



Why Minority Governments?—A Little History

And why British Columbia [and Canada] should shift to proportional representation.

by Rafe Mair

“The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to speak of many things: Of shoes, and ships, and sealing-wax” and what the hell we’re going to do in B.C. [and Canada] to bring about the critical changes to our system where about a quarter of the electorate is electing a sizeable majority.

The numbers are simple. About 50 per cent vote and 40 per cent of that vote elects a majority. That majority has an iron grip on the tools of power for four years, leaving the rest of us relying on the Opposition to make noises that show up the government’s failings—although there is nothing they can do about them.

This system is called first past the post (FPTP). Canada is one of the last so-called democracies to operate under this system

It’s interesting that as I write this [Oct. 2013] German Chancellor Angela Merkel has been returned to office with 41 per cent of the vote, but because her nation operates under a partial proportional representation (PR) system Ms. Merkel must form a coalition. The German system is much like that of New Zealand’s mixed member proportionate (MMP) which I’ll get to in a bit.

In a pure PR system, voters are offered platforms from several parties and they select whom they wish with seats in the legislature being in proportion to the votes the parties receive. Each party selects a list of proposed members and for a party to gain any seats they must meet a threshold of five per cent (or whatever per cent is the law) before they can take a seat. Under this system there are no constituencies—the formula is a simple matter of Grade 1 arithmetic.

Making every vote count

Before I go further, let’s talk about constituencies.

These came into existence because of the long distances between voters from the capital. If FPTP is in place, people in remoter areas feel comforted in knowing that they have someone in Victoria [Ottawa] especially mandated to look after their affairs.

Those who have been MLAs, if they speak honestly, will acknowledge this is rubbish. The government is run by the premier and his or her, forgive the lack of manners, henchmen in cabinet. In B.C. there is, effectively, one super leader with the rest of the government MLAs doing what they’re told. The distance is of little consequence now that email gives voters instant contact with their MLA. With a proportional representation system, however, there is this to consider: parties will be forced by circumstance to demonstrate concern for all voters, since all votes count. No area can be ignored just because it doesn’t “vote right.”

Mix it up

In 1999, Gordon Gibson, Nick Loenen, Gary Lauk and I—all former MLAs from different parties, studied various systems. The four of us met several times and came up with a report containing, amongst other

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Rafe Mair

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Wendy Bergerud 1954-2016

“Wendy’s passing is a great loss to the Fair Vote community, where she worked tirelessly to promote proportional representation at all levels of government. She was a wonderful teacher, a passionate advocate for civil rights, and a loving wife and mother. From her classmates in graduate school at Waterloo, to colleagues in provincial ministries, she was widely regarded as an amazing statistician and biometrician. Wendy died of cancer on March 8th, 2016.”

(Excerpted from her obituary in the Victoria Times Colonist, April 9th, 2016).

The editor of JUSTnews is grateful to Wendy for her friendship, and for having shared with him and others her deep knowledge of electoral systems, obtained during her membership on the B.C. Citizens’ Assembly. Many past articles in JUSTnews have benefited from her comments and expertise. Her sense of fun and her laughter were infectious.



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things, a recommendation for a constituent assembly to recommend how we should govern ourselves.

I took this report to a radio interview I did with then opposition leader Gordon Campbell and he vowed to take it to his caucus, and when he became premier he brought the recommendation to fruition. The constituent assembly, 50 men and women from all corners of the province, recommended something called STV which, to my way of thinking, was the best recommendation I had seen. Unfortunately it was complicated and easy to throw nasty one-liners at. Insiders like Bud Smith for the [B.C.] Liberals and the [B.C.] NDP’s Bill Tieleman fought it tooth and nail. Insiders always like the status quo and many would rather spend ten years in the wilderness, able to achieve nothing, in the hope of a chance themselves to have a four year absolute dictatorship.

The main arguments marshaled against the STV proposal were that multi-membered constituencies would be too clumsy and the system would lead to minority governments.

To take up the first complaint, let’s turn to the New Zealand system. In that country, constituencies are made larger because half the seats are off party lists. In these times of emails and live face-to-face telephones (Skype), servicing such ridings is easy enough.

I believe that minority governments make good sense. They drastically rein in the premier’s powers as he [or she] can easily be brought down. The minister of finance no longer is able to cram his budget through the legislature but must face serious debate by MLAs with power. The sham debates that now take place will be long gone as all MLAs now have a say. Voters will be able to insist that the MLA pay attention to their opinions because the MLA, now no

longer chained to the party whip, has the power to act upon his constituent’s wishes.

Minority report

Minority government doesn’t mean a rudderless government. In many places where PR or MMP are in place, governments have been very stable indeed, the shining example being Germany. The overarching fact is that parties are never in a hurry for an election. The system in fact creates a mutual assured destruction element meaning that parties will cooperate. Most minority governments last the full term, but only by trashing the arrogance that is the hallmark of FPTP and listening to all.

The main problem with the PR part of MMP is the party list. Will nominees be selected because they’re large donors to the party or someone the party seeks to reward? It seems to me that a province of two major parties which stacks leadership meetings and candidates for the legislature would be loath to worry about such things. Remember that each party has to put up its best, lest the other have better lists. In any event, this is easy to overcome—by a system of “primaries” as in the US.

If we are not content to continue a system where a quarter of the voters gets 100 per cent of the power we should do something.

I throw my modest proposals on the table.

Rafe Mair’s political career began in 1975, when he was elected as a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the British Columbia Social Credit Party representing the riding of Kamloops. In 1981, he left government and has since served as a radio talk show host in Vancouver. In the early 1990s, he gained national notoriety and support alike for his role as an outspoken opponent of both the Meech Lake and Charlottetown constitutional accords.

This article was excerpted from TheTyee.ca, 1st Oct. 2013.

