



Canada's Housing Policy to 2007

By J. David Hulchanski

Canada's Housing Policy is Market-Based

Only five percent of Canada's households live in government-owned or non-profit housing. This is the smallest percentage of social housing of any Western country except the United States.

Canada's housing system, unlike that of most Western nations, relies almost exclusively on the market for the provision of housing. This is a problem for those too poor to pay rents for appropriate housing. A housing system based on the market cannot respond to social need.

Given the emphasis on markets, the government's role in Canada's housing might appear small. But this is not the case. If it were not for federal housing policies and programs, Canada's homeownership rate would be much lower, and its housing system very different from what it is today.

Canada's housing policy emphasizes ownership

Following the Second World War, federal and provincial governments created mortgage lending and insurance institutions through government statutes, regulations and subsidies. Municipal governments provided the serviced land and zoning regulations that permitted the construction of relatively cheap housing. Since the early 1970s, a steady stream of house-purchase assistance programs has helped maintain an ownership rate at about 66%.

In 1963, the federal government began a joint provincial program to provide subsidized housing corporations for low-income households. By the mid-1970s, when this program was replaced with a more decentralized, community-based non-profit program, about 200,000 public housing units had been built.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), established in 1946, focused public funding almost exclusively on owners. Between the mid 1940s and mid 1960s, most households obtained at least a part of their mortgage loan from the federal government.

The CMHC focused on helping house buyers and private investors supply rental housing. There was never a policy of assisting owners and renters equally.

Homeowners have, on average, about double the income of renters. It is ironic that the bulk of government support flows to wealthier homeowners rather than to poorer tenants. This, not surprisingly, is rarely reported by politicians or public servants. The federal government

did report that it would spend \$76 million on its Affordable Housing Initiative in 2008, but made no mention of the approximately \$6 billion in annual tax revenue it would not collect from the long ago cancelled capital gains tax. There is no such tax subsidy for Canadians who rent.

The Growing Gap

There is nothing wrong with supporting homeownership, but in recent decades the gap in wealth between owners and tenants has grown. In the late 1960s, the income gap between owners and renters was about 20%. By 1999, the gap had increased to 208%. Almost 20% of

renters live in housing that needs major repairs, or is overcrowded, compared with 10% of owners.

Canada's housing system is seriously out of balance: it is discriminatory in the way it treats owners and renters, and its reliance on market supply-and-demand works for owners, but not for renters. Some sectors of the population are excluded from access to housing.

Jurisdiction

All levels of government are continually making decisions that affect housing. Yet disputes over jurisdiction continue.

Inside this Issue:

- Highlights of CUSJ AGM
- Critical World Priorities
- History of Canadian Unitarians for Justice, Part II.
- Sir Humphrey confronts Poverty
- and more...



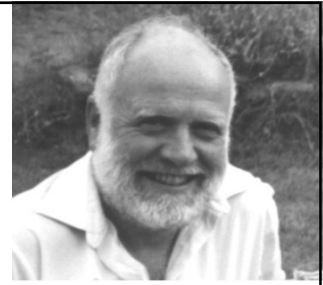
J. David Hulchanski

From the Editor

At the Annual General Meeting of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice this past May 21st (summarized in this issue of JUSTnews), members arrived at a consensus that working for affordable housing should be one of CUSJ's priorities this coming year. That, therefore, is the focus of this issue, and the lead article provides information on Canada's housing policy. The immediately preceding issue (Spring 2010) focussed on "Poverty and Homelessness," so the current JUSTnews continues a theme.

Homelessness is a symptom of a larger problem: the world is on a disastrous course, and if we want to avoid the worst that could befall us, we'd better start doing something about it—and soon. Mel and Christine Johnston took a trip to India this past September, and their reflections on the current world situation are provided on p. 9 (Critical World Priorities). They offer no solutions, but those of us who have been thinking about this for a while—perhaps most CUSJ members—know that one of our first steps must be to build a network, a community. We cannot turn the world onto a less disastrous course alone, but we *can* do it together.

Which is to say, all is not doom and gloom. JUSTnews, as in the past, continues to offer possible solutions to problems. And in addition to more news and views than usual from CUSJ members in this issue, you might get a chuckle from cabinet secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby's brush with a feminist who is upset with how the police treat the poor in her borough. Enjoy!



In the March 1996 federal budget, the government announced that it would transfer administration of federal social-housing programs to provinces and territories, ending 50 years of direct federal involvement. This was a unilateral policy decision, not the settlement of a legal or constitutional dispute. It was also a financial decision—a means of saving money at the federal level.

