

Journey of an  
Unrepentant  
Socialist

Brewster Kneen

Brewster Kneen, 2014

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For you who walk there is no road.  
The road is made by walking.

Camínante, no hay camino  
Se hace el camino al andar.  
Antonio Machado

# Introduction

When I first met Brewster, I was attracted by his passionate commitment to social justice and his active pacifism. As we got to know each other, I realized that his Christian theology did not fit the mould of the Protestantism I was familiar with, growing up in Newfoundland. The focus was not on heaven and hell, nor on salvation or redemption from sin, but on the Incarnation, which he understood to be about God's presence in the world. This theology has been basic to his life and work.

After our marriage we settled in Canada and he became a Canadian citizen. He was already 30, and his formative years had been spent in the USA. Much of the history he recounts in this book reflects that background, even though the rest of his life and work has been based in Canada.

The initial impetus for writing this book came from Brewster's ongoing work of analysing and trying to explain what is going on in the food system. He was reading books about the post-war years in North America, and looking back through his own archives, when he exclaimed, "You know what? Anti-Communism won!"

The book also brings Brewster and me full circle. The meeting at which we met was designed to introduce us young leaders of the peace movement and the infant New Left to some of our elders, people who had not given up and become cynical, but who had held to their socialist and pacifist principles. Now we are the elders.

This memoir, then, tells his story of the New Left and the peace and social justice (Civil Rights) movements of the 1960s and the absorption and disintegration of the organized Left in North America by the end of the century. It's a personal story

America by the end of the century. It's a personal story of his deep engagements with these movements as well as his first-person observation of the Prague Spring, and describes his own "long march through the institutions", starting with the Church. It is very personal, but not just individual: as the scribe for a variety of groups over the years, Brewster is able to quote lengthy excerpts of manifestoes and notes from some of the intense discussions which illuminate the thinking of the younger activists of the period – and which sound eerily contemporary. He also tracks his own thinking and that of the groups he was working with in the following decades: as a farmer, as a cogent analyst of the strategies of corporate capital and its drive to control and exploit the globe, and as a public speaker and writer.

This is not just a chronicle of an interesting piece of the past. The existential terror of nuclear holocaust which marked the '60s is echoed today in the reality of climate change.

Maybe anti-Communism did win – for a time. It was not a final victory. Social movements are emerging around the world, from the global peasant-led movement for food sovereignty to the Aboriginal-led movement in North America to protect the land from destruction by oil, gas, mining, and forestry. For the first time in my experience, there are public voices in Canada denouncing capitalism. There is a renewed sense that another world is not only possible, as the slogan has it, but necessary, and we had better get on with it before we destroy the planet. Some years ago Brewster came across the term "public intellectual" and adopted it to describe himself. As an intellectual exercise in political/historical analysis, then, this memoir is also intimate, though very much focused on the dialectic between Brewster's life and the intellectual, social and political context in which he has lived. In editing this work I had some struggles with him in this regard. I thought he should



have discussed feminism more fully, for example, given that the movement against violence against women has been such a large part of my life. I finally realized that this is not because of a lack of sympathy to feminism. Indeed, he mentions his debt to the feminist critics of science in his understanding of biotechnology and genetic engineering. It's more that feminism has uncovered rather than challenged his own world view – with regard to violence against women, he simply cannot understand how a man could be sexually aroused by a woman's pain and fear. That's just who he is – like his respectful and mutually supportive relationships with our two children. “What's the point of talking about it?” he says. “It's not what this book is about.”

Of course as his work partner, editor, companion and lover for more than 50 years I might have a slightly biased view, but I still think that the focus of the book obscures some of who he is: his playfulness and his deep sensitivity to beauty, whether music, poetry, or landscape. On the other hand, I think it does show his intellectual curiosity and ability – one could even say, habit – of coming to an issue from a different angle, and of sticking to his principles regardless of their unpopularity. Travelling with him has never been dull. – *Cathleen Kneen*

## Nothing comes from Nowhere

This tale is as much about the political and social context and history of my life as it is about my life itself. That context is increasingly important, as I realize in conversations with younger people that very often they were not even born at the time I am talking about. The 1960s and 1970s may feel to me like a recent time which everyone knows about or at least has

heard about, but that is not so. Yet they are a crucial period of our history if we wish to gain some understanding of our present political situation.

It was the mid-1970s and I was visiting my friend and colleague Bas Wielenga at the Centre for Social Analysis in the Church of South India theological faculty in Madurai, South India. A Dutchman who studied in West Germany, as it was then, Bas was teaching social analysis to Christian pastors so that they could engage in effective social justice ministries. One afternoon he said we were going to walk to a nearby village to observe a group of university students putting on a play about water issues in the village centre. I asked Bas why we were going to walk rather than ride bicycles. "My students," he replied, ask the same question. I say to them that if they ride, they will get there too soon."

The village we were going to visit was not very far away, but it was a different place than the city where Bas' faculty was located, and the students needed to feel the difference and observe the village culture if they were going to be good pastors and organizers. They also needed to feel the open spaces and fields between villages.

The lesson was not lost on me. I had already done some very interesting walking all over the eastern U.S.A. during and after my teen-age years growing up in the Midwestern city of Cleveland, Ohio. I often hitch-hiked and walked, in a time where cars and trucks were far less numerous and drivers did not assume that some other car or truck would soon pick a solitary hitch-hiker. The walking part of hitch-hiking was usually through small towns and cities. It was much easier to hitch-hike on the open road, as drivers recognized that you were going some distance, at least to the next town. I remember spending one night with a truck driver delivering donuts to

the coffee shops in a number of small towns. When he was through with deliveries and heading home, I got out and carried on, on foot. One ride I was glad to escape from, in Louisiana, was with a guy who stopped at a small hotel and wanted me to accompany him to his room to pick up a gun. It was a pistol, loaded, that he tucked in his belt as we exited the hotel, then in his sock or under the seat in his car. I made very sure that my left foot was ready to stomp on his hand if I saw it moving toward the pistol.

Several summers, while I was in school, years before there was such a thing as racial integration in the South, I hitch-hiked around the southern US. It meant walking through the separate white and Black areas of the towns. While I do not recall having any 'difficult' experiences, or seeing anything shocking, I'm sure I took in the conditions of deprivation and segregation all around me. I certainly found that I preferred roadside bushes to the segregated toilets. Had I driven, I would not have been able to observe and absorb as I did.

I have always used public transport in cities when available, but there are also many times when I prefer to walk, to discover what lies between where I am and where I am going. I've also made a practice of climbing hills so that I can observe where I am. I recall doing this in Kyushu, Japan: leaving the US Navy ship I was on while it was docked, and climbing the nearest hill, observing and emotionally absorbing the rice paddies, temples, and wind-sculpted pine trees that were obviously the inspiration for traditional Japanese bonsai.

In my twenties, I hitched-hiked all over Europe, sleeping on roadsides, in youth hostels and riding on all manner of vehicles, one of them a small motor scooter loaded down with goods for the market along with the farmer and his wife. I couldn't see how they could add me to their load, but in their generosity

they stopped for me, and I gratefully scrambled on to keep the chickens company.

I lived in Edinburgh, Scotland, while attending the Church of Scotland theological faculty. I loved the city, partly because it was possible to walk around it – or through it from one side to another – and get to know it as a whole. It was not an unknowable alien. Having been a city of passageways and courtyards for centuries, and a fortress at times, it was built compactly and there was not much alternative to walking. I loved Prague for similar reasons.

Because here we are ‘walking’, and not riding in an overpowered automobile (or circling Earth in a spaceship), our seeing – and thinking – will be about what is within view, recognizing without apology that our view is both limited and proximate. While hiking or walking, I frequently stop to observe some creature, or an interesting facade. This book also stops to take note of something, or takes a detour to a particular view point.

Now I will take you on something of a walk through my life, observing and reflecting on some of what has composed it, and occasionally turning off to explore a side-track, or to look more closely at what lies underneath a rock or behind a tree. It’s not that I think my life has been so notable or extraordinary, but because a couple of years ago I realized that when I was in my late twenties and early thirties I was living and politically active in what I see now as a very significant decade – the 1960s – during which anti-Communism cemented its hold on the political and social culture of North America and much more of the “free world” and its allied less-free states and colonies. I think it was the decisive decade when even the Left, socialist groups and trade unions alike, conceded victory to the forces

of anti-Communism, with the result that left wing politics – union, party, and New Left – shattered and disappeared.

