



Conservatives Proven Stupid, but Progressives are Idiots

by George Monbiot

Conservatism is linked to low intelligence; but the real idiots are the progressives letting it win.

Self-deprecating, too liberal for their own good, today's progressives stand back and watch, hands over their mouths, as the social vivisectionists of the right slice up a living society to see if its component parts can survive in isolation.

Tied up in knots of reticence and self-doubt, progressives will not shout stop. Doing so requires an act of interruption, of presumption, for which they no longer possess a vocabulary.

Perhaps it is in the same spirit of liberal constipation that, with [one exception], we have been too polite to mention the study published last month in the journal *Psychological Science*, which revealed that people with conservative beliefs are likely to be of low intelligence. Paradoxically it was the *Daily*

Mail that brought it to the attention of British readers last week. It feels crude, illiberal to point out that the other side is, on average, more stupid than our own. But this, the study suggests, is not an unfounded generalisation but empirical fact.

It is by no means the first such paper. There is plenty of research showing that low general intelligence in childhood predicts greater prejudice towards people of different ethnicity or sexuality in adulthood. Open-mindedness, flexibility, trust in other people: all these require certain cognitive abilities. Understanding and accepting others—particularly “different” others—requires an enhanced capacity for abstract thinking.

Prejudices arise from conservative ideology, not stupidity

But, drawing on a sample size of several thousand, and correcting for both education and socioeconomic status, the new study looks embarrassingly robust. Importantly, it shows that prejudice tends not to arise directly from low intelligence, but from the

conservative ideologies to which people of low intelligence are drawn. Conservative ideology is the “critical pathway” from low intelligence to racism. Those with low cognitive abilities are attracted to “right-wing ideologies that promote coherence and order” and “emphasize the maintenance of the status quo.” Even for someone not yet renowned for liberal reticence, this feels hard to write.

This is not to suggest that all conservatives are stupid. There are some very clever people in government, advising politicians, running thinktanks, writ-

ing for newspapers, who have acquired power and influence by promoting rightwing ideologies.

But what we now see among their parties—however intelligent their guiding spirits may be—is the abandonment of any pretence of high-minded conservatism. On both sides of the Atlantic, conservative strategists have discovered that there is no pool so shallow that several million people won't drown in it. Whether they are promoting the idea



Inside this Issue:

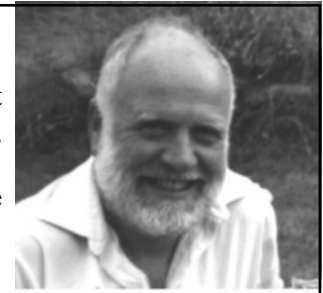
CUSJ AGM
CUSJ President speaks out...
Inequality: is government the answer?
And more...

From the Editor

Canada is sinking to a new political low as the Harper Government, one of the most un-Canadian governments ever, trashes democracy, the environment, health care, and social programs for the poor, the homeless, First Nations people and refugees. All this to spur economic growth, the need for which is doubtful, and to reduce the national debt.

Money, clearly, is more important to the Harper Government than people. Canadian values of compassion and peacekeeping are being replaced with consumerism and militarism, at least by some Conservative politicians. But Progressive Conservatives are starting to object. I have had a soft spot for them ever since Conservative Senator Con Di Niño some years ago urged limiting corporate and individual donations to political parties.

Are we in CUSJ doing enough? George Monbiot, in the lead article in this issue, notes we progressives have become constipated by “terminal niceness.” It’s time to state, politely but forcefully, that those who support Conservative policies are generally the poorly educated, the self-interested, and the stupid, and they are being taken advantage of by a few very smart people of dubious morality. It’s time, as someone has said, to speak truth to power.



that Barack Obama was not born in the US, that manmade climate change is an eco-fascist-communist-anarchist conspiracy or that the deficit results from the greed of the poor, they now appeal to the basest, stupidest impulses, and find that it does them no harm in the polls.

David Frum decries current conservative ideology

Don’t take my word for it. Listen to what two former Republican ideologues, David Frum and Mike Lofgren, have been saying. Frum warns that “conservatives have built a whole alternative knowledge system, with its own facts, its own history, its own laws of economics.” The result is a “shift to ever more extreme, ever more fantasy-based ideology” which has “ominous real-world consequences for American society.”

Lofgren complains that “the crackpot outliers of two decades ago have become the vital centre today.” The Republican party, with its “prevailing anti-intellectualism and hostility to science” is appealing to what he calls the “low-information voter” or the “misinformation voter.” While most office holders probably don’t believe the “reactionary and paranoid claptrap” they peddle, “they cynically feed the worst instincts of their fearful and angry low-information political base.”