Most provincial and territorial governments also withdrew help from those most in need. Provincial and territorial budget cuts in housing, social spending, and urban affairs were the result of the federal government's downloading the deficit onto provincial taxpayers. Dismantling the federal social housing supply program also meant that provinces and municipalities had to bear the indirect costs of inadequate housing and homelessness. These included the costs of physical and mental health care, emergency shelters and services, and policing.

Although there is a constitutional barrier to direct federal assistance to municipalities for housing, when federal money is made available, provincial governments have difficulty denying municipalities access to that money. After 1973, the federal government directly funded new

social-housing projects built by non-profit societies as well as non-profit housing corporations established by municipalities. However, jurisdiction may suddenly become an issue if the federal government does *not* want to engage in a housing program.

After much talk and many promises, the 2004 and 2005 federal budgets allocated some new funds for housing and municipal infrastructure. As in the past,

the federal government launched housing initiatives in the face of strong political pressure from civil society, and it continues to do so. There is no evidence that governments have ever intended to move towards making the housing system more just and inclusive.



Slum housing in Toronto

Abridged and edited for JUSTnews from J. David Hulchanski, September 2007, Research Bull. No. 38, Centre for Urban and Community Studies. The chapter of the book on which this article is based is available at www.hulchanski.ca.

J. David Hulchanski is the associate director of the Cities Centre and professor of housing and community development in the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. In the 1980s he was a professor in the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of British Columbia and Director of the UBC Centre for Human Settlements.



President's Posting – September 2010

Let me begin with thanks to my predecessors who founded CUSJ and who set the vision for a Unitarian organization committed to social action and public voice on the issues of our day. I particularly want to honour Philip Symons, who served as president for four years and now serves as editor of JUSTnews. Thanks to Katharine Im-Jenkins for her leadership during her year as President, and for staying on this year as secretary. It was a great pleasure to work with all the board across the country. Most have given us good service for five years or more. It is an honour to serve this deeply caring and socially committed group of people.

At our World Café on CUSJ day in May, we



World Café with l. to r. Rev. Steven Epperson (face only), Sonya Ignatieff, Rev. Fred Cappuccino, and Joan Elgar.

explored our passions and our priorities. There was a solid consensus that we should work with the CUC to promote a National Housing policy built with input from all the groups in our country who are homeless or in substandard housing. The CUSJ Board takes action and

writes letters whenever there is a strong feeling that something is not right—in areas of justice, human rights, and the environment.

For me it has been a very thought-provoking summer. In July, I watched with the rest of Canada as the Harper government spent more than a billion dollars getting our police forces across Canada ready to put down Canadian citizens participating in legal democratic dissent. We saw the negotiated safe demonstration areas closed down and innocent people herded into detention centres without being given their human rights. Later, my husband Ron and I and U*U's from Perth joined the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship to demonstrate against the closure of the prison farms. We watched about 20 Canadian citizens (including a 14-year old girl) get arrested in this protest, but this action barely made the national news. (Go to www.cusj.org to see the letters we wrote on these subjects.)

I find myself, like many other Canadians, quite disturbed by the direction Prime Minister Harper and his Government are taking and his serious attacks on the values that make up our Canadian identity. I am concerned at his harsh actions when people disagree with him. This is a time when we need to “stand on guard” to protect our democracy and our Canadian values. In a time when people are often afraid, we do not need to regress toward a more authoritarian, punitive society. We need to be open to new ways, creative, compassionate and community-building, as the world has to adjust to new energy systems, new food systems, new economic systems and new social systems for the twenty-first century.

We live in a world with great challenges and great opportunities. How will Canadian Unitarians and Universalists participate and even influence the direction of our society in these times? The CUC has recently appointed Richard Armstrong to lead an Active Democracy Task Force to study the CUC's democratic practices, how we make decisions and find voice in the wider world. We in the CUSJ will take some time to reflect on our own. How can we become more engaged as individuals, as CUSJ chapters, and as a Board, to build a strong, powerful voice for Unitarian values and principles in Canada? Please visit our website www.cusj.org to see the many ways that you can get involved and contribute.

Frances Deverell, President

Are you a CUSJ Member?

We need your membership! If you enjoy JUSTnews and are one of those people who pick it up from a table at your congregation's place of residence, please consider joining. The form is on the back page.

Highlights from CUSJ's Annual General Meeting

May 21st, 2010

At the University of Victoria

From 10 a.m. till noon, a World Café was led by the Reverend Frances Deverell. Twenty-four people participated. Three questions were posed:

1. What is the Role of CUSJ—what helps us; what stops us?
2. Given your vision of our role, how should we work on issues related to: Environment, Housing, Poverty, Civil Rights, Democracy.
3. Where is your heart? Where should our focus be?

