
Social Justice Forums

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

Upcoming Forums

January 10th

Is affordable social housing threatened in Vancouver?

For three years, advocates fought to save the Little Mountain Social Housing complex, the biggest social housing project in Vancouver. They lost this battle; Little Mountain is now being demolished.

Some of Vancouver social housing is several decades old and there is discussion about redeveloping other social housing projects. Is BC moving away from social housing for low-income families, towards more supportive housing for people with special needs? Where does this leave the many people who depend on affordable housing?

Presenter Leslie Stern is a long-time advocate for social housing, a founder of Entre Nous Femmes Housing Society, a board member of the Lower Mainland Network for Affordable Housing, and a researcher and policy analyst on housing issues.

January 24th

Afghanistan, Canada, and Pipeline Politics

John Foster and Millie Morton from the Kingston, Ontario Unitarian Fellowship.

Why has Afghanistan become the central focus of Canadian foreign affairs, aid and defence spending? We spent our lives doing international work, and the stated reasons did not make sense to us. We found ongoing plans for a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Kandahar to Pakistan and India, and competition for the immense gas reserves of Turkmenistan, one of Afghanistan's northern neighbours.

Social Justice Notes

Winter 2010

Little Mountain Report:

This battle is lost, but not the larger campaign for more affordable housing!

By Catherine Hembling

Little Mountain Housing is a sad sight, the piles of wreckage rapidly disappearing into the ground, inside the old foundations, in a mockery of composting. The beautiful straight grained timbers have been reduced to slivers by an environmentally "sentive" grinding apparatus. The once vital community of families and seniors is scattered to suites and apartments all over the east side of Vancouver. A skeleton crew of four families still reside in the "row houses" overlooking the continuing demolition of buildings at the south eastern end of the site at 37th and Ontario, though it is unclear for how long.



This battle is lost, but not the larger campaign for more affordable housing!

The spirit of the Little Mountain Housing is alive and well, and fighting for more affordable housing than the replacement 224 units negotiated in the deal between the provincial government and the developer, Holborn Properties. The spirit lives on in the Riley Park South Cambie Visions Group, part of a working group convened by the City of Vancouver.

The Working Group is a body drawn from a broad cross section of

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Little Mountain Report (continued from Page 1)

community representatives who have an interest in, or are affected by, the planning and redevelopment of the Little Mountain Housing site. It will provide advice to City planning staff on the preparation and evaluation of the Development Framework for the Little Mountain Site in preparation for a rezoning decision by City Council in September 2010.

Please Join us! If you have any interest in joining this vibrant group, email Allan Buium, abuium@telus.net, the chair of the RPSC Visions group.

Much is at stake: Among the issues at stake are the numbers of affordable units on this formerly public land - the precedent of which will be a reference for future redevelopments by BC Housing - and the credibility of civic consultation as part of the democratic process.

There is an acute need for affordable units in Vancouver.

On November 19, 2009 there were roughly 14,000 names on the list maintained by BC Housing, by their own account. This list is province wide. No separate stats. are kept for the City of Vancouver, but if we pro-rate, based on population, there are roughly 7,000 names of people seeking affordable housing in Vancouver. The criteria for acceptance to the list is "dire need", that is, in danger of losing accommodation because of inability to pay, or actual eviction. The immediate circumstances according to BC housing, are usually loss of job, injury, disability, fixed income, combined with renovation and gentrification of older buildings.

We do not need more high end condos built on the Little Mountain site.

The average annual income of a family unit in Vancouver is \$45,000. If we use CMHC criteria, that advise only 30% of gross income should be used for shelter, \$1125 per month is what a family of average income can afford for housing. It is extremely difficult to find a one bedroom suite in Vancouver for that amount. It is not surprising that more and more families earning less than average use the Food Bank or are turning up in shelters. There is a desperate need for new affordable units.

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

Join us there!

Carbon tax and dividend (con't from p. 6)

banks and speculators. Cap-and-trade is advantageous only to energy companies with strong lobbyists and government officials who dole out proceeds from pollution certificates to favoured industries.

