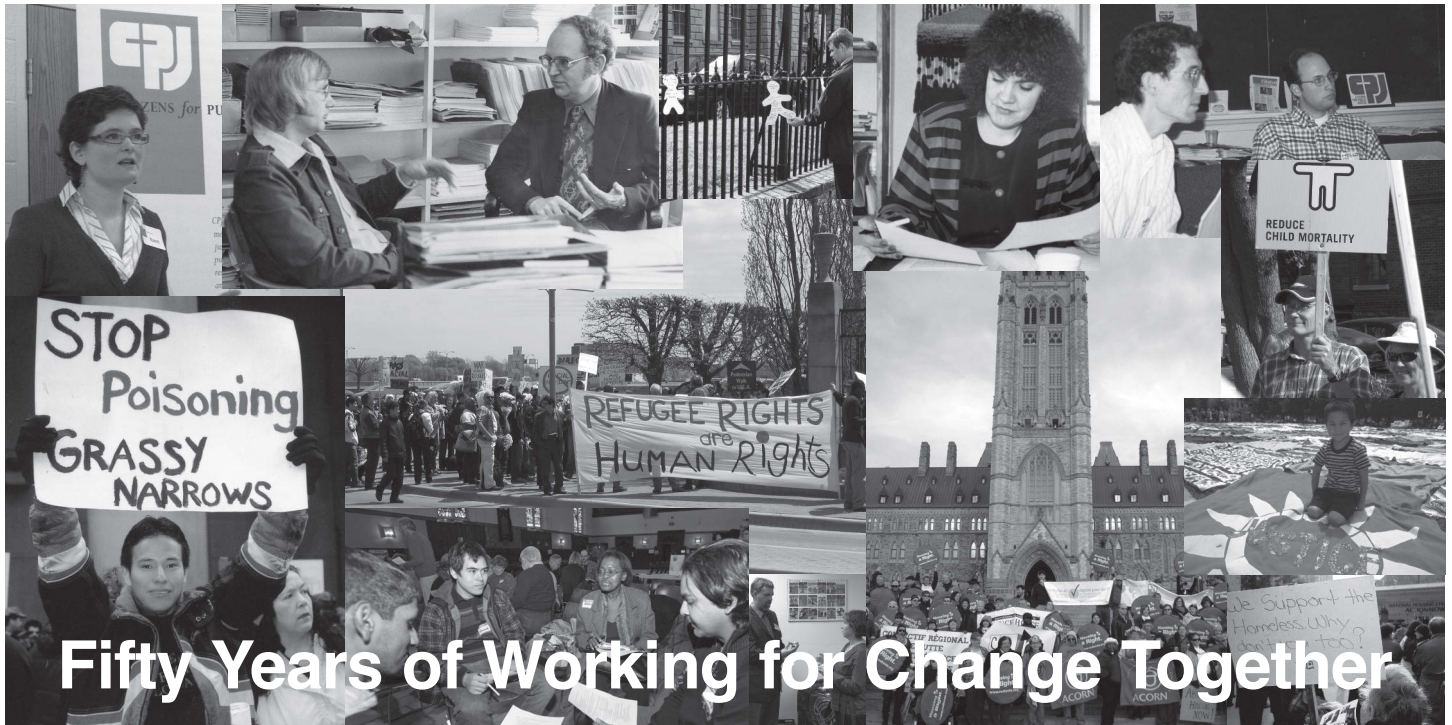


the Catalyst

Citizens for Public Justice



Spring 2013



Fifty Years of Working for Change Together

We rejoice this year to be celebrating CPJ's 50th anniversary. In deciding what to lift up as a symbol of what this stands for, we didn't choose the gold so often associated with 50th anniversaries (we didn't even think of it!) but fire. Fire symbolizes passion. Fire is God uses to call Moses to a role of leadership. Fire is how John says the one who comes after him will baptize followers. Fire is how the Holy Spirit appears to the disciples gathered after Jesus' death to call them to bear witness and give leadership to new ways of being.