The most popular answer to the last questions was, "Social housing that is sustainable, energy



CUSJ's World Cafe workshop

efficient, re-used."

The CUSJ Executive has subsequently used the responses to these questions as a guide for this year's priorities [affordable housing being one of them].

From noon to 1:30 p.m. lunch break.

At 1:40 p.m, Katharine Im-Jenkins, the outgoing president, called the meeting to order. The Rev. Frances Deverell gave the invocation, and members were welcomed to Victoria by Christine Johnston.

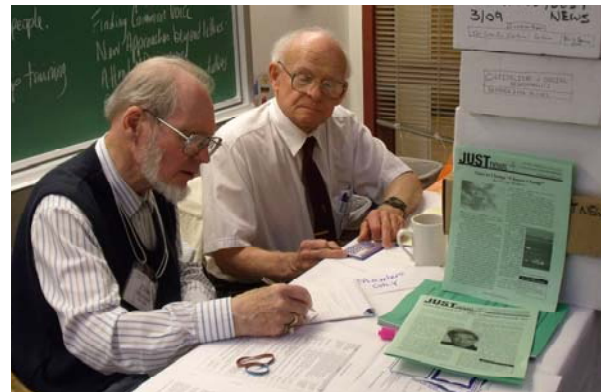
Philip Symons introduced the Guest Speaker, Peggy Wilmot. Peggy is on the Steering Committee of "Faith in Action," a small multi-faith organization in Victoria concerned with poverty and homelessness. She does much of the hands-on work of FIA. She told the story of bodies floating down a river. People rush to save the drowning people until finally somebody asks, "Why are so many people drowning in the river?" It transpires there is a hole in a bridge upstream, and



Guest speaker Peggy Wilmot with outgoing president Katharine Im-Jenkins

people are falling through it. We must address the root causes of poverty as well as help the poor. Faith in Action tries to resolve problems in social justice by empowering people and helping them find the resources to help themselves. Worth and dignity is central. A few years ago FIA produced a report: *Breaking the Cycle of Mental Health, Addictions and Homelessness*.

Bob Staveley gave a very positive financial report. Don McDiarmid reminded members that the annual year now begins on April 1st. He continually updates the membership list, but many members are not paid up, and our membership is dwindling. He asked us to raise the profile of CUSJ in our congregations by talking to friends,



Don McDiarmid, membership, and Bob Staveley, treasurer, at work.

and announcing each issue of JUSTnews and Discussion Paper as it appears. We need to encourage people to become members and to participate.

The slate of directors, including Sean Barron who was nominated from the floor, was approved (see box for list of Directors, their position and region).

Members resolved that the executive explore social networking alternatives to our listserve, such as NING, and report back to our next year's meeting. The need for training in any new social networking was recognized.

Members also resolved that the executive begin planning to move CUSJ's executive base from Ottawa to a new location by the AGM 2012.

The meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m., and the majority of members met at the restaurant *Nostalgia* in Cadboro Bay for a communal meal.

CUSJ Board of Directors May 2010-May 2011

Executive

Ottawa

- Frances Deverell, President, to serve one year
- *Vacant*, Vice President
- Katharine Im-Jenkins, Secretary, one year
- Bob Staveley, Treasurer, two years
- Don McDiarmid, Membership Chair, two years

Members at Large

British Columbia

- Joy Silver, two years
- Debbi Simmie, two years
- Philip Symons, one year (Newsletter Editor)
- Christine Johnston, one year

Prairies

- Adina Lyon, two years
- Rosemary Falconer, one year

Ontario

- Margaret Rao, one year
- Debra Mair, two years
- Pauline Heinonen, one year
- Sean Barron, two years

Quebec

- Ruth di Giovanni, one year
- Christina Duvander, two years

Maritimes & NFLD

- *Vacant*
- *Vacant*

Membership Secretary's Report (2010—abridged)

Our membership year now begins on April 1st. We hope that members will take note of this renewal date.

There is no set amount for dues because we want membership to be available to people irrespective of their circumstances. As a guide, our current average membership donation is about \$50 per membership household (i.e., mailing address) per year. This corresponds fairly closely to the amount required to put out JUSTnews and Discussion Papers, and support some NGOs doing great social justice work.

We currently have 315 addresses on the membership list, of which 119 are paid up. Our hope is to increase that number and bring the second (119) much closer to the first (315).