We will have to walk rather slowly. The '60s were, after all, a busy, almost hyper-active decade of decolonization, primarily in Africa, and mounting fear in the USA that the Soviet Union would take the place of the old colonial powers and their access to the resources of the old colonies. Hence the birth of NATO and the Cold War of the USA against the Soviet Union, which only came to an end in 1989, though anti-Communism had by then shaped the political culture of the West and prepared the way for Reagan, Thatcher and neoliberalism.

The 1960s were also a time of global unrest, to put it mildly, from the rise of the New Left and the civil rights movement in the USA to the Cultural Revolution in China, decolonization in Africa and the rise of socialist movements in Central and South America, not to mention the threat of nuclear war, which peaked with the “Cuban missile crisis” in 1961.

## *Utopian dreams and the Kingdom of God*

We shall overcome,

We shall overcome,

We shall overcome some day,

Oh deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day. ....

Oh deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall live in peace some day.

The simplicity of this song, something of an anthem in the civil rights movement of the '60s, made it possible to sing it as an expression of longing, but with no indication of whether we would overcome in our lifetimes, within history or beyond

history. It was always a song of solidarity, and though I never heard this articulated, it was also a song of protest and hope in the face of the dominant culture's insistence on 'realism', which meant, of course, the abandonment of hope.

I refer to utopia quite often in this book, but I offer no scholarly definition or description of Utopia or The Kingdom of God. Both are expressions of hope, both refer to an ideal society of the future, a dream. Utopia refers to a dream of the kind of world (or just city or state) one would like – or perhaps even hope – to live in. Virtually everyone could have a different, description of their utopia, or utopian vision.

The Kingdom of God is usually even more ephemeral and may be best described as a hope beyond time and history, though there have certainly been Christian churches and movements that have expected the Kingdom of God within history and, in some cases, including the Social Gospel and some Evangelical sects, have seen themselves as building the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the best expression of the idea of the Kingdom of God is the image from the Book of Revelations of the lion and the lamb lying down together.

For me, here, utopia stands in contrast to the limited, rather hopeless attitude of Realism, which takes its definitive lines from what is already experienced. On the contrary, like the lion and lamb, utopia opens a vision of something completely new.

I have always thought about utopia, not as the outcome of human progress or human perfectability, but as the vision of a world where the social energy goes not into war, empire building, or capital accumulation, but into addressing the question, "How are we going to organize our lives so that we,

and future generations, can live well together?" One might describe this as the political program of the Kingdom of God.

Without utopian dreams no genuine political theory can be constructed. Without a utopian vision – or a ‘Communist Horizon’ in the words of Jodi Dean<sup>1</sup> – politics can amount to little more than pragmatism. This opens the door to power politics and the dubious ethics of ‘lesser evil’, with the consequence that humanity would never know what might actually be possible.

Beneath the stagnation of those who have closed their minds to the future is the pervading feeling that there are simply no alternatives, that our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well. . . The decline of utopia and hope is in fact one of the defining features of our social life today.  
– *Port Huron Statement, 1962*

The current regime of Neoliberalism offers no vision, no dream, just a counsel of despair for all but a tiny, diminishing elite who are busy blindly furnishing their private domain of wealth and privilege. The rest of us will have to do with their leavings.

Is this the best we can do by way of Utopia?

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What follows, then, is something of an autobiography, not for its own sake, but because of the period in which I have lived, as a way to frame the mid-20th century collapse, in North America and apparently in Europe as well, of any utopian dreams or socialist visions, along with the fracturing and virtual disappearance of the left in the mid 1970s. Perhaps it was my

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1. Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, Verso, 2012

theology, which ranks hope over rationality, that kept me from being overcome by the apparent futility of utopian visions and socialist dreams, and I have not yet succumbed to despair, in spite of all the good reasons for doing so.

Ever since the 1917 Russian Revolution, the West's fear of 'Communism' – referring strictly to the Soviet Communism of the Stalin period – has cost the world dearly, politically and socially. I believe we won't survive without a more hopeful vision of the future than that offered by liberals, neo-liberals, social democrats, and right-wing populists and pseudo-conservatives, all of whom have been busy implementing, whenever the opportunity presents itself, their ideology of individualism (which they assume to be a universal human characteristic), capitalist domination, the so-called free market, colonization, and Progress. This ideology proclaims that the only possible way to organize a viable and desirable economy and society is according to its dictates. There is no mention of the State except as a negative entity, in spite of the obvious dependence of neoliberalism and The Market on that very State.

The result of the battle of the West against Communism has been the production of the political and social poison of anti-Communism that began in reaction to President Roosevelt's New Deal in the USA in the 1930s. The term 'Communism' was applied to any progressive political or social movement or party that appeared to threaten the rule of capital. At the same time, any dream or vision of a just society (and now we must add environmentally respectful society) and a peaceful world has been described and dismissed as 'utopian'. We are all supposed to be realistic and accept that Progress requires capitalism, injustice and environmental destruction. This is an unacceptable dystopian nightmare.



## Genesis and the rewards of walking

As I have drifted from the Christian church, particularly since 1995 when we moved from Toronto to British Columbia and I made a rather unrewarding effort to be engaged in small local Anglican church in two different communities, I have wondered, from time to time, Whatever happened to my theology? To address that, however, I had to ask myself, what theology? Unable to think abstractly about that, I started asking myself, why did I study theology in the first place? – which I did, as I have mentioned earlier, first at the Church of Scotland seminary (New College) in Edinburgh (1957-58), then at Union Theological Seminary in New York (M.Div 1961). I knew I wanted to go to seminary to study theology but it was not to become an ordained minister in a Christian church. Nor was it because I was fascinated by church doctrine, or because I thought it would lead to a good teaching position.

It was not until 2008 that I came up with a plausible answer – just 51 years after I embarked on that course of study – as I was walking about Edinburgh, Scotland, revisiting familiar places including Arthur's Seat, and reflecting on my first year of theological studies there. That had been a wonderful year for me, one which greatly expanded my intellectual and social world as well as healing my wounded ego after a brief marriage during my time in the Navy after graduation from university. (More on that later.) The intellectual side was not just through the seminary courses, but also through the other intellectual and social offerings of an ancient city and culture, such as a noon-time series of lectures and readings of Scottish poets,

attending concerts, and becoming acquainted with Scottish history and castles. In addition, there was the valuable experience of being one of a 3-4 person team running a drop-in centre for teenagers in the (at the time) notorious slum of Greenside. The 'club' was in the otherwise unused sub-basement of an old church (now a boutique hotel). The young teenagers who came were all refugees' from every other club in the city, having been kicked out for causing trouble or because their culture was working class. We did not have any such 'trouble' in Greenside, which I have always attributed to our respect for them and our function in the club as peacemakers, not police. Whenever we sensed trouble brewing, we would casually place ourselves, often with our hands in our pockets so that we were sitting ducks, between the two guys getting steamed up. We never had a fight in the club.

During that day in Edinburgh I realized that I had long told myself that I studied theology because I wanted the (intellectual) discipline, which was true, but what really drove me was a quest for a 'big picture': some knowledge and understanding, not just of the 'free world' or The West, but of the larger and more diverse cultural, political and material world of which I was an inhabitant. In the 1950s Union Seminary was the place to go for that, together with social ethics. (I will discuss this in more detail in New York: Theology and Politics.)

The occasion that had brought me to Scotland was a memorial celebration of the life and work of Milan Opocensky, a Czech theologian who had died two years previously. It was a gathering of Milan's colleagues from the years roughly 1960 to 1985, held at the Church of Scotland House in Dunblane. Having worked closely with Milan in the context of the Youth Commission of the Christian Peace Conference for a number of

years in the 1960s, I wanted to recognize and honour a friend and colleague and I thought it would also be an appropriate opportunity for me to think deeply about why I studied theology and what had happened to that theology over the years.

I will come back to the CPC because it was not only very important in my own life, but because it was a highly significant movement between Communism and Christian faith at a crucial time in world history when it was widely assumed that one could not be a Communist and a Christian.

Theology is, of course, is all about the Big Picture – the biggest picture, in fact, though it has all too often been limited by the small frame of some sectarian ideology. Theology is not about doctrines and creeds, though it certainly can be about beginnings and endings, and, in between, miracles. Doctrines and creeds come along later and under particular historic circumstances, too often related to issues of secular and/or ecclesiastical power.

The really Big Picture is all about context and relations, about social and economic relations, about how we are getting along together and the arrangements that make this possible – or not. Today it would have to include trade agreements, flows of goods and services, structural inequity and accumulation of wealth. It would also have to include climate change and its causes and consequences. But to state it more simply, it is our understanding of who we are and how we relate, each of us, both to other people and to other creatures, the earth and the environment of which we are an element.