In 1962, the Christian Action Foundation (CAF) was founded in Alberta. It pushed for Christian action in politics, labour, and education, energized by the vision of a radically different society based on gospel values. While some of the original issues have changed, there are others we continue to work on, including justice for Aboriginal peoples, an end to poverty, and a need for government that serves the best interests of the people. In Ontario, the Committee for Justice and Liberty emerged at the same time, and was officially incorporated fifty years ago in 1963 as the CJL Foundation. It was later joined by the CAF, and eventually became known as Citizens for Public Justice.

Since then, we've worked to inspire and transform public policy in Canada. Significant moments have included leading for a moratorium on the proposed Mackenzie pipeline in 1975, ongoing solidarity with Aboriginal peoples' rights, calling for sustaining the social safety net in response to the harsh 1995 federal budget, moving the office from Toronto to Ottawa, and many more.

And an abundance of people of faith, courage, and insight—including you—have led to lasting change and exciting visions for the future.

We'll be sharing our story throughout the year in a diversity of ways: each *Catalyst* will have an article from a key member, with Lee Hollaar writing in this edition about past and future solidarity with those on the margins. We also have a great lineup of writers who'll be sharing online monthly reflections—Harry Kits, Kathy Vandergrift, and Murray MacAdam are all online now – on how they have contributed to and learned from CPJ's work for transformation.

And we've got special events planned! John Olthuis will be speaking in Edmonton at an evening kicking off our annual meeting on May 30. We'll be launching our new reflection, prayer, and study resource for ecological justice in Winnipeg at a gathering in September. Folks in Toronto are planning an exciting gala, also in September, with speakers, music, and great food. We'll be having an Ottawa event in November.

Details about what is happening and where, as well as reflections, can be found on our anniversary page at www.cpj.ca/50years. Please contact us if you're interested in organizing something in your own region.

We look forward to celebrating the future with you!

In Review

Housing for All



We kicked off 2013 by calling for accessible and affordable housing for all along with our partners at *Dignity for All: the campaign for a poverty-free Canada*. The housing campaign included a widely shared infographic, online articles that explored housing issues in more depth, prayer and worship resources, and a call to action. The focus was Bill C-400, which called for a national housing strategy. While we were disappointed with the bill's defeat at second reading on February 27, we celebrate the strong responses that came from across Canada.

Scorecard

We're continuing work on the *Poverty Trends Scorecard*, which was launched on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty last October. The first section, "Poverty Trends – Canada 2012" has been widely circulated, downloaded, and quoted on TV and radio, and we're continuing to use the info in our writing and social media posts. "Income, Wealth, and Inequality" has just come out, and we're looking forward to releasing two more reports on spending patterns and the labour market. Visit cpj.ca to check it out for yourselves!

Video Online



Thanks to all who contributed to the making of our video! It provides an eye into what the key issues we're working on are, and some of the many people who are making CPJ's work happen. Take a look: www.youtube.com/c4pj.

CPJ on the Hill

There's been a full slate of meetings with MPs about Bill C-400: various combinations of Simon Lewchuk, Brad Wassink, and Joe Gunn have had productive meetings with Conservative and Liberal MPs from Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and the Yukon.



From left: Simon Lewchuk, Harold Albrecht, MP for Kitchener-Conestoga, and Brad Wassink

CPJ continues to be present at the ongoing All-Party Anti-Poverty Caucus meetings: Simon attended December ones that focused on Working Income Tax Benefit, and Joe and Brad went to the February one that focused on income inequality.

And we also participated, on Parliament Hill and on Victoria Island, in December and January events that were part of the vigorous Idle No More movement calling for greater recognition of the rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and for protection of our ecological systems.

Coming Soon: New Resource

Work on a worship, reflection, and study resource following in the footsteps of the successful *Living Justice: A Gospel Response to Poverty* is underway! It will be available in September: get in touch with Brad Wassink (orders@cpj.ca) if you want to order advance copies or make a special contribution and be recognized as a sponsor.