The madness hasn’t gone as far in the UK, but the effects of the Conservative appeal to stupidity are already making themselves felt. Yesterday the Guardian reported that recipients of disability benefits, scapegoated by the government as scroungers, blamed for the deficit, now find themselves subject to a new level of hostility and threats from other people.

While society burns, progressives fiddle

These are the perfect conditions for a billionaires’ feeding frenzy. Any party elected by misinformed, suggestible voters becomes a vehicle for undisclosed interests. A tax break for the 1% is dressed up as freedom for the 99%. The regulation that prevents big banks and corporations from exploiting us becomes an assault on the working man and woman. Those of us who discuss manmade climate change are cast as elitists by people who happily embrace the claims of Lord Monckton, Lord Lawson or thinktanks funded by ExxonMobil or the Koch brothers who are now framed as the authentic voices of the working class.

But when I survey this wreckage I wonder who the real idiots are. Confronted with mass discontent, the once-progressive major parties, as Thomas Frank laments in his latest book *Pity the Billionaire*, triangulate and accommodate, hesitate and prevaricate, muzzled by what he calls “terminal niceness.” They fail to produce a coherent analysis of what has gone wrong and why, or to make an uncluttered case for social justice, redistribution and regulation. The conceptual stupidities of conservatism are matched by the strategic stupidities of liberalism.

Yes, conservatism thrives on low intelligence and poor information. But the liberals in politics on both sides of the Atlantic continue to back off, yielding to the supremacy of the stupid. It’s turkeys all the way down.

Published in the Guardian 7th February 2012.

www.monbiot.com

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/feb/05/daily-mail-calls-rightwingers-stupid>

CUSJ President Speaks Out¹

C-38 – Anti-Democracy, Anti-Environment, Anti-Economic Justice

Thank you for inviting me here to speak on behalf of the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, and thanks to all of you who came here today to stand in the rain and protest this terrible budget bill. I didn't want to come out here and stand in the rain for a protest! Did you? I came because my heart is broken. This budget bill is a terrible bill for Canada. I came to stand on guard for Canada. As a Unitarian minister I want to hold up three principles I hold sacred.

The first is democracy. I object to the process of C-38. An omnibus bill hides the facts. An omnibus bill suppresses debate. We pay MP's to examine the details, give close scrutiny, debate, and to LISTEN! Closure gives no time for this. In a democracy, government regulates industry for the benefit of the common good. This budget fires scientists

who study Canada and produce knowledge. This budget fires librarians, archivists and statisticians who organize and store and make meaning of knowledge and who keep our history. This government doesn't want to make decisions or set policy based on knowledge. It doesn't value who we are. This budget fires inspectors in all areas.

When government abrogates its responsibility of oversight, it leaves the fox in charge of the chicken coop. We will have more Walkerton's, food poisoning, Enbridge leaky pipelines, and Gulf oil spills.

The second principle is the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. I believe the earth, the air, the water are



sacred. I believe all species have a right to a place to live. Gigantic scale mining produces industrialized landscapes that wipe out all life in their path. This trend must stop. It is a false economy. We must change our ways to live in harmony with the natural world that sustains us and gives us life. Mr. Harper and Mr. Baird are dismantling our environmental protection, to promote rapid tar sands growth. They want to ignore their obligations to consult with First Nations who live and die eating polluted wildlife. They care nothing for the needs and well-being of future generations. This

bill changes the face of Canada, without debate, for the sake of greed and profit. This government was elected by 39% of the vote, but it wields 100% of the power and gives 61% no respect. One minister can make and change rules with no consultation. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Why are they afraid to talk? Why are they afraid to listen?

Third: I hold justice, equity and compassion sacred. Where in this budget do we care for the homeless? Where in this budget do we care for the hungry? Instead, funding for Medicare and education is threatened. Our pensions are under attack.

For the first time our children will have less security and well-being than we have had. The social safety net that my parents' generation set up is being dismantled piece by piece.

I stand here today, in the rain, to stand on guard for Canada. I call on this government to slow down, slow down, slow down. Break up this bill. Give us a national debate about the kind of Canada we want. We want democracy. We want environmental protection.

We want government oversight of industry. We want respect and consultation with First Nations. We want equity and a fair chance for all people and all life.

¹President Frances Deverell's speech to the Lead-Now rally outside The Hon. John Baird's office, Saturday June 2nd, 2012.



CUSJ Ottawa Chapter on an earlier occasion protesting Omnibus Crime Bill

CUSJ's AGM Monday May 12, 2012, 10:00 EDT

Lord Elgin Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario

Forty-four people attended the AGM, approximately half through on-line live-streaming.

President Frances Deverell reported both good and not so good news. The good news is CUSJ is now using Facebook in addition to our e-list to communicate. One hundred and twenty-one people are on the e-list. The website has been improved and updated. A new West Coast Chapter has been formed.

