



The History of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

from Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice's website, www.cusj.org

Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ) was formed in 1996 when about 70 members of five Unitarian Universalist Congregations and Fellowships of Greater Toronto met to discuss their concern with government cuts to social services.

The founding group, of about 35 members, felt that more must be done by Unitarians within their churches and the greater community to protect the social programs that define Canada as a civilized and compassionate nation. From its modest beginning, CUSJ has grown into a national organization with membership coast to coast. Our membership

now numbers approximately 350 (in 306 households) representing 44 Congregations and Fellowships.

Unitarians have a proud history of being in the forefront of the struggle for social change and justice. CUSJ follows in the footsteps of our forebears by keeping their spirit very much alive.

The Pre-history of CUSJ

by Norman A. McLeod

Website editor's note: On February 13, 2000, Norman McLeod, a founding member of CUSJ, gave a talk to the Unitarian fellowship of Peterborough on the history of CUSJ to that time. Since the history of CUSJ had not yet been officially recorded, the JUSTnews's editorial board offered to publish the talk.

UU activism at a nadir

Canadian UUs, with some justification, have always perceived themselves to be in the forefront of the fight for social justice. The degree to which this perception is valid is sometimes open to question in my view. Our enthusiasm for social justice causes, while

having a solid underlying base, seems to ebb and flow with the times. In 1996, when CUSJ was formed, it seemed to many of us that we were in an ebbing mode.

Many older Unitarians looked back with nostalgia to the 1950s, '60s and '70s when social action was strong in our denomination, as it has been throughout

our history. In the Toronto area, some felt that by 1996 the level of our denominational involvement had become quite weak.

Over time, one of the indicators was felt to be the low level of coverage of social action issues in the *Canadian Unitarian*. Efforts

to correct this saw the birth of *Social Action Network News*, which was sent out across Canada. Regrettably, this endeavour, though promising, was short-lived and thus social action seemed to languish again denominationally. Note that I am not ascribing this viewpoint to Unitarians in general, but the sentiment was unmistakably there.

The Common Sense Revolution spur

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



Inside this Issue:

CUSJ History	1- 2, 4 -8
CUSJ News	3, 6 - 8
Justice and Democracy	9 -10
Democracy & Climate	10 - 11

CUSJ HISTORY

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

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

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

ISARC led the way

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

"The conviction of our faith value tells us that where there is no vision, the people perish. From the perspective of the faith community, we have already gone close enough to the



Mike Harris, Premier of Ontario from June 26, 1995, to April 14, 2002.

dissolution of a people. We urge this government and this committee to refrain from any more incursions into what makes us a people, a community, and what unravels our life together.

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

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

The early years of CUSJ

With this background, the Social Action Committee of South Peel got together with some First Church of Toronto activists to discuss their frustration and possible action. The upshot of this discussion was a meeting for the Greater Toronto Area Unitarians, on Sunday 24th March, 1996.

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

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

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

From the beginning we started to work on letters to politicians, both provincial and federal, on such issues as taxation, the tension between reduction of the deficit and the maintenance of social



continued on page 4

CUSJ NEWS

CUSJ's Members for All Seasons! President's Message

February 2018 Greetings!

This season of 'extreme' cold weather from coast to coast to coast is just one version of the "climate of change" that Canadians are facing, in every season, and every sense of the phrase. No doubt, there will be more record-breaking temperatures, fires, floods and droughts to come, so we will need all hands on deck to create the inner and outer resilience needed to take on the physical and metaphorical storms ahead. Writer and activist Rebecca Solnit entreats us 'to feel the horror and the hope, both, together—and then to choose hope.'

Every hard-hitting issue of *JUSTnews*, our CUSJ newsletter, challenges me to do the same, winter, spring, summer and fall!