‘Cosmology’ is perhaps a more inclusive word, with space for the spiritual, than the framework of a secular, materialist two-dimensional Western culture that is preoccupied with

identifiable bits and pieces, as in genetic engineering, space exploration, Markets and Progress.

Such a cosmology puts in perspective the structures of capitalism and economic 'growth', of wealth accumulation and systematic impoverishment, of militarization and war, of 'consumption' and destruction of the environment and 'natural resources'. It casts a clearer light on the displacement of material business (once called manufacturing, trading and shop-keeping) by finance: a transformation of The Market from trade in real goods and services to trading in derivatives and other financial abstractions such as stock indices.

## Vocation

I am fond of asking people, "where did you go off the rails?" - why are you not walking down the conventional road of ignoring the uncomfortable realities I have just described?

I must now address that question: where, and why, did I go off the rails? And, again, why theology?

The answer remains elusive, though I can identify various influences and experiences that led or pushed me along the path my life has taken. One of them has been the idea of 'vocation': having a particular responsibility for what I do with my life, what kind of work I pursue, as opposed to pursuit of a career, though a vocation could also become the base of one's career.

It would be easy enough to say that my sense of vocation was simply an inheritance from my mother's Scots-Irish Presbyterian side of the family, but it was much more than that. Maybe I just thought too much of myself, but that does not explain my feeling that there was some special work for me to do, some ministry that I could and should devote my life to. For a middle-class person like me, it might have been a 'call' to

an ordained (or 'lay') ministry, or to some professional vocation of service of a social nature, such as a doctor or nurse, or a teacher.

Having a vocation, or calling, has commonly been interpreted as having a private word from God. For me it is, rather, the outcome of a conversation between myself and the world and a critical identification of injustices that my life might address, such as the inequity of wealth and power in the world of my experience and the structures that create and perpetuate this inequity.

Over the years my understanding of vocation has been subtly reshaped to being a question of for what, to whom, and for whom am I responsible? To address this, of course, one has to know where one is situated, historically, politically, and socially and what the needs of the world are, on the one hand (contextual analysis), and what one's talents and interests are on the other. However, I have never understood vocation to be simply an intellectual or professional pursuit. Indeed, manual labour or artistic creation can be particularly valuable in demystifying one's context and enhancing one's grounding in the material, natural world.

For me, this turned out to be carpentry and farming, which included machinery repair, barn building, and care of livestock. It also included several years of producing public affairs programs for radio (CBC) and remodeling houses (mostly our own). This latter 'occupation' was the result of observing and learning from electricians and plumbers on the job and deciding I could do the job as well or better than what they were doing. My 'vocational training' for this line of work started much earlier with using and maintaining gas lawnmowers and then a very early "Whizzer" motorbike and an almost home-made motor scooter. Later on I rebuilt and souped-up a 1937 Ford coupe,

installing the 'new' engine during exam week in my third year of university. (Back then automobiles were mechanical, not electronic, constructs.)

In the 1960s, at the urging of feminist friends (and wife) I actually organized and taught a 'fix-it' course for women in the basement of our old house in Toronto. The objective was to demystify the construction of a house. I pointed out the basic construction features, how the plumbing and electrical facilities worked. I described the basic rule of wiring as black power, white return. I also stuck my ever-present little pocket knife into a beam or two to show them how to recognize dry rot. (There is a political dimension to everything.) My mature 'students' were delighted with what they learned about how a familiar bit of the world they lived in was put together and how to fix it themselves. That was reflected in the second half of each session when we went upstairs for a study session on Marxism.

My father's advice to me before a high school swimming meet: Forget the others, it's not about winning, but about how well you can do against yourself. It was, to the best of my memory, the only explicit advice my father ever gave me, and the most enduring advice I ever got from anybody. I took his advice personally, but not individualistically; I loved the team work of my high school soccer team where I was a goal-scoring half-back. In my high school years I played soccer in the fall, swam in the winter, and ran the quarter-mile and hurdles in the spring.

This advice, and my notion of vocation, stand in stark contrast with what seems to be the dominant preoccupation of capital, where the 'value' of your life, your worth, is understood as a function of your so-called productivity. In a materialist culture what matters most is your contribution to 'the economy',

as measured by the surplus of your labour that can contribute to the national economy (and the wealth of the wealthy) regardless of its value to the society. Of course this immediately raises the question of how productivity is measured. Measuring the productivity of an assembly line worker, bus driver or a construction worker is one thing, but how does one measure the productivity of a teacher, a nurse, a subsistence farmer – or a political agitator? I suppose I could count up the number of published books and articles I have written, but that would be a rather shallow way to measure my productivity, though I know that an academic career may depend on just such measurements and not necessarily on the quality of teaching.

Another way of seeing the ideology of productivity is its premise that more is good. Being more productive means producing more, but of what? In an economy such as that of the USA or Canada, more should not be a desirable objective. The equitable distribution of what has been selectively produced is an altogether different question. Producing more agricultural commodities for export may appear to enhance the Canadian economy, but it has no direct effect on domestic distribution and may impoverish the farmers of both the importing country and the exporting country.

## *Behind the "Iron Curtain"*

In the countries of central and eastern Europe in the mid-20th century there was much going on that was not recognized – or could not be recognized and respected by either East or West – and my experience in two of these, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, contributed much to my political formation.

Both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia went through highly creative political and philosophical periods under Communist

governments after World War II. Had they been able to continue on their chosen roads, both could well have made very significant, though different, contributions to our collective political lives and well-being.

Once branded as Communist, however, the hopes of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as societies committed to “the Communist horizon” were dismissed as utopian fantasy by the capitalist West which could not see or accept any definition or practice of Communism other than Stalinist. The Yugoslav communist hope for a society of diversity, equity and justice was crushed by the rigid anti-Communist mentality and political program of the USA on the one hand, while on the other hand the Soviet Union felt deeply threatened by such deviations from the party line and fear of losing segments of their empire.

### ***Yugoslavia***

The Communist government of Yugoslavia, led by Josef Broz Tito, emerged out of the resistance against Nazi Germany. With Germany’s defeat, Tito and his comrades pioneered not just the idea of workers’ control of their workplaces, but its actual practice after he won the internal struggle with the old Communist Party apparatus. Decentralization and democratization were his key policies, in contrast with the centralized and authoritarian control in the Soviet Union and, indeed, throughout much of western capitalist society. The response of the West was relentless demonization of Tito as a Communist who could by definition do no good.

One of the most knowledgeable observers and analysts of what was happening in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at the time was Edward Crankshaw who wrote,



“The proposed dismantling of the Yugoslav Communist Party apparatus, the surrender of the levers of power by an entrenched ruling class of privileged functionaries, is an undertaking of stunning sweep and boldness. Its implications for the Communist world in general are beyond the imagination at this stage, but are obviously complex and exciting to a degree. Marshall Tito for the second time in his career (the first was the defiance of Stalin in 1948) has started a process which will change the mood of history.

“What he is trying to do in practical terms is to free Yugoslavia from the shackles of a party bureaucracy (his own creation) whose vision is narrow and whose word has long been law, and to harness to the business of government and production new forces and new talents; to broaden the base of government by enlisting the active participation of men of ability who have no use for party intrigue and party doctrine; and to unite the people by appealing to what used to be known as enlightened self-interest.”<sup>2</sup>

I had a particularly rich summer work experience in Yugoslavia in 1958 as a member of the *Medunaroda Brigada* (International Brigade) working alongside other brigades of young – well, relatively young – people from other countries, Socialist and non-socialist: Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, Scotland, Poland, the German Democratic Republic, German Federal Republic, Tunisia, U.S.A., and, of course, Yugoslavia itself. The work we were engaged in with picks, shovels and wheelbarrows was building a road from Zagreb to Ljubljana. The real work of the road building, however, was the building

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2. London Observer Service, Globe & Mail, 21/6/66

of a communist society and a single country out of the peoples and territories of Slovenia, Serbia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This was never explicit, but the more “efficient” tool of road building, a big bulldozer with ‘Marshall Plan’ painted on it, was parked well off to one side.

At the same time, productivity was considered of great importance, particularly by the East Germans. Every afternoon when we had finished the days labour, a leader from each brigade, together with the Yugoslav coordinators, would gather to discuss the day’s efforts and decide who should be identified as the hardest worker for that day. I don’t remember any prizes. The East Germans would always have one of their own brigade singled out for having moved the most wheelbarrows full of dirt – and they had been counting. But the rest of us – I was designated leader of the International Brigade – had a different understanding of productivity and one of us would suggest that ‘x’ from Tunisia had received the ‘award’ the day before, so it was the Poles’ turn. The next day it might be one of the international brigade. The East German ‘youth’ were probably all 30-year-old factory workers and they just could not understand what was going on. So we began to make something of a contest out of seeing if we could get the Germans to relax and laugh, something we did achieve before the summer was out. Productivity as a vocational evaluation was transformed into the building of solidarity and what would today be called community. A highlight for me was a surprise ‘birthday party’, marked by the baking of a very large cake and everyone singing Happy Birthday to me.