Fee-and-dividend, in contrast, is a non-tax - on average it is revenue-neutral. The public will probably accept a rise in the carbon fee rate, because their monthly dividend will increase correspondingly. As fee-and-dividend causes fossil fuel energy prices to rise, a series of points will be reached at which various carbon-free energies and carbon-saving technologies are cheaper than fossil fuels plus the fee. The market place will choose the best technology. As time goes on, fossil fuel use will collapse, coal will be left in the ground, and we will have arrived at a clean energy future. A rising carbon fee is essential for a climate solution. But how to achieve a fair international framework?

The critical requirement is that the United States and China agree to apply across-the-board carbon fees, at a relative rate to be negotiated. Why would China agree to a carbon fee? China does not want to be saddled with the problems that attend fossil fuel addiction such as those that plague the United States. Besides, China would be hit extraordinarily hard by climate change. A uniform rising carbon fee is the most economically efficient way for China to limit its fossil fuel dependence.

Copenhagen discussions showed that China and the United States can work together. Europe, Japan, and most developed countries would very probably agree to a similar status to that of the United States. Countries refusing to levy an across-the-board carbon fee can be dealt with via an import duty collected on products from that nation in accord with the amount of fossil fuel that goes into producing the product. The World Trade Organization already has rules permitting such duties.

The international framework must define how proceeds from import duties are used to assure fairness. Duties on products from developing countries will probably dwarf present foreign aid to those countries. These funds should be returned to developing countries, but distributed so as to encourage best practices, for example, improved women's rights and education that helps control population growth. Fairness also requires that distribution of the funds takes account of the ongoing impacts of climate change. Successful efforts in limiting deforestation and other best practices could also be rewarded.

- James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, was the first scientist to warn the US Congress of the dangers of climate change.

Carbon tax and dividend (con't from p. 5)

cheapest energy. The Kyoto Protocol illustrates the deceit of our governments, which have not screwed up their courage to face down the fossil fuel industry. Global fossil fuel emissions were increasing 1.5% per year prior to the 1997 Kyoto accord. After "Kyoto" emission growth accelerated to 3% per year. A few developed countries reduced their fossil fuel use. The only important effect of that was to slightly reduce demand for fuel, helping to keep its price down. The fuel was burned in other places, and products made were shipped back to developed countries.

As far as the planet is concerned, agreements to "cap" emissions, such as the Kyoto Protocol and the imagined Copenhagen Protocol, are worthless scraps of paper. As long as fossil fuels are the cheapest energy, they will be burned somewhere. This fact helps define a solution to the climate problem. Yes, people must make changes in the way they live. Countries must cooperate. Matters as intractable as population must be included. Technology improvements are required. Changes must be economically efficient. The climate solution necessarily will increase the price of fossil fuel energy. We must admit that. But in the end, energy efficiency and carbon-free energy can be made less expensive than fossil fuels, if fossil fuels' cost to society is included. The solution must have honesty, backbone and a fair international framework. We need a rising price on carbon applied at the source (the mine, wellhead, or port of entry). The fee will affect all activities that use fossil fuels, directly or indirectly. The entire fee collected from fossil fuel companies should be distributed to the public. In this fee-and-dividend approach people maintaining a carbon footprint smaller than average will receive more in the dividend than they pay via increased energy costs. The monthly dividend, deposited electronically in their bank account or on their debit card, will stimulate the economy and provide people with the means to increase their carbon efficiency. All that governments need do is divide the collected revenue by the number of shares, with half-shares for children, up to two children per family.

Some economists prefer a payroll tax deduction over a dividend, because taxes depress the economy. The problem is that about half of the public are not on payrolls, because of retirement or involuntary unemployment. I suggest that at most 50% of the collected carbon fee should be used for payroll tax deduction.

Cap-and-trade is the antithesis of this simple system. Cap-and-trade is a hidden tax, increasing energy costs, but with no public dividend. Its infrastructure costs the public, who also fund the profits of the resulting big

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Meat is a Social Justice Issue

By David Steele

When people think about why some people avoid meat and eggs and dairy, they generally think of three possibilities: animal welfare, the environment and personal health. All are compelling reasons to avoid the use of animal products. But there is another powerful reason to eschew meat, dairy and eggs. Meat is a life and death issue.

I'm not talking about the lives and deaths of the animals who become our food. Nor am I talking about the social justice issues related to workers on farms and in slaughterhouses—all of which are bad enough. I'm talking about mass starvation.