It has been a privilege to come to know our 'seasoned' *JUSTnews* editor and Board member **Philip Symons**, over the years. Philip dives unflinchingly into the domestic and global crises of our times, while managing to extend a message of hope with equal parts humour and humility. Philip has been part of CUSJ since early 1998, when he joined the *JUSTnews* editorial committee, bringing his professional expertise, and his social justice-minded spouse and soul mate, **Marya Nijland**, to the copywriting table. Philip went on to become CUSJ President for two consecutive terms. He became *JUSTnews* editor in 2006, following in the footsteps of fellow First Unitarian Church of Victoria congregant and *JUSTnews*' first editor, **Mel Johnston**. I would be remiss, if I did not mention Mel's equally social justice-minded spouse, **Christine Johnston**, a founding member of CUSJ, who came up with the 'JUSTnews' name and also served faithfully as Treasurer of the Board for seven

years. Christine continues to be an active CUSJ member and inspiration to all UUs.

CUSJ has been blessed to have such multi-talented and committed members from its earliest days, first as a provincial, and within 3 years, a national social justice network. *JUSTnews* continues to uphold the highest standards in print journalism. CUSJ members have come to eagerly anticipate and rely on receiving our quarterly newsletter which, like all-seasons tires, helps steer us through the bumpy highways and byways of life. Under Philip's editorial direction, the roadmap of life is mostly clear, if not straightforward. There are always unexpected forks in the road and choices to be made. Knowing that we are a community of like-minded seekers, in good company, makes the bumpy roads easier to negotiate.



Margaret Rao, CUSJ President

As Philip passes a milestone four score years, he has chosen to turn over the steering wheel to the next generation of UU writers and activists. The good news is that a highly qualified member of the Board, **Leslie Kemp**, has offered to fill Philip's BIG shoes. Leslie has a wealth of experience on a number of editorial boards and in all aspects of writing, as well as being a longstanding social change activist and environmentalist. We are thrilled to have Leslie take on this new position, and we wish Philip and Marya all the best in the coming years, whichever forks in the road they choose to take. Knowing them, they will be as involved as ever in social justice causes but will also take the

time to follow their own leisure pursuits, including sailing the deep blue seas surrounding Vancouver Island in fair weather.

I would also like to acknowledge the team work of all of the Board members, a number of whom are long-time members, myself included, as well as a few more recent members, all of whom bring their own unique talents to the table. Although we cultivate a long distance relationship for the most part, we do meet on a regular basis and face to face over the Internet. When we do meet in person, at annual meetings or special events, we are keenly aware of our shared humanity and the ties that bind us to our 'beloved' faith communities. We also share a deep

continued on page 4

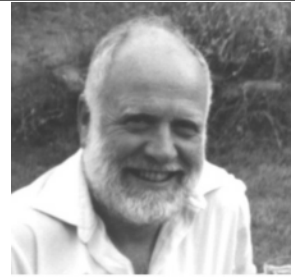
CUSJ HISTORY

From the Editor

After twelve years as your editor of JUSTnews, I'm passing the job to someone whom I know will bring a new look and life to your newsletter: Leslie Kemp. I'm excited to see what she might do to rejuvenate this publication, and hope she enjoys the job as much as I have.

In deciding on the theme for this issue, I reviewed the articles I'd kept that drew attention to some problem that needed attention, but finally decided the theme for this issue should be Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ) itself.

The history of CUSJ, reviewed in the lead article, reminded me of my concern for our denomination, headed by the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC). As someone recently has said, the United and some Anglican churches have caught up to Unitarians in progressive thought, and our denomination's record on the Israeli-Palestinian issue is abysmal. CUSJ, the CUC's affiliate, remains as relevant now as it ever was. I'm proud to see the way our current and recent presidents, backed by stalwart Board Members, have been so active in keeping our organization vibrant, and working hard for love and justice. I know readers of JUSTnews and members of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice will continue to support them. There's still much to be done!



President's message continued from page 3

passion for justice, freedom and equality. If you feel the same way too, we would love to have you put your name forward as a nominee for the Board of Directors. We are always looking to grow our eco-social justice network in common cause with other justice-minded organizations. We know a better world is not only possible but is urgently needed. We know we are the ones we've been waiting for. Love and justice go hand in hand. Together, we will be the change we wish to see.

