

Tar sands fever threatens Edmonton farmland

By Cheryl Mahaffy

Edmonton has been shielded for years from the full repercussions of pell-mell growth in the Alberta tar sands five hours to the north. Now the region is getting a taste of the environmental and social maelstrom buffeting those communities, as plans steamroll forward for as many as nine massive oil upgraders just northeast of the capital city, in an area euphemistically termed the Industrial Heartland.

Three quarters the size of Edmonton and straddling the North Saskatchewan River, this land has attracted an epidemic of kitchen-table dealmaking as corporations stake out terrain for industrial complexes that will turn tar-like bitumen into synthetic crude oil. Projects completed by 2020 in “Upgrader Alley” could tally \$46 billion or more, consume 10 times the water used by the city of Edmonton and produce a sixth of Alberta’s greenhouse gases, according to the Pembina Institute.

Among those affected by the upheaval are Wayne and Luz-Maria Groot and their children, Luis and Ana Sofia. I’ve known Wayne for years as an unassuming member of our church congregation, an enviable cross-country skier and a farmer whose rich loam yields bumper crops of potatoes. In late June and early July, as Alberta’s Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) heard arguments for and against a proposal by Petro-Canada Oil



Reuben Mahaffy

Luz-Maria and Wayne Groot with their children Luis and Ana Sofia. Their family farm is being threatened by new oil upgrader developments.

Sands Inc. to plant an upgrader on 36 quarters of farmland just east of the Groot fenceline, I came to know Wayne as a quietly eloquent advocate for a precious resource under siege.

Changing landscape

Wayne’s father purchased this land in the early 1980s, when the family farmstead in Edmonton was slated for development. Since then, Wayne and his brother Don have developed a thriving seed potato business with customers from PEI to Mexico. With transportation costs escalating and an “eat local” ethic gaining steam, they began laying plans to sell table potatoes closer to home. Looking farther ahead, Wayne and Luz-Maria dreamed of passing the farm to a fourth generation.

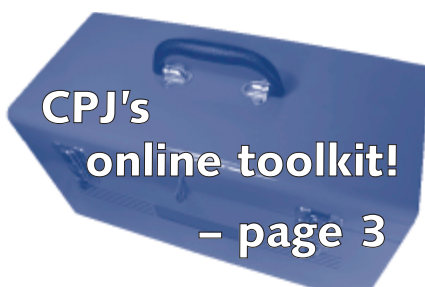
All that changed a few years ago, when rumours began circulating that huge swathes of farmland around them were being secretly optioned at lottery prices. No sooner had Petro-Canada closed in on one side than Suncor bought up more than

20 quarters on the other – and urged the Groots to sell. Then, after the fact, local authorities rezoned the land to allow heavy industry.

With sinking hearts, the Groots realized they could be losing all their neighbours in return for a corporate complex whose early forays had been divisive and bullying rather than neighbourly. What’s more, Alberta could be losing a prime chunk of agricultural land even as alarm bells ring about worldwide food scarcity.

Galvanized into action, Wayne joined other residents in intervening against the Petro-Canada proposal. As Citizens for Responsible Development, they spoke passionately against losing the silence, the starry night skies, the ability to let children roam, the expectation that surrounding air and water will not cause harm. They also sounded the alarm about squandering irreplaceable farmland, which one resident termed “tantamount to sacrilegious.”

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Round-up

2008 AGM

On June 9, CPJ members, board and staff met at Dominion-Chalmers United Church in Ottawa for CPJ's 2008 Annual General Meeting. **Janet Wesselius**, board chair, led the meeting, and CPJ members heard presentations from **Harry Kits**, executive director, **Kathy Vandergrift**, vice-chair of the board, **Bill Lodewyk**, board treasurer and **Suzanne Boileau**, director of finance and operations.

The meeting included approval of the 2008 budget and affirming new (**Mark Huyser-Wierenga** and **Maylanne Maybee**) and returning (**Ruth van Mossel Adema**) board members. Members also approved changing CPJ's Bylaw #6, which states the location of CPJ's head office, from Toronto to Ottawa as of July 1, 2007.