Yugoslav President Tito, who was responsible for the work camp program, knew well that if the young people of his extremely diverse population did not learn to live together, the

country could not survive. Sadly, he was correct, as events in the 1990s showed. (Tito died in 1980.) During his time as the President of Yugoslavia, Tito was vilified in the West simply because he was a Communist, without any recognition of his break from Moscow and his efforts to create a democratic socialist state (with a Communist horizon) embodying many of the principles espoused by his detractors. It would be a grave error, of course, to give the impression that the social and political transformation sought for Yugoslavia was attributable solely to a great leader.

The vilification of Venezuela's Hugo Chavez four and a half decades later was strikingly similar to the treatment of Tito, suggesting that it is ideological anti-Communism, together with capitalist opportunism, that motivates such attacks, not a desire for democracy, justice and equity.

### ***Czechoslovakia***

Czechoslovakia elected a Communist government in 1948 and in the late 1950s and 1960s enjoyed a tremendous burst of creativity in science, art, music and political life. But the vitality of the Czech culture threatened the Soviet Union which saw its own influence diminishing and its political hegemony threatened. The overextended Soviet state simply could not tolerate the Czech example of a genuinely autonomous Communist or socialist state embarking on its own path, however much we all needed a dynamic example of an independent socialist society.

Before WWII, Czechoslovakia was well-known for its highly advanced JAWA motorcycles. While we were in London we met a Czech engineer who had worked for JAWA. He told us of his frustration and disappointment that, after 1948, the Communist bureaucrats, with their conservative notion of

Communism as central planning and their incompetence (having been given their jobs on the basis of their ideological subservience), refused to allow JAWA to continue improving its motorcycles. The engineer said that JAWA could have been the world leader in motorcycles, instead of continuing to produce the old pre-WWII models into oblivion.

Like the Yugoslav peoples, the Czechs regarded Communism not as an ideological program but a social outlook and philosophy with a vision of a just, diverse, and inclusive society. To the capitalist West, such a vision was utopian nonsense and it was much more convenient and dismissive to deal with Communism as a mirror of the West, that is, a materialist, violent society driven to expansion and control. This made it quite impossible for the West to appreciate the profound experiment that was taking place in Czechoslovakia in the arts, science, economics, and governance. The West seemed capable only of looking forward to the 'liberation' of the Czech lands and their inclusion in the 'free world' of Western Capitalism.

Through my involvement with the Christian Peace Conference and numerous trips to Prague between 1964 and 1969 I had something of a front-row seat to observe what was happening. I also forged important friendships through that work, including Milan Opocensky and Bas Wielinga whom I have already mentioned. I will tell more of this story in the chapter on the Christian Peace Conference and the All-Christian Peace Assembly.

The either-or attitude of the USA in particular also rendered it incapable of recognizing the Christian-Marxist dialogue that was being nurtured in Czechoslovakia. While the Russians publicly ignored this development (the Russian Orthodox Church was regarded as a 'state church' above politics) Western Christians saw such a dialogue as an impossibility. For me, it

was a dynamic process, not of one side seeking to overthrow the other, but of two philosophies about 'man' and history seeking to understand each other and to address the question of how Christians and Marxists could fruitfully work together for the benefit of all.

The Soviet Union seemed to regard what was taking place in Czechoslovakia in much the same way as the USA, not as a program of revitalization for Communism but a potential military threat. It brought the Prague Spring to an end with a military invasion in the autumn of 1968, a sad and tragic end to a bold political experiment.

### ***East Germany***

A third country, the German Democratic Republic ('East Germany'), on the other hand, did not aspire to a creative role in the evolution of Communist states, but was a bulwark in the Soviet defense against the constant threat of "rollback" by the right-wing anti-Communist hawks in the USA. (I got a taste of the resultant culture at the Yugoslavia work camp.) The DDR was also a heavy-industry component of the Soviet economy. At the same time, the USA was determined to undermine the DDR's political stability and its economy. The relentless propaganda machine of the USA cynically promised that if the East Germans would overthrow their government, the DDR could count on becoming a wealthy consumer society like the German Federal Republic (West Germany) and the USA.

What was never mentioned, of course, was that the utopian dream the U.S. propaganda machine offered the East Germans was not to be found in the USA, where there was no public day care, no universal health-care system, and great inequality.

As Rudi Dutschke put it in a talk I recorded in 1968, "You know that in West Germany and West Berlin anti-Communist

prejudice is very, very strong, and you know also that this anti-Communist prejudice has been filled with the historical content of Stalinism.”

This is not to ignore the police-state characteristics of the DDR, embodied in the secret police (STASI), but the role of the police was bureaucratic more than political or ideological. The state was ruled much less by its ‘elected’ president than by its “Communist” (or one could almost say Soviet) bureaucracy. (The little Trabant automobile was a bureaucratic facsimile of Hitler’s VW beetle ‘people’s car’.)

## Growing Up

I was born in 1933, the year President Roosevelt introduced the first of his New Deal initiatives to deal with a collapsing capitalist economy. I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where my father, a mechanical engineer, worked for the Lincoln Electric Company, a pioneering manufacturer of arc welding machines. I mention the company because it was founded with highly unusual management practices and labour relations and as my father worked his way up from the factory floor to senior management, I was favourably, if subtly, exposed to the values and attitudes of the company which were, as expressed by its president, James F. Lincoln, highly individualistic and capitalist. Lincoln was paternalistic, no unions ever got in the door, but at the same time, the company has never laid anyone off. Its profit-sharing scheme means that while wages are on the low side, employees get a bonus at the end of the year, as a share of company profits, that might equal their annual wages.

When I was quite young, my father would sometimes take me to his office in the factory and then onto the factory floor where I would be introduced to some of the workers ... and pick up and pocket nuts and bolts and interesting scraps of

metal. My father's respect for the workers was obvious, and this kind of respect has likely been one of the major reasons for the company's success.

That was probably the beginning of my aborted vocation of engineering, which actually came to an end when, after one year of mechanical engineering at Cornell, I switched to liberal arts. I made the move not because the mechanical engineering courses were too hard, but because they were dull, and I had decided that I did not want to lead a double life, being an engineer at work and a person at home. I did not want the bifurcation of work and play that seemed to be pervasive in the culture. This desire for wholeness, mental as well as physical and spiritual, has remained a characteristic of my life ever since.

I started grade four, at age nine, at Hawken School, a private boys school on the other side of the golf course behind our house, because my previous school – a progressive private school (Park School) – had to close. I was given to understand that it was because wartime gas rationing had made it impossible for the students, including my sister and me, coming from all over Cleveland to travel to school by private automobile. There may have been other financial reasons that I never knew about and possibly even political reasons, as the anti-Communist fanatics went about identifying supposed 'Communists' such as progressive teachers.

It was my good fortune to be able to walk to school every day, rain or shine, hiking (or skiing when there was snow enough), across the 'primitive' non-manufactured golf course with streams, woods, bridges, and a multitude of places to play. There was no fence so our backyard extended right onto the golf course as I mowed the grass out a little further with each cutting. There was no cause for concern about pesticides on the

golf course and in its creeks – there were none. The golf course had not been sculpted with an earthmover. It still had significant hills, woods and creeks and gullies with wooden bridges, and weeds. And in the winter, when there was enough snow, on a small hill the old Model A Ford that was up off the ground on small concrete piers would power a small ski lift consisting of a good sized rope wound a couple of times around one tireless rear wheel, with another wheel at the top for the rope to go around.

I wonder now how building very small dams and redirecting water flow and catching little fish might have shaped my fluid mental processes and disrespect for arbitrary intellectual and political boundaries.

Hawken School – grades 4-9 – had a very good athletics program with team sports and a personal physical development program. I remember Mr. Godfrey, the physical education director, working with me to identify physical strengths and weaknesses and then strengthen the weaknesses. It was also the place where I learned to speak publicly – each student had to deliver an address to the student body a number of times. In retrospect, it was all a reflection of the school's emphasis on the whole person, mind, body and spirit. The school was not about training to get rich or become a lawyer or business executive or simply to get a good job. Perhaps that was because it was just assumed that the students were of the elite and would do well if properly formed as whole persons.