Citizens for Public Justice

309 Cooper Street, #501
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0G5
tel.: 613-232-0275
toll-free: 1-800-667-8046
e-mail: cpj@cpj.ca
web: www.cpj.ca

Citizens for Public Justice's mission is to promote public justice in Canada by shaping key public policy debates through research and analysis, publishing, and public dialogue. CPJ encourages citizens, leaders in society, and governments to support policies and practices which reflect God's call for love, justice, and stewardship.

CPJ annual membership fee

includes *the Catalyst*:
\$50 / \$25 (low-income)

the Catalyst, a publication of **Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ)**, reports on public justice issues in Canada and reviews CPJ activities.

Spring 2013 (Volume 36, Number 1)
ISSN 0824-2062
Agreement no. 40022119
Editor: Sarah Shepherd

***the Catalyst* subscription:**
\$20 (three issues)

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Taking Back Compassion: Reducing Inequality

By Sarah Shepherd

Churches have a long history of speaking out against poverty. Only a scattering of statements have been made that specifically name inequality, however. But if we go as far back as 1984, we do find a good example from The United Church of Canada, responding in depth to the world's "moral crisis" and saying we need government policies to "move society in the direction of greater equality and increased security of income for the poor."

At the time the bottom 20 per cent of Canadians only had 3.4 per cent of the national income, whereas the top 20 per cent had 40.6 per cent. The 1984 statement has particular resonance with CPJ's newest poverty research that finds that things have only gotten worse. Who is speaking out for change?



Photo: Pam Lau, www.flickr.com/photos/pamlau.

Inequality issues have recently come to the forefront with the Occupy movement. However, it's important not to focus only on the richest one per cent of the population.

So where are we today?

Jim Sinclair of North Bay, a congregational minister at the time and the United Church's General Secretary from 2003 to 2006, says: "Looking back to our best intentions in 1984, it's very clear we are still a long way from achieving the

right balance between commerce and community. In my adult lifetime I have not felt the contrast between the wealthy and the more marginalized as much as in recent years. The highest level of government increasingly demonizes the most vulnerable in both attitude and social policy."

Statistics from 2010, released last summer, bear this out. The lowest 20 per cent now has even less, 2.5 per cent, and the wealthiest group more, with 47.5 per cent. While by some measurements the economy is doing well, as we emerge from the 2008–09 recession the rising tide is not floating all boats.

Who is being affected?

Inequality is driven in part by loss of secure, well-paid, and unionized jobs, with one in four Canadian workers earning less than \$13.33 per hour. The greatest toll is on the poorest: unequal societies are most stressful for those with low incomes, affecting immune systems, cardiovascular health, and aging. On the flip side, societies that have a greater level of equality have also been shown to have higher levels of trust, educational success, and social mobility.

Greater equality benefits us all. And Canadians know that: the Broadbent Institute's poll on inequality issues from 2012 shows that almost nine out of ten Canadians think that it's time for governments to tackle the problem of income inequality. Two-thirds would be "very" or "somewhat" willing to pay slightly higher taxes to protect social programs like health care, pensions, and access to post-secondary education.

What is Canada doing?

Last year, MP Scott Brison (Liberal) introduced motion M-315, supported by members of all parties, asking the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA) to undertake a study of income inequality in Canada. Brison named churches as being "on the front lines." If the federal government wants to address the social and the economic well-being of Canadians, it should fully support the finance committee's upcoming study on income inequality. We're concerned, however, that only one meeting –

Now Available: "Income, Wealth, and Inequality"

This second report in our four-part *Poverty Trends Scorecard*, following up on the release of "Poverty Trends – Canada 2012" last October, looks at income and inequality trends in Canada. While many are doing better than they were in the 2008–09 recession, the gap between the richest and poorest Canadians is growing at an alarming rate.

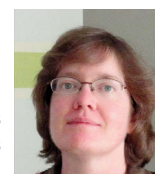
The report is comprised of seven two-page fact sheets, covering a range of topics from income trends, to the impact of inequality, to the growing concentration of wealth. Visit www.cpj.ca/povertytrends to download the whole report or the individual fact sheets, as well as for information about the entire project.

nowhere near enough time – may be all that the Finance Committee devotes to the study.

What role can we play?