Don McDiarmid, Membership Secretary



Bob Stevenson, CUSJ president from 2006-2008

My Reflections on our Second Principle

By Bob Stevenson

One of the benefits of being retired is to have some free time to read books and the indie media on the computer. It is so omnipresent that one wonders what seniors did in their spare time before e-mail. Here are a few ideas from books and listserves that relate to our Second Principle, the future where they will apply, and our role as Unitarians.

i. The creators of our Seven Principles did fine work. They start with "To affirm and promote." That is our call to action and Pablo Neruda told us that "Action is the mother of hope." Our Second Principle talks of justice, equity and compassion in human affairs. Note that the word is not equality, for that would cause debate about its various meanings. Equity is more precise. My Collins dictionary defines equity as "fairness, equal adjustment or distribution; giving to each his due according to the sense of natural right." That's almost Marxist. It certainly sounds subversive, like the "s" word that is never mentioned in the corporate media ("socialism"). The irony is that we have a socialist system but it is socialism for the elite, the 2% who own most of the wealth and power. I have been a member here for 20 years and have never heard equity explained as economic justice.

Perhaps our silence simply reflects the dominant neo-conservative political culture of the past three decades, which stresses "inequity" resulting from privatization, downsizing of our public services, corporate tax cuts, and a market economy that produces an obscene distribution of income.

ii. What might the future be where we are called to act on our principles? Let me comment on two imminent threats, namely the state of the US financial system and Peak Oil. Our largest trading partner has been

selling two billion dollars of debt each day for the past decade. As Chris Hedges points out in his book *The Empire of Illusion*, “when the Chinese and the oil-rich Gulf states refuse to buy US treasury bills then the American dollar will be junk.” If you think that his comments are preposterous and that we would have heard about this, I assure you he is not alone. The situation will be compounded with the impact of Peak Oil. It has been the subject of numerous books such as the aptly named *The Party’s Over* by Richard Heinberg. His latest ideas are in our JUSTnews Discussion Paper No. 18 (Spring 2010).

iii. In May 2007 two top best selling books were about religion, actually anti-religion. They were *The God Delusion* and *God is Not Great or How Religion Poisons Everything*. You can relax because Unitarianism is not in either index. We are not identified with any fundamentalism that seeks to take us back to the middle ages. We have the reputation of being progressives. James Kunstler in his book, *The Long Emergency* talks about the majority of people who are “sleep-walking through history.” How else do you explain the election of the Harper government? I’m sorry but I couldn’t resist. As citizens awaken they will be calling for leadership from someone other than the Christian Right. We are starting to provide it. Two hundred people here in Ottawa are organizing Sustainable Living groups to educate ourselves and discuss our response to these challenges. Jane Lindsay and Keith Shackleton of our Congregation are involved. Alistaire Henderson of our Environmental Group has organized our first Community Shared Agriculture project to link a local organic farmer to our Congregation. All the writers who foresee a localized economy stress the provision of food and the 100 kilometre diet. It’s going to happen. In fact we are fortunate because we have an Experimental Farm with soil that has been nurtured for over a century. I foresee it as one huge vegetable patch. It’s inevitable and our leadership as educators and facilitators will make it happen.

In summary our principles are sound; secondly we will be deeply challenged with issues such as financial collapse and Peak Oil. Thirdly Unitarians will be expected to provide leadership. I think that our Second Principle of justice, equity and compassion in human affairs will give us courage on the rough road ahead.

Bob Stevenson is a past president of CUSJ (2006-2008) and a member of Ottawa congregation.

CUSJ Protests Prison Farm Closures

The following letter was sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister of Public Safety Vic Toews by then president of CUSJ Katharine Im-Jenkins on January 10, 2010.

Dear Prime Minister Harper and Hon. Vic Toews, MP:

The Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ) notes that the greenhouse has been closed down at the Pittsburg Prison farm and fears that 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. These actions will reduce access to rehabilitation and training for inmates in Canada’s prison system.



CUSJ believes that the prisoners benefit directly from their prison farm experiences, by caring for and nurturing animals, providing food for local consumers, following routines, running farm machinery and working outdoors in a healthy environment. Witnesses tell us that animal therapy is very effective for many people who have not managed to fit into society. The prisoners themselves talk about how much they value the program, how they willingly get up at 4:30 a.m. each morning to milk cows and perform other farm tasks. The positive interaction they have with the animals is a new experience for many of them. In this environment they learn many transferable work skills that apply to both farming and other employment opportunities. Prisoners are people with human rights and human needs, and the prison farms are one of our most powerful tools to rehabilitate people and ready them for coming back into society.