We also bade farewell to outgoing board members Janet Wesselius, **Sue Wilson** and **Mike Hogeterp**. Harry was honoured for his 20 years of service to CPJ, and was presented with a certificate in recognition of his contributions to Canadian public policy by Paul Dewar, MP for Ottawa Centre.

Read more about the AGM on page 7.

Poverty reduction workshops

In May, CPJ staff **Chandra Pasma**, **Trixie Ling**, **Harry Kits**, **Karen Diepeveen** and **Suzanne Boileau** travelled across the country, holding workshops on poverty reduction strategies. Almost 150 people participated, including many CPJ members and people new to CPJ's work.

It was encouraging to meet people in Ottawa, Halifax, London, Winnipeg and Edmonton, and affirm a shared passion for solving poverty in Canada. We explored the meaning of poverty and what

a national poverty reduction strategy could look like.

Thanks to all who participated – we look forward to continuing this conversation with all CPJ members. See page 5 for **Trixie's** article about the workshops.

Income security

As part of her work on guaranteed livable incomes, policy analyst **Chandra Pasma** attended the Basic Income Earth Network World Congress in Ireland mid-June. She attended workshops exploring international perspectives on guaranteed livable incomes, and gathered with other Canadian advocates and politicians to discuss how Canada could ensure income security for all citizens.

The Senate sub-committee on cities has also been exploring issues around guaranteed livable incomes. In June, the committee hosted a roundtable on this issue, inviting **Chandra** to attend as an expert witness. **Chandra** and other participants highlighted the need to move away from a judgemental system of income security to one that recognizes the dignity of all persons.

Welcome and congratulations

Throughout May, CPJ welcomed several newcomers to our office.

Kevin Elder joined us as our financial development assistant, replacing **Darlene McLeod**, who is currently on maternity leave. Congratulations to **Darlene** and her husband, **Jon**, on the birth of their daughter **Glynis**!

We also welcome **Marguerite Grant**, our new administrative assistant. **Marguerite's** warm and welcoming smile will greet you when you stop by our office.

Maria van Geest, a Master's student in Globalization and International Development at the University of Ottawa, is

our summer student. **Maria** has spent the summer developing an advocacy toolkit, available at www.cpj.ca. See her article on page 3.

And in early August, we welcomed **Joe Gunn** as CPJ's new executive director. With many years of experience advocating for justice within Canada and around the world, **Joe** brings much vision, passion and energy to this position.

Welcome all of these new faces when you have the opportunity to do so!



Joe Gunn, Marguerite Grant, Kevin Elder and Maria van Geest join the CPJ staff in Ottawa.

Goodbye

At our Annual General Meeting on June 9, CPJ members, board and staff said farewell to **Harry Kits**, who has served CPJ for 20 years as executive director.

Harry's tireless passion for public justice was always evident. He was eager to build relationships with CPJ members, dialoguing with them on public justice issues, and he encouraged and mentored staff.

He will truly be missed – please join us in thanking **Harry** for his dedication and leadership and wishing him God's blessings as he moves forward.

If you have a memory of CPJ or **Harry** that you would like to share, please pass it along to us! We welcome your letters, cards or emails.

PHOTO: Michael Krakowiak

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Undeliverable copies of <i>the Catalyst</i> should be returned to: Citizens for Public Justice, 309 Cooper St., #501 Ottawa, ON K2P 0G5	<i>The Catalyst</i> , a publication of Citizens for Public Justice (CPJ), reports on public justice issues in Canada and reviews CPJ activities. Please contact us if you wish to reprint material. EDITOR: Karen Diepeveen DESIGNER: Eric Mills	CPJ'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 membership fee: \$50/\$25 low-income, includes <i>the Catalyst</i> .



Practicing rich advocacy in the age of instant gratification

By Maria van Geest

A few weeks ago, while walking home from work, I met a recruiter from a local non-governmental organization. When I told her I was already a member of her organization, she asked me whether I wrote letters and emails for their campaigns. I said that I did.