The world is facing a food crisis of unprecedented magnitude. Grain stocks are at record lows. Food prices are skyrocketing. Hundreds of millions of people are starving. Fully 800 million are on the brink. They cannot afford to feed themselves. And the prospects for a rapid turnaround are dim. A recent report from the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development tells us that food prices will remain extraordinarily high for at least the next ten years. The UN warns that the world's bottom one billion are about to become the world's bottom two billion.

This terrible crisis is rooted in four basic problems. One, our population is growing and the growing numbers of mouths makes feeding them that much more difficult. Two, Australia is experiencing an exceptionally severe drought that has cut deeply into the world's grain and rice supplies. Three, biofuels are increasingly cutting into our food supplies. As British journalist George Monbiot recently pointed out, over 100 million tonnes of corn and soy will become automobile fuel this year. Biofuels are responsible for about one-third of the price increases for vegetable oils and grains, according to the UN/OECD.

All of this pales, though, in comparison to reason number 4 - the corn and soy and other grains that we feed to farm animals so that we can eat meat.

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Meat and social justice (con't from page 3)

Citing Monbiot again, some 760 million tonnes of corn and soy will be fed to animals this year. Most of that feed will, quite literally, be wasted. The great majority of the grain and soy fed to farm animals does not become meat. It becomes body heat, carbon dioxide, methane and manure.

And, unfortunately, things are set to get worse. The UN/OECD report predicts that global meat demand will grow 2.5% per year over the next ten years. Meeting that demand will be equivalent to stealing 19 million tonnes of food out of the mouths of the poor next year, rising to over 200 million tonnes ten years from now. If we allow the trend to continue, a very large swath of humanity will be consigned to horrific and slow deaths.

In his carefully researched book, *The End of Food*, Paul Roberts argues that our future is bleak. Modern agriculture is too industrialized. It relies too much on fossil fuel inputs. Food crops are too inbred. Farm animals are raised in too high numbers in too close quarters. Sooner or later disease pandemics will run rampant among them – if grain shortages don't kill them first.

Roberts argues that system-wide collapse is inevitable. We will respond to this crisis only when it becomes a crisis even for us in the rich West. By then, it will be too late.

But he may be wrong and we can prove him wrong. Grow your own food to the maximum of your ability. Support organic agriculture – in the long run, it's one of the best hopes for humanity. And avoid meat and dairy and eggs. As George Monbiot points out, diverting the grain fed to animals to human mouths instead would cover the food deficit 14 times over.

Reprinted from the Canada Earthsaver, July/August 2008

*Don't miss our Social Justice
Bazaar*

*Sunday February 27th in the Fireside Room
after the Service*

James Hansen: Copenhagen has given us the chance to face climate change with honesty

A carbon-use dividend for everybody must replace the old, ineffectual 'cap-and-trade' scheme

Reprinted from the London Observer, December 27, 2009

The minimalist Copenhagen global climate accord provides a great opportunity. The old deceitful, ineffectual approach is severely wounded and must die. Now there is a chance for the world to get on to an honest, effective path to an agreement.

The centrepiece of the old approach was a "cap-and-trade" scheme, festooned with offsets and bribes - bribes that purportedly, but hardly, reduced carbon emissions. It was analogous to the indulgences scheme of the Middle Ages, whereby sinners paid the Church for forgiveness.

In today's indulgences the sinners, developed countries, buy off developing countries by paying for "offsets" to their own emissions and providing reparation money for adaptation to climate change. But such hush money won't work. Yes, some developing country leaders salivated over the proffered \$100 billion per year. But by buying in, they would cheat their children and ours. Besides, even the \$100 billion hush money is fugacious. The US, based on its proportion of the fossil fuel carbon in the air today, would owe \$27 billion per year. Chance of Congress providing that: dead zero. Maybe the UK will cough up its \$6 billion per year and Germany its \$7 billion per year. But who will collect Russia's \$7 billion per year?

Most purchased "offsets" to fossil fuel carbon dioxide emissions are hokey. But there is no need to flagellate the details of this modern indulgences scheme. Science provides an unambiguous fact that our leaders continue to ignore: carbon dioxide from fossil fuel burning remains in the climate system for millennia. The only solution is to move promptly to a clean energy future.

The difficulty is that fossil fuels are the cheapest energy, if the price does not include the damage they do to human health, the planet, and the future of our children. "Goals" for future emission reductions, whether "legally binding" or not, are utter nonsense as long as fossil fuels are the

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