Philip has the last word on passing on his editorial mantle to Leslie: "Enjoy the job – a lot! As Guy Dauncey said, 'If it's not fun, it isn't sustainable'."

Wise words to live by. Thank you Philip.
Love, Joy & Justice!!!

Your appreciative President,
Margaret Rao president@cusj.org

CUSJ History, continued from page 2

programs, etc. Many of these letters were written by, and spoke only for, individuals, but a few went out under our organisation's name. And of course we started work on a newsletter.

Associations were formed with other social justice organisations and in particular with ISARC. ISARC is a highly effective group of experienced religious and lay professionals, committed to social justice and drawn from many faiths, and denominations and social justice groups. It is an Ontario-based organisation which

has lobbied assiduously, and at senior government levels, on behalf of the poor and underprivileged against many provincial government policies.

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

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

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

continued on page 5

CUSJ HISTORY

Federal Government creates hell

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

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

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

CUSJ goes national

From the beginning the original committee wanted to develop CUSJ as a national organisation rather than a Toronto or Ontario one. We needed a newsletter that could reflect thoughts and opinions from across the country. Fortunately we had in our midst a man with abundant skills in this direction, namely, Mel Johnston of Toronto First Unitarian Church.

Mel set to work to produce the first newsletter, a modest paper, to which some of the original committee contributed. The first issue was distributed to UU congregations and to each member. It was well received and it seemed we were on our way to solving the problem of social action coverage in the denomination.

The newsletter has gone from strength to strength. Mel, with the backing of an editorial committee, continued to put out a high quality newsletter. It is now a professional publication of which we are justly proud and has become a key factor in CUSJ's effectiveness. We regard it as critically important and at one low point in our fortunes we decided that, if we could achieve nothing else, publication of the newsletter would be reason enough



Mel Johnston, first
JUSTnews editor

for our existence. Fortunately, it has not come to that!

The above-mentioned low point occurred in the winter of '98-'99. The original Toronto steering committee ran out of steam after losing a few members and it became increasingly administration-oriented. In the meantime, the Victoria BC. church, having had for some time a very strong and active social action committee, was showing great interest in CUSJ. When Victoria signed up a

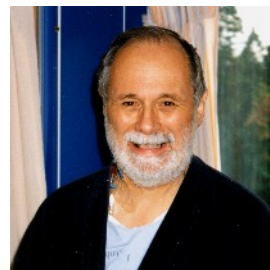
new player in the form of our newsletter editor, who had taken early retirement to that city, the means of revitalisation seemed at hand.

CUSJ in Victoria

The Toronto steering committee decided to ask Victoria to take over the role of the steering committee. They accepted, thus taking a large step towards fulfilling the initial dream of becoming a national organisation. The takeover took place early in 1999 subject to approval of the 1999 AGM.

At the watershed AGM in 1999, a number of important decisions were made:

1. The transfer of the steering committee to Victoria was approved;
2. Bob Van Alstyne of Victoria was confirmed as president;
3. A Board of directors, drawn from across Canada, was elected;
4. A new constitution was approved; this was prepared by the Victoria committee, which included retired law professor, Keith Jobson (Kim Turner, CUC president and a CUSJ member, helped with this).



Bob Van Alstyne

The decision was taken to apply for associate membership with CUC (this was subsequently granted so we now have official status).

For six years (1999 to 2005) the organisation was run very effectively from Victoria. Membership numbers were 235 (in 210 households), from 36 of 53 congregations. The annual budget was \$4,300 (the newsletter required \$1000 per issue for 1600 copies). Board Members came from nine cities from Nova Scotia to BC.