A first step is learning about the issues and sharing them with others. Our "Income, Wealth, and Inequality" report (see sidebar) is broken down into accessible fact sheets. A recent op-ed by CPJ staff on motion M-315 was published in the *Hill Times* and is on our website at www.cpj.ca. You can contact your MP about motion M-315, and encourage the government to take action to halt the growth of inequality.

And we can continue to work toward what Jim Sinclair describes as "My hope for a more just community – Isaiah's 'green shoots' out of dry ground – from a new generation who illustrate a resolve to 'take back' compassion and the common good as primary values in public life."



Sarah serves as Communications Coordinator at CPJ.

Refugee Health: Churches Need to Speak Out

By Brad Wassink

On June 30, 2012, the federal government made drastic cuts to health care being provided to refugees by the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). This program includes coverage for medication, eye care, dental care, prosthetic devices, and wheelchairs. Now provinces and refugee sponsors, many of whom are churches, are forced to cover these expenses.

Health care professionals responded

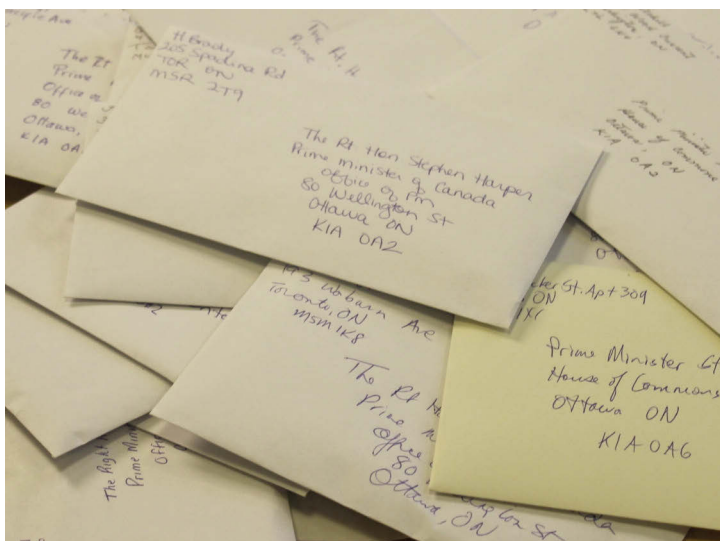
Health care providers were persistent and unified in their requests for the cuts to be rescinded. A nationwide coalition that included the Canadian associations for nurses, dentists, pharmacists, family physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, midwives, social workers, optometrists, pediatricians, and medical students conducted research, wrote letters, and rallied across Canada.

They launched a program that shared vivid examples of unnecessary costs and confusion over the new rules. One woman, 36 weeks pregnant, told to bring \$3,000 to her next obstetrics appointment because she was no longer covered. After weeks of investigation and worry, IFHP reinstated her coverage. In many cases, care is simply being denied. A young girl from a malaria-affected many country developed a high fever but couldn't have tests to rule out malaria. Elsewhere, a man was denied urgent eye surgery to prevent blindness.

Letters were sent to the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration and of Natural Resources, and the provincial and territorial Ministers of Health and of Citizenship and Immigration. On June 18, health care workers from coast to coast held a National Day of Action, including an impressive event on Parliament Hill attended by CPJ.

And they made an impact. On June 26, the government quietly announced that the cuts would not apply to government-sponsored refugees. It was a minor

victory, as there would still be limited or no supplemental health care coverage for privately sponsored refugees. Advocates persisted, holding candlelight vigils across the country on December 15 to call for full reinstatement of health care.



People across the country sent their 59-cent "saving" back to Ottawa to show their support for meeting refugee needs.

Photo: Kaitlin Bardswich.

rescinded. The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, as well as the Christian Reformed, Quaker, and United churches prepared information for their members, encouraging them to write to their MPs.

Hospitality House Refugee Ministry in Winnipeg, along with the Anglican diocese of Rupert's Land, sued Citizenship and Immigration Canada for breaching their contractual obligation of providing the IHFP. Students from Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg started the "59 Cents Campaign for Refugee Health Care" that encouraged Canadians to send 59 cents – their portion of the alleged taxpayer savings – to their MP.