In addition, the prison farms are an integral part of the local economy in the areas where they operate. They provide farm products to local organizations, donations to non-profit groups and jobs to companies that provide

materials for the farms. Closing the farms will mean that all the eggs, milk and other produce that the farms have provided will need to be obtained elsewhere.....where? from outside Canada? Currently, the prison farms provide much food to the inmate populations in our jails. It is hard to see how the government is going to save money by closing these farms.

Since an unjustly high proportion of our inmates in federal prisons are Aboriginal, we also believe that prison farms should not be closed without wide public consultation, particularly with First Nations communities. In the Aboriginal healing paradigm, prison farms provide three relational outcomes:

1. They help the wrongdoer understand, on an emotional level, the value of creating caring and responsible relationships with husbandry, which is a transferable behaviour to people and society.
2. They help the wrongdoer work towards seeing different ways of relating so as to reduce the likelihood of creating future relational disharmony; and
3. They help the wrongdoer transform past dysfunctional relationships into respectful ones.

Why are we removing what is perhaps the most positive part of our prison system in order to replace it with an inhuman, American-style warehousing approach to our security problems?

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the need for justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Prison farms exemplify these values in relation to our inmate populations and we would like to see them strengthened rather than closed down.

I would appreciate a meeting with you to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely,
Katharine Im-Jenkins,
President
Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice.

Katharine Im-Jenkins,
immediate past-president.



Minister Defends Government's Spending on Housing

Editor's note: Many people have written to the Hon. Diane Finley, Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, in support of Private Member's Bill C304, An Act to ensure secure, adequate accessible and affordable housing for Canadians. Many have received a form letter in response. Here are some pertinent sentences from that response. Note that the government has committed or announced funds for social housing, but with one exception nowhere claims actually to be spending this money—although it may be doing so.



Hon. Diane Finley
“For those whose needs cannot be met in the marketplace, the federal government works with provinces and territories, municipalities, First Nations and other housing stakeholders to improve housing choice and affordability...”

“Our government committed \$1.9-billion in September 2008 to housing and homelessness over five years from April 1, 2009 to March 31, 2014...”

“Since inception, as of March 31, 2010, more than \$1-billion had been committed and/or announced under the Affordable Housing Initiative for the provision of close to 47,000 units across Canada. Provinces and territories cost share federal funding on a 50/50 basis and are responsible for the design and delivery of the programs.

“Canada’s Economic Action Plan builds on these efforts by taking action to strengthen Canada’s economy with a one-time investment of more than \$2-billion over two years to build new and repair existing social housing.

“The federal government, through CMHC, currently spends some \$1.7-billion annually in support of 620,000 households living in existing social housing.... In addition, in the 2007 Budget, the Government announced a \$300-million First Nations Market Housing Fund to support market-based housing on-reserve that will give First Nations people living on reserve a better chance to own their own homes. The fund became operational in May 2008....

“...CMHC continues to offer a broad range of products, services and programs to help the development of affordable housing projects....More information is available on CMHC’s Affordable Housing Centre Web site at www.cmhc.ca/affordablehousing , or by calling toll-free at 1-800-668-2642.”

From a letter dated July 26, 2010.

Canadian Unitarian Council Urges PM to repatriate Omar Khadr

On September 10, 2010, the CUC (Canadian Unitarian Council) Peace Monitoring Group drafted a letter for CUC President John Hopewell's signature urging the government to acknowledge that Omar Khadr's rights have been infringed and to repatriate him to Canada. Here's the letter.

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the Canadian Unitarian Council, I urge the Government of Canada to respond to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Canada (Prime Minister) v. Khadr, 2010 SCC3, [2010] 1 S.C.R. 44¹ case. I also express concern that Canada actively participated in a process contrary to Canadian international human rights obligations and acquiesced to Mr Khadr's ongoing detention thereby depriving him of his right to liberty and security of the person guaranteed by s.7 of the Charter, contrary to the principles of fundamental justice.

We recognize that the Supreme Court of Canada left the decision to repatriate Mr Khadr in the hands of the Government of Canada to be "Consistent with the separation of powers and the well-grounded resistance of courts to intervene in matters of foreign relations." The judgement also stated that "the proper remedy regarding the breach of his rights under Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms is to grant Mr Khadr a declaration that his *Charter* rights have been infringed." Its decision leaves the government "a measure of discretion in deciding how best to respond." That discretion includes the right of the government to seek repatriation of Mr Khadr.