But when she started talking about their current campaign as if I was familiar with it, I was at a loss. I had probably received an email about the issue and taken the suggested action of emailing the Prime Minister, but this campaign did not sound at all familiar to me. It seemed I had read over the information too quickly, clicked to send my message, and promptly forgotten all about it.

This got me thinking about what it means to be an advocate in the age of the internet, text-messages, and Blackberries. Has our instant-gratification culture infiltrated the realm of political activism?

Instant activism

The communication tools of our culture – email, instant messaging, text messages and the like – are often blamed for disconnecting us from one another and weakening our communication skills. The irony of these technologies is that they connect people around the globe, while making us more disconnected from our neighbours. They also encourage volume rather than depth, making it possible for an individual to connect with hundreds of people a day, without having a meaningful conversation with anyone.

These effects are present in the way we engage in political activism. Email alerts have become the norm for any organization involved in advocacy. The internet is an incredibly powerful tool to increase awareness, support and involvement in a campaign. Anyone with a passion can start a website or a blog that has the potential to reach millions of people. Organizations like Make Poverty History and Amnesty International have achieved wonderful victories in combating poverty and promoting human rights through mass internet campaigns. Such success stories demonstrate the power of digital connectedness, and they ought to be celebrated.

However, along with the advantages of this interconnectedness, we must examine the potential pitfalls. Mass email campaigns work very well for straightforward issues that can be

explained in a brief paragraph. Such straightforward issues will naturally gain the support of many people. But how many of those receiving these emails, and acting on them, are truly invested in the causes? Does this method contribute to the deterioration of our research and communication skills? Could we be missing out on more fulfilling types of advocacy when we limit ourselves to mass email campaigns?

Rich advocacy

Effective campaigns must take advantage of modern technologies while preserving the skills necessary to engage in rich advocacy. Rich advocacy means understanding the ins and outs of an issue, speaking from personal experience, and making real connections with decision-makers.

Rich advocacy starts with becoming passionate about an issue of injustice. It may mean getting to know the victims of this injustice and trying to understand their situation. It means reading in-depth reports, examining more than one side of the issue, and researching current policies or legislation. It means being creative in coming up with solutions and devising advocacy tactics. It means building relationships with decision-makers through persistent dialogue. These actions are an essential part of what it means to strive for public justice.

Practicing rich advocacy means investing time in a cause, being willing to deal with “grey” areas, and persevering through potential setbacks and disappointments. Not everyone is able to invest the time and energy required to do this. But each of us can take small steps toward this, first by getting connected in our communities, identifying needs around us, and beginning to address them.

The fact that we can participate in advocacy campaigns from our computers should not prevent us from spending time on the complex, sometimes overlooked issues that are all around us. Activism that is grounded in real relationships, with valuable time and energy invested in it, will be effective and long-lasting. We will

be less likely to sink into apathy because it will mean something to us personally. Engaging in rich advocacy through building relationships and investing in a cause is not only effective, but fulfilling as well.

Maria van Geest is CPJ's summer student and author of CPJ's new advocacy toolkit, available at www.cpj.ca.



CPJ now has an online advocacy toolkit!

Does a political decision or piece of legislation concern you, but you aren't sure what to do about it?

CPJ's new advocacy toolkit can give you tips on how to get started, what kinds of actions you can take, and how to most effectively carry through with those actions.

The toolkit contains information such as:

- How to form a campaign strategy
- How to schedule a meeting with your MP and what to say
- When and how to engage in the legislative process
- How to increase public awareness
- . . . and more useful information

To view the toolkit, visit our website:

www.cpj.ca.

**To order a hard copy, call CPJ at
1-800-667-8046.**

BC electoral reform gets a second chance

by Antony Hodgson

On May 12, 2009, British Columbia voters will go to the polls to answer for the second time a referendum question asking whether we want to change the way we elect our Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs): do we want to use the existing electoral system (First-Past-the-Post, or FPTP) or the single transferable vote electoral system (BC-STV) proposed by the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform? I consider this referendum far more important than the actual election results because, while the winning party will govern for four years, how we answer the referendum question will affect the quality of our political life far into the future.

