husband became unemployed when he'd unexpectedly become incapacitated by an aggressive form of multiple sclerosis. With the wife's maternity leave ending, the possibility of the middle class family plunging into abject poverty was becoming all too real.

Something important was missing from that article: political context. There was no mention of Premier Gordon Campbell's BC Liberals. No mention of cuts eroding already indecent welfare levels, nor of the gutting of legal requirements to justify rent increases, nor of dying commitments to affordable housing. No mention of BC's child poverty being the

worst in Canada, nor of cuts to family bonuses, childcare and non-profit family services. Et cetera.

One article can't include every relevant issue; however, there was also not one political comment on the following pages covering BC Transit's "Stuff-the-Bus" campaign to gather gifts for needy local families, nor Market Square's gingerbread house collection for food banks, nor school children wrapping toys for deprived kids.

De-politicized appeals are dangerous

Yet, if we all knew poor families would be falling onto a strong social safety net providing a decent standard of living, then our emotions wouldn't be tugged so powerfully, right? So BC's political context

was the crucial backdrop that made these stories heart-rending or inspiring. But instead of discussing politics, *poverty was implicitly presented as a natural, if tragic, accident of personal fate, rectifiable only through other people's acts of beneficent pity.*

And that's common in charity appeals, isn't it? That's why charity, as an institutional response to poverty, is dangerous: it frequently downplays political contexts. Charities themselves often don't want to risk alienating potential donors by sounding politically partisan. It's much easier

to appeal to (or exploit) the nearly universal human reaction to help in emergencies (e.g. we aren't hearing many charities discussing right now Canada's significant role helping foster recent military coups, political corruption and impoverishment in Haiti).

I don't want to discourage anyone from giving to charity, but this exemplifies why we must remind ourselves of its dangers. *Charity, as idea and institutional response to social problems, often simply traffics on pity for victims of political policies, instead of fostering reasoned analysis, personal change, and well-informed protests against the perpetrators of those policies.* Charities may even worsen situations, as Joya pointed out, by naively or deliberately assisting repressive governments.

Conversely, if we educate ourselves politically, then we sometimes discover that our desire to help is not so much a noble act of compassion as it is a vigorous duty born from a wrong—a wrong we may have helped perpetrate.

This article originally appeared in Focus Magazine, Victoria, January, 2010.



The B.C. Legislative Buildings, Victoria—currently this place does not care for the homeless.

Micro Banking: Putting Our Principles Into Action

By Lisa Greenly

How many times have you used credit? Perhaps to finance education? Start a business or buy a house? Used credit to buy food, furniture or transportation? What would have happened had credit not been available? How limiting would that have been for you?

Billions of people in our world live in poverty with no access to affordable credit—many use money lenders and pay interest charges above 80%. Paying back the loan and the interest leaves very little money from their labours and sends them back to the money lender over and over again.

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize recipient Mohammad Yunus and The Grameen Bank proved that micro loans break this cycle by offering money at affordable rates. Entrepreneurs are then able to use what we would consider very small amounts of money to start a new business or expand an existing business. They can then earn enough money to feed their families, educate their children or build adequate shelter.

I believe that micro lending is one way we can put our principles into action by assisting people in a way that builds dignity and self worth, fosters justice, fairness, compassion, freedom and peace. Only once we have eradicated poverty can we begin to bring our interconnected web back into balance.

Working through the web-based site **KIVA.org** and their 100+ micro finance field partners, the

Unitarian Flames lending team is putting our principles into action by lending money around the globe. The Unitarian Flames connects Canadian UUs with entrepreneurs, other UUs and lenders from around the world. For as little as \$25US anyone can be involved in fighting poverty in a meaningful transparent way!



Check out the Unitarian Flames at: www.kiva.org/team/unitarian_flames.

Watch for 'KIVA at Conference' this May at the CUC ACM in Victoria. The first 500 people to register will receive a \$25 gift certificate—enough to fund one loan!

Want more information? Contact Lisa Greenly at unitarianflames@shaw.ca

Lisa Greenly is an active member of the First Unitarian Church of Victoria.

While the world burns, the peoples' assembly in Copenhagen's December 2009 post-Kyoto negotiations commits to 'system change not climate change'

By Terisa E. Turner

At the climate change talks in Copenhagen from December 10 through 19, 2009, the governments failed to agree on emissions cuts. But civil society organizations did unite globally behind a call for system change, not climate change (<http://www.klimaforum09.org/Declaration>). The transition to living fuels, to solar energy and to social justice was presented as a transition to a democratic commons on a global scale. There is now in place a global coordinating committee that is organizing for a November 2010 popular assembly to parallel the governments' next climate-change meeting in Mexico.