Every Christmas eve my parents hosted a carol sing, for neighbours and aunts and uncles who had come to our house to celebrate Christmas. My mother played the piano and the singing was vigorous. But there never was any particular celebration of the birth of Jesus, nor even any discussion about



it and what it might signify. So it was sentiment – good gentle sentiment – and familial celebration of a particular culture.

## High School

My ‘archives’ (which, in writing this book, I was delighted to find were quite extensive and carefully filed) seem to start with Grade 12, my senior year at Western Reserve Academy, a private boys’ boarding school not very far from home that I attended for grades 10-12. There I was fortunate in having a wonderful English teacher – Franklin “Jiggs” Reardon – who encouraged us to write essays on a wide variety of subjects, often subjects about which I, for one, had voiced some opinion in class. Mr. Reardon earned his nickname because he looked like Jiggs, a popular comic strip character of the time: a somewhat short balding man whose shirt never quite met over his rounding belly and, like the rest of his clothes, whose frayed edges testified to many years of use. His political perspective, never explicitly stated, was decidedly not right-wing, and he encouraged me to examine or explain the perspective my father had implanted in me. A 1951 essay for Jiggs illustrates this well: I naively wrote, (reflecting the policies of my father’s employer, Lincoln Electric), “Obviously labour cannot survive without management nor management without labour. Both can and must work as a single unit for the benefit of all. Management can help in this union by making the employees the stockholders. This makes the employees work for their own benefit and they take pride in ownership as everybody does, especially ownership of their job.” This was pretty much what Tito was working towards in Yugoslavia, but I knew nothing of that at the time.

A Christmas card from Jiggs many years later (1974) expressed his political outlook that had no doubt had a considerable, if subtle, effect on me so many years earlier:

“This nation is now getting its just deserts. It becomes increasingly more evident that there is some sort of moral imperative at work. The pursuit of wealth to the neglect of the common welfare, the exploitation of natural resources, the failure to check the disastrous expenditures of the war machine, the loss of civil liberties and the perfidy of elected representatives are but a few illustrations of the distance we have traveled along the road to natural disaster.”

Among my archives I also found an essay that amounted to a lament that the school taught us virtually nothing about the world we were living in, at a time – 1949-51– when a great deal was happening and the world was being radically reshaped politically. We heard nothing of the Cold War and the anti-Communism of the McCarthy era, though I now have to wonder if Jiggs’ early retirement from Western Reserve Academy was not called for by the John Birch Society or some other hate-filled anti-Communist secret organization.

My vague awareness of the significance of the two World Wars and of the conflicts of the larger world at the time did lead me to write, in essays for Jiggs in 1950, that, “I think that knowledge of the problems facing the world and their probable solutions is far more valuable toward a peaceful world than a dead language or ancient history,” and, “It is obvious that the only solution to world peace lies in world unity with one supreme organization at the head, with the power to enforce laws and keep peace. This organization would undoubtedly function best if composed of representatives of the many countries of the world. This type of organization is the type fostered by the United World Federalists.”

At some point during the McCarthy era, the UWF was Red-baited out of existence.

I also remember my disappointment and anger that I was not allowed to participate in a senior (grade 12) philosophy seminar because I did not have the proper prerequisites! But I was welcome on three seasonal athletic teams: soccer, track and swimming.

## University life

I graduated from Western Reserve Academy in 1951 and entered the Cornell University School of Mechanical Engineering that autumn, having been told that was where I belonged. Like many other men my age, I signed up for the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC), assured that in doing so I would be able to finish my university degree without being drafted. For many of us graduating from high school in 1951 this seemed like the best way to avoid the newly re-instituted 18-year-old military draft and avoid being involved in whatever was going on at the time (which was actually the Korean War).

Between the Korean War's outbreak in June 1950 and 1953, the U.S. Selective Service inducted 1,529,539 men while another 1.3 million volunteered, mostly for the Navy and Air Force. In 1951, Congress passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act to meet the demands of the Korean War. It lowered the induction age to 18½ and extended active-duty service commitments to 24 months.

When registering for classes, we also had to fill out the registration form for NROTC. In doing so, we encountered a little box in the form titled 'race' and had to ask what we should put there. 'Caucasian' was the answer provided. Such was the monoculture I grew up in: white, essentially European and middle class. Yes, there were also 'negroes' in this white world,

as participants with defined roles in our monoculture. For example, while I was in school, we had a Czech live-in maid who went off to work in a factory in WW II and was replaced by a wonderful Black woman. In a summer evening we would go fishing for minnows in the golf course creeks behind our house. She would fry up our catch for a snack.

Mechanical Engineering was not to my liking, so as I have mentioned, I switched to liberal arts, where I took a variety of courses pointing in no particular direction except that, being required to designate a 'major' area of study, I chose economics. I remember little of that, but I did take at least one course on economic development and produced a paper on the relationship of population growth to industrialization. The prof liked my paper and kept it for his own use. I also distinctly remember the course on European Civilization which was much more of an engaging cultural and political history than the dry record of kings, queens, wars, victories and defeats that was characteristic of any history course I had up to then. I was annoyed that I had been denied the pleasures and learnings of real history earlier on.

In the summer of 1952 my family moved from Cleveland to New Haven, Connecticut, part of the reason being to remove my sister and me from the pressures of the upper class social life that we were being caught up in (dancing school and debutante balls). My father also felt it was time for him to leave the Lincoln Electric Company, where he was vice-president, and take up a new challenge, as president of the Safety Car Heating and Lighting Company in New Haven, Connecticut, to salvage the company and give it a new life – which he did.

During my second and third year at Cornell I lived in a fraternity house (Chi Psi – the same one as my father) and found it increasingly undesirable. It was uncomfortably narrow in

class composition – only ‘good white Americans’ – even though the university as a whole did contain some racial diversity in spite of its class monoculture. In a letter to my mother I tried to explain my feelings about the fraternity: “I had a feeling of a lack of depth, or thoughtfulness. . . immature and rather shallow. . . But the heart of the matter is the idea of a group existing as an entity in itself . . . the name (like that of a fraternity) becomes the important thing, not the men within it.”

What disturbed me most about my fraternity ‘brothers’ was their attitude – vocally coarse and physically dominating – towards women. This was most crudely manifested during houseparty weekends.

Part of my Naval Reserve ‘experience’ while at Cornell – in addition to the regular classes we had to take – was a ‘midshipman cruise’ the summer between my junior and senior years. This amounted to six weeks aboard a naval destroyer, including stopovers in Quebec City and Havana and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. That was in 1954. The stop in Guantanamo was brief and we were told nothing about the military base. The stopover in pre-revolution Havana, however, had a profound effect on me: the experience of gross, vulgar inequity between the waterfront opulence of U.S. tourists and the other side of the road, with its bars and brothels and young boys pimping for their mothers or sisters, catering to the wealthy Americans. Even in the racially divided southern USA I had not experienced such blatant inequity, and it was obvious to me that Cuba needed a revolution! I was not aware at the time that the revolution had already been initiated in 1953, led by Fidel Castro to its final victory in 1959.

My only direct experience of the virulent anti-Communism that gripped the USA during that decade and beyond was my father’s emotional outrage if I ever mentioned Cuba and Fidel

Castro in any favourable way, however slight. Otherwise my father was a quiet, unemotional capitalist Republican who read books about sailing. (What else would a successful American business executive be?)

Later, when Castro came to New York to address the United Nations in 1959 and did not accept the racism with which his entourage was greeted downtown, he moved to the Theresa Hotel on Lexington Avenue at 125<sup>th</sup> Street in Harlem. Living in New York City by then, I joined the welcoming crowd and still have a vivid memory of him standing on the hotel portico addressing a jubilant, almost totally Black crowd, with no barricades or troops of police to 'protect' him.

In my senior year at Cornell I was a counsellor in a freshman dormitory which provided me with a single room at no cost and enabled me to move out of the fraternity house, making a big difference to my finances, since I was paying my own way through university by then. Being no longer confined to the fraternity encouraged me to mix with a much wider range of people, such as those I met in Cornell United Religious Work (CURW) in which I had begun to get involved the year before. I wrote of this experience:

“My junior year, after making a quick investigation into many of the more popular campus activities, I began to attend a weekly discussion group under the auspices of CURW. The character of the people and the joy they seemed to take in living was a force that made me wonder what they had found that I hadn't. ... Gradually I began to realize that I really did believe in God, and the Christian teachings began to take on some real significance for me. With this realization of my belief, and through a close examination of what my real interests were, I realized that the Christian ministry was perhaps the vocation I was seeking.”