Our existing system: First Past The Post

Our existing system is well-known to us – the province is divided into a number of ridings and the candidate in each riding with the greatest number of votes is elected as the MLA for that riding. CPJ has highlighted many critiques of this system over the years (disproportionate outcomes, exaggerated regional differences, lack of diversity, etc), but the essence of all these critiques is that FPTP forces many voters to accept representation by someone they did not vote for. In the 2005 BC election, which produced what many considered to be one of the most balanced outcomes in many years, only 52% of voters were represented by the person they voted for.

Because of these problems, and because the BC Liberal party itself suffered from one of FPTP's inconsistencies in losing the 1996 election despite winning more of the popular vote than the NDP, in 2004 Premier Gordon Campbell took the innovative step of charging a Citizens' Assembly (a kind of citizens' jury consisting of 80 men and 80 women randomly invited from every riding in BC) with reviewing our current voting system and recommending an alternative that was guaranteed to be put to referendum if FPTP was found wanting.

Single Transferable Vote (STV)

The Single Transferable Vote (or STV) the assembly proposed is perhaps unfamiliar to many of us, though it is currently used for various bodies in Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland, India and the US. The fundamental goal of STV is to ensure that almost all voters have an MLA who they have personally chosen to represent them. It does this by merging several current ridings and allowing candidates to collect votes across the resulting mini-region or district. If a candidate collects a single riding's worth of votes, they are elected. Typically, each major party will put forward several candidates in each district, so voters can choose between candidates as well as parties.

To prevent vote-wasting, voters can also indicate more than one choice using a '1' to indicate their first choice, a '2' to indicate their second, and so on, for as many candidates as they wish to. If a voter's first choice doesn't have enough support to be elected, their ballot is transferred to their second choice.

Public justice implications

Apart from the novelty of STV, did the Citizens' Assembly make a wise choice? That is, did they in fact choose a system that is likely to produce a healthier democracy and a more just society? I believe that the answer is emphatically 'Yes' for at least three key reasons:

- **STV will dramatically improve the accuracy of our democratic representation.** If we believe that the purpose of our legislature is not to rule, but to deliberate and seek consensus, then it is crucial that all substantial perspectives be heard in our public deliberative processes. By having 90% or more of our voters represented by an MLA they have chosen, compared with just 50% now, a more diverse group of MLAs (diverse in gender, ethnic background and political perspectives) will be represented in the legislature and their varied concerns will be reflected in the resulting legislation.

- **Accountability of our MLAs will be enhanced** because all of them will need the active support of those who voted for them to be re-elected. If MLAs fail to adequately serve the interests of the voters who supported them, those voters are free to give their votes to other candidates of the same or different parties. STV has in fact been criticized by party loyalists as forcing representatives to be more attentive to their constituents than to their party, which the loyalists sometimes interpret as disloyalty to the party. Most non-partisan citizens do not see public responsiveness of their representatives as a significant problem.

Since representation will be more accurate (or proportional), **a party will be unlikely to win an outright majority of seats unless they actually have majority support.** The opposition parties will therefore be stronger and will play a larger role both in legislative committees and in scrutinizing the government. When no party has an outright majority, they will have to negotiate with possible partners in order to pass key legislation. This will likely produce more conciliatory and civil attitudes both during the election campaign (when candidates hope to benefit from transfers from their opponents' supporters) and during the term of office.

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A call to action

The coming campaign in BC will present an excellent opportunity for CPJ supporters to raise questions about how our electoral and governance processes work for all Canadians. We encourage you to learn more about these issues at our website, stv.ca.

Antony Hodgson is a professor of mechanical engineering at UBC and volunteers as a director of Fair Voting BC. He also coordinates the educational website, [Demochoice BC \(demochoice.ca\)](http://demochoice.ca), which runs virtual versions of real elections as if they were being run under STV.



Antony Hodgson



Let's envision Canada without poverty

By *Trixie Ling*

What is poverty? What are its symptoms and causes? If someone's basic needs are not met, can they live with dignity? What can governments do to reduce poverty? How do we engage our Members of Parliament on poverty issues? These were some of the challenging questions CPJ asked as we dialogued with people about poverty in Canada and suggested ways of fighting against poverty.

