

Social Justice Forums

The second and fourth Sundays of every month in the
Fireside Room after the Service

Upcoming Forums

June 27th

No oil tankers on BC coast; no Enbridge pipeline from tar sands to Kitimat

Join Andrea MacDonald from the Dogwood Initiative for an important and timely presentation on tar sands oil flowing through British Columbia and what we can do about it.

Presenter Andrea MacDonald has worked with Greenpeace Canada, Greenpeace International and Canadian's for Climate Justice. She has worked around the world on environmental and social justice issues including organizing a letter writing and educational project with children in Cambodian and Canadian elementary schools. In her spare time she likes to spend time with friends and family, rock climb, do yoga, ski and ride her bike.

July 25th

Film Showing: Workers of the World Relax

The principle of continuous growth which rule our economy have brought us here. But is there a different path?

What if we used our gains in productivity to slow down? We could work less and produce less. It would also mean consuming less.

Join well-known local activist, author and filmmaker Conrad Schmidt for the film and lively discussion afterward.



Social Justice Notes

Summer 2010

Fannie Lou Hamer: A Model for Us All

By David Steele

Sometimes it's really tough working for social justice. Entrenched power seems overwhelmingly intransigent. Most of us seem content to ignore the terrible problems of this country and of this world. We don't even seem to care. We want to lead lives untroubled by the tragedies outside our doors.

It can be very good, therefore, for us to look back at the lives of others – people who faced overwhelming odds and much worse than indifference, yet nevertheless managed to overcome them. Fannie Lou Hamer was just such a person.

Fannie was born to a family of poor black sharecroppers in 1917 Mississippi. She had only 6 years of schooling and her life was full of hardship. She worked the fields from a very young age. When her parents managed to buy two mules to help with the farm chores, the mules were poisoned by a white neighbor. He wanted to teach a lesson about "maintaining one's place." As a young woman, and without her permission, Fannie was sterilized by a white doctor. She was always poor, always downtrodden.

But they couldn't stop Fannie. In 1962, she attended a SNCC (Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee) meeting where she volunteered to try to register to vote – a very courageous act for a Black woman in 1962 Mississippi. She was lucky – she wasn't attacked and beaten when she lined up to take the test, but she was fired from the Marlow plantation for her simple act. She was told never to return. It took three attempts, but

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Fannie Lou Hamer (continued from Page 1)

Fannie did finally manage to register. She was still denied the vote, though. She couldn't afford to pay the Mississippi poll tax.

"I am determined to become a first-class citizen.... I am determined to get every Negro in the state of Mississippi registered," she said. She was bound and determined to fundamentally change America. She took up working for SNCC, traveling the state, helping others to register in their own communities. For her efforts, she experienced the weight of 1962 Mississippi "justice."

In the summer of 1963, Fannie and a few SNCC coworkers attended a voter registration workshop in Charleston, SC. On the way back, their bus made a stop in Winona, Mississippi. Fannie and another SNCC worker, Annelle Ponder, were arrested and taken to the Montgomery County jail. There, they were both brutally beaten. Worse, two Black prisoners were forced to carry out the beatings, forced to attack the women under threat from the police.

"One of the men told me, 'Get up from there fatso,' and he carried me outa that cell... They had me to lay down on this bunk bed with my face down, and they had two black prisoners. A lot of folks would say, 'well, I woulda died before I'd done that.' But nobody know the condition that those prisoners was in before they were s'posed to beat me. And I heard the highway patrolman tell that black man, said, 'If you don't beat her, you know what we'll do to you.' And he didn't have no other choice."

Fannie and Annelle were held in that cell for three days without treatment. Fannie sustained permanent damage to her feet, her kidneys and an eye. For the rest of her life, she walked with crutches or a cane. Her friend, Medgar Evers, fared much worse. The same night as Fannie and Annelle were beaten, he was shot to death in his own driveway.

But even this brutal violence couldn't keep good Fannie down. In 1964, she helped found the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That year, in the Mississippi primary, the MFDP got more votes than the regular Democratic Party. So, she and the other MFDP delegates traveled to Atlantic City – to the Democratic National Convention, determined to

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The Social Justice Committee meets the second Sunday of every month at 9:30 a.m. in Budny

Join us there!