Yet these efforts could have made a larger impact with more collaboration, persistence, and promotion. Dekker says, "If all the churches had united, perhaps we could have accomplished something already."

Churches had little impact

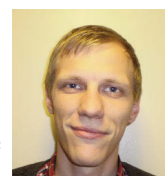
The churches' responses lacked the persistence and unity of the medical community. Many wondered where the churches even stood on the issue. Yet, these cuts will hit them hard in both their ministries and financial health.

Rose Dekker, Refugee Coordinator for the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, explains the threat. "Churches and community groups already raise between \$20,000 and \$30,000 to settle a refugee family. It has been a huge benefit that they didn't have to worry about those additional costs." She worries about refugees arriving with serious and expensive medical needs, a definite possibility given what refugees have survived. "This could cause a church to go bankrupt," she says, "and as we promote refugee sponsorship among our constituent groups, we have to be upfront about the potential risk."

Great work was done by some faith communities. Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian leaders wrote to the government requesting that the cuts be

Perhaps they still can. On April 4, Refugee Rights Day, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and Amnesty International are launching a new campaign with CPJ's support. Colleen French of the CCR explains. "The 'Proud to Protect Refugees' campaign is asking organizations to make a public declaration of their support for refugees and people seeking support in Canada."

Citizens for Public Justice will work to ensure the voice of Canadian churches is heard in defence of our common ministry in service of refugees. From Refugee Rights Day in April to Refugee Sunday in June, churches will have plenty of opportunities in the coming months to show they are proud to protect refugees.



Brad serves as Public Justice Intern at CPJ.

Building Public Justice Together

By Lee Hollaar

As part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, we are inviting key members to reflect in the Catalyst on what involvement in CPJ means to them. This issue's reflector is Lee Hollaar of Aldergrove, British Columbia.

Last month our church dedicated a Sunday offering to the local food bank. It was a pleasure to think and act locally, without losing a perspective of what needs to change globally. The very next day the same food bank's director was on radio explaining the challenges the organization is facing. Clients' needs for the services have gone up substantially. Complicated by other demands of "competing" organizations in the community, donations of both cash and food were down. The commitment to serving people had to come first, he said. If funds didn't arrive shortly, services would need to be cut further. They were doing everything possible to meet the needs of the voiceless poor.

That is a common story of other support agencies in Canada and the US. Where is the voice of the poor? Who is ensuring that society, its citizens, churches, and governments can see and hear the most vulnerable among us? And for any of us to remain silent implies a callousness and insensitivity to suffering around us: an act inconsistent with the gospel's repeated call to remember the poor.

The story of this food bank is not an anomaly. The overall atmosphere in Canada today for charities is not promising; many are facing similar financial stress, and planning for the future is often impossible given the struggles to stay open today. Statistics Canada has recently verified that average annual donations fell from \$457 per person in 2007 to \$446 in 2010. And when adjusted for inflation, this decline becomes more significant.

And that is one reason I am a member of Citizens for Public Justice: to be one of those who speaks for the poor and the marginalized. Fifty years ago a group of deeply committed Christians founded this organization. This year we celebrate

our 50th anniversary – an important moment in the life of any person, or any organization – honouring CPJ's achievements over the past half century. The board, staff, and volunteers are responsibly planning how we can sustain this important and successful ministry. Stewardship of resources and future financial planning are all part of that.

In late 2012 we completed a feasibility study and determined that CPJ needs a future-focused campaign to financially support our work, in light of current financial challenges. This study was undertaken with the capable assistance of Janet deVries, a professional with Christian Stewardship Services. Her effort received much-appreciated input from some of our key donors. The board has now adopted a plan that will focus on supporting our strategic objectives, including ecological justice and poverty elimination; expanding our very successful youth internship program; and purchasing property as a way to give CPJ's public justice work greater presence and better assurance of a more certain financial future.

These are exciting challenges for Christians committed to social justice. We want to move forward enabled by and honouring our story of advocacy in our current democratic context. An adopted statement of one of the Christian communities involved in founding and supporting CPJ states: "We call on government to do public justice and to protect the freedoms and rights of individuals, groups, and institutions; so that each may freely do the tasks God gives. We urge governments to ensure the well-being of all citizens..."