In coordination with our Envisioning Canada Without Poverty campaign (www.canadawithoutpoverty.ca), CPJ took to the road during May and hosted workshops in Ottawa, Halifax, London, Winnipeg and Edmonton to explore a national poverty reduction strategy and empower citizens to engage in advocacy.

There were many good discussions among almost 150 diverse participants, including people from faith communities, those working in policy, anti-poverty activists, CPJ members, students and those new to issues of poverty. It was especially encouraging to see young people at the workshops, for they will be the future leaders tackling poverty issues. The different perspectives from this range of participants enriched and broadened the discussions of the impact of poverty.

A complex issue

During the workshops, we looked at poverty as an issue of dignity and rights in relation to well-being. As Christians, we are called to respect the dignity of each human being. In practice, this means we should promote the well-being of others by ensuring that everyone's rights are respected and basic needs are met.

As we challenged people to think about the symptoms and causes of poverty, we saw that poverty is more than just low income. Poverty can include not being able to afford groceries, not having access to child care, having no hope for the future,

social exclusion and lack of affordable housing.

The complexity of poverty requires a comprehensive solution to address various causal factors. While we need to address the symptoms of poverty, it is important to tackle the root causes to stop cycles of poverty.

During the workshops, we explored how governments – the federal govern-

actively engaged in anti-poverty advocacy and others had never spoken to their MP, our goal was to empower people to get involved in advocacy by writing a letter or visiting their MP, asking them to work toward a federal poverty reduction strategy.

We concluded by identifying other ways of getting involved in the fight against poverty, such as holding letter-

writing campaigns, organizing an MP forum, writing letters to newspapers to raise awareness of poverty, volunteering in local organizations and sharing what you have learned with others by talking to your friends and family about poverty issues in the community.



PHOTOS: Trixie Ling (left) and Karen Diepeveen (right)

How to fight poverty in Canada: Chandra Pasma (left) leads a Winnipeg workshop, while Trixie Ling leads a discussion in Ottawa on strategies to reduce poverty.

ment in particular – can play a strong role in addressing these root causes. We discussed how a national poverty reduction strategy could successfully fight poverty with a long term vision of targets and goals, action plans with supporting budgets, accountability structures and poverty indicators to measure success and failures.

Through such a comprehensive program, the federal government could begin to address the crippling effects poverty has had on Canadians across the country. At each workshop location, people identified issues surrounding affordable housing, income security, and education. As we traveled, we heard these issues being raised again and again – confirming the fact that poverty truly is a national issue that needs to be addressed at the federal level of government.

One of the workshop highlights was hearing people speak honestly of their advocacy experiences and share their doubts and success stories. Personal stories can contribute to successful advocacy as we spend time with and walk alongside those living in poverty.

While some participants had been

Envisioning together

It is important to take action on poverty and not be immobilized by the overwhelming task at hand. Advocacy is an ongoing process; change does not come in a day. We must persist, for we have a duty to work toward a society in which all people can flourish and fulfill their callings, contributing to the common good. God's call for love, justice and compassion should motivate us to advocate for those experiencing injustice.

Since our workshops, we have followed up with MPs Glen Pearson and Irene Mathysen to talk about poverty reduction strategies. We encourage you to continue to write letters or meet with your MP, asking them to commit to eliminating poverty by implementing a national poverty reduction strategy.

Visit www.canadawithoutpoverty.ca for information on how you can take action. Our hope is that together we can work toward God's vision of a society without poverty.

Trixie Ling is CPJ's public justice intern.



“Upgrader Alley” could destroy irreplaceable farmland and communities, Citizens for Responsible Development argued.

Prime land threatened

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“We have an amazing and unique situation for growing potatoes here,” Wayne said. Besides rich soil, adequate rainfall, nearby markets, water for irrigation and pest-killing cold winters, the land benefits from a river valley microclimate that adds precious frost-free days to a short growing season.