CUSJ NEWS

CUSJ AGM Vancouver 2016

by Christine Johnston

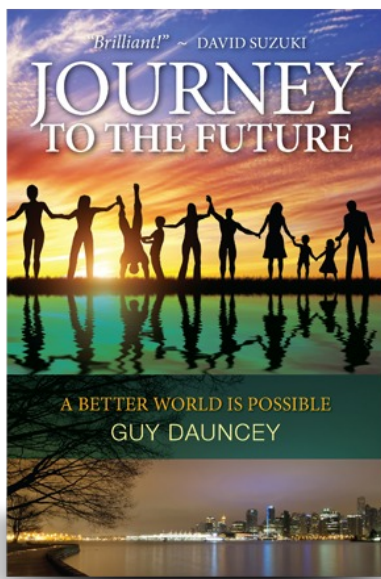
The CUSJ AGM events were some of the highlights of the CUC May weekend in Vancouver this year, in particular the dinner on the Saturday night followed by a “moving movie” on Haida Gwaii, and the AGM itself on the following Monday morning. Both the dinner and the AGM were well attended with about 50 people present at the AGM plus up to 18 on-line at one time or another.

The AGM began with table discussions of the pros and cons of forming local Chapters. Greater Toronto and Vancouver Island are contemplating forming chapters to add to those already established.

Margaret Rao will continue as our dedicated President, and after 10 years in the financial saddle, Bob Staveley will be replaced this autumn by David Mason. Two new faces were added to the CUSJ Board, Marlene Koehler (secretary) and Erol Court (Member at large, Ontario).

Members were reminded that congregations do not make donations to CUSJ, but rather pay for “expenses for services rendered” (such as JUSTnews). Congregations need to request an invoice to keep church treasurers and the CRA (Canadian Revenue Agency) happy.

Our Board is involved in many diverse areas as detailed in the CUSJ Annual Report. One organization that several people felt deserved greater support from CUSJ was the International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group (ICLMG). Steps for reaching out to the younger generation via social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) were raised by three young adults present.



The new covenant between the CUC and CUSJ concerning their different responsibilities and roles (at the end of the Annual Report) caught my eye as an important clarifying document. As a past CUC and CUSJ Board person (as is Leslie Kemp) I found this simple contract key.

Keynote speaker Guy Dauncey of Ladysmith, Vancouver Island, gave a dynamic presentation based on his new book/novel, “Journey to the Future” (the year 2032). He illustrated his talk with colourful and clever illustrations on screen. His powerful optimism and humour captivated the audience. May his optimism prove justified!



Christine Johnston is a member of First Unitarian Church of Victoria.

JUSTnews Proof-Reader Retires

If JUSTnews has few typographical, spelling or punctuation errors, it's in great part because of the dedicated work of the two proof readers who carefully peruse every issue.

Bert Macbain has been on the “production team” of JUSTnews, probably as a proof-reader, since the Winter 2000 issue, when we began recording the names of those helping produce our newsletter. She retired with the production of the last Discussion Paper, Winter 2015-16, and has been replaced by Alastaire Henderson.



Bert MacBain,
photo Mary Cramer

I want to thank Bert for her 16 years, at least, of proof-reading JUSTnews. Not only has she found and corrected many small items that didn't catch my eye, but she also questioned grammar and other matters not strictly within a proof-reader's purview. I deeply appreciate Bert's long service and her dedicated eagle-eyed work.

Editor

CUSJ Board Passes Motion in Support of Dr. Hassan Diab

CUSJ's mission is to defend and promote Unitarian principles, such as the inherent worth and dignity of every person, justice and equity in human relations, democracy, peace, and liberty for all. These principles call upon us to be a witness for justice on behalf of those who have not had access to fair treatment by the law in Canada.

Given that:

- Hassan Diab was born in Lebanon. He studied sociology in Beirut, received a PhD from Syracuse University, New York, and moved to Canada where he became a Canadian citizen in 1993. He taught Sociology at Carleton University and the University of Ottawa prior to his arrest. He holds dual citizenship.
- Dr. Diab was arrested in 2008 by the RCMP after being accused by France of involvement in a 1980 bombing in Paris that killed four people and injured dozens. France requested his extradition from Canada based on intelligence France received in 1999. Literally no one knows its reliability. France does not extradite its citizens.
- Hassan steadfastly maintains his innocence. He claims this is a case of mistaken identity and that he was not in Paris in 1980.
- Diab was held in prison until he was able to negotiate bail with strict conditions including curfews, confinement to the Hull-Ottawa area, and having to pay for his own security ankle-bracelet at a cost of about \$2000/month. He endured constant unscheduled visits to his private living quarters by the RCMP. He was never charged and was detained under similar conditions to those detained under security certificates.
- The evidence that France submitted has been thoroughly examined and discredited in several Courts in Canada. The intelligence information offered was found to be unreliable. The Crown Attorneys (representing France) withdrew the intelligence information from the case against Hassan. They also withdrew two handwriting analysis reports after the defence showed that documents being



Hassan Diab

used for comparison were not written by Hassan but by his ex-wife. In spite of this embarrassment, the French submitted a new handwriting report making the same claims. Five world-renowned handwriting experts testified that this report is fatally flawed, and that an objective analysis would point to Hassan's innocence.

- Canadian Justice Robert Maranger found the French handwriting analysis report against Hassan "very problematic," "convoluted," "confusing," and "with conclusions that are suspect." The judge dismissed virtually all of the other evidence as insufficient to meet the very low threshold for extradition. However, he declined to exclude the discredited handwriting analysis report despite his numerous misgivings about it. He added that "the prospects of conviction in the context of a fair trial, seem unlikely" but that Canada's extradition law left him no choice.
- The Court of Appeal for Ontario refused to overturn Justice Maranger's ruling. In a decision that surprised many Canadian extradition experts, the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear Hassan's appeal in November 2014, despite its pointing to conflicts between B.C. and Ontario Court interpretations of the Extraditions Act. He was extradited to France the next day without being allowed to say goodbye to his family a day before his daughter's birthday.
 - Hassan has been in pre-trial detention in a prison outside Paris for 426 days now [March 23, 2016]. He could wait several years more before the investigating magistrate decides whether to bring him to trial. His applications for bail with house arrest and electronic monitoring have been repeatedly denied. He spends 20 hours of 24 in his cell and has 4 hours a day when he can either exercise or study.
- This makes seven years Dr. Diab has been held in detention or on repressive and expensive bail conditions in either Canada or France without charge or trial.
- Canadian law assumes that Canada has extradition agreements with countries that have fair justice systems. However, France was criticized in a well documented 2008 Human Rights Watch report for accepting unsourced intelligence and for running unfair trials.
- In Hassan's case, the intelligence and handwriting reports that the French withdrew in

Canada remain in the dossier in France and have been used to deny Hassan bail. If a trial is held, Hassan would not be able to challenge the unsourced intelligence or cross-examine his accusers because no one knows who they are. Hassan Diab was never actually charged with anything prior to his extradition, although Canadian extradition law only allows extradition to face charge. He has been in detention or out on bail without charge for seven years. According to current Canadian law his detention should be illegal, and is certainly not in the spirit of Canadian values.