For the important work of social justice to take place in the name of Christ we need the continued support and



Mariel Angus leading workshop on human trafficking. Mariel was CPJ's second public justice intern in 2008–2009. Mariel went on to complete a graduate degree and lives and works in London, Ont.

commitment of those compelled by faith to do this ministry. Some are still the "originals" and others have joined us along the way. CPJ's support base, however, is aging. We need to engage younger supporters to do justice: "telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord" (Ps. 78:4). CPJ is committed to advocating for justice now but is also currently undertaking a renewal campaign of our mission. We cannot allow this commitment to wane, we must "Speak up...for the rights of all who are destitute" (Prov. 31:8).

Lee is a member of the CPJ board of directors representing B.C. and the Yukon, and chair of the Building Public Justice Together campaign.



The gift of CPJ membership

If you've received *the Catalyst*, you're probably a CPJ member already. Do you know someone else who would support this work of justice with a community of dedicated people creating change together?

CPJ membership is a gift you can pass on to others: to learn more e-mail us at cpj@cpj.ca or visit "Support CPJ" at www.cpj.ca.

Building Homes, Building Lives

An interview with CPJ member and affordable housing developer Nick Volk.

CPJ: How did you become aware of the need for affordable housing in Canada?

NV: I'm a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, a lay Catholic volunteer organization dedicated to serving the poor. Anyone can call us for help – with food, rent, clothing, or bills – and we go to visit people in their homes. I have been in dreadful places I could not believe anyone could live in. Over 80,000 families are on the waiting list for a decent, affordable place to live in Toronto alone.

CPJ: What sort of difference does affordable housing make?

NV: Adequate, affordable housing has a dramatic impact on people's physical and emotional health. People with an affordable place to live are better able to live a self-sustaining life, pay their bills, and care for their families.

It's also been proven that with affordable housing, public costs for health care, correctional services, and more drop sharply. Every dollar invested in affordable housing puts two dollars back into the economy through construction jobs, taxes, and the stability that gives people an incentive to go to work.

CPJ: Tell us about your experience in developing affordable housing in Toronto.

NV: In 1987 the Ontario government brought in legislation that allowed non-profits – not just government – to build affordable housing. I jumped at the opportunity and we established the VincentPaul Family Homes Corporation. After seven years of determined work with politicians, businesses, construction companies, and architects we built 164 mixed-income (1/4 market; 3/4 rent-geared-to-income) family apartments.

The building, named Gower Park Place, won the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association's "best non-profit affordable housing" award. We heard residents say things like "I'm living in this attractive place – maybe I have some self-worth," and "I see people going to work every day – maybe I could do that." Gower has had 81 per cent of its rent-geared-to-income families move out to buy their own homes, allowing others to move in. The president of the Residents Association reported recently that many more residents have gotten jobs, and that the children have all graduated from high school, often going on to secondary education.

CPJ: What would you like to do next?

NV: We want to build more. We have established a new non-profit corporation – AT HOME in East York Family Homes – to build 250 new mixed-income affordable units for mother-led households. The City of Toronto has allocated two acres of surplus land, but other levels of government are no longer providing funding. We are



searching for funds, because the benefits of affordable housing greatly outweigh the investment.

CPJ: What are some of the challenges you've faced? How have you overcome them?

NV: The work with various levels of government, community groups, churches, and developers is steady and demanding. There can be a lot of red tape. Securing funding can be slow. For Gower, intense contact with the mayor, councillors, and planning department was a major help. Community opposition to affordable housing can also be a challenge. The major community group for Gower was in full opposition. Since it was an election year, Council gave us a flat "no." But we won our appeal at the Ontario Municipal Board.

CPJ: What more can be done?

NV: Many faith groups are doing housing advocacy. Recently, the MultiFaith Alliance to End Homelessness (23 faith groups in Toronto) was a major leader in the campaign for a national housing strategy. They, with many others, asked their members to contact their MPs to support Bill C-400, the *Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing Act*.