Petro-Canada proposes to stockpile the top layers of farmland for reclamation when the tar sands are depleted. Wayne and his neighbours are skeptical that soil built up over thousands of years can be returned to its original form a century later, particularly for growing root crops.

The Government of Alberta terms securing its prime agricultural land “a provincial priority,” Wayne noted, quoting a letter received days earlier from Premier Ed Stelmach. “It is time we started acting on these priorities,” he said. “There is no reason that heavy industry should be built on these soils.”

Nor is Wayne alone in blaming lack of political leadership for the fact that short-term fossil fuel production continues to trump our long-term need for food. “The Province of Alberta is a culprit in this,” says Jim Visser, retired potato farmer and long-time advocate for soil stewardship. Not only potato production, but a thriving market garden industry is at risk, he notes. “The capacity we are losing now can never be replaced.”

Industry growth

For decades, the province has encouraged industry to locate along this prime stretch of the river despite the quality of soils found there. With oilsands extraction mushrooming beyond the north’s ability to cope, pressure grew to pipe some of the bitumen to the Edmonton region for upgrading. Anticipating an influx of taxes and jobs, local governments were happy to comply, despite vocal protests.

To their credit, the four rural municipalities involved hoped clustering the forest of towers, tanks and cooling ponds would create some synergies, including feedstocks for an existing Agrium plant that was threatening to close. But their belief that Upgrader Alley will translate into “improved quality of life for all,” as Sturgeon County Mayor Don Rigney told the ERCB, is

already proving false for those living near the existing upgrader.

Only now, with two more upgraders approved, another five applications submitted and land purchased for a ninth, is the province moving ahead on an overarching land-use framework that pays some attention to the cumulative effects of incoming industry. The resulting Capital Region Integrated Growth Management Plan is supposed to impose “limits on impacts, rather than on development” based on thresholds being set for land as well as air, water and biodiversity.

Public interest?

Numerous voices are calling for a moratorium on upgrader construction at least until those frameworks are complete, particularly given escalating concern about the tar sands’ climatic impacts from such significant markets as the United States.

But an undercurrent of inevitability prevails, a sense that upgrader approvals will roll onward like the monster mining trucks up north, blind to what lies immediately ahead. After all, the bitumen is already being mined, the land already assembled and rezoned, the community torn apart, the plant extensively designed.

The ERCB is provincially mandated to approve natural resource projects that are in the public interest, taking into account social, economic and environmental effects. But nowhere is “the public interest” defined. After reviewing a decade of board decisions in a study sponsored in part by the ERCB, Alberta’s Environmental Law Centre concluded that the term has been used as shorthand to justify decisions based mainly on the views of the businesses being regulated. “The result is that the public interest, by default, becomes defined in terms of economic interests.”

John Hiemstra, political studies professor at The King’s University College, challenged the board to take a far broader view. Given that life is “only partly about economics, and depends more on the quality of human relations, the integrity of creation, the justice of our communities, and the ability of us all to flourish,” he said, “we need to start considering an economics of enough as the key element of the public interest.”

Wayne challenged the board to break with the past. “It is no longer acceptable to frivolously give the green light to these projects,” he said. “I believe that this project cannot be approved until we, as a province, especially in these complex times, have a clearly defined and debated understanding of what actually is the public interest.”

Despite the odds, Wayne professes hope. Hope that the ERCB will at least demand a safer, less destructive facility than the norm. Hope that economics will delay this project, as it has others, giving the land a reprieve until saner times prevail. Hope that the light shed on this case by Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, local media, the *Globe and Mail* and others will by some miracle inspire the ERCB to consider everyone when weighing the public interest, future generations included.

For himself, Wayne hopes he and his family can continue growing potatoes, that staple food – with farmers across the fence. As he often says, “I’d rather manage a farm than a bank account.”

Edmonton writer Cheryl Mahaffy co-authored Agora Borealis: Engaging in Sustainable Architecture and appears in several anthologies. She also writes for magazines, non-profits and other clients, with particular focus on justice and stewardship.