First World countries struggle to maintain control

The nine Latin American states in ALBA (Spanish acronym for Bolivian Alliance for the Peoples of our Americas) successfully held out in the final hours of the climate talks in Copenhagen, defending the United Nations democratic process that requires consensus. The COP 15 (the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC) ended with a very sharp division of the world's governments between the green capitalists on the one hand (business as usual as Earth careens further into tipping points and meltdowns) and, on the other, eco-socialists of many stripes and organizations all strongly committed to assisting in the emergence of a new global political economy that reverses ecocidal accumulation without end.

Of great importance in any appreciation of the deadlock inside the official talks is the issue of money. The private sector is baying for public subsidies. Some thirty billion dollars for the first three years (2010-2012 and then 100 billion dollars per year up to 2020) have been committed by the USA and other states. Most of this is targeted for the global South, for climate change 'mitigation' on terms similar to the disastrous failed 'market reform' conditions that continue to be required by the World Bank. This means more structural adjustment and more neoliberal enclosures for private profit. There is palpable outrage at this neo-imperial effort to extend corporate rule in the face

of dramatic market failure and the collapse of capitalist relations all around.

A Parallel Popular Congress

At the popular assembly on the evening of December 18 a very different and jubilant atmosphere reigned. The Danish civil society organizations had mounted a terrific peoples' assembly. This was a first. Never before had the climate change talks been paralleled by a popular congress.

There are two more key features of the peoples' achievement. First, the focus is on action against the climate chaos perpetrators, the big profiteers and Big Oil. Second, there is astounding unanimity that solutions are in hand and they are systemic, not piecemeal. This is where pre-figurations of eco-socialism come in. In dramatic contrast to this holistic unity, profiteers remain divided and fixated on the hopeless reductionism of counting molecules of carbon and trying to put a commodity price on them.

As the events in Copenhagen came to an end, very much in evidence was the superb contribution of women, indigenous and third world



Photo (by Hauwa CLR James Turner):

Terisa E. Turner and her niece, Adabu Brownhill, who is pursuing a special ecology program in high school. Adabu got a T-shirt that reads "Keep the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole, the tarsand in the land."

peoples. The greatest victories clustered around the demand to shut down the tar sands, and more widely to stop all fossil fuel production. "Keep the oil under the soil, keep the coal in the hole, keep the tar sand under the land," as OilWatch demands. This demand, previously obscure and on the margins since it was put forward by Ecuador civil society in Kyoto in 1997 is now the front line demand.

Eco-socialism and Climate Camps

The new social form in robust evidence in Copenhagen is the popular commons or what can be called eco-socialism. The new social vehicle that is nurturing this transformation (and fossil to solar energy transition) is the Climate Camp. In fact the peoples' assembly was a kind of giant Climate Camp, evoking memories of teach-ins and love-ins of the 1960s, as direct actions launched out to free political prisoners and challenge climate criminals. We are going to see the phenomenon of climate camps explode in the coming months.

Terisa Turner is an energy economist from the oil, gas and tar sands area of northern Alberta. She is also the Social Action Committee coordinator, Fergus-Elora Unitarian Universalists. From December 10-19, 2009 she blogged from Copenhagen for the journal Canadian Dimension: <http://canadiandimension.com/blog/>. Her website is: <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~terisatu/>.

JUSTnews apologizes: Nepal Human Hair Solar Panel Hoax

The last issue of *JUSTnews* (Winter 2009-2010) reprinted an article "Teenager invents £23 solar panel made from human hair." It seemed to be an innocent little story about Nepalese teenagers stumbling on a cheap way of making solar panels. Unfortunately, it was a hoax. Here is part of what is reported at <http://sites.google.com/site/edwardcraighyatt/hairsolarpanelnepl>.



"An article appeared in the *Daily Mail* claiming that an 18-year-old Nepalese student Milan Karki and colleagues invented a solar panel capable of generating 9VDC/18W with human hair as the main component.

"The idea that human hair can be used as a solar cell has long been debunked but continues to be circulated on so-called 'free energy' or "zero point energy" blogs and eco blogs.

"What has really happened? The Trinity College students made a cuprous oxide solar cell that is commonly used for demonstrations in school laboratories. This cell does indeed generate a small voltage and current, but is completely impractical to scale to a larger size, and the cell would work just fine without human hair."