Fannie Lou Hamer (con't from p. 2)

challenge the regular Mississippi delegation. On national television, Fannie spoke passionately on behalf of her delegation. "If the Freedom Democratic Party is not seated now, I question America. Is this America? The land of the free and the home of the brave? Where we have to sleep with our telephones off the hook, because our lives be threatened daily because we want to live as decent human beings?" She spoke about the beatings in Winona, how Blacks in Mississippi were kept from voting, then she wept. The delegations from several states supported the challenge. But President Johnson would not support the MFDP delegates and they were turned away. But not before awakening the public to the reality of racism and discrimination. By 1968, things had swung the Freedom Party's way (now renamed the Mississippi Loyalist Democratic Party). Fannie Lou Hamer and the other MLDP delegates took their seats to a standing ovation at the Democratic Party's troubled National Convention in Chicago.

Fannie didn't confine herself to the voting rights struggle alone, important as that was. She understood that empowerment required much more than just the vote. And she worked tirelessly that real empowerment and real democracy might take root.

She organized grassroots cooperatives in and around her Mississippi community. Cooperatives, she very reasonably argued, gave people much needed control over their economic lives. Most cherished among them was the Freedom Farm Cooperative. "If you give a hungry man food, he will eat it. If you give him land, he will grow his own food," she liked to say. Fannie organized for low-income housing, for child daycare and school desegregation. She helped found the National Women's Political Caucus.

On March 14, 1977, she died of cancer.

A poor, black sharecropper's daughter - inspired by a deep desire for justice, working with a great many others – Fannie Lou Hamer was instrumental in bringing profound change to Mississippi and to America. She understood that without truly equal rights and economic empowerment, there can be no democracy.

It is a proud, proud tradition, this fight for social justice and real democracy. The life of Fannie Lou Hamer is an example we would all do well to aspire to. She truly was a model for us all.

Condensed from an article published in Ithaca Today, January 9, 2001.

Ombudsperson Reports on Senior Care in British Columbia

BC government has accepted only 4 of 10 recommendations

By Jenny Podlecki

Ombudsperson's Report to the Seniors' Forum held May 14 at the Firefighters' Conference Centre.

The Ombudsperson said that the government has accepted 4/10 recommendations & only the intent of the remaining six. The Ombudsperson's findings were:

- 1. The Ministry has not adequately identified the rights of seniors in residential care facilities.*
- 2. It has not ensured that adequate info about residential care facilities is publicly accessible. A website has been accepted in principle but it is promised be ready for Sept. 30, 2010.*
- 3. Residential & family councils in all facilities with a liaison person at each facility working with management & staff has been sidelined by the suggestion of regional family advisory councils. The BC government has rejected the establishment of an ongoing position to promote & help develop resident & family councils to report publicly on those activities every year. In contrast, Ontario legislation provides stronger & comprehensive support to Family Councils than does BC.*

At the workshop on Building Family Councils given by Kim Slater I learned that institutions hire & fire so lower paid staff can be hired. A complete changeover 4 times a year sometimes happens.

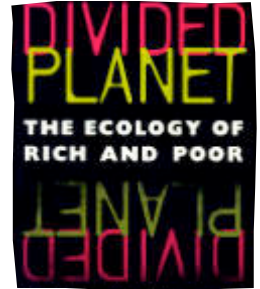
Riverview is to be closed & patients are to be transferred into occupied community-based residential care facilities. BCHC & ACR are concerned about the co-location of those with mental health challenges with the vulnerable residential care population & the fact that the supply of residential care beds in the community will be depleted. There are already 211 fewer residential care beds than 10 years ago. At the Youville Residence the 2 top floors will be renovated for this purpose, but how will the elevators, gardens, laundry & kitchens be secured? 20 young adult males will be transferred to St. Vincent's Langara. If they were being transferred to a children's residence, there would be concern, but why not when the residents are mostly female & vulnerable?

FYI, a new tower will be built on St. Paul's parking lot. There is concern it will be for private patients.

Book Review

Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor,' by Tom Athanasiou

Review by Michael Lane, condensed from Dollars & Sense Magazine, Nov. 1997



"Environmentalism is only now reaching its political maturity," says Tom Athanasiou in *Divided Planet: The Ecology of Rich and Poor*. Starting from this simple premise, Athanasiou lays out an ambitious array of issues a mature movement needs to face, including the environmental and economic ruin left by the Cold War and the much-touted "global economy," the occasional antagonism between the politics of conservation and economic development, and the racist and class-bound baggage of some North American environmentalists. He manages to do all this while synthesizing a range of ecological thought with progressive political and economic theory.