Not-so-good news: CUSJ wrote fewer letters this year, despite the Harper government's attacks on charitable status of non-governmental organizations that disagree with his agenda [silencing opposing voices and decreasing democracy in Canada].

The President noted that CUSJ needs to work more closely with the CUC, particularly with the CUC's social justice Monitoring Groups.

Membership Chair Don McDiarmid reported we now have a membership of 200 households. The membership year begins in April (and if you haven't yet paid your dues for 2012, they

are now overdue—for payments by cheque see address on last page of this newsletter; by PayPal, see website).

Treasurer Bob Staveley announced that as of March 31st we have a bank balance of a little over \$4,000. Annual expenditure of \$8,912 arises mostly from the printing and distributing of JUSTnews, although these costs are decreasing as more people ask to receive JUSTnews by email.

Elected Board of Directors

President, Frances Deverell

Vice President, Margaret Rao

Secretary, Adina Lyon

Treasurer, Bob Staveley

Membership coordinator, Joy Silver

JUSTnews editor, Philip Symons

E-list manager, Joy Silver

Webmaster, Ellen Papenburg

Web Editor, Frances Deverell

Regional representatives:

Maritimes, Kathleen Webster (joining in Sept.)

Quebec, Christine Duvander

Eastern Ontario, Debra Mair

Ontario, Margaret Rao, Jim Sannes

West, Adina Lyon, Ahti Tolvanen

B.C., Joy Silver, Philip Symons

Keynote Speech by Clayton Thomas-Muller

at the CUSJ AGM May 21, 2012,
Elgin Hotel, Ottawa

From notes taken by the editor of JUSTnews.

We live in a time of incredible challenges. When I was young, travelling by sled dog was normal. And then the snowmobile arrived. We used to be able to pull as many fish from the lakes as we wanted. The earth has provided us with great wealth.

But there are many barriers for First Nations people. My mother took me to Winnipeg to grow up off the reservation, but there were still many barriers in the city.

There is a global triple crisis: 1) the end of the era of cheap energy, which affects everyone in so many ways, 2) the loss of natural capital (natural resources), ecosystems are collapsing as a result of things like the tar sands, and 3) catastrophic climate change.

Canada has its own history of overcoming troubles, reconciliation between natives and non-natives, etc. Some people work to rectify the situation, others either

take no interest or are occupied in other ways. Although the situation has improved, in the last few years the neo-conservative agenda has brought more problems upon us. Scientists have been fired, the omnibus crime bill has been ratified and passed with many implications for First Nations. Aboriginal rights groups have had funding cuts.



Clayton Thomas Muller

One of Canada's biggest problems: the tar sands

One of the worst problems for Canada is the extraction of oil from the tar sands. The amount of earth moved in this process is greater than that moved in the

building of the Panama canal, the Great wall of China and a couple of other constructions all combined. The tailings ponds are huge, and their proximity to the Athabasca River is less than 500 m. If one of the holding dams should rupture—and they do—it would foul 1/6 of North America’s fresh water. In a time of water scarcity and insecurity, this is crazy!

The aviation industry is one of the big drivers of climate change. Why won’t the government let Air Canada employees strike? Because this would jeopardize the jobs of the oil-sands workers, of which there are 77,000.

There are two types of technology for extraction: open pit mining used where oil is above 300 ft from the surface, and in-place extraction where oil is deeper than that. There has been no ecological study of the effects of the latter technology, but it resembles “fracking,” and we know some of its dangers. In-place extraction uses 5-6 barrels of water for every barrel of oil extracted. Both processes use an enormous amount of natural gas. Tar sands extraction is energy cannibalism: 1 barrel of oil to extract 3 barrels of oil (conventional oil wells can recover 100 barrels per barrel used).

Our dollar is now dependent on the price of oil. Retail workers earn little money compared with manufacturers and oil extractors. The tar sands are the crown jewel for the US’s military industrial complex over the next century, and the tar sands represent a huge investment by big oil companies for the same period.

But the communities impacted are many. Pipelines rupture at unpredictable intervals. Tar sands oil is loaded with quartz which erodes pipelines, making spills more likely. The tar sands affect many First Nations and their communities both in Alberta and BC. The superport in BC will also affect many communities there.

Oil extraction from tar sands a moral as well as environmental concern

All of this comes down to morality. Climate change itself is a moral issue. While economics is important, people are dying or are sick as a result of our economic exploitation. First Nations people are

getting sicker than most others because of their close connection to the land. There is no superstore up north. But there is wildlife. A rare form of bile-duct cancer has been connected to chemical toxins in wildlife. If the same toxins were to be found in urban foods, it would be a huge issue. However, because it affects only those living in isolated communities, the government ignores it.