JUSTnews apologizes for not checking the story and for propagating this hoax. PEKS

Book Review: Jeffrey D. Sachs, “The End of Poverty”, Penguin Books, 2005, \$23.69

In “The End of Poverty,” Sachs makes clear from the start that he is not talking about the relative poverty of the poor in rich countries, or even moderate poverty “where basic needs are met, but just barely.” Sachs is talking about extreme poverty “[which] means that households cannot meet basic needs for survival.”

Most of the world’s extreme poor live in South Asia (400+ million), Sub-Saharan Africa (300 million), and East Asia (250+ million), with a few more in Latin America, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and North and Central East Africa. Within the confines of this topic, Sachs does a masterful, instructive job, pulling no punches when laying blame for past and present failures by the rich, while even-handedly noting that the poor have responsibilities too.

The learning journey

After laying out the problem, Sachs takes us, in the first half of the book, on a learning journey. Sach’s wife, Sonia, to whom the book is dedicated, is a paediatrician, and he was struck by her methods. When attending a sick child, she first makes a diagnosis while simultaneously attending to any immediate threats to life, and then she prescribes a course of treatment that addresses the specific problems of that child.

Through his work, first in Bolivia, then Poland, Russia, China, India and finally Africa, Sachs learned that different countries have different ills that require different solutions. “Providing economic advice to others requires a profound commitment to search for the right answers, not to settle for superficial approaches.”

And of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Sachs says: “Clinical economics is needed to replace the past twenty years of development practice known widely as the structural adjustment era. This era...was based on a simplistic, even simpleminded, view of the challenge of poverty.” (p. 81)

No excuses for inaction

The second half of the book addresses the questions of what needs doing and why there are no excuses for inaction. He lays out the UN’s eight Millennium Development Goals and deplores the unilateral military response of the USA to the events of 9/11 that have delayed, if not sidetracked, implementation of these goals.

He debunks neo-conservative cures of poverty that suggest: “...markets should rule every nook and cranny of the economy” and their claims that aid is superfluous even dangerous because it delays market reforms.

He champions the need for debt cancellation to help heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) out of the poverty trap.

He makes clear that while poor countries have a responsibility to fight corruption, corruption is in part a result

of poverty (e.g., when salaries are so low government officials must accept bribes to survive), and therefore corruption is no excuse for withholding aid. He points out that rich countries can easily afford the aid required, and indeed cannot afford to fail in providing it: “The effort required of the rich is indeed so slight that not to do it is to announce brazenly to a large part of the world, ‘you count for nothing.’ We should not be surprised, then, if in later years the rich reap the whirlwind of that heartless response.”

The problem identified

Sachs has mostly praise for the anti-globalization movement, though he deplores any associated violence, and chastises the movement’s leaders for opposing foreign direct investment that brings increased trade with it. He does recognize the problem: “If governments would do their job in setting up the right rules, major international companies would play a vital role in solving problems.” He even recognizes the subversive power these corporations have gained: “multinational corporations often go well beyond their market demands...and instead, expend substantial efforts, often hidden under the table, to make the rules of the game themselves.”

Those of us with a global view of our world’s problems may find the restrictions of the topic mildly frustrating, but as Sachs says, “...the goal is to end *extreme* poverty, not to end all poverty, and still less to equalize world incomes...”, or, one might add, address any of the problems of sustainable development (by which he means “self-supportive continuous economic growth”).

Ideology should not get in the way

My feeling of discomfort is best expressed in the inimitable words of Stephen Lewis. “People are always asking me how I can consort so closely with Jeffrey Sachs,” says Lewis¹. “They even imply a groupie mentality that naturally cuts me to the quick.”

“Well, let me be absolutely clear. I’m a democratic socialist; my ideology is my life. And it is true to say that Jeffrey Sachs is not a democratic socialist; in fact, although he and I have never discussed it, it would seem from his writings that he’s a profoundly misguided democratic capitalist. These are mortal flaws which I charitably overlook. The fact of the matter is, however, that whatever our philosophic differences—and there is no bridge long enough to span the philosophic divide—Jeffrey is quite magnificent in his unswerving pursuit of the end of global poverty, and the amelioration of the human condition. His nostrums may sometimes not be my nostrums. But the power of his intellect and his influence in the service of the most noble of causes are all things I hugely admire, and I’ll be damned if I’ll allow ideological dogma to get in the way.”

Amen. PEKS

¹Lewis, Stephen. 2006. *Race Against Time*. CBC Massey Lectures. House of Anansi Press Inc., Toronto. 2nd ed., p. 166-167.



JUSTnews is published by
Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

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JUSTnews should be addressed to

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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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Publications mail agreement No. 40037866



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Ottawa, ON
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Printed on recycled paper