Running a countrywide organisation in a country like ours poses unique communications challenges. These challenges were met in four ways:

continued on p. 6

CUSJ NEWS

CUSJ History continued

1. The distribution of the newsletter 3 or 4 times a year.
2. The distribution of fact sheets, on current items of social justice concern, at intervals between newsletters (these were discontinued after circa 2000). These sheets provided members with the facts they needed to lobby MPs with letters, email, visits, etc.
3. The establishment of an email list serve, which could broadcast messages over the Internet, to provide instant communications with all members who signed on to the list. This proved valuable in coordinating national effort and in providing information on numerous CUSJ topics. It will be even more useful when members become more familiar with how to use it most effectively.
4. The use of inexpensive, do-it-yourself teleconferencing. CUSJ Board meetings regularly hooked up 10 people coast to coast for a two-hour conference call. This technique had the fortuitous and welcome result of inhibiting the normal Unitarian verbosity. Participants apparently shrink from grabbing more than their fair share of airtime, as they're inclined to do at a face-to-face meeting. The Toronto group also started to use the technique with good success and additional benefits of cutting down night driving time, saving gas and reducing pollution, etc. This is a system to be highly recommended.

This history can be found on the CUSJ website: <https://cusj.org/about/history/> History since 2005 still requires recording.

CUSJ AGM

Are you passionate about social justice and environmental issues? Are you looking for a chance to apply your UU principles to the pressing issues of our times?

Join CUSJ at our annual general meeting (AGM) on the Victoria Day holiday Monday, May 21st at McMaster University in Hamilton.

As usual, the CUSJ AGM is held the weekend of the CUC National Conference, from May 18-20, 2018.

Watch www.cusj.org for more information.

Fossil-Free CUC Congregations

Here is the CUSJ list of Canadian UU congregations that have divested from fossil fuels, with the date, where available.

Divested congregations

Most of these are listed on the 350.org page of divested organizations.

1. UU Estrie in Québec's Eastern Townships divested circa 2007. About 50% is in the CUC SRI trust fund, and around 2015, most of the remaining 50% was invested with Desjardins' 'fonds verts'.
2. The Unitarian Church of Montréal voted to divest on March 5, 2017.



The Unitarian Church of Montréal

3. First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa.
4. The Unitarian Fellowship of Northwest Toronto.
5. First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto.
6. Unitarian Congregation of Niagara.
7. The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough passed a resolution to divest.
8. The Unitarian Church of Calgary invested their entire endowment fund in the CUC SRI Trust Fund in August 2015.
9. Westwood Unitarian Congregation in Edmonton, Alberta, invested their entire endowment fund in the CUC SRI Trust Fund in 2015. (Mike Gallagher, Chairman of the Westwood Unitarian Endowment Fund, writes, "The Board wished to ensure the funds were invested ethically and with a better rate of return than we were getting with the GICs. We have not regretted that decision, since the investment has increased by almost 13% in the

CUSJ NEWS

past 12 months. Our Board has been very happy with the arrangement with CUC.”)

10. The Unitarian Church of Vancouver.

11. First Unitarian Church of Victoria divested in 2015.

Already fossil-free congregations

The congregations listed above are not the whole picture. Some congregations made the decision to avoid fossil fuels from the outset, and some have confirmed to the CUSJ that they do not have investments, which means they too are fossil free.

1. South Fraser Unitarian Congregation has always dealt with a local credit union that focuses on socially and environmentally responsible lending/investing.
2. Beacon Unitarian Church, Coquitlam, BC.
3. Elora & Fergus Unitarian Church, Fergus, ON.

Smaller congregations, probably fossil free

These congregations did not respond to our survey, but, because of their small size, are unlikely to have investments. If you have evidence to the contrary, please get in touch!

1. Arborg Unitarian Church, Arborg, Manitoba.
2. Capital Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Victoria, BC.
3. Comox Valley Unitarian Fellowship, Comox, BC.
4. First Unitarian Church of Hamilton, Hamilton, ON.
5. First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo, Nanaimo, BC.
6. Huronia Unitarian Fellowship, Barrie, ON (lay led).