I invite everyone to come to Fort McMurray in August for an annual walk through the tar sands and for a spiritual gathering. Shell’s risk-development conference is currently convening in The Netherlands. First Nations have been working hard against the tar sands and their associated pipelines. The largest protest in history was recently held on the steps of the Parliament Buildings. There is a growing international movement against the tar sands; a paradigm shift is taking place concerning the environment, class and race. There are some actions we can all take: write letters, donate to organizations, target banks and Canadian pension funds (one of the largest investors in the tar sands). We need every Canadian to be on the front line of this fight against the current government’s direction. The next few years will be difficult, but we need to work together.



Tar sands open-pit mining, Alberta

Clayton Thomas-Muller, of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation also known as Pukatawagan in Northern Manitoba, Canada, is an activist for Indigenous rights and environmental justice. With his roots in the inner city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, Clayton began his work as a community organizer working with Aboriginal youth. Over the years Clayton’s work has taken him to five continents. Based out of Ottawa, Ontario, Clayton is involved in many initiatives to support the building of an inclusive movement for energy and climate justice. He serves on the board of the Global Justice Ecology Project, Canadian based Raven Trust and Navajo Nation based Black Mesa Water Coalition. He was recognized by Utne Magazine as one of the top 30 activists under age 30 in the United States and as a “Climate Hero 2009” by Yes Magazine. Clayton is the Tar Sands Campaign Director for the Indigenous Environmental Network.

Bill C-10, The Safe Streets and Communities Act

An Open Letter to Canadian Senators and Parliamentarians (edited) from CUSJ President Frances Deverell

Sunday, 26 February 2012

I have personally sat with the Senate since the beginning of February listening to the witnesses and weighing the issues brought up about Bill C-10 and about the nature of Canadian Society and its criminal justice system. I have tried to listen with an open mind and an open heart.

The issues are more complex than I first realized. I was unaware until near the end that the focus of many of the witnesses was to interpret new language offered that had not been in the old bill. Witnesses wanted to inform the Senate of the consequences of their actions. They asked: “What is serious violent crime?” “What is protection of society?” “Are youth capable of adult moral and rational responsibility?” “What actually deters crime?” “Do victims have rights to services equivalent to that received by offenders?” “Who is a victim of a crime?” How much will this bill cost the system and who is going to pay for it, i.e., what programs will be cut?”

There are other issues. Will this net put many more people at the bottom of the crime hierarchy in jail? Will it incarcerate more aboriginal and mentally ill people? When the government and the Senate ignore the warnings of so many that the marginalized will be the ones to pay, does this mean these people can be thrown away in the interests of the Canadian middle and upper classes?

You are in a better position than I am to know the answers to these questions. I beg you to reflect deeply on them. Release the government analysis of the Bill in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. If this law does not meet the standards of this Convention—to do what is in the best interests of the child—do not pass it. Take it back to the drawing board until it does. The Convention is the best standard we have, and Canada has committed its signature to it. Keep our international agreements.

I agree with Senator Lang that justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. Where we disagree is on how to achieve that. There are times when jail time is the right answer to contain the

behaviour of certain troubled and violent people, but there are also times when it is not. Jail is not the only effective remedy against crime and sometimes it causes more harm than good. We need judicial discretion. When the whole community has problems with alcoholism, drug abuse, and family violence, it is no solution to isolate one individual for punishment. A much bigger investment in prevention and healing in the whole community is required.



Senate, House of Commons

Based on the testimony in the Senate, it is clear that we have systemic ills in our society that need addressing. It is also clear that we must support community-based solutions like restorative justice whenever possible. They will provide much more healing and ultimate community safety than a short term jail sentence with few opportunities for rehabilitation. The needs of victims for counselling and sometimes income support must also be addressed. There are many investments in crime prevention that

could make us safer. I appeal to you with all my heart. Use all appropriate tools available for particular offenders, and invest as much in prevention as you do in enforcement and incarceration as we move forward with our justice system.

In faith,
Rev. Frances Deverell
President,
Canadian Unitarians For Social Justice.

Letters

Dear Editor,

Jerry Storie writes in the Spring 2012 JUSTNews Discussion Paper No. 23 of the problems caused by new immigrants’ value systems being in conflict with Canadian values.

It is unfortunately the case that many born Canadians hold values equally in conflict with the values expressed in the Canadian Charter. Outspoken among these are fundamentalist Christian ministers and Roman Catholic bishops. Even many Conservative members of Parliament oppose equality for all Canadians.

Interfaith dialogue has shown the same diversity within all faiths. Christian and Islamic religious teachings have in common being misused to advocate intolerance. It is not a problem unique to new arrivals.