Our Unitarian Universalist principles call for us to uphold the inherent worth and dignity of all peoples and to work for justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Omar Khadr is a Canadian Citizen and, at the time of his detention, a child soldier. He is the only child in modern times ever to be charged with murder for his participation in a battle. Regardless of his guilt or innocence, he is worthy of the rights that are generally guaranteed to all Canadians and deserves to be tried in Canadian courts in an open and transparent manner.

We urge you to:

- 1) respond to the Court's decision by granting a "declaration that his Charter rights have been infringed"² and
- 2) capture the government's power defined in this judgement's decision of the separation of the power of the Courts and the Government by repatriating Mr Khadr no matter whether he is found guilty or not guilty.

Yours sincerely,

John Hopewell

President, Canadian Unitarian Council.

¹see <http://csc.lexum.unmontreal.ca/en/2010sec3/2010sec3.html>

²Ibid.

John Hopewell is a member of First Unitarian Church of Victoria where he has been the UN envoy for several years, and is a past president of the congregation. He is also a past president as well as the current president of the CUC.



Government Cancellation of Imam's Talk Chastised

The following letter drafted by Elinor Mueller for the Ottawa UU Fellowship was sent to Minister of Defence Peter MacKay and all party leaders.

We are appalled by the actions of Defence Minister Peter MacKay in cancelling the public talk at the National Defence Headquarters to mark Islamic History Month by Imam Ziyad Delic, the executive director of the Canadian Islamic Congress. That this was done precipitously and with no direct communication to Imam Delic is inexcusable. Not only is it rude in the extreme, it smacks of knee-jerk intolerance and ignorance of what this man stands for.

As members and friends of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa, we know first hand that Imam Delic has been at the forefront of reaching out and building constructive relationships between



Imam Ziyad Delic

Muslims and other groups in our society. He abhors violence, has stated this clearly, and has been tireless and passionate about finding ways of creating understanding and acceptance on all sides. That he could be held accountable six years later for reprehensible remarks by a former president of the Canadian Islamic Congress not only negates all the positive work that he has done in the meanwhile but also begs the question—can he and his Congress never move beyond this? And whose fault is it, if we won't let him?

We have heard Imam Delic speak about the exemplary way the Canadian integration model works. He is a proud Canadian. As a spokesperson for Muslims he is articulate about the values we cherish in our open, democratic society. He comes from war-torn Bosnia; he knows what racial/ethnic/religious intolerance creates. He has dedicated his life to promoting understanding in our multicultural society. We need to applaud this man who steps forward to build bridges. Peter MacKay and others who have vilified Imam Delic need to ask more questions before making public decisions that encourage division and intolerance in our society.

Critical World Priorities

By Mel and Christine Johnston

We have just returned from an extensive tour of South India and Sri Lanka. Our membership and interest in the IALRW (International Association of Liberal Religious Women) and the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom) motivated us to undertake this journey. Both of us were delegates representing the Canadian IARF Chapter of the CUC at the conferences of these organizations that took place in early September in Kochi, Kerala, South India. (The worldwide meetings are only held once every four years.)

This experience has deepened our understanding of a number of religious traditions and the issues that concerned the conference participants. We listened to speakers from all over the world who presented a wide range of very serious issues and some viable solutions to their problems.

What troubled us was the lack of consensus or even awareness amongst the delegates concerning priorities. The conference organizers chose a variety of good topics for discussion, but did not focus adequately on priorities. So we came away feeling that action on key issues would likely be weakened or non-effective because of the lack of agreement on, and context of priorities.

This has forced us to reflect on the global problems we are all now facing. They are so diverse and profound that one could simply turn away from them and sink into despair and inaction. Those who are concerned are relatively few (TV and the press have done a good job of helping “dumb down” the population as the full story is carefully hidden), but if we/they are to act on any issue at all we/they should agree on the “developing conditions” that are to be faced and decide on what collective and effective action is to be taken.

We believe that these “developing conditions” add up to what might be termed a “paradigm shift” in world priorities. Probably no one can predict the ultimate outcome of such profound global changes, but a starting point may be some kind of agreement on what confronts us at this moment. We believe that most of the primary and secondary problems we face, both locally and internationally, arise out of these “developing conditions.”

No solutions are proposed here. For the time being we seek only a consensus on the “way things are.” The next stage may be solutions and what, if anything, we can do.

We present the following fourteen points for reflection and comment:

1) Deterioration of the global environment continues unabated.

2) Natural resources are diminishing rapidly.

3) Over the globe, there is continuous warfare (often not a declared war) and regional destabilization concerning, mainly, the struggle for, and control of remaining natural resources.