Hassan Diab has not had the due process of law that should be the right of any Canadian citizen.

The Resolution:

Be it resolved that the board of the Canadian Unitarians For Social Justice (CUSJ) supports the right of every person living in Canada, whether legally or illegally, to know the nature of charges and evidence against them, to have a right to review the evidence against them and to have a right to a fair trial according to the standards of the Canadian legal system, including the right to cross examine witnesses as to the validity of their evidence in a Canadian court of law;

Be it resolved that the CUSJ Board call on the Canadian Ambassador to France to visit Dr. Diab regularly and ensure he receives fair treatment while incarcerated in France;

Further *be it resolved* that the CUSJ Board call on the Government of Canada to request the Government of France to stop delaying and either charge Dr. Diab and give him a fair trial, based on reliable, untainted evidence; (the faulty handwriting analyses should be discarded, as they were in Canada, as well as the unsourced intelligence against him); or release him and send him back home to Canada based on a lack of evidence against him.

This CUSJ press release dated March 23rd, 2016

Update May 24, 2016. Former Ottawa academic Hassan Diab is back in a Paris jail barely a week after he was released on bail.

French prosecutors filed an appeal on Saturday [May 21st], after terrorist suspect Diab was released on May 17, alleging he was a flight risk and a threat to civil order.

Diab's Canadian lawyer Don Bayne called the decision "tragic."

<http://www.ottawasun.com/2016/05/24/french-appeal-court-orders-diab-back-to-jail-pending-trial>

Letter: response to Dale Perkins

In JUSTnews (Winter 2015-2016), Dale Perkins peppers his letter "Why be a Unitarian-Universalist?" with questions (I counted 9) and you, dear editor, wrote that you would publish short responses. So I will pick only this question: "Are there significant features about the UU faith community that warrant serious consideration in contrast to other faith or secular groups?"

My experience with three faith communities over the years (Anglican, Quaker, Unitarian) is that each may be principled in its own (often similar) words, but all such communities wax and wane, substantially but not only because of leadership, both professional and lay. Like life, everything is always in motion, sometimes rising, sometimes falling. So if one is looking for a spiritual home, timing counts. The Unitarian church Dale visited (mine), is waxing. There is energy and intent to act on a variety of social justice fronts, and that matters most to me. For more years than I care to add, I have heard torrents of words. Spiritual cheer-leading. That said, the messages I hear Sundays I find eloquent, thoughtful and relevant. This, or maybe this church, is a demanding place (sometimes too much for me) because it holds me to account. This I need because, sadly, I am old and lazy.

I remain close to a local meeting of the Religious Society of Friends because from time to time I badly need the silence they generously share. I have never heard any community as noisy as ours before and after service. It is a barnyard of gabbling. Friendly gabbling, or is it gossiping? One of the great unattributed achievements of church communities generally is the fertile setting they provide for gossiping.

But I am also drawn to where I am by my curiosity. We treasure diversity. We embrace theists and atheists, people who lean towards Buddhism or Islam and people who are recovering from their last church or just looking hard and listening with care, trying to find their niche. My experience with Christian churches includes being puzzled by and then offended by their exclusivity, at least at the institutional level. In matters of faith, no one has all the answers. At my place, especially in the small groups, I get a chance to hear life stories from people who have ranged the world, sought the insights I am also seeking, had experiences they are willing to share. I love that part.

"Are there significant features about the UU faith community that warrant serious consideration in contrast to other faith or secular groups?" For me, yes, there are. If anyone is curious, I can only suggest, in the words of the man from Nazareth, come and see.

Don Vipond, *First Unitarian Church of Victoria*

Democracy

“Institutionalized Bribery” Survives in Canada

Democracy Watch

In December 2006, Parliament passed Bill C-2 (the so-called “Federal Accountability Act” (FAA)) which made historic changes to Canada’s 33-year-old political fundraising rules in the *Canada Elections Act*. Among other progressive changes, as of January 1, 2007:

- there is a \$1,200 annual limit on donations by each Canadian to each federal political party, and a combined total limit of \$1,100 annually to each parties’ riding associations (and, during an election campaign, the same combined total limit applies to donations to each party’s election candidates);
- corporations, unions and other organizations are banned from making donations;
- disclosure of political donations is more comprehensive and timely, although disclosure of a party or candidate’s donors is still not required before an election vote takes place;
- secret, unlimited donations of money, property and services to election candidates are prohibited, and;
- federal politicians are prohibited from having a trust fund.



Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch

- all candidates and parties must be required to disclose publicly all donations, gifts, and the status of any loans, during the week before election day, so voters know who is bankrolling campaigns;

- disclosure of the identity of each individual donor’s employer must be required (as in the US) and disclosure of each donor’s direct organizational affiliations must also be required (to help ensure that corporations, unions and other organizations are not funnelling donations through their employees or board members);

- secret, unlimited donations of money, property and services to candidates in nomination races and political party leadership campaigns must be banned (Bill C-2 (the FAA) bans secret donations to election candidates, but not to candidates in nomination races nor to party leadership candidates);

- secret donations may still effectively occur if federal governments do not comply with the UN Convention Against Corruption or other international standards that require the monitoring of the bank accounts of all public officials who have decision-making power;

- riding associations and political parties are still allowed to have a secret trust fund and send secret, unlimited donations to the fund (as long as they don’t use the donations for campaigns);

- the penalty for accepting a secret donation of money, property or services, or having a secret trust fund, must be increased from ridiculously low penalties of \$500 to \$2,000 to \$100,000 and a jail term;

- given that federal election dates are now fixed every 4 years, spending by candidates, riding associations and political parties must be limited for at least 6 months before each election day;

- donations by political parties to riding associations and candidates must be limited to decrease the possibility of party headquarters influencing the selection of candidates, and to make associations and candidates more independent from party headquarters; and

- spending limits must be established for political party leadership campaigns to ensure a level playing field for all candidates (spending by nomina-

Loopholes in Federal Canadian Law

While the new law limits the influence of money in politics, the following loopholes that allow for secret, unlimited donations need closing:

- donation limits and disclosure requirements are needed for “volunteer labour” donated to parties and candidates during nomination races, or election and party leadership campaigns; this this will close a loophole that allows corporations, unions and other organizations to give employees paid time off to work on campaigns;
- loans to parties, riding associations, nomination race candidates, election candidates and party leadership candidates from corporations, unions and all other types of organizations must be banned, or at least strictly limited, and loans from individuals must be limited so that they cannot be used to influence the government or politicians;



One of the homes of “institutionalized bribery.”

tion race candidates, election candidates, and political parties is already limited during campaigns).