J. McRee (Mac) Elrod

Letters continued

8 April, 2012

Yesterday I received a lovely letter. First a bit of background.

When in Delaware Ohio, my family purchased, in conjunction with a black family, a failed fraternity property on a then all-white street. We subdivided the property, they taking the red brick “mansion,” and we the “party house” made from the original log prison of the town. We each had five children of the same ages and genders, so in effect we became a blended family, the wives (still sexist we) taking turns preparing dessert every evening. I received a letter from one of their daughters, an excerpt of which follows:

“I often share with people the delight of us five kids growing up with your five kids—all the same age and gender. No one but God could have orchestrated such a combination. Here in the States, where race seems to be at the forefront (still) of so many negative occurrences, I sometimes share with others my childhood memories.

“I speak of a childhood where my parents raised us in such a diverse environment that it became second nature to us to respect everyone’s individuality and judge no one based to their race or sexual preference. What usually follows is my story of our next door neighbours with whom we became very close and whose five children were all the same age and gender as ours. Very secondary, and perhaps meaningless to us as children, was the fact that those neighbours of ours were white.

“Thank you, ‘Mac,’ and as well to your wife and kids, for adding such an important dynamic to my childhood experience. I only wish that others, who can’t help but treat people unfairly based on different skin colour or ethnicity, had the same opportunity I did to grow up next door to the Elrods.

“Blessings to you and yours!”

J. McRee (Mac) Elrod

March, 2012

To the Hon. Thomas Mulcair:

I am seriously thinking of voting for you [as national leader of the New Democratic Party], except for one thing.

When you visited Thunder Bay, I asked you for your opin-



Thomas Mulcair, leader of the New Democratic Party.

ion on the Occupy Movement. You said that you wouldn’t touch it with a ten-foot pole.

Wrong answer in my view and the reason the NDP has little appeal for grass roots movements. If we really want to win, we do have to connect with these people—a diverse lot if there ever was one—ranging from the down-and-out to middle class folk, some without a job, others sympathetic to the occupiers’ protest.

According to an article in the *NY Review of Books* (Feb. 9/12), “a recent Pew Research Center poll found that for the first time more people under the age of thirty view socialism positively than view capitalism positively—although what they meant by socialism was not clearly defined. It seems possible that the wars and recessions of the past decade have given rise to a politicised generation that will have, over the coming years, a lasting effect on the country [USA].”

There was a sense of this happening in Canada at the outpourings of grief for Jack Layton. Because of his tragic death, we have lost that momentum.

If you do become the national leader, I hope that you will not dismiss the Occupy Movement (if it rises again) or a similar movement out-of-hand, but that the NDP should consider its relationship to any movement opposing the great inequality in our society.

Jean Morrison, member NDP
Thunder Bay-Superior North

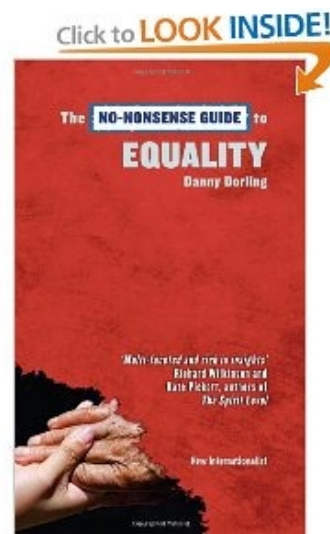
The No-Nonsense Guide to Equality,

by Danny Dorling, published in Canada by New Internationalist Publications Ltd. And Between the Lines, Toronto and Ottawa, 2012, 176 pages, \$16.

Richard Wilkinson, co-author of the celebrated book *The Spirit Level*, says Dorling’s book contains so many important points that you have to read it twice. It’s hard to get a better endorsement than that.

Another selling point: *The No-Nonsense Guide to Equality* is not much bigger than a lady’s wallet, but it contains a range of arguments for greater equality—digging all the way back to the hunter/gatherer societies...

From a book review by Trish Hennessy, *CCPA Monitor* June 2012, p. 5.



Are even our Courts suspect? Gulf Island Tides Editorial

Editor's note: While this editorial addresses some specifically British Columbian problems as well as national ones, its well-written message is pertinent to all Canadians.

These days, the blue elephants in the chambers of political power are shadowy presences, created by lies and secrecy and nourished by political hubris, fear of discovery, and contempt for the citizenry.

Even if we can't see elephants, we will imagine them, and we will assume they are real.

We don't know what actually happened to Afghan prisoners, but we are fully entitled to suspect that it wasn't pretty and that Canada was, to our national shame, complicit.