CURW had a non-sectarian program, including Protestants, Catholics, Jews, 'foreign students', and others, based in a beautiful building built for it by a wealthy alumni family in 1953 at the height of the church building frenzy following World War II. CURW encouraged a deepening of religious faith, liturgical explorations and, to a degree, social justice. As a whole, there was little attention paid to doctrine, though the teachings and practices of the different faiths were communicated in denominational clubs or groups.

In CURW we did not get into political issues in any depth or any probably-divisive political or social issues, unfortunately. Now I can only wonder if the underlying reason for this was the assumption that the political system of the USA was deemed to be globally normative and therefore it was not really necessary to know and understand how others organized their lives together - they would become like us in due course, pushed along by relief and 'development' money provided by the U.S. Government to ward off any 'Communist' efforts or inclinations. The discussion in CURW stuck with philosophy and religion, though with, I would now say, a pacifist inclination.

During my senior year at Cornell I was co-chair of the annual week-long university-wide CURW Campus Conference on Religion, which entailed a great deal of preparatory work throughout the year. It was in that context that I met Christine Carlson who became my first wife. We were a picture of the ideal college couple, she an attractive blonde, me a handsome dark haired all-round guy. Towards the end of that year I wrote an essay on vocation for the CURW Campus Life program:

For some time I had also thought of the ministry but immediately put the thought out of my mind because I just wasn't the right kind of person and I didn't really

have any so-called 'religious' beliefs. ... Last fall I began to realize what I felt was missing from the life around me. It was God. God was being ignored and so were some of the basic Christian teachings. Then one day I received a note from my mother. She had been in the hospital since early June and had a serious spinal operation in July. She was in the hospital until after Thanksgiving. ... When I received the note from her it was the first since last spring. The writing was that of a little child, for in the surgery the nerves controlling her right hand had been badly damaged. It was then that I became aware that there was only one thing that could have sustained her through so much pain and long agony [for the past few years], and that was a faith in God.

... I felt that the ministry was the place for me. It was not sudden; it had built up over the years, based on a desire to work with other people and help them in whatever ways I could, combined with certain basic values and ideals, much of which I owe to my parents.

About that time I also wrote a note to myself: "But respect for God and the universe is fundamental, and after that, or perhaps before, comes respect for the earth and the people on it." The note is particularly meaningful to me as 50 years later I continue to think that respect is probably *the* foundational ethical principle of life. The rest is all elaboration.

I graduated from university in 1955 with a major in economics. It was about then that economics was transformed from political economy into economics and pronounced to be a science, with its own ideology and truth, a subject about 'facts' substantiated by statistics and calculations, and 'resource' and money flows. I never did take a course in statistics. Learning about this transition explains, to my satisfaction, why 'modern'



economics has always seemed to me to be a make-believe, fraudulent game.

Timothy Mitchell, in his 2011 book *Carbon Democracy*,<sup>3</sup> elaborates a description of this transformation and its consequences:

The economy came into being as an object of calculation and a means of governing populations not with the political economy of the late nineteenth century, but only in the mid-twentieth century. Its appearance was made possible by oil, for the availability of abundant, low-cost energy allowed economists to abandon earlier concerns with the exhaustion of natural resources and represent material life instead as a system of monetary circulation – a circulation that could expand indefinitely without any problem of physical limits. Economics became a science of money; its object was not the material forces and resources of nature and human labour, but a new space that was opened up between nature on one side and human society and culture on the other – the not-quite-natural, not-quite-social space that had come to be called ‘the economy’.

It was in CURW that I found encouragement for my pacifist inclinations which had first surfaced when I was 14 or so attending a summer camp in New Hampshire. I was in the oldest rank, but there was one guy who liked to pick on me – I have no memory of why – and one day I just got fed up and decided to put him in his place. I slugged him, hard, laid him out, and that was the end of that. I don’t think I’d ever hit anyone hard before, and I know I never did again. I said to myself, I can do that, but I don’t want to and don’t like to. Maybe that

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3. Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy*, Verso, 2011

was the beginning of my pacifism – and the first of a recurring pattern of trying something, then deciding that, yes, I can do that, but I don't want to, or yes I can do that, so I will. It is likely also the basis of my approach to technology: just because we can do something, like genetic engineering, does not mean that we have to take that path. Collectively as well as individually we can “just say no”.

Of course I was also increasingly influenced by the pacifist/ non-violent teachings and practices of Jesus so that by the time I was graduating from Cornell I had become a conscientious objector to military service. But then I was faced with the decision I had made four years earlier to sign up with the Naval Reserve.

In my final term at Cornell I had tried to find a way out of active duty, but when I consulted the clergy associated with CURW, no one ever told me about the legal possibility of conscientious objection, so upon graduation I felt I had no choice but to accept a commission as a junior naval officer. I applied for service on a non-combatant ship (no guns) with the result that I spent a year and a half on an unarmed troop transport ferrying mostly U.S. soldiers from Seattle across the Pacific Ocean to serve as UN peacekeepers in Japan and South Korea. The other six months of active duty was spent on a rust-bucket refrigerator ship taking supplies to those peacekeepers. Fortunately there were career enlisted men who knew about refrigeration and could keep it functioning since I knew nothing about refrigeration but was nevertheless listed as ‘refrigeration officer’ – along with being designated chaplain, legal officer and communications officer.

My naval experience did not make a great contribution to my intellectual or spiritual growth, but it did confirm my pacifist

convictions and nurture a healthy lack of respect for authority (in the form of senior officers) and bureaucracy. This was probably also a contributing factor to what some would describe as my anarchist tendencies.

My experience in the U.S. Navy, like my experience of Havana in the Naval Reserve, deepened my awareness of the inequity that was assumed and supported by the U.S. military machine. We never went ashore in Inchon, Korea, because the harbour was too shallow for the ship to dock, so the UN peacekeepers (mostly US, with a few Canadian, Swedish and other tokens of internationality) had to be ferried ashore while their gear and other supplies were off-loaded onto small craft by Korean workers. Seeing these men with almost no clothes or even shoes and, to my eyes, very undernourished, I realized that what our troops were 'protecting' was a huge gap between rich and poor. I saw this too in what was then Formosa - now Taiwan - when we made a brief stop in Keelung. I think the word I probably used at the time to describe what I saw was 'primitive,' referring to the poverty and filth of that industrial city and its rudimentary infrastructure. Japan was very different. Unlike Korea, the war had been over for a decade in Japan, and I did not see Nagasaki or Hiroshima. What I did see was the bustling Japanese cities of Tokyo and Yokohama, and some of the still very traditional rural areas near Mount Fuji and on Kyushu. The beauty of the countryside with its small villages, rice paddies, and ancient temples remains very much with me. So does a small very old silk "factory" which I stumbled upon among the trees on one of my walks on Kyushu. In front of the small wooden house was a fire pit with pots for dyeing the raw silk. The wood floor inside was deeply burnished by many years of human traffic and a large loom was the major occupant of the space. I imagine that several generations of

spinners, dyers and weavers had worked there, and were still working there, and I am sure that my appreciation of beauty with simplicity was strongly influenced by that experience.

My Navy experience also made me realize that the life and affluence of the USA was neither universal nor normative and that the world was full of very differing cultures with very different histories.

## *Back to school*

Release from active duty in the Navy in mid-1957 really meant, for me, the beginning of a new life. My very short marriage (1956-57 - Chris found a new partner while I was away at sea) ended in agreed divorce and me feeling shamed and sorry for myself. In the class and culture of my upbringing, people did not get divorced - it was considered, it seemed to me, to be shameful, if not sinful. Like people with disabilities, it was something one just did not talk about. Thirty years later Chris contacted me by phone and explained that our brief marriage was a bit of her life that she needed to come to terms with. She was expecting me to be angry with her, but I said I was so pleased to hear from her. So not long after that, when I went to San Francisco for research on my book about Cargill, we met and I had dinner with her and her family and liked them all. Our marriage, I realized, was not a case of bad judgement, but of bad timing. We've remained in touch.

At the time, however, I was intent on putting the whole episode behind me and getting a fresh start on the rest of my life. I sold my little red Triumph sports car and ordered a new green Porsche Speedster to be picked up at the factory in Stuttgart at Christmas time. Then I began my new life as a single man with enough savings to go to Edinburgh and do a

first year theological course at New College, the seminary of the Church of Scotland, living in the seminary dormitory on The Mound, a stone's throw from the castle. (Most theological schools, or seminaries, are post-graduate programs, though at that time their basic degree for three years of graduate work was a Bachelor of Divinity, later more appropriately renamed Master of Divinity, or MDiv.) I also became very interested at this time in the Iona Community, an intentional community of Christian laymen and clergy founded by George MacLeod on the Isle of Iona off the west coast of Scotland during the Great Depression.