Loopholes in Provincial and Territorial Laws

All Canadian provincial and territorial laws have the same loopholes as the Canadian federal law above, and in addition they have the following loopholes:

- other than in Manitoba and Québec, donation limits are much higher than a few thousand dollars, allowing wealthy interests to buy influence with the government;
- several provinces, including British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and PEI do not have donation limits;
- other than in Manitoba and Québec, corporations, unions and other organizations are allowed to make donations;
- all jurisdictions allow fundraisers to act as “bundlers” of donations from other individuals, without any disclosure of the identity of bundlers;
- other than in Ontario, donations to parties are disclosed only once each year; donations to riding associations everywhere are disclosed only once each year; and disclosure of a party or candidate’s donors everywhere is not required before an election vote takes place;
- secret, unlimited donations of money, property and services to all types of political candidates are allowed, and;
- candidates, elected officials, riding associations, and political parties are allowed to have a secret trust fund and accept secret, unlimited donations to the fund (as long as they don’t use the donations for campaigns)

Excerpted from *Democracy Watch*,
<http://democracywatch.ca/campaigns/money-in-politics-campaign/>

Media Centralization

by Elizabeth May, MP

I am the only federal party leader to raise the issue of corporate control of media. It is a clear threat to a healthy democracy to have the bulk of the media owned by a handful of large vertically integrated corporations. Postmedia (a successor to the empire built by Conrad Black) contains 42 daily newspapers across Canada—including both Vancouver’s major dailies.

CTV once had an ownership interest in the *Globe and Mail*, but divested its remaining interest this summer [2015]. Meanwhile, Global is owned by Shaw. Sun Media controls all the Sun chain of papers as well as TVA, the French commercial network in Quebec—itself owned by PQ leader P.K. Peladeau. A handful of owners control most English and French media.

Counteracting centralized media

It is not a healthy situation. So the challenge in a democracy is to counteract the corporate media message. One could argue that is why we have a public broadcaster—CBC/Radio Canada. However, [in October 2015] it is abundantly clear that the public broadcaster is pulling punches to avoid angering the Conservative administration.

While it is clear the strategy of giving the Conservatives an easy ride has not worked in the interest of CBC, it remains, sadly, the case that our national public broadcaster is not the solution to the threat of corporate media centralization.



Social media

Can we democratize media through social media? Can we tweet and Facebook our way to digital democracy? I have certainly tried in this [2015] election. When corporate media (and the Conservative party) kept me out of their small private debates—*Globe and Mail*, Munk Debate and TVA, I tweeted my way into the space. It is never as effective as actually being there, but is a way of reaching millions. It is a particularly important way to try to reach young people. If youth decide to vote in this election, it will change everything.

I have also communicated using twitter and Facebook, replying to questions from any interested Canadian. The challenge of expressing any idea in 140 characters forces an economy of words. Tweets are to newsletters as haiku is to epic poetry. It can be done!

Town hall meetings

I try between elections to stay in touch with constituents through townhall meetings—reporting to my bosses, the citizens of Saanich-Gulf Islands, all the key issues and bills on which I have been working. Regular townhall meetings give me the best form of communication—an honest exchange of ideas in person in a respectful space. With nine townhalls twice a year I have kept in regular contact. In January the total number of attendees exceeded 1,500.



Newsletters

Newsletters also help. I have innovated with what other MPs use as a promotional flyer mailed at public expense to every home. In my case, I have treated my mailing on the public dime as a form of indy media—covering one issue in depth four times a year.

Those newsletters helped me a great deal as each one included a questionnaire with a space for comments. Citizens in Saanich-Gulf Islands have a lot to say and we usually received hundreds of comments in response to each mailing.

Reform corporate media rules

Even though we have a voice in the face of corporate media, that does not mean we should ignore the problem. It's time to take up the recommendations of 35-years-ago from Tom Kent's Royal Commission on the Fifth Estate. We need to apply anti-trust rules to corporate media monopolistic practices.

We need to diversify the voices of newspapers, radio and TV. And we need to fully fund the national public broadcaster and remove political interference from its governance.

We must name and address the problem before the next election.

Elizabeth May is the Member of Parliament for Saanich and the Gulf Islands. This column was published in Island Tides, October 12, 2015.

Economics

It's Time to Restore Fairness in Canada's Tax System

by Lindsay Tedds

Canada's tax system is a mish-mash of deductions, exemptions, credits, transfers, and rates that has no unifying objective or premise and disproportionately benefits the wealthy. A simple way to tax the rich and restore fairness in our tax system is to reduce the numerous and sometimes overlapping tax expenditures that do not have clear public policy benefits that benefit high income individuals at the expense of low income households. Doing so would free up much needed funds for targeted tax and income relief to those households that need it most.

End taxbreaks

According to the Conference Board of Canada, there are now nearly 200 tax expenditures, also known as tax breaks, related to personal income at the federal level alone. These federal tax breaks result in an estimated \$100-billion of foregone tax revenue annually. It might surprise most Canadians to learn that these tax breaks amount to nearly 80 per cent of total personal income taxes collected. Without these tax breaks and assuming no behavioural changes, we could collect \$225-billion.

Tax expenditures include both tax credits and deductions. In essence, tax expenditures represent revenues that the government has elected not to collect from tax payers for one reason or another.

Child fitness tax-credit popularity misplaced

Some of these tax expenditures may be popular with tax payers, but their popularity is misplaced. For example, research has found that the Child Fitness Tax Credit and the Public Transit Amount, directed \$107 million (70 per cent of the value of these tax credits) in tax relief to the top 25 per cent of tax filers. Because these tax credits are non-refundable not all households that claim them actually derive any benefit at all, demonstrating the complexity these credits add to our tax system.