We don't know what are the terms of the Independent Power Producers' contracts with BC Hydro, but we are entitled to think that maybe they may not have been a good deal for BC Hydro, and eventually, for its customers.

We don't know why both the federal and provincial governments seem to regard Freedom-of-Information requests as such a low priority and an unwanted intrusion on their work, but we are entitled to speculate that much of government would not stand up to the scrutiny of a public armed only with basic concepts of ethics, fairness, logic, and common sense.



David Basi

And, most recently, we don't know what is happening now in the Basi-Virk trial in BC Supreme Court¹, since a publication ban has been imposed by the presiding judge; we don't know why the public has been locked out of the courtroom; we don't know why the trial appears to have been delayed another two weeks; and we don't know why the publication ban itself

was imposed. But we are entitled to suspect the worst, and to believe that uncomfortable truths are being concealed from us. We are fully entitled to make up our own explanations of what actually happened, and what is happening now, and why.

It is bad enough that our trust in politicians has been destroyed; that Canada's reputation is tarnished; it is worse that our faith in government itself is damaged. That the courts should now become an object of growing suspicion is absolutely destructive to a civilized society.

Power that depends on secrecy is an illusion. To use power to maintain secrecy breeds suspicion. Suspicion destroys trust, eventually destroys governments, and ultimately destroys democracy.

Editorial Island Tides, April 29, 2010. www.islandtides.com

¹David Basi [former ministerial assistant to BC Finance Minister], Aneal Basi and Bob Virk [former ministerial assistant to BC Transportation Minister] have been charged with accepting bribes, breach of trust, fraud and influence peddling. The charges arose in connection with the sale of BC Rail to CN Rail. Basi and Virk pleaded guilty at the last moment to having provided insider information and receiving money for this, and were given two years less a day house arrest. All references to fraud were dropped, and their \$6-million legal bill was paid by taxpayers with no explanation as to why the usual procedure was not followed of paying only if defendants are found not guilty.

Middle Class Voting itself out of Existence

By Thomas Walkom

In a strange way, the Depression of the 1930s helped create the modern middle class.

The legacy of this slump may be its destruction.

That the middle class is under attack is not news. People know it in their own lives as pay cheques wither and jobs disappear.

Now a new Canadian study indicates the extent to which this country's middle class has been eroded — even during the so-called good times.

Written by economist Armine Yalnizyan for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, "The Rise of Canada's Richest 1%" uses previously unpublished research to analyse who reaped the gains during the boom years 1997 to 2007.

By an astounding margin, the winners were the ultra-rich. The top one per cent of the population — those earning an average of \$405,000 — appropriated more than 30 per cent of the extra income generated in that decade.

Which left less for everyone else.

In past years, the plight of the very poor has received considerable attention, particularly in this newspaper [The Star]. But increasingly, the other side of the income gap is being addressed.

The Trouble with Billionaires, a recent book by journalist Linda McQuaig and tax lawyer Neil Brooks, takes on the common assumption that the ultra-rich deserve what they make, as well as the belief that well-to-do philanthropists are always motivated by a desire to do good works.

Now Yalnizyan, whose previous work on Canada's growing income gap highlighted problems faced by the poor has turned to the logical corollary: if some people are doing relatively badly, others must be raking the cash in.

Or, to paraphrase McQuaig and Brooks: the problem with billionaires is that they soak up all the money.



CCPA Economist Armine Yalnizyan

Yalnizyan points out in her study that incomes in Canada haven't been so unequal since the beginning of World War II.

And, she notes, the gap between those at the very top and the rest of us—also known as the middle class—is growing faster than at any time in recorded Canadian history.

Canada's middle classes have been under attack before. Middle class wage earners made gains in the early 1920s, only to see them wiped out by the Depression.

Yet it was the hard times of the '30s—and the great boost that those times gave to radical social movements and Communist parties—that convinced governments they had to act.

Programs like unemployment insurance, welfare and old age pensions—as well as union-friendly labour laws—were designed in large part to prevent social upheaval.

And they worked. In the decades after World War II, the North American middle classes prospered. The gap between the rich and everyone else narrowed significantly.

Ironically, Depression-era left-wing agitation had helped to create, by the 1950s, a stable, conservative, bourgeois (and anti-Communist) society.

Today, we see the same impoverishment of the middle classes that Canada endured 75 years ago. Employers use high unemployment levels to beat back unions. Governments use recessionary deficits as a rationale for cutting social spending.

But today, unlike the '30s, no popular radical movement threatens the social order [*Ed's note: this was written before the rise of the Occupy Movement*]. So there is little reason for governments to do anything serious.

Instead, there is pressure—from the middle classes themselves—to adhere to the bourgeois virtues of thrift and individualism by cutting taxes, reducing social spending and limiting the power of unions. [*And this pressure still continues today. Ed.*]

As documented by Yalnizyan, such measures help the very rich. But they don't help the disappearing middle class.