Pastor of a church in Govan, the industrial heart of Glasgow, MacLeod was deeply disturbed by the wasted lives of his unemployed parishioners and very concerned about the witness and relevance of the church. Not too far away was the Isle of Iona, on which stood the remains of the 6<sup>th</sup> century abbey of St. Columba which had been the staging point for the teams of workers that Columba sent to preach the Gospel and support themselves by working for their keep in the villages they were evangelizing.

I visited the Isle of Iona several times over the years and was deeply impressed with the social vision and dedication of the members of the community and their corporate discipline, including financial. I never quite made it to a long-term commitment to the community, however much I agreed with its principles, in part because I intended to live on the other side of the ocean. I still wonder sometimes if I made a mistake in not joining such a disciplined community.

As I was exposed to a larger world of European history and culture I began to think of my four-year university experience as one year of mechanical engineering, one year of economics, one year of Naval Reserve and one year of swimming. (I was

on the Cornell swim team every year.) With this background, I decided it was time to get an education, so along with theology, I started to read widely, go to art galleries, and visit historic sites in England, Scotland and Western Europe during, and for several months after the end of the academic year.

By then I had decided to attend the protestant faculty in Paris to learn French and continue my theological studies. To do so meant shipping my car back to the USA to be sold so I could live for another year on the proceeds. However, that plan went awry when I hit a wet spot on a blind curve in the road to Liverpool to get the car shipped to Boston. I chose to slide off the shoulder of the road rather than get on the wrong side where I could not see if anything was coming, and slid along an old fence, doing significant damage to the left side of the car before it came to rest. I got it back on the road and drove back to Edinburgh and, in effect, put the money I had been expecting to live on into the repair shop, where the car stayed for months.

I carried on to Paris, sent my trunk to a friend in London, and spent the summer hitch-hiking around Europe.

Before returning home in late autumn of 1958, I spent some weeks in a dismal but cheap room in London thinking and writing - letters to my parents, but mostly to myself - trying to consolidate and articulate my view of the world and the culture I had grown up in and my place in it. I was determined not to return to the USA until I could do so on my own terms - which, as it turned out, was when I had just enough money left to pay for a ticket back to the U.S. on a freighter. I see those days, now, as consolidating a turning point in my life.

For a while before then, I had visions of myself, bearded and beret'd, reading existential philosophy on a café sidewalk on the Left Bank of the Seine. That vision evaporated when I

ran out of money and had to return home, but existentialism remained an essential aspect of my own philosophy, more significant in my theology than any notions of linear progress or what happens to us when we die. In fact, the present has always been of greater interest to me than the future, that is, the question of how I am to live today has always overshadowed any question about what happens to me later on, or when I die. This implies a moral imperative in existentialism that is not necessarily present in Christian theology which, with its focus on 'the last things' or 'the last days', can all too easily cast the present as a kind of waiting room either for Apocalypse or personal life after death ('taken up into Heaven', however one might conceive of that).

This is where my own theology has serious problems with traditional Christian doctrine, for example, the last line of what is called The Apostles Creed states: "I believe in. ... the life everlasting". It does not say in what form, or under what conditions, but it is more likely to be conceived of as romantic Victorian rather than working class industrial Victorian (at least that is what is suggested by Church architecture and stained glass windows).

Of course, people do live on in the memories and personalities of others, just as their lives carry, in many ways subtle and bold, the lives of those who have gone before them.

Just before my graduation from Cornell in June, 1955, my younger sister Nancy was killed in an automobile accident after a beach party the night before her high school graduation. I have a vivid memory of standing outside after receiving the news, gazing into the sky and saying, Why?

I had no thoughts of Nancy 'going to heaven' or any such sentiments. My question was, why did those four teenagers die

in a crash? My response to my question was, because they, more particularly the driver, suffered what I now call technological hubris. That is, we think we are in control of the technology and can and will make it do what we want. But there are very real limits to how fast a car can be driven around a curve in the road under a railroad overpass. As Nancy's death sank into me, I thought about her life and her special gifts and they entered into my vocation: I became responsible, in some small way, for carrying on her life.

Theologian poet Dorothy Soelle put it simply: "Is there life before death?" Responding to this question is for me the heart of Christian theology, and why the nature of life in all its complexity is far more important than speculation about, or the study of, 'last things'.

Eschatology, like any apocalypticism, has a major stake in a future as some kind of leverage point, which it attempts to spell out in a variety of languages. Nuclear holocaust was widely feared in the 1960s, particularly in association with the 'Cuban missile crisis', as the coming apocalypse, 'the end of the world'. The apocalypse of the Gospel of John in the New Testament is of a radically different sort. It speaks of – or promises – the end of the world on a Judgement Day on which all will perish for their sins with the exception of the 'elect', who will be transported to a heavenly realm to enjoy eternal life.

Now there is clearly the reality of global warming and climate change so severe that it becomes apocalyptic, carrying a dread comparable to that of nuclear holocaust, though in 'slow-motion'.

So why do we not fear? Could it be that we see time as a never-ending upward sloping line, a line with its ending somewhere beyond the horizon?



Or is it that Western Civilization has so filled us with fear of Others and fear for the loss of our assumed wealth and privilege that we have no room for a more important fear of what we may well be bringing upon ourselves?

And is it possible that the hope embedded in faith may have a role in enabling resistance to the political and social forces pushing us in this direction?

## *Heritage*

Being the only boy among a crowd of female cousins, I always had a great time at family reunions, which took place for many years at a large pre-civil war home in Orange County, New York, that was the homestead of some distant relative. I think those reunions came to an end during the WW II years. This extended family, as well as my more immediate grandparents, aunts and uncles, however, and my parents, continued to constitute a significant aspect of the 'environment' of my growing up. Ambition and a concern with status were not notable marks of their lives. My father's father worked at a number of jobs and was involved in voluntary work and local politics. My father's brother founded and ran a small factory making parts for the automobile industry. My mother came from a long line of what I would call distinguished scholarly and socially conscious Presbyterian clergy families. My mother's father, a Presbyterian minister, died the year before I was born and I've long regretted that I never knew him personally. On my mother's side my uncles were an interesting lot, one a country doctor, one a school teacher, one the head of a barge line on the Mississippi River (for whom I worked as a deckhand one summer), and one who had a variety of jobs and was a loving, fun uncle, graciously supported by other members of the family. My aunts were all involved in community affairs

with a significant interest in nature and what we now refer to as ecology. Unfortunately, my grandmother on my mother's side also died before I was born. I would like to have known her, as well as my grandfather. She was well known as a woman of grace and love for nature, characteristics passed on to and through her children.

Amongst this tribe there was a great deal of caring and love, not just for the family members, but for a wide circle of friends, hired help, and the people they worked with or met from day to day. Harsh words were not spoken, as far as I can recall. As mentioned before, the word which I think best characterizes these relationships is 'respect'. It was certainly an attitude – in today's vernacular, a 'value' – that was inculcated in me as I grew up. It was what might now be described as an ethical norm for us, though I would also regard it as a Biblical 'commandment' fundamental to the Ten Commandments.

Perhaps it is that attitude toward others that gave my family a strong social outlook and curbed the individualism that has become so characteristic of Western Civilization. It was probably this family culture that also excluded virtually any nationalism or cultural chauvinism, my father's antipathy towards Fidel Castro notwithstanding.

In the book *Wobblies and Zapatistas*,<sup>5</sup> Staughton Lynd says: "The real path to God is to have a tender experience with humanity."

Shortly after my return from Edinburgh and London in 1958, where, as I said earlier, I had holed up to think and write, trying to hold out with a diminishing small purse of money until I was ready to return to my native culture on my own terms, I

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5. Staughton Lynd and Andrej Grubacic, *Wobblies & Zapatistas*, PM Press, 2008

went to visit my uncle Charlie, a country doctor. He took one look at me, and the bald spots in my beard and scalp, and said, "Malnutrition". This simple diagnosis was obvious, once stated, but rather far from the medical opinions of fancy doctors that my mother had referred me to in New Haven, Connecticut, who were not familiar with malnutrition amongst their wealthy patients and thought I might be in need of a psychiatrist.

During that visit, my uncle Charlie directed me to an old book in his cellar. The pages were tender with age and included yellowing scraps on which were written notes for the speech my great grandfather, Robert Hezekiah Beattie, gave before the Presbytery in defense of his refusal to allow the American flag in his church. He reminded the Presbytery that his son Charles, refusing to fight in the Union Army, was serving as an orderly in a hospital in the South as a conscientious objector with his father's encouragement. I think this was my uncle's way of telling me that my pacifist convictions did not make me the black sheep of the family, but rather that I was upholding the family honour – at least in his eyes.