Investors' tax deductions

Other tax expenditures are not well known at all. For example, there's a deduction and a tax credit for investors who purchase qualifying flow-through shares (FTS), common shares in oil and gas companies that pass on tax deductions to the investor. While industry lobby groups claim this tax treatment greatly benefits exploration in Canada, in reality FTS mean that tax payers are shouldering the burden associated with high-risk investments by

high-income individuals. In fact, investments in FTSs are predominately done for tax planning reasons and are actively marketed to investors who are looking for last-minute tax deductions and credits. An unintended cost of the FTS regime is that it is likely shifting investment dollars away from other, less risky, and unsubsidized investments.

Stock options

Another example is the special deduction on stock options. It has been estimated that limiting this deduction would increase taxes paid by wealthy Canadians by approximately \$300-million a year.

Lindsay Tedds is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria, B.C. The Globe and Mail published this on Friday, Nov. 08 2013, 5:45 PM EST. This column was part of The Globe's Wealth Paradox series—a 10-day in-depth examination of our growing income inequality and the best ideas available for improving upward mobility for all.



Refundable Tax Credit Could Reduce Income Inequality

by Miles Corak

A reasonable goal for public policy would be to eliminate inequality in the lower half of the income distribution, to have everyone standing at least one-quarter of the way up the income ladder.

For a single person this would require an annual income of \$20,000, and for a two-parent family with two children about \$40,000. At last count about 3 million Canadians, including 570,000 children, don't have that much money. The way to change this is simple: Just give them more money!

If only it were so.

The law of unintended consequences can undo the best of intentions: Give people money, and it should be no surprise that they will work less. [However, see next article by Muriel Wiens.] This is why social policy now comes with strings attached.

The Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), which the government describes as an earnings supplement for low-wage workers, pays no benefits unless someone is making more than \$3,000 a year, and pays more as a claimant earns more. This creates a strong incentive for those not working, and possibly collecting welfare, to jump into the job market rather than withdraw from it.

But the program, which has the potential to play a big role in the fight against low income, is not

generous enough to have a major impact: it provides a maximum of \$970 a year for someone making at least \$5,800, but less for each dollar earned above \$10,000 or so, amounting to nothing at all for those with incomes above about \$17,500. The rates for families are higher, but in the end do little to give the working poor a significant boost.

What is holding the government back?

This is an expensive program, and costs are surely part of the story, as is the fear those already working will slack off. But proposals to enhance the WITB have to be judged by taking into account all of the costs, and all the benefits. For example, kids raised on the bottom rungs of the income ladder have a disproportionately large chance of growing up to be low-income adults. Being raised in a family with more money improves the odds of breaking out of an inter-generational cycle of disadvantage, but how the parents get the money also matters.

Working is much better than passively receiving a government cheque, since welfare and unemployment insurance also have a way of being transmitted from parent to child. The inter-generational benefits of having working parents, and of lowering the time and financial stress they face, even if they work fewer hours, is also an unintended consequence of the program and one that speaks to a real benefit. In fact, the often-overlooked, perverse incentive from expanding the generosity of this program is that it may succeed too well in increasing work effort.

Would a substantial rise in benefits flood the market with low-wage workers, create more competition for jobs, shift bargaining power to employers and induce them to lower wage rates even further?

Although the law of unintended consequences will always be in force, it need not be a showstopper. If we think hard about all of the costs and all of the benefits, proceed steadily and incrementally while learning along the way, there is no reason why the WITB can't reduce some of the most damaging consequences of greater inequality by lifting those at the bottom of the ladder.

Miles Corak is a professor of economics at the University of Ottawa. He blogs at mileskorak.com and you can follow him on Twitter @MilesCorak



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Guaranteed Annual Income Tested

by Muriel E. Wiens

It was forgotten for years, until by chance, in 2005, professor Dr Evelyn Forget stumbled across 1,800 dusty boxes of research results, and went to the Manitoba town of Dauphin to see whether anyone would talk to her about the time when everyone in the area lived above the poverty line.



Dr Evelyn Forget, University of Manitoba

What happened in Dauphin

A typical story she heard was that of a single mom with teen-aged daughters, who used her income to get an education and, with a part-time job, taught her daughters that a far different life was possible for them than they had expected before the income assistance. That story was mirrored by others.

From the disorganized reams of evidence, Dr Forget winnowed out results that showed that when everyone was free of poverty, there were fewer accidents, kids stayed in school longer, hospital trips were decreased, and local businesses thrived. The more ephemeral effects of the experiment in “Minicome,” of improved self esteem and sense of belonging to a community, cannot be measured, except perhaps in fewer teen pregnancies and decreased crime, other effects of the Dauphin experiment. Opponents—who thought that it would result in larger families and an unwillingness to work—were proved wrong. There was a slight effect of refusing to work but this was corrected by only deducting fifty cents on the dollar from earned income for a time after an unemployed person found a job.

How it worked

Here’s how it worked: the experiment was supported financially by the Pierre Trudeau government providing 75% of the cost, and by the provincial government providing 15%. Every household was allocated the same basic amount: 60% of the Stats-Can low income cut-off, depending on family size and location.

Actually, Canada has a partial income support program in the form of a Guaranteed Income Supplement for Seniors, and a national child care benefit. But the gap in the system is the lack of support for the working poor.

Those who balk at the price might not know that evidence from the Dauphin experiment indicates that

a Guaranteed Annual Income would save millions in social assistance and health care, and in reduced child care and elder care programs, let alone the cost of policing. The Dauphin experiment suggests that poor people use crime to gain income, and once financially supported, find a less risky way to live.

Eligibility could be assessed by income tax records. In fact, Milton Friedman, that staunch defender of corporate profit, supported the idea of what he called a “negative income tax” to top up the incomes of those below the poverty line.

Not a socialist plot

It isn’t really a right-left issue. It has more to do with niggardliness. Harper’s negative attitude to income support differed from that of the Conservatives under Robert Stanfield, in 1969, who favoured an income assistance plan. Hugh Segal, a long-time Conservative Senator, has commented on Harper’s attitude: “It’s an abomination that he wouldn’t discuss it when we have close to ten percent of the population living below the poverty line.” The Harper government couldn’t see that ‘it was not charity to the unworthy and lazy.’