Unknown status

There are 46 CUC member congregations according to their website, so when one subtracts the 20 divested congregations listed above, 26 congregations remain that may or may not be fossil free, as I write this in May 2017. I suspect that most of these congregations, as typical faith communities, have no investments and are thus fossil-free, but I have not been able to confirm this.

If your congregation has not divested because of lack of information, I urge you to get in touch with the CUC, or with one of the congregations that has divested, for help getting started—or you can contact Cym Gomery or another member of the CUSJ Board for help with your quest.

Note: For a list of faith-based organizations world-wide that have divested, see the GoFossilFree site.

This information is taken from the CUSJ website at <https://cusj.org/fossil-free-cuc-congregations/> with thanks to Cym Gomery, web master.



Comment: “The Uninhabitable Earth” (Discussion Paper No. 34)

by Fred Lautenschlaeger

For decades, environmental reviews have highlighted various aspects of looming disasters. The foreboding review by David Wallace-Wells is the most recent. But such studies lack analysis of the entangled multidimensional problem of economics, psychology and powerful lobbying forces in a democratic society, not to mention the influence of international markets.

We ask governments to act, we demonstrate, but rarely do we remind consumers of their unsustainable consumption. “Don’t ask what the government can do for you”. Understandably, consumers respond to the life-force of growth to gain or retain advantage in a competitive world. They succumb to sophisticated marketing strategies. The consumer-marketing interface is the root of over-consumption and environmental deterioration. Psychologists tell us (Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 2012) that we are governed more by our perceived physical needs and ambitions than by what our ‘wisdom’ would recommend. We experience a loss of traditional religious authority. This increased sense of ‘liberation’ comes without an increased sense of responsibility. ‘It is the ultimate rationalist fantasy that... [we] ought only to be the servants of reason’ (ibid p. 28). No matter how reasonable our environmental analyses are, they are not likely to affect our passions.

A Gallup poll compared opinions in 2017 with those approximately 10 years earlier. People showed lower support for government environmental regulations, higher fuel standards, higher emission standards, mandatory controls on CO₂ emissions and alternative fuels. An Innovative Research Group study asked people to rank their most important issues. Climate change ranked only seventh, at 6%, after jobs, economy, and health care with a combined 40%.

The consumer in the industrialized west has an ecological footprint four to five times higher than what is globally sustainable. The blame has to be shared between marketing executives who endorse increased consumption, and the employee/executives who ask for increasing compensation. It is all of us whose primary protein intake is meat, who show pride in our homes

CUSJ NEWS

and possessions—even as 60 million refugees barely survive. Religious leaders will not take unpopular positions: their main concern is the spiritual well-being of their flock.

The consumer must accept greater responsibility, but instead shifts most of the blame onto “the government.” The “One Ton Challenge” to the populace from the Government of Canada in the 90’s failed, as did the appeal to support the Kyoto Protocol. How many would sell their vacation home or buy a smaller car for purely ecological reasons? China is blamed for being the largest GHG producer, but the USA is the largest polluter per capita. The major responsibility is not with government.

Democracy should reflect the will of the people. However, the most influential powers affecting government policies are not the demonstrating masses, but a few people of economic influence. The reality is that some major polluting industries are still today’s growth industries, such as airlines and cars. The federal government is unlikely to move against the agricultural industry, or restrict cheese production at a time when trade agreements allow increased imports from Europe, or reduce meat production while the pressure to import from the USA increases. Who can move a nation of comfort into a lower level of comfort simply to improve sustainability? Environmental efforts will not succeed unless we can change human nature and recognize that government policies are based on it. We need to bring the environmental risk close to home—to the personal level—rather than discussing it in general terms

As Yemen is destroyed, weapons producers and richer countries profit—temporarily. The world is uninhabitable only by those without the resources to adjust to continued evolution.

Fred Lautenschlaeger is a member of First Unitarian Church of Toronto.