CPJ celebrates 45 years, heralds next chapter

CPJ's Annual General Meeting saw many new and long time supporters gather in Ottawa on June 9. It was a chance to celebrate CPJ's 45-year-history with old friends, say goodbye to longtime executive director Harry Kits, and look to the future with renewed enthusiasm and vision.

A moving part of the evening was celebrating Harry's 20 years of service as executive director. Lisa Chisholm-Smith expressed gratitude on behalf of CPJ board and members, thanking Harry for his dedication, vision and for shepherding CPJ's transition to Ottawa.

Joining Lisa was Paul Dewar, Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre. Paul commended Harry for his commitment to public justice, presenting him with a certificate in recognition of his



Passing the torch: Harry Kits and Gerald Vandezande with new executive director Joe Gunn at CPJ's AGM.

longstanding service.

Graciously accepting their thanks, Harry's heartfelt words spoke of his sadness at leaving his CPJ family but also his

excitement for the next chapter of CPJ's life. "Lots of things have happened at CPJ over 20 years – lots of ups and downs, lots of encouraging times, lots of very difficult times. But for me, the fondest memories are going to be the people – decision makers, members, staff and board – who have become friends over the years. I look forward to where CPJ will go, with the new staff making a significant impact on where the organization is going."

The AGM gave members a chance to meet the new CPJ team. CPJ's new executive director, Joe Gunn, said, "It was a great opportunity

for me to encounter friends and supporters – the people who really are what CPJ is all about. It was a real pleasure for me to hear the well-deserved tributes to Harry Kits, and to have a few good moments with Gerald Vandezande. This organization has a lot of excellent history, with stories of deep commitment, generosity and service for others, and these stories need to be told to new generations of committed people through CPJ's work."

Suzanne Boileau, director of finance and operations, echoed this sentiment. "It was uplifting to meet with CPJ members, and to receive their encouragement. The obvious support and shared passion for working for justice is an inspiration – I look forward to seeing where this momentum will take CPJ in the coming year."

It was an evening of reflection, celebration and looking forward. Join us as CPJ starts this next chapter and establishes a strong public justice presence in Ottawa.

Read more about the AGM on page 2.



John Hiemstra speaking in Ottawa.

AGM explores tar sands, public justice

How are the oil sands affecting Alberta? What are some of the explosive issues emerging from this development? How are we to understand these deep-rooted and complicated economic, social, environmental and political issues?

These were some of the questions that featured speaker John Hiemstra, political studies professor at The King's University College in Edmonton, posed to CPJ members, board, staff and friends at CPJ's Annual General Meeting on June 9. John showed devastating images of the environmental impacts of oil sands development, telling of the irreversible effects the oil sands have already had on surrounding communities and ecosystems in northern Alberta.

John then went on to outline the dominant modernist approach to analysis used to understand the tar sands. It focuses on narrow issues, he argued, thus failing to address "the context of the larger dynamics and deeper influences driving the whole set of developments." In doing so, this approach obscures the underlying ideologies determining the government's role in the development.

He suggested we use a public justice approach to delve into issues around the tar sands. This approach, he stated, can peel away the layers of the debate, ex-

posing the central values at the heart of the issues. It can be a deeper, integrated approach, one that realizes meaning can be found in "interconnections, relationships, communities, and wholes."

John left us with a challenge, urging "CPJ and Christians worldwide to develop and use comprehensive, integral approaches to analyzing problems, and to discern [the] government's public justice role in these issues, including the 'awesome and awful' tar sands boom."

CPJ's new executive director, Joe Gunn, was inspired by John's words.

"I was moved to remember how I first heard of CPJ back in the 1970s when the issues were similar: frontier energy development in the MacKenzie Valley, Aboriginal rights, southern consumption pushing northern environmental destruction, and Christians' prophetic, unwavering and ultimately successful calls for a moratorium."

It was fitting to hear John while reflecting on CPJ's 45 years of history. His challenge reiterated the importance of continuing to work for justice in Canada, and the need for us all to actively respond to God's call for love, justice and stewardship.

The full text of the talk, as well as a video version, is available on our website, www.cpj.ca.