Furthermore, it might surprise Donald Trump and his yelling supporters that Thomas Paine, one of the American Founding Fathers, wanted citizens to be paid a bonus to equalize property and eliminate ‘the invidious distinctions between rich and poor.’ He suggested it might be paid to all citizens at the age of 21. That would get rid of post-secondary education debt, a modern scourge on the young that shames us all.



Guaranteed income being tried now

Income support is an idea whose time is coming, and is supported by the Green party. Although the Swiss turned it down, fearing that people wouldn’t work if they weren’t bribed, other countries are conducting pilot projects similar to the Canadian Dauphin experiment. Holland and France both initiated pilot projects in the last months of 2015. Finland has initiated a program to pay every citizen \$1,100 per month and scrap all other benefits in an effort to reduce the ‘unemployment’ rate. Perhaps this is ‘code’ for poverty.

Closer to home, Alberta is considering it. The mayors of Edmonton and Calgary enthusiastically support the measure as a way to eliminate the poverty trap. It would end child poverty, a problem our politicians wring their hands over but do nothing to solve.

Federally, this is something of his father’s heritage that Justin might wish to honour.

Muriel E. Wiens lives on Gabriola Is., B.C., and “likes to think about the world.” This article is reprinted from Island Tides, January 28, 2016.

Wealth, and How the Rich Are Regaining Power in Brazil

by Gwynne Dyer

The Brazilian Senate voted 55 to 22 in May 2016 to impeach President Dilma Rousseff. She will be suspended for the next 180 days while the same body tries her on the charge of understating the size of the budget deficit before the last election.

Official justifications for impeachment

Two justifications have been offered for this unseating of an elected president, but both are pretty flimsy. The first is the legal justification, which is that Rousseff's government tweaked the accounts a bit to make Brazil's financial situation look less bad before the last election in 2014.

She did, but which elected government anywhere does not try to put the best face on its figures? Anyway, nobody believes that this is the real reason for her removal from power.

The broader political justification is that she has made a mess of the economy. The economy certainly is in a terrible mess—in each of the last two years it has shrunk by four percent, one-tenth of the population is unemployed, and inflation is exploding—but every big commodity-exporting country has been in the same mess since the global financial crash of 2008. The demand for their exports simply collapsed.

Rousseff didn't create this crisis, but inevitably she gets the blame for it. That, rather than some obscure legal issue, is why nearly two-thirds of Brazilians think she should be impeached. But while she might have done better at managing the crisis, in a democracy political questions like this are normally settled by elections, not by impeachment.

The 55 senators who voted to impeach her all know that, but they couldn't resist the temptation to take her down. Which brings us to the real motive behind all this, and the worrisome comparison with Thailand, where the generals took over in 2014.

The real motive for impeachment

The Thais, like the Brazilians, evicted their military rulers from power in the 1980s by non-violent political action. As is bound to happen in a democracy, both countries then developed powerful political movements that demanded a redistribution of wealth in favour of the impoverished half of the population. And in both countries the prosperous urban middle classes mobilised against this threat.

The hopes of the Thai poor were focussed on Thaksin Shinawatra (prime minister 2001-2006) and later, after the military forced him into exile, his sister Yingluck Shinawatra (prime minister 2011-2014). In Brazil the left-wing leader was Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva of the Workers' Party (president 2002-2010), and subsequently his close ally Dilma Rousseff (president 2010-2016).

In Thailand the struggle between the rural and urban poor (the 'yellow shirts') and the defenders of the economic status quo (the 'red shirts') descended into the streets early, and had got quite bloody by the time the generals seized power in 2014. They intervened in favour of the 'red shirts', of course, but they seem determined to hold on to power themselves for the foreseeable future.

So the wealthy can welcome the military

Brazil's politics have been less violent and the military have not intervened (yet), but it is just as much a class struggle—made more intractable by the fact that in Brazil social class is colour-coded. The white half of the population is mostly prosperous, the "pardo" (mixed-race) and black half mostly poor.

The most important single measure of the Workers' Party government is the famous Bolsa Familiar, a straight cash payment to those whose income is below the poverty line. To qualify, they must only ensure that their children attend school 85 percent of the time and are fully vaccinated. It has lifted 45 million people, a quarter of the population, out of poverty.

Nobody will admit that this crisis is about ending government subsidies for the poor, but the crowds demonstrating against Rousseff's government have been almost entirely white. So is the cabinet sworn in by the new interim president, Michel Temer. But Temer is going to have a very hard time running the country.

Outraged Workers' Party supporters are already being radicalised by the "coup" that has driven Dilma Rousseff from power and the struggle is moving into the streets. Mass demonstrations and barricades are now a common sight, and the protesters will find it hard to resist disrupting the Olympic Games that start in Rio de Janeiro in early August.

Which may provide the excuse for the Brazilian right to welcome the military back into power.

Gwynne Dyer is an independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries. 13 May 2016.



President Dilma Rousseff



Poverty

Poor, White, Angry—and Dying Younger

by Trevor Hancock

Donald Trump's supporters are often described as poor, white, poorly educated and angry. This is partly true (others also vote for Trump), but there is a related factor that has been less remarked upon, and that I believe is important. The death rate among poor, white middle-aged Americans is increasing.

I suspect this poor health is both a symptom of and a contributor to the anger and despair that is being felt in the American middle class, and that is translating into a political movement that many are warning is reminiscent of the birth of fascism in the 1930s.

Importance of education

Writing in *The Atlantic* this month [March 2016], Derek Thompson suggested there are four characteristics of Trump's voters: they didn't go to college, don't think they have a political voice, want to wage an interior war against outsiders, and live in parts of the country with racial resentment.

Thompson cites data showing that for those without a high-school diploma, real earnings fell 20% for men and 12% for women aged 30 to 45 between 1990 and 2013. Those with a high-school diploma or some college also did poorly, although not quite as badly, but the proportion of men in this group working fulltime, full-year fell from 76% to 68% in that same period.

On the other hand, employment and real earnings increased for women with a bachelor's degree (men stayed the same), and even more for men and women with an advanced degree. Thompson notes, "Non-college men have been trampled by globalization, the dissolution of manufacturing employment, and other factors, for the last few decades."