Thomas Walkom's column appears Wednesday and Saturday in The Star. This one appeared on December 01, 2010.
<http://www.thestar.com/News/Canada/article/89927>



On Inequality: Is Government the Answer?

by Reilly Yeo

The complex forces of globalization and technological change have not eliminated the ability of citizens to use the state as a means to fight inequality.

Inequality is finally, mercifully, a topic of common concern. Articles are regularly popping up in the mainstream media, expressing relief at our new-found willingness to address the topic, from people who had a platform for addressing such issues well before the Occupy movement did. Lately these articles seem to support a common premise: inequality is driven by complex forces some of which are, to quote Globe and Mail columnist Jeffrey Simpson, “beyond the reach of government.”

Are technology and globalization beyond the reach of government?

Technology and globalization are most often singled out as examples of these forces. From global editor-at-large Chrystia Freeland of Reuters, “[Rapidly rising inequality] is the consequence of a massive—and broadly positive—economic transformation ... the big drivers are the twin revolutions reshaping the world economy—globalization and new technology.” From Vancouver Sun columnist Craig McInnes, “Why are we working harder and earning less? ... technological change and globalization.”

Certainly, technology and globalization—if they can be so neatly separated for analytical sake—are playing a major role in structuring the world. But instead of simply suggesting that this explanation is “politically inconvenient,” as Freeland does, we need to take a careful look at how government shapes, is shaped by, and responds to these forces.

Globalization and technological change are the result of our collective actions. So, we need to remember, is government. It doesn't take much to realize that very selective, government-driven trade liberalization is a key component of globalization. Government decisions to enter trade deals also coincided with decisions to de-fund education and social services, to ignore the effect that both globalization and technology would have on the working class, who faced either a transition into high-skilled labour, or the decline into informal and low-paying service-sector jobs that has gutted wages on the lower end of the spectrum.

We need more than a simple return to “big government”

To be clear, looking back to government doesn't mean blind support for the postwar consensus model of big government. It's past time for us to innovate beyond that model, not by abandoning the idea of government, but by being both imaginative and pragmatic about what it can look like in a networked society. Abandoning the idea that government—which, we easily forget, can simply mean the body of people who make and enforce laws, a body we are all potentially part of—can solve problems is some of what has gotten us into this mess of inequality in the first place.

When people are increasingly in dire need, we should be loath to see government get smaller. Even many economists would agree with this statement. Instead we should focus on seeing how it can become more open, more democratic, and more widely distributed. Words like “capitalism,” “socialism,” or “anarchism” have utterly failed to help all of us come together to agree on what a more equitable distribution of governing powers might look like.

Looking to government is essential if we want a meaningful democracy that combats inequality. So is re-conceiving what government means to us. What we're learning from this crisis and the response of Occupy movements is that “grassroots” democracy is the logical response to political systems that have lost touch with the body politic. That lesson is long overdue.

Needed: grassroots participatory democracy

What we may be learning, too, is that democracy at a “grassroots” level is the only real kind of democracy, since the alternative—representative and bureaucratic—has failed to meet the basic condition of striving to serve all people equally. The postwar consensus was fantastic for producing a large middle class, a great achievement; but let's not forget that it still left a marginalized underclass who were alienated both from and by the bureaucratic structures of a centralized government.

That bureaucracy, which is more easily navigated and manipulated by those with power and resources than by anyone else, has also contributed to the creation of a dominant class who can curse and cajole the state into doing its bidding. This undermines democracy. That shouldn't shock us, as former American president Franklin Roosevelt predicted it in 1938 and former president Thomas Jefferson predicted it almost 200 years ago.

Globalization and technology have helped produce such shocking inequality in large part because the policies that shape the development of these two forces have systematically been made through bureaucratic processes that exclude and alienate the “grassroots.” As a result, “public” policy has failed to prioritize the

Forgetting that government can solve problems is part of what got us into this mess in the first place.

public good. Turning away from government now because of the complexity or inconvenience of these two forces would only increase their negative effects.

Inequality cannot be addressed without confronting complex technological and globalizing forces—forces that both drive, and are driven by, government policies. If we ignore either of those realities, we're mystifying a conversation that desperately calls for clarity. Let's focus like a laser on re-imagining what democratic government looks like by returning to the pure and simple roots of the concept: equal participation in making laws and policies that leave us free to flourish, that help refine and articulate our notion of and commitment to the public good. Almost nothing is beyond the reach of this force.

Reilly Yeo is Managing director of OpenMedia.ca. This article first Posted: Jan 05 2012.