4) The economies of the developed nations are becoming increasingly dependent on producing items for war.

5) The centres of the production of consumer goods have and still are shifting from the developed to the developing countries.

6) The traditional, developed economies are collapsing. This is characterized by mass unemployment and general social dislocation. This is often hidden by our press and leadership, but the number of prisons being built may be a symptom of this.

7) The global financial system is collapsing resulting in the liquidation of sovereign wealth and the personal wealth of millions of people.

8) Both locally and globally the polarization of wealth intensifies, and many wealthy people do not seem to care about the poorer majority.

9) The population explosion continues unabated. By 2050, world population will increase 50% from 6.3 billion to roughly 9.1 billion.

10) The movement of populations is becoming a major global issue, be they refugees or legal and illegal immigrants.

11) The rule of law is disintegrating both locally and internationally. What used to be called fascism, i.e. dictatorial leadership, is increasing in North America and elsewhere.

12) The remaining democratic institutions are weakening in their power. The processes of governance are becoming less and less transparent. Key services are being privatized. Canada is only one example.

13) There is a profound, rapid and continuous change in technologies.

14) The rapid change in communications technologies intensifies widespread cultural change and, in many places, resistance to that change. The new global communications systems provide unprecedented opportunities for both dialogue and authoritarian control.

The internet and international conferences provide places for dialogue across national and religious lines. Action on small issues is great, but let us not forget the larger paradigm or picture.

Mel and Christine Johnston are members of First Unitarian Church of Victoria. Christine is well known for her social justice work and interest in interdenominational and inter-faith affairs. Highlands piper Mel was the first and longest serving editor of JUSTnews. He is a practitioner of Tai-Chi and Buddhism.



The History of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

Editor's note: Part I of this History, published in JUSTnews Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring, 2010, described how CUSJ sprang from the low level of UU activism at the time of Premier Mike Harris's 'Common Sense Revolution' in Ontario from 1995-2002. Although the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition (ISARC) strongly protested Ontario Bill 26 to a legislative Committee in Dec. 1995, Unitarians were not among the faith groups signing the statement. Part II of this history picks up the story from there.

Part II The Founding and Early years of CUSJ

By Norman A. McLeod

With this background, the Social Action Committee of South Peel met with some First Church of Toronto activists to discuss their frustration and possible action. The people at First Church agreed to arrange a meeting for the Greater Toronto Area Unitarians. The meeting was called for Sunday March 24th, 1996.

To the astonishment and delight of the organizers there was standing room only at the meeting, the initial tenor of which can be summed up in one word, FRUSTRATION. All the Greater Toronto Area congregations were well represented at the meeting as well as some from those within driving distance. In the context of the political environment of the day and the action of some other churches, one question was raised repeatedly at the meeting: where are the Unitarians?

CUSJ is born

In no time there was a consensus. Within two hours CUSJ was born and a steering committee was formed. Seventy people had signed up to join the new organisation to be dedicated to raising the level of Unitarian participation and action on social justice matters, and to raise our all-but-invisible public profile on the issues of the day.

The new steering committee elected Doug Rutherford of Toronto First as its chair and set to work with great energy. We produced a statement of purpose, since revised, and had it approved by a number of congregations.

From the beginning, we started to work on letters to politicians, both provincial and federal, on such issues as taxation, the tension between reduction of the deficit and the maintenance of social programs, etc. Many of these letters were written by, and spoke only for, individuals, but a few went out under our

organisation's name. And of course we started work on a newsletter.

Liaison with other faith groups

Associations were formed with other social justice organisations and, in particular, with ISARC. ISARC is a highly effective group of experienced religious and lay professionals, committed to social justice and drawn from many faiths and denominations and social justice groups. It is an Ontario-based organisation that has lobbied assiduously, and at senior government levels, on behalf of the poor and underprivileged against many provincial government policies.

Until CUSJ joined this group, as you have heard, there was no Unitarian representation. Since we joined, we have been represented at ISARC by Jeff Brown, the minister of the South Peel congregation. Consequently, Unitarians are now listed in ISARC pronouncements, books etc. (I believe we were once listed as the Unitarian Peace Council. However, our name was there.) It is a simple statement of fact that this diverse Ontario group was almost invariably, if not always, unanimous in its reaction to provincial government initiatives in the social policy field. Their unanimity and some local experience have convinced me that multi-faith action can be very effective in getting results and may well be very appropriate to small groups such as ours.