Voiceless and powerless

Thompson's second characteristic is that Trump voters feel voiceless. He cites a RAND study that found "voters who agreed with the statement 'people like me don't have any say about what the government does' were 86.5% more likely to prefer Trump."

In a recent CBC Radio interview, American journalist Thomas Frank pointed out that Trump talks a lot about trade deals that have led to unemployment, reduced wages and other harmful im-

pacts. Unsurprisingly, these trade deals are very unpopular with those most affected—the people who are core Trump supporters. Yet Frank notes that both the Democrats and the Republicans have supported free-trade agreements and continue to do so, so they cannot speak for those who have been "trampled" by globalization.



Donald Trump

In a September 2015 article, Anne Case and Angus Deaton (the latter won the 2015 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics for his work on health, well-being and economic development) described an increase in the death rate of white non-Hispanic men and women aged 45 to 54 between 1999 and 2013. They noted that this is unique to whites, is largely driven by increased deaths from alcohol, drug use and suicide, and is accompanied by declines in self-reported physical and mental health, and increases in pain and disability.

The role of inequality

Moreover, they noted that this increase in death rates was not seen in any other rich country, and that "it was driven primarily by increasing death rates for those with a high-school degree or less." In fact, death rates did not change for those with college education less than a bachelor's degree, and declined for those with a bachelor's degree or higher degree. The parallels with the population said to be core supporters of Trump are striking.

In discussing the factors underlying this "epidemic of pain, suicide and drug overdose," Case and Deaton noted that "ties to economic security are possible." They cited "widening income inequality," slow growth in earnings in this group and concerns over future pensions. A less comprehensive social safety net than is found in Europe and Canada is probably not helping.

The lesson here is simple, and should be a warning to Canadian governments that do little to address poverty. Drive people into poverty and despair and you will sow the seeds for premature death rooted in alcohol and drug abuse, leading to social breakdown, anger and extremist politics [and radical religious views].

Dr Trevor Hancock is a professor and senior scholar at the University of Victoria's school of public health and social policy. This article was published in the *Victoria Times Colonist* on Wednesday March 23, 2016.



Homeless Need a National Plan

Victoria Times Colonist Editorial

Fierce criticism erupted when the government of Saskatchewan sent two homeless men to B.C. They were given one-way bus tickets to Vancouver and Victoria by the province's social services ministry, and basically shown the door. One of the men reportedly has epilepsy.

Officials in Regina are clearly embarrassed by the blow-back, and a review of procedures is underway. But callous, and indeed disgraceful, as this incident was, it is merely the tip of an iceberg.

Last year in B.C. almost one in seven new income-assistance recipients came from elsewhere in Canada. More than half—1,561 out of 3,100—arrived from Alberta. Saskatchewan was also high on the list, although every province in the country contributed.

Migrating homeless can cause unmanageable pressures

Both B.C. Premier Christy Clark and Housing Minister Rich Coleman took the high road when questioned.

"Wherever they are in Canada...if they decide to come to British Columbia, we're going to support them," Clark said. And Coleman noted that Canadians have the right to live in any province they choose.

Yet staff who run homeless shelters in Victoria and Vancouver report unmanageable demands for accommodation. There is a strong sense, in both cities, that resources are stretched to the breaking point.

The migration from the prairies is due no doubt to hard times in the oil patch. But every region of the country is confronted with economic difficulties that could get worse before they get better.

The question is, what should be done? While humanely speaking it is our duty to help anyone in need, there is a practical issue to be faced.

The solution must be national

It is unreasonable to fix on B.C., or any other province, the responsibility for dealing with the challenge that is national in scope.

In other fields, health care for example, the need to break down regional barriers has been recognized. A Victoria resident who falls ill in Ottawa will be treated there, no questions asked. And when the bill is sent to B.C., it is promptly paid.

A similar approach is long overdue in supporting the homeless and those who can't find work. If unemployed Albertans move to B.C. and require assistance, it seems reasonable to ask our neighbours to bear some of the cost.

There are two ways of approaching this. Health bills are paid through reciprocal agreements worked out between the

provinces. That might offer a solution.

More likely, though, a national overlay will be needed. The provinces share health costs, in part, because the Canada Health Act gives every citizen a portable right to medical care. It is the moral and legal fabric of this statute, particularly the portability aspect, that creates the framework for cooperation.

Along the same lines, we need a nationally authorized benefit that the unemployed or homeless can take with them, funded by their home jurisdiction. Yes, this is a departure from tradition. And no doubt it will be resisted initially in poorer regions, whose government might be happy to see out-of-work residents get up and leave.

But while no doubt there will be obstacles, this shouldn't be mission impossible. Every part of the country has an equal interest in ensuring citizens are properly treated. This can only be done if all provinces play a part.

An ethical duty

Consider it nation-building—part of the unfinished business of bringing our country together. For Canadians are fair-minded, and expedience at the cost of what's right offends us.

As well, there is a new administration in Ottawa, pledged to a kinder and more inclusive style of governing.

So let the premier and her ministers appeal to this larger audience. They have an unanswerable case to make.

Reprinted from the Victoria Times Colonist, Sunday March 20, 2016.



"In-tent City" across the street from Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, Victoria, B.C.



Environment: Climate Change and Energy

Climate: Time to do what is necessary

by Elizabeth May, MP

I write this from the train heading back from New York to Canada. The last time I made this trip was September 2014, coming home from the Peoples' Climate March. My daughter and I marched with over 400,000 people through the streets of New York, with the explicit goal of encouraging the climate talks to succeed. My favourite placard that day read "It is time to stop debating what is possible and start doing what is necessary."

That one sentence encapsulates our current debate: some want to keep arguing about what is possible, while the rest of us understand we are running out of time to do what is necessary.

In September 2014 the pressure was for the Lima talks at COP20 to go well enough to create a positive outcome for Paris in 2015 at COP21. But as has been clear from commentary, reasonable people can disagree on how much the Paris Agreement has met the demands in the streets. And complicating this assessment has been a lot of confused and confusing reporting.

Erroneous reporting is dangerous

In nearly every media story about the Paris Agreement, new climate targets and how we get there, there are frequent errors. The constant repetition of these errors is not just frustrating; it is dangerous.