Reilly Yeo, a member of the Re-imagine CBC team, holds the Re-imagined CBC logo that participants created at the Re-imagine launch. Photo: Angus Wong

Smiles

In Pierre Trudeau, Canada at last produced a political leader worth assassinating.

—Irving Layton

One Russian is an anarchist, two Russians are a chess game, three Russians are a revolution, and four Russians are the Budapest String Quartet.

—Jasha Heifetz

The French have just invented the Michelin bomb. It destroys only restaurants with fewer than four stars.

—Ambrose Bierce

Canada is useful, if only to provide me with furs.

—Madame de Pompadour

From CCPA Monitor June 2012, p. 9.

Charter of Rights failing to protect poor Canadians

by Laura Track

Today, April 16, 2012, our Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms turns 30. Like all 30th birthdays, it's an opportunity to celebrate the Charter's many successes, and to reflect on the challenges yet to be overcome. There's no denying it—at 30 years old, the Charter is a grown-up, and must be assessed according to adult expectations. Have the values underlying the Charter—respect for human dignity and personal autonomy, commitment to social justice and equality—been adequately reflected?

The Charter holds government accountable

The enactment of the Charter and its placement within Canada's Constitution as the highest law of the land significantly transformed Canadian law and politics. The Charter reflects the notion that government power should be limited by justice, that certain rights and freedoms must be protected from state interference, and that individuals should have access to a court of law to challenge violations of their rights. Canadians have used the Charter to fight for equality for gays and lesbians, to confront discrimination in the provision of health care and other government services, and to challenge police action that undermines liberty, among many other significant battles. The Charter has served as a very powerful tool for holding government accountable.

The Charter protects fundamental freedoms

The Charter protects fundamental freedoms including freedom of conscience, expression, and assembly, as well as democratic and voting rights, rights on arrest and detention, mobility rights, and the right to equality before the law. It addresses language rights and the preservation of aboriginal rights, as well as Canada's multicultural heritage. Importantly, the rights it protects are not absolute; section 1 of the Charter declares that guaranteed rights may be subject to reasonable limits, so long as those limits can be justified in a free and democratic society.

Protecting individuals from state interference is important, but our liberty also depends on our ability to access the resources we need to survive and thrive: education, health care, and an adequate standard of living, including housing, food, water and income. Fulfilment of these economic and social rights is also necessary for our enjoyment of the rights the Charter does cover.

The Charter has failed to protect basic human rights

To date, the Charter has been largely unsuccessful in responding to one of the most pressing human rights issues of our time: the vast and deepening economic inequality that exists in our society. While the rights to shelter, food, or an adequate standard of living are not explicitly set out in the Charter, claimants have attempted to use its provisions to argue for protection of these basic necessities of life.

By demonstrating the ways in which poverty undermines Charter rights to life, liberty and security of the person and violates the principles of equality and fundamental justice, claimants have attempted to show the courts how the injustice of poverty is a human rights violation. However, few poverty-related Charter cases have been successful. Canadian courts continue to treat economic and social rights as "second class" rights, rather than as essential components of the Charter's equality and security guarantees.

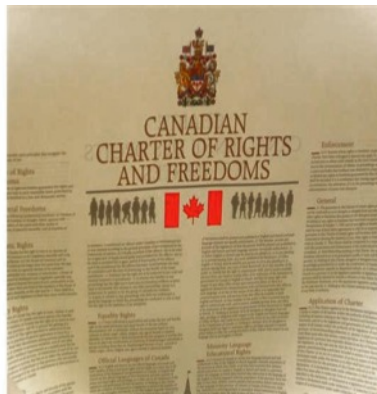
Right to a decent life still not recognized

A low point in the Charter's 30-year history was the case of Louise Gosselin, who challenged a Quebec government policy of providing significantly lower levels of social assistance to claimants under the age of 30. The rate was well below the poverty line and vastly insufficient to allow young women and men to meet their basic needs; Gosselin went hungry, lived homeless, and exchanged sex for shelter and sustenance. While the case was brought on the basis of age discrimination, the real issue was her experience as a woman living in poverty, forced to compromise her body, her dignity and her safety because of a lack of state protection. Yet, the majority of a divided Supreme Court of Canada held that her Charter rights had not been infringed.

The Charter at age 30 still needs maturing

The Charter is described by the Supreme Court of Canada as a "living tree," capable of growth and expansion. At only 30 years old, the Charter still has great potential to grow and expand. Growing up means taking responsibility. It means acknowledging that in our abundant society, 3.5 million Canadians live in poverty, a disproportionate number of them women. A mature Charter must respond to this injustice; in another 30 years, let us hope it has fulfilled its promise.

Special to the Vancouver Sun. Laura Track is legal director of West Coast Women's Legal Education & Action Fund.



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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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