CUSJ actions

From the beginning CUSJ worked on letters, usually signed by an individual but sometimes by the chair on behalf of the committee. Among some of the other early activities were, to name a few:

1. Presentation by our chair, Doug Rutherford, to a legislative committee against the (Toronto) amalgamation bill. This was covered on the Ontario Legislative channel with the Unitarian name clearly displayed on the screen.
2. Another presentation to a similar committee by Wey Robinson, now of Hamilton, against the "new speak" titled, *Tenants Protection Act*, an act which, as expected, has made its contribution to homelessness.
3. General participation in vigils, protest rallies, and large meetings of allied groups.

While early work tended to be concerned with Ontario policies we were not enamoured with federal actions either. We were not in sympathy with the total obsession with the deficit and the massive cuts to the Canada Assistance Plan and social programs. These ended the federal government's participation in a national housing strategy, and I need not elaborate on the consequences of that.

(Thinking back on this time, I recall Mr Martin saying that he would balance the budget “come hell or high water.” Well, true to his word Mr Martin has balanced the budget and Hell has come to untold numbers of our poorest and most vulnerable fellow citizens. In addition, great frustration has come to all the lower levels of government onto which he downloaded responsibilities.)

At this stage the fledgling committee was much more concerned with action than administration, and rejected the idea of drafting a constitution as a diversion we did not immediately need. Thus we continued with our letter writing etc. and formed affiliations with other groups with which we shared objectives. These were Citizens for Public Justice, Metro Network for Social Justice and the National Anti-Poverty Organisation. We have made financial contributions to all of these groups.

To be continued in Part III.

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.

Sir Humphrey Confronts Poverty

Excerpts from cabinet secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby's private diary.

October 31—I met the leader of the Houndsworth Council today, at the PM's request. To my surprise, Agnes Moorhouse is a quiet, pleasant, well-spoken middle-class lady, apparently well educated and properly brought up. She is extremely hostile, of course, but I must say she has excellent manners.

She told me I could call her Agnes, and when I addressed her as “dear lady” instead, she objected to what she called “sexist crap.” I settled for Ms Moorhouse, which is pronounced “Mis” and seemed wholly appropriate for her.

She seemed to feel I was out of touch with ordinary people. I can't imagine where she got such a strange idea. I explained patiently that I was fully informed about the disadvantaged members of our society, had read all the official reports, seen all the relevant statistics.

Whereupon she fired a string of irrelevant questions at me: “What does half a pound of margarine cost? What time do Social Security

offices open? How long can you run a one-bar fire for 50 pence in the meter?” And so forth.

Of course I didn't have the foggiest idea of the answers. But she seemed to imply that, if I had known the answers, my attitude to authority would be different.

This is a preposterous notion. We all agree that it would be marvellous if there were no poverty, and we all sympathize with those who are less well off than ourselves. But we simply do not have the resources to achieve an equally high standard of living for everyone.

To my astonishment, she rose from her chair and started wandering around my office, appraising the value of everything she saw. She asked me if my desk was my own. And the portraits. And the porcelain. She knew full well that they were government property, and she estimated that the contents of my office would fetch “eight grand,” which I believe is the vernacular for £80,000.

“Enough to keep 21 one-parent families for a year,” she said.

I was about to explain to her that depriving the rich doesn't create any more wealth for the poor in the long term when she asked me about my salary. I refused to tell her, but she had “looked it up.” Is there no privacy any more, no respect? Is nothing sacred?

She had the audacity to propose that I drop my income to £100 per week, leaving £75,000 a year to be given to the needy.

But enough of such nonsense. I insisted we get to the main issue on the agenda, which was her decision to withhold funds from the police, ban them from the Houndsworth council property, and sack the Chief Constable.

She tried to justify this decision by claiming that the police in her borough are insensitive and racist. I am sure many of them are, but “it is still in the interests of all of us,” I told her, “especially those ordinary people on the high-crime housing estates, to have adequate law enforcement.”

She didn't accept that either, so I warned her that such a denial of police protection could lead to the overthrow of our whole system of government, even our way of life.

“*Your* way of life,” she said with a smile, “not theirs.”

She was, in short, happy to abolish Parliament, the courts, the monarchy—everything! I offered her some matches to burn down my office, but she smilingly declined. I asked why.

“It's a nice office,” she said. “I might need it some day.”

From Yes Prime Minister, BBC, edited by Jonathan Lynn and Anthony Jay; reprinted from the CCPA Monitor September, 2010, p. 17.

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www.cusj.org

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.

I agree with the above Statement of Purpose, and wish to
☐ join or ☐ renew membership in CUSJ.

Enclosed please find my donation of \$_____

Name_____

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Add me to the CUSJ Listserve: ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ I want to know more

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