The difficulty is in sorting out what the Paris Agreement requires of nations, from what Canada has so far committed to do, and what it costs to get there. I have read news articles that assume Canada's target is consistent with the Paris goals—it is not. I have read stories that assume the new Liberal administration of Prime Minister Trudeau has adopted the previous government's weak climate target. It has not. I have read articles that claim the Paris Agreement is not legally binding. It is.

These issues tend to get muddled. Even one of my most respected sources of information, the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO), has this week stumbled slightly into error.

COP21 goals

Let's start with the goals of the Paris Agreement. It is a turning point. For the first time

195 nations have essentially agreed that our economies are going off fossil fuels. The treaty calls for reducing emissions sufficiently to avoid global average temperature ever exceeding 2°C above what it was before the Industrial Revolution, while striving to keep the world safer by holding global average temperature to no more than a 1.5° rise. That implies keeping concentrations of green house gas (GHG) to no more than 425-450 parts per million. And that measurement means very dramatic reductions in GHG emissions.

The Paris Agreement requires countries to place their own plans, both for emission reduction targets, adaptation and financing to help poorer countries, in line with the United Nations climate secretariat. These targets can be removed at any time, but only to be replaced with more aggressive targets. This is the "ratcheting up" feature of the Paris Agreement.

Current goals lead to failure

The current aggregate of all tabled targets of all nations—if achieved—take us to a range of global average temperature increase of 2.7° to 3.5°C. Anyone familiar with climate science will recognize in those temperatures a threat to human civilization itself. They are not merely "failed targets;" they suggest a "failed species."

Of all the currently tabled targets, Canada's is among the weakest. While the European Nations pledge to reduce GHG to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, Canada's pledge is even weaker than the US, and is the weakest of any G7 nation. Our base year is 2005, when emissions were far higher than in 1990. And our deadline year is five years later than the US. Under former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada pledged to reduce emissions 30% below 2005 levels by 2030.

If Canada wants to have any credibility in signing and ratifying the Paris Agreement, then our target must be significantly boosted. It is time to stop debating what is possible and start doing what is necessary.

Opponents use errors to push back

But there is push back. Even though Environment and Climate Change Minister Catherine McKenna has always referred to the Harper target as "the floor," forces are gathering to set that goal in concrete. Bear in mind, Harper never consulted provinces (or anyone) before setting that target. Nor did his government develop any plan.



There was a Cabinet document prepared for the Conservative administration as the 30% below 2005 by 2030 target was being put forward. It suggested that Canada should look to buy credits in other nations.

PBO commits two errors

That thought brings me to where the PBO paper committed two serious errors. Firstly, the Parliamentary Budget Office is to be commended for undertaking the work. It relied on the NRTEE (National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy) paper from a few years ago estimating the cost per tonne of reductions within Canada. It also looked at carbon pricing estimates from those calculating how high a carbon price would need to be to meet our targets, *by that mechanism alone*. The PBO estimate of what it will cost every Canadian is premised on the assumption of a \$100/tonne of reduction cost.

But this is an “all hands on deck” kind of moment. Carbon pricing is only one mechanism. Improving energy efficiency, hiring legions of carpenters, electricians and plumbers to reduce the 30% of GHG emissions that come from our leaky buildings, and improving the East-West electricity grid to bring green renewable power from one province to another, will accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. Carbon pricing is a necessary step, but it is not by itself enough, and by itself it is too costly.

We need to involve developing countries

Moreover, to reduce GHGs fast enough to avoid 1.5 degrees, we would be smart to put resources into reductions in developing countries where the price per tonne is much lower. The discussion in the Cabinet document to the previous government was right about this. But the PBO paper leaves out this aspect of meeting the 1.5 degrees target. The atmosphere does not care where the GHGs come from—a tonne of GHG from India or Venezuela has the same warming impact as a Canadian tonne.

Secondly, the PBO is to be commended as well for figuring out that Canada’s current target does not meet even the 2°C level of ambition. So PBO describes the current Harper target as “interim.” The implication is that sometime before 2030 we have time to move to a tougher target. But we do not. Carbon dioxide emitted today remains powerfully warming the atmosphere for another 100 years. As Secretary General Ban Ki-moon explained at the United Nations signing ceremony on Earth Day 2016, the window is rapidly closing on our opportunity to keep global average temperature [increase] below 1.5°C. We must ramp up targets faster and everywhere.

Canada can lead

And here is where Canada can play the most important role. We need to lead in ratcheting up our target. We need to add up all the current provincial plans and demand more of provincial governments while pressing the federal government to use all of its jurisdiction and powers to be much more aggressive. Fortunately, spending on green infrastructure will help our economy. Fortunately, catching up with other countries’ investments in clean and green technologies will create more jobs.

The risk is not in doing too much to address the climate crisis. The threat is of reckless complacency and the siren call to “be reasonable.”

Slightly edited from

<https://www.greenparty.ca/en/blog/2016-04-25/climate-time-do-what-necessary>, April 25, 2016.

US childrens’ environmental rights upheld

by Patrick Brown

District Court in Eugene, Oregon upheld the rights of 21 children, ages 8–19, representing their generation, and Dr James Hansen, representing future generations, to the exercise of due process by the US government to control and limit the greenhouse gas CO2 in and over the United States. This is a novel legal action with novel objectives.

This hearing dealt specifically with motions by the US government and the fossil fuel industry to dismiss and strike the childrens’ action, which names the government and the industry as Defendants. Their motions were denied, thus freeing the action to move on to further stages in the judicial process.

Their remaining agenda is ambitious. They seek a declaration that the *Energy Policy Act, Section 201*, is unconstitutional. (This section authorizes the sale of biomass from federal lands for energy generation.) They also ask the court to order the Defendants to prepare an ‘enforceable national remedial plan to phase out fossil fuel emissions’. And, very specifically, they seek a declaration that the government’s authorization to Jordan Cove Energy for an LNG terminal at Coos Bay is unconstitutional.

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President
Margaret Rao

Editorial Committee
Philip Symons, Editor; Don Vipond,
and Leslie Gillett.

Production and Proof Reading
Philip Symons, Alastair Henderson,
and Debra Mair,

Distribution Lists
Joy Silver

Submissions to or enquiries regarding
JUSTnews should be addressed to:

Philip Symons, Editor JUSTnews
1394 Vista Hts.
Victoria, BC, V8T 2J3

Phone 250 592-6484
philmar@islandnet.com

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- 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
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