The world needs our voices

By Jennifer deGroot

As an activist, I am occasionally asked why I do what I do. Generally, I am hard-pressed to answer the question. I just do it because it's who I am; it's the right thing; my parents did it; the world needs our positive response to injustice and oppression.

This past winter I read two books by ordinary people who responded positively to the world in extraordinary circumstances. Fauziya Kassindja was a young, relatively wealthy Togolese woman who, upon the death of her father, was about to be circumcised and forced into an arranged marriage. In her book *Do They Hear You When You Cry?* she describes how, at age 17, she escaped to the United States where she requested asylum. She was promptly incarcerated. For 16 months she suffered unspeakable horror in the U.S. prison and legal systems. Eventually Kassindja was granted asylum in a ground-breaking case that paved the way for future women escaping female genital mutilation.

The other book I read was Rigoberta Menchú's biography. Menchú was born into a large indigenous Quiche family in rural Guatemala. Her book *I, Rigoberta Menchú* documents her community's culture and history, and its struggle for justice. Menchú tells the story of her own political awakening as she and others around her recognized their position at the bottom end of Guatemalan society. Menchú becomes active in the struggle for indigenous rights amidst severe military repression. Along the way, she loses two

siblings to abuses related to migrant labour. Another brother and both of her parents are murdered for political reasons. In 1992, Menchú

Jennifer deGroot, with her son Zavi



was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

As I read, I wondered how I would have responded in those circumstances. Would I have been bold enough to speak out, or in Kassindja's case, to flee? Or would I have buckled? These women's stories are virtually impossible for me to relate to. I was born into wealth, rights and democracy. I will never experience first-hand the kind of suffering and abuse these women did. Chances of fate have landed me in a different world.

Yet, it's also the same world. It's the same world in which 500 Aboriginal women in Canada have gone missing and are presumed murdered. It's the same world in which millions of Burmese and Zimbabweans can't seem to shed brutal regimes. And it's the same world of Hiroshima, Guantanamo Bay, and poverty in our own backyard. It's a world in which

we must all act from our own situation, as Menchú and Kassindja did. This is my world. We're all in it together.

For Kassindja and Menchú their faiths, Islamic and Christian respectively, are central. As it is for me.

My belief in a good God who created a good world sustains me in the struggle for a life together in which all have an opportunity to live their full humanity. Advocating for those who have been silent, silenced, or ignored is how I choose to participate in God's creation story.

The contributions we can bring, as advocates for peace and justice, are at once miniscule and significant. Consider the simple act of writing a letter on behalf of a political prisoner. One-third of all Amnesty International cases show some resolution, either a lessening of oppressive conditions or a release from prison.

Consider the Friends of the Lubicon – a few individuals who helped stop logging giant Daishowa. And then consider all those who struggle daily for their human rights to be met, and see no change in their lifetime. The Burmese and Zimbabweans who dream of democracy. Indigenous people around the world who

Using our voices, pens, feet and hands to work for justice is a lifelong commitment.



work daily for their rights to be recognized.

A reporter once asked me why I bothered to demonstrate given that my efforts wouldn't make a difference anyway. I was taken aback. Things do change. After years of lobbying, a small group of us managed to persuade our provincial government to adopt legislation related to sweatshops.

But often things don't change. HIV and AIDS are still decimating Africa. There are still about 270 prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. Using our voices, pens, feet and hands to work for peace and justice is not a simple 'I-do-this-and-then-that-follows' equation. It is a lifelong commitment to continue to dream, to imagine, to struggle for a different kind of world.

I am an ordinary person. I may never accomplish anything extraordinary. And so I do the dishes, weed a row of squash, lead a workshop, write letters, read about Kassindja and Menchú, cook supper, meet with a politician, push my one-year-old son in the swing, try to think about how to respond to my neighbour and her two daughters who are caught in a cycle of dysfunction that plays itself out on their porch daily, make strawberry jam, take note when I see the police interrogating another Aboriginal youth, and dare to believe that the world needs our voices.

Jennifer deGroot grows food, mothers, rides her bike, and facilitates popular education workshops on women's political and economic rights in Winnipeg.