A national housing strategy is essential. It demonstrates the shared responsibility for affordable housing with federal, provincial, and municipal governments, the private sector, Aboriginal groups, and other key stakeholders. It would provide a framework for funding and incentives to build, operate, and repair affordable housing and other crucial housing supports. It would ensure that funding was available and used in an effective and timely manner. It would give us a coordinated basis to work from.



Nick is an affordable housing developer and builder who lives in Toronto where he volunteers with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Rooftops Canada, and Habitat for Humanity.

Pipelines and Public Justice

By Joe Gunn

Recent issues of the Catalyst have printed reflections on various issues related to energy projects in Canada: John Olthuis on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, Tony Clarke on the Keystone XL, and both Randy Haluza-DeLay and Will Braun on the Northern Gateway proposal. How can a public justice lens allow us to decipher the politics of energy projects and pipelines?



Photo: Larissa, www.flickr.com/riss

Many Canadians have been reminded of Prime Minister Harper's 2006 reference to Canada as "an emerging energy superpower." There was the expectation then that the enormous reserves of bitumen found in the Athabasca oil sands would yield fabulous, eternal wealth for Canada, with estimated potential oil reserves among the top three countries on the planet. Some 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) are now squeezed from the oil sands, with production plans rising to 3.7 million bpd by 2021.

Or maybe not.

The future price of oil is a major consideration. The industry estimates that anything less than \$80 per barrel makes oil sands production uneconomical. Although the current price of oil is almost \$100, there are enormous changes on the horizon. The USA, which currently imports 1.4 million barrels a day from Alberta, may soon be swamped with its own oil. Some analysts suggest that America has sufficient reserves in shale formations, which are now accessible with newer technologies like hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), and could become the world's largest oil producer by 2020. Mid-western USA no longer seems so thirsty.

If President Obama was serious about his promise to take climate change seriously, even hinting at a cap-and-trade proposal in his State of the Union address, Ottawa would finally be forced into comparable action. Could placing a price on carbon and imposing vehicle mileage efficiencies and reductions in energy use, coupled with the use of more natural gas, renewable energy, and new supplies of American fuels, further hinder the expansion of Canadian petroleum exports?

Canadian crises

The implications for Canada are huge. More than 99 per cent of Canada's oil and gas exports go to the United States, increasing from 11 per cent to 22 per cent of Canada's global trade between 1992 and 2011.

Alberta has already announced a loss of almost \$6 billion in revenues, as American buyers receive a "discount" on

the lower price of Canadian exports. Ottawa suffers a smaller revenue loss, but the Harper government courts alternative buyers by supporting every pipeline proposal industry envisions.

At least four different pipeline options are on the table (see chart this page). The Keystone XL proposal would carry Alberta bitumen to refineries on the Texan Gulf coast. Opposition to this project has resulted in the Sierra Club's first act of civil disobedience in the environmental advocacy organization's 120-year history, when activists were arrested for tying themselves to the fence at the White House.

The Northern Gateway proposal, heavily opposed by Aboriginal people and the general public in British Columbia, would allow energy to be exported to new markets in Asia. Expansion of the existing Kinder-Morgan line to the Fraser Valley faces many of the same oppositional concerns.

Opposition leader Thomas Mulcair prefers shipping western oil to Eastern Canada as a "pro-business, common sense solution" which would mean reversing Enbridge's Line 9 that currently runs from Quebec into Sarnia, Ontario.

In March, for only \$399, you can attend the Manning Centre's annual conference, designed to "build Canada's conservative movement." The question posed in their aptly-titled "Energy Dragon's Den" is not whether more pipelines are needed to conserve the land, defend the climate or respect Aboriginal rights – but simply, "should our oil go west, east, or south?" Canadians need to consider other alternatives, which now include leaving a good portion of oil sands production in the ground.

| Pipeline | Distance | Destination | Owner | Capacity | Cost |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. Keystone XL | 1,200 miles | Texas Gulf Coast | TransCanada | 850,000 bpd | \$7 billion |
| 2. Northern Gateway | 731 miles | Kitimat, on the BC Coast | Enbridge | 525,000 bpd | \$6 billion |
| 3. West to East; Line 9 reversal | 2,340 to 3,000 miles | Montreal or St. John NB | TransCanada /Enbridge | 500,000/300,000 bpd | \$5 billion |
| 4. TransMountain expansion | 710 miles | Burnaby BC | Kinder Morgan | 600,000+ bpd | \$5.4 billion |



Joe serves as Executive Director of CPJ.