CUSJ Membership

Your membership fee for 2018 is due by the CUSJ Annual Meeting, May 21st. There is no set amount as we do not want finances to be a barrier to becoming or remaining a member. If finances are not a concern and you think CUSJ worthwhile, you might consider \$50 to help cover the costs of less fortunate members. Payment may be made through PayPal.

Ottawa Unitarian meets Hassan Diab

Most Unitarians are familiar with the slogan on the MUSC brochure quoting Margaret Mead and the power of a small group of citizens to bring about social justice. We have just seen an example of this with the support group for Hassan Diab. They have done the hard work of lobbying and raising the money to pay for his French lawyers. You all know his story which began ten years ago. Then in November 2014 he was extradited to France despite the absence of credible evidence and no charges being laid. There he faced solitary confinement for twenty hours a day and lost forty pounds during his ordeal. Imagine how the French prison authorities would treat a person convicted of a heinous crime. Hassan was finally released and returned to Ottawa on January 14, 2018.

Yesterday Linda and I attended a party at the home of a friend. To our surprise Hassan, his wife Rania and their two children arrived. We thought that Hassan would



take more time to adjust but he was in good spirits and has done several interviews with the media especially about the need to reform our extradition laws. Hassan thanked me for the letters that I sent to him in prison. Those were difficult to write because they couldn't contain any political comment and also because of his situation.

I hope that our CUSJ Board will write to the Minister of Justice and encourage the Government to reform our extradition laws. No Canadian in the future should have to face extradition based on flimsy evidence and no charges laid. Many countries, including France, will not extradite their citizens under similar circumstances.

Bob Stevenson is a member of First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa and a past president of CUSJ.



JUSTICE AND DEMOCRACY NEWS

Hassan Diab Finally Freed—This Time Unconditionally

by Cym Gomery

Thanks to the French justice system, Hassan Diab is finally free today, January 12, 2018.

Tim McSorley of International Civil Liberties Monitoring Group states, “This time is different. The other times were orders to release him on bail, not to end the charges. This decision actually ends the charges and orders his unconditional release. Apparently, the prosecution can still appeal the decision, but no news on that yet. So yes, he is really free!”

In a Press Release statement, Diab’s lawyer, Don Bayne, stated (our emphasis):

“We’re elated, relieved and thankful. We’re thankful to the French judges for their wisdom and courage to buck political and social pressure to make a completely just decision, *something that we believe the courts in Canada failed to do at every level*. Thankful that Dr. Diab’s wife, Rania Tfaily, led the fight for justice with such dignity and perseverance. Thankful to Minister Freeland, Sam Moyer, Maria Lamani, and others at Global Affairs Canada for their genuine and impressive support to a Canadian who never should have been extradited. And thankful, too, for the efforts of the wonderful Canadians who make up the Hassan Diab Support Committee.

“We would add this—now is the time for the Justice Minister, indeed the Prime Minister, to order a complete review of the Extradition Act and procedures that led to years of injustice for an innocent Canadian. How could Canada have extradited a Canadian to France when France never, never had a case against Dr. Diab fit to go to trial? How? Because Canada’s Extradition Act enables stripping Canadians of liberty unjustly. This Canadian was extradited on overwhelmingly unreliable evidence yet every Canadian court allowed this to happen. So while we are thankful and relieved that justice has been served, we must ensure the system is corrected so that no other Canadian experiences what Dr. Diab has.”

Amen to that!

From the CUSJ website
(www.cusj.org) by Cym Gomery January 12, 2018.



Hassan Diab



Canadian Ethics and Lobbyist Watchdogs Asleep

Democracy Watch keeps a close eye on all aspects of Canadian democracy, and finds it weak. The federal government is doing little to rectify this.

Ethics Commissioner Mary Dawson investigated federal cabinet ministers, Members of Parliament and government officials many of whom clearly violated federal ethics rules, but she let 95% of them off scot-free. Two-hundred and eighteen of her 253 rulings were held in secret.