Athanasiou warns that, "History will judge the greens by whether they stand with the world's poor." Environmentalism must come to grips with the fact that ecological destruction and human misery are byproducts of the same capitalist growth-engine. His discussion of capital and class, rich and poor - at least as much as the meticulous exposition of fact - makes *Divided Planet* an important work.

Athanasiou traces a path from early warnings of the global scale of the environmental crisis to the dawning recognition among even mainstream environmentalists that social and ecological problems are inextricably linked. He recalls the shameful racism found, in varying degrees of explicitness, in the remarks of such notable spokesmen for the environment as Edward Abbey, author of the deep-ecology novel *The Monkeywrench Gang*, and Paul Ehrlich, author of the best-seller *The Population Bomb*.

Athanasiou offers no concrete program of action; it is not his purpose. Instead he makes cautious generalizations without disguising his opinion. The book is well documented, intellectually sound and provocative. His accessible style is a welcome relief from both political rhetoric and the compromising language of international lawyers, which constitute too much of what has been written on international development and the environment.

The Spirit Level

Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better

By Catherine Hembling

Langara College's June 11-12 workshop *Talking and Walking Sustainability* gave me much food for thought, much validation of our UU values, many more connections with kindred spirits in social justice and environmentalism. I was surprised and delighted that it also gave me the chance to revisit a striking idea that I'd heard Dec. 27, 2009 on CBC Michael Enright's Sunday Edition.



The workshop was subtitled "Keeping both Environment and Social Justice on Equal footing" (and co-organized by UCV's Leslie Kemp). "Hmmm", I mulled over the decision to attend,...."Could this be a prelude to a joining of the Environment and Social Justice Committees? Hmm... Perhaps, down the road...Who knows?..."

If there were ever to be a committee matchmaker it might be that striking idea, my personal Ah Hah moment during December 27, 2009's CBC interview with Ed Broadbent and Kate Pickett, the latter one of the authors of The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better. The authors, British epidemiologists Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett were quoted time after time in the workshop.

The subtitle of their book encapsulates their ideas, based on (in Wilkinson's case) "thirty years of research and compilation of 200 different sets of data using sources such as the UN, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation, and the US Census, to form a bank of evidence against inequality that is impossible to deny." *

I have to confess that I have not yet read their book, but for those of us who are time starved there are other ways!!! The Guardian has a review, quoted several times in this article, and a recorded interview with the authors, both of which can be accessed by googling Wilkinson and Pickett Spirit Level. I have not yet located the CBC Enright interview, but I think it is archived.

Wilkinson and Pickett have compared countries world wide, as well as comparing individual US states. First the social justice issues: "On

almost every index of quality of life, or wellness, or deprivation there is a gradient showing a strong correlation between a country's level of economic inequality and its social outcomes.This has nothing to do with total wealth or even the average per capita income.** Those same inequalities seen through a social lens also produce status competition, rivalry, lower levels of trust, lower school results, increased violence and crime.

And on the environmental side: Marked inequalities also produce an anxiety level where consumerism is easily promoted, and harder to control. Conversely, where there is greater equality there is a greater sense of community, a greater sense of public responsibility which are embodied in increased recycling and increased keeping of international environmental agreements. Increased community responsibility is also embodied in effective legislation which acts on both affordable housing shortages and climate change.

"The authors point out that the life-diminishing results of valuing growth above equality in rich societies can be seen all around us. Inequality causes shorter, unhealthier and unhappier lives." (and not just at the lower end of the economic spectrum). "It increases the rate of teenage pregnancy, violence, obesity, imprisonment and addiction; it destroys relationships between individuals born in the same society but into different classes; and its function as a driver of consumption depletes the planet's resources."*

There is no silver bullet, no panacea for the deadly serious issues of our times, but for me it was a powerful awakening that we "Green and Social" activists are working under the same frail umbrella in a driving rainstorm of legislated inequality. Those who support either Green or Social action need to share tactics and resources, and understand that social justice walks alongside environmentalism on the same footing. It is good to recognize and hold hands with partners.

* Lynsey Hanley in her review of *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett *The Guardian*, Saturday 14 March 2009

Other readings on this topic:

June 2010 New Internationalist articles: Inequality Costs the Earth, Bob Hughes, page 16 and Mean Machine, Danny Dorling, page 20

Also: Affluenza, Oliver James; Status Anxiety, Alain de Botton; Respect: The formation of Character in an Age of Inequality, Richard Sennett; Status Syndrome, Michael Marmot