Growing Food Sovereignty in Gardens

By Nettie Wiebe

Looking out of my window on this late winter afternoon I am staring into the unblinking, unrelenting face of our prairie winter. The bright sunshine and blue sky can't deceive me. The temperature hasn't climbed above -15 degrees in days and still threatens to plummet to -30 or colder on some nights. My beloved garden is buried under a thick blanket of snow.

But even in the depths of winter, I feel certain that spring with its hope of resurrection, will come. And when the warm weather arrives, all this snow will melt away – first in the wide-open fields, then along the fence lines, and finally along the north side of the lilac hedge that shelters my garden. And maybe even before that last ribbon of snow has yielded, a few brave shoots of asparagus will emerge to signal that the power of new life can no longer be suppressed.

Gardening is both a humble and a humbling business. It requires literally “down and dirty” digging in the soil, planting seeds, weeding and wondering. In an age when we are increasingly reliant on technology, my garden provides a welcome alternative mode of being. It opens the way to a functional organic relationship with earth, reminding me that my life is intimately interwoven with, and ultimately reliant on, the soil and sun. Growing food not only enhances ecological knowledge, it engenders a deep respect and awe for the intricacy, diversity, and sheer power of the plant, insect, bird, and soil life surrounding us all.

Cultivating a mindful relationship with our food has never been more challenging or more important. Unlike preceding generations, the majority of us no longer live among those who grow our food. Much of the food sold in Canadian grocery stores has travelled long distances. And most eaters know remarkably little about their daily meals: Where was the food grown? By whom? Under what conditions?

The complex global food system displayed in supermarket aisles has



Photo: 350.org, www.350.com

The global Via Campesina movement works to protect diverse food species.

serious ecological, economic, political, and moral consequences. Food from around the world has come millions of freight miles with the attendant greenhouse gas emissions. The uniform appearance of fresh produce can only be achieved by suppressing nature's diversity with intensive chemical herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, and fertilizers.

These obvious ecological outcomes are accompanied by economic and political dynamics. Out-of-season fresh fruits, vegetables, and flowers are made possible through the conversion of local food-growing fields into export crops. Millions of peasants and small-scale farmers have been impoverished and displaced as land, here and elsewhere, is consolidated and converted. This rural displacement represents an incalculable loss of social well-being, familial and community integrity, and cultural diversity.

But like the asparagus in my garden, a movement of peasants, small-scale farmers, and indigenous peoples' organizations from around the world, the Via Campesina, (which includes Canada's National Farmers Union) is defying the odds. As global, corporate agribusiness and financial interests, enabled by deregulation and trade agreements, are usurping control over agricultural production and markets, the Via Campesina is engaging everywhere in political, ecological, and cultural struggles to wrest control of food back

into the hands of local communities. Within the framework of food sovereignty, farmers and their allies are working to protect seeds, land, water, and cultures.

Food sovereignty brings farmers together with citizens in the shared interest of living and eating within sustainable, just, and life-giving food systems. Food sovereignty ensures greater self-reliance, diversity, and resilience in our own communities. And it changes our relationships with the earth, our lunches, and each other.

In our current food regime, a potted tomato plant, a kitchen or community garden, or a farmers' market are all small spaces of independence from the global food system. Growing some of our own food, knowing some of those who grow it, or even something more about the places where it is grown is an antidote to indifference or arrogance. It awakens wonder.

In my own life and work, my garden not only affords me the practical benefits of delicious, nutritious, fresh food, it is a place of delight, new life, and Easter joy.



Nettie is a Saskatchewan organic farmer, ethics professor and avid gardener, cook, and eater.