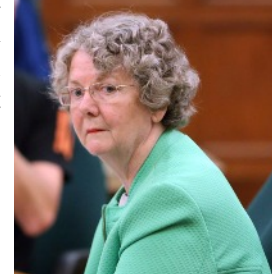
Federal Lobbying Commissioner Karen Shepherd investigated lobbyists she caught violating federal lobbying rules, but she let 84% of them go free. Eighty-eight of her 105 rulings were held in secret. In 2008 she referred only a few cases to the RCMP, and only four were prosecuted for violating lobbying rules.

Since neither the Ethics or Lobbying Commissioner do any audits to catch people violating the rules, many hundreds of other people have probably violated the rules without being investigated.

The Auditor General audited the weak record of the Integrity Commissioner in 2010, and held her accountable for her poor record. The Ethics and Lobbyists Commissioners would appear to provide fertile ground for further investigations by the Auditor General, for as watchdogs, they appear to be asleep.

Extracted from Democracy Watch:
campaigns@democracywatch.ca
Dec. 13, 2017.

Democracy Watch is an organization worth supporting!



Outgoing Ethics Commissioner Mary Dawson



Outgoing Lobbying Commissioner Karen Shepherd
(Photo: Sean Kilpatrick/Canadian Press)



Duff Conacher of Democracy Watch

DEMOCRACY AND CLIMATE NEWS

Money and Power

The latest revelations from the leak of the Paradise Papers raise troubling questions, not only about government's failure to collect what's owed, but also about the power of money.

The revelations serve as a reminder that those who can afford to hide income from the taxman can also afford to hire the very best lobbyists to help ensure that, whatever the public interest, governments don't close the loopholes that allow tax avoiders to get away with it.



Countries with politicians, public officials, or close associates named in the leak. Figure by Jay Coop.

In 2013, as G8 countries prepared to launch a regulatory overhaul seeking finally to put an end to the secrecy in which offshore tax schemes flourish, the leaks reveal that a powerful lobby group got to work. The International Financial Centres Forum, funded by 11 of the world's biggest offshore law firms, achieved what it called "superb penetration" into the highest ranks of government, managing to water down significantly the transparency rules that were eventually adopted.

The paradise Papers are doing nothing to soothe those who worry about the unseemly intertwining of money and power in politics or about the extent to which the economy is rigged by the few against the many. The government can do something about that. It can, for instance, close unfair and ineffective tax loopholes and collect what's owed. Or it can sit back, defend the current arrangements and watch the cynicism grow.

From the Toronto Star, reprinted in the Victoria Times Colonist Tuesday, November 14th, 2017.

Attempts to find information about the International Financial Centres Forum (IFC Forum) led only to "Forbidden entry" postings. JUSTnews Editor.

Warm winters, scorching summers: New maps project impact of climate change

All of Canada is projected to get warmer in the future, even under a low-carbon scenario

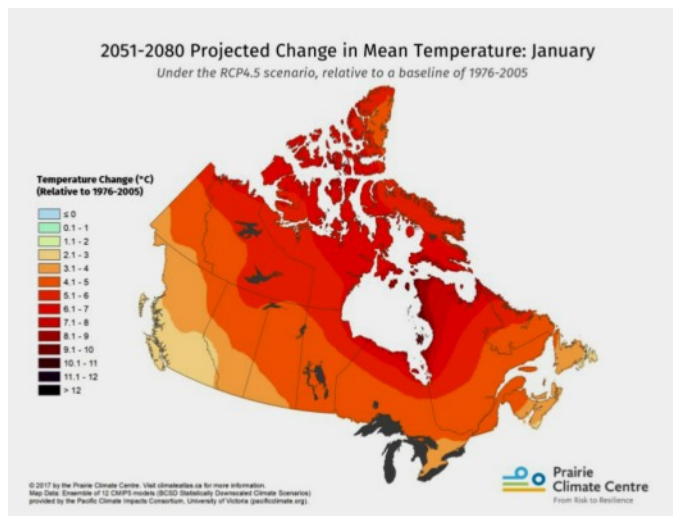
by Sharon Kelly

Is this the end of the Great Canadian Winter?

A new report says that even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced, all of Canada is projected to get warmer by the end of the century, while the number of 30 C plus days per year are predicted to "explode" under the current global warming trajectory.

The report by climatologists at the University of Winnipeg-based Prairie Climate Centre looks at how temperature and precipitation are likely to change under two hypothetical warming scenarios: a "low-carbon" one that assumes emissions will slow, and a high-carbon scenario that assumes the opposite, "that humanity will continue to emit more and more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere well into the future."

"It is of course urgently necessary that we reduce



greenhouse gas emissions to prevent the most dire climate-change consequences, but we must also accept the reality that at least some climate-change impacts are all but guaranteed," writes climate-change researcher Ryan Smith.

How much warmer and wetter will our future climate be?

According to a series of maps produced by the Prairie Centre climatologists:

CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS

- Under a high-carbon scenario, in some months the Arctic is projected to warm by more than 12 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. Sea ice and snow reflect unwanted solar energy back into space. Without it, the open ocean would absorb sunlight, speeding the rate of global warming.
- The months of December and January are projected to warm faster than the month of June. Warmer winters might sound marvellous, but they make it easier for agricultural and forest pests to survive winter. Cold winters are also vital for winter roads relied upon by “tens of thousands of Canadians,” including First Nations.



Stein Glacier, Switzerland, retreat of ~550 m from 2006 to 2015. Credit: James Balog and the Extreme Ice Survey

- Southern Canada is expected to get wetter through the spring, fall and winter—increasing the risks of the kind of flooding that soaked swaths of Ontario and Quebec this year—but much drier in summer, increasing drought and wildfire risks.

The modelling was based on two 30-year future periods, 2021 to 2050, and 2051 to 2080, using 12 different climate models. The researchers used an average of the models. “Overall, the globe is projected to warm by two to three degrees Celsius by 2051 to 2080, compared to 12 degrees or more for some places in the Canadian High Arctic, assuming the high-carbon future we’re trending towards,” Smith said in an email.

Toronto’s summers are projected to warm by four degrees Celsius by 2051 to 2080 in a high-carbon scenario; in comparison, its winters are projected to warm five degrees Celsius. Churchill summers will warm by 3.5 degrees Celsius; its winters by 9 degrees.

While Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal are warming at a slower rate (at least compared to the Canadian Arctic), the warming is still “dramatic and worrisome,” Smith said. “Even a few degrees of average temperature change can lead to a drastic climate change.” For example, Toronto currently

averages 12 days per year that reach or exceed 30 C. By 2051-2080, under the high-carbon modelling, that number is projected to rise to 55 days.

Future winters will be very different

“Sometimes the ‘average mean temperature change’ can be very misleading, especially when we talk of only a few degrees of change,” Smith said. “The reality is that small changes in the mean add up to big changes in the extremes.”

Why is winter changing, and projected to change more than summers? There’s an energy deficit during winter, Smith explained.

Longer nights and shorter days mean energy is being lost to space. Greenhouse gases stop this escaping heat. “More simply: we cool off at night, and nights are longer in the winter, and greenhouse gases prevent the planet from cooling off,” Smith said.

The less snow the less reflective the surface. “As soon as you get the snow cover gone, boom, it warms up really quickly, because the sun gets absorbed by the ground,” said Danny Blair, a University of Winnipeg professor of geography and director of science at the Prairie Climate Centre.

“Winter, in our future, is going to be very different from the past,” he said. Winters will get not just warmer, but wetter.

The researchers were also struck by the projected average drying and warming in the summer months across the Prairies and into Alberta and BC., with 20-per-cent drops in precipitation in some regions. “That spells trouble,” said Blair. Drought and forest fires “are even more-so going to be a problem in our future.”

Sharon Kelly is a national writer covering health, medical and social issues for the National Post. Filed October 26, 2017.



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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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