Another indication of the family's history of resistance was the hiding place for runaway slaves in the old house where we attended family reunions. Halfway up the back stairs from the kitchen, in a small landing, there was a trap door giving access to a cupboard- like space. We did not play in it, but we were aware of it as children.

Later I came upon a New Testament, published in 1860, with an enigmatic pencilled note in the back: "Robert Hezekiah [Beattie – my grandfather] was baptized by his uncle David, 1865, April 23. On that day the choir left the gallery on account of their leader, being spoken to, for singing the Star Spangled Banner on the Sabbath."

## *New York: theology and politics*

After my return to the U.S. and a couple of months of enjoyable work earning my tuition in an old fashioned hardware factory (the Sargent Hardware factory and its working class environs are now buried under massive elevated highways above the New Haven waterfront), I started Union Theological Seminary in New York City in the middle of the 1958-9 academic year. Entering Union mid-year gave me an extra semester before graduation in June 1961, enabling me to take several extra courses. I lived in the seminary residence at Broadway and 125<sup>th</sup> Street, uphill from, and to the west of, the Black ghetto of Harlem.

The seminary was - and is - across the road from the Rockefeller-sponsored Riverside Church, a monument to white wealth. A block away was the 19-story Interchurch Center, built in 1958 with gifts by John D. Rockefeller and others, together with a consortium of the Orthodox, African-American, and mainstream Protestant denominations. A condition of the Rockefeller gift was that the exterior of the structure had to be clad in the same color limestone as Riverside Church, the Rockefeller's church home at the time. The Center's cornerstone was laid by then-President Dwight D. Eisenhower. The building's purpose was to foster cordial relations between the Protestant churches and church agencies by providing space and facilities for their collaboration as well as their individual denominational and ecumenical work. It also discreetly provided office space and support services for some of the 'radical' social justice groups of the 60s, such as the North American Council on Latin America. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. occupied the building from its inception, but after years of declining church membership and wealth, in February, 2013, the NCCC consolidated its offices

on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, and vacated its New York headquarters.

This trinity of buildings clustered on Riverside Heights – Riverside Church, Union Theological Seminary and the Interchurch Center – now stands as a collective memorial to the power and prestige of liberal Protestantism in the U.S. that peaked in the late 1950s.

At the time, the seminary had the reputation of being the strongest voice for social justice in American Protestantism and it was this, not metaphysics, that attracted me to Union. Hebrew, New Testament Greek, or the study of Paul's Epistles interested me no more than church doctrines such as the Holy Trinity, Original Sin and Redemption. What did interest me was the theology of the Kingdom of God, of justice, reconciliation and hope. With its high intellectual standards and strong emphasis on social ethics, with everything situated in the global context, Union Seminary was where I wanted to be. At that point, I was well aware of Reinhold Niebuhr's reputation as an intellectual giant and forceful advocate in social ethics, but nothing more.

The global context at the time was the Cold War between Russia and the West, or more accurately, 'Communism' and 'The Free World'. Capitalism was a word that only now, five decades later, is finally re-entering the public discourse. The U.S. was so traumatized by its constructed fear of Communism that U.S. 'defense' policy was an all-or-nothing policy based on nuclear deterrence and mutually assured destruction, or (appropriately) MAD.

As I soon discovered, there was a profound contradiction between the reputation of the old UTS of the Social Gospel years and the political and theological orientation I encountered. In fact, by 1959 Christian ethics at Union Seminary had been stood on its head by the illustrious Reinhold Niebuhr, with the

pacifism and socialism of the Social Gospel relegated to a quaint, or even dangerous, moment of history.

Arms control, nuclear disarmament, racism, and civil rights were, nevertheless, major preoccupations of the student body, and some of the faculty. 'Radical' ministries were being created to address conditions of social injustice, one of the best known was being the East Harlem Protestant Parish where I did my field work one year. And of course there was the dynamic political scene of the city which included civil rights, anti-nuclear, pacifist and socialist activities to complement my studies – or distract me from them. One of the first people I met at Union was Alice Hageman, an ecumenically-minded social justice activist, who epitomized the kind of globally-minded academic-activist community that I wanted to be part of. Alice made me feel 'at home' at Union.

### ***Reinhold Niebuhr***

Reflecting on my time at Union, I have come to realize just how important Reinhold Niebuhr was to the process which, in my view, deeply damaged the social imagination of Americans and left them with only the fearful and destructive ideology of anti-Communism. His work displaced the hopeful framework of the Social Gospel with the cynicism of Christian Realism. Niebuhr's theological anti-Communism provided the essential 'ethical' theological legitimation of the anti-Communism that dominated the USA from the mid-1940s. I have therefore devoted some space here to my reflections on the man and his legacy.

Niebuhr apparently regarded his work as a necessary corrective to the idealism of the Social Gospel that had expressed and shaped the liberalism of both church and society in the USA in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He

attacked, or dismissed as errors, the utopian vision of the Biblical Kingdom of God, and politics as the exercise of trying to move in the direction of a just society in the light of that vision, that were central to the Social Gospel.

Niebuhr's 'Christian realism' was grounded in his insistence that "man" was sinful and this sin had to be contained or countered by the structures and forces of power. The context of his thinking was, not surprisingly, the rise of Hitler and Nazism in Germany and Stalin and Soviet Communism. The exercise of power politics was essential because man was, in effect, incapable of altruistic or idealistic practice (pacifism) in the real world. Thus Christian realism was profoundly anti-utopian and fatalistic, though it was certainly not considered as such around Union Theological Seminary at the time.

For me, the consequence was that while I studied with Niebuhr, and he and John Bennett were the faculty members for whom I wrote my thesis on non-violence and its major figures – such as Dorothy Day of Catholic Worker fame, Gandhi, Kagawa in Japan and others – under the title "Voluntary Suffering and Social Change", Niebuhr became more of a foil than a teacher. My pacifist ethics and socialist politics were developed more in opposition to than under his tutelage. The only identifiable socialist among the faculty was Eduard Heimann, who split his time between teaching in Bonn, Germany, and at Union. Sadly, there were only 6-8 of us students who took advantage of his broad knowledge of European history and Marxism to ask him to lead several seminar courses for us. He taught us on the basis of the German texts of Marx and Engels, such as the Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 that were not then available in English.

At the time, social justice activism at Union consisted of a lot of education and action for civil rights (including picketing

Woolworth's on 125<sup>th</sup> St every Saturday to draw attention to its racist practices in the U.S. south), nuclear disarmament and peace (sitting out the civil defense drills in public view instead of hiding in the seminary basement), but it was all essentially reformist in both economic and political terms, though I have no recollection of ever talking about this at Union. I found I had to pursue my socialist interests largely outside the seminary through involvement in the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation and various other leftist activities. By that time, however, socialism had been redefined as 'democratic socialism' and become strongly, if not so vocally, anti-Communist, in keeping with the broader political climate of that era. I found that there was really little political space for me in what were identified as socialist organizations.

There was an unarticulated assumption, at least among whites, that there was nothing inherently wrong with capitalism and no radical political programs or policies were put forward, just calls for specific reforms of the system. Similarly, it was, and still is, assumed that the best, and only really legitimate, form of government is that of the USA: a federal government composed of three distinct branches with separation of their legislative, executive and judicial powers, with elections being the litmus test of its, and any other, actual democracy.

### ***The Social Gospel and Christian Realism***

What, then, happened to the pacifism, socialist politics and the collectivist dreams of justice and equity that were characteristic of the Social Gospel, which characterized and dominated liberal North American Protestantism a century ago?

Walter Rauschenbusch (1862-1918) was the most notable preacher and teacher of the Social Gospel. For him, Communism, communalism and socialism were



interchangeable, but he did not share the utopian idealism about achieving the Kingdom of God that characterized much of the social gospel. He taught that although we will never have a perfect social life we must still seek it. Rauschenbusch, in other words, distinguished between a faith in the possible fulfilment of the Kingdom of God and the certainty of the Enlightenment doctrine of Progress.

In 1916, Harry Ward, a socialist social gospel preacher, teacher and activist, was invited to be a lecturer at Union Seminary, where he remained until his retirement in 1941. Ward held that Jesus and socialism shared the same ethic and that the hope of the world was to merge the Christian and socialist faiths. By the time Ward began teaching at Union, he was regarded as an anti-capitalist revolutionary and by 1931, after a visit to the Soviet Union, he was described as “a fervent Communist fellow-traveler”. It is possible that Reinhold Niebuhr’s strong anti-Communism was at least partially a reaction to Harry Ward’s idealism.

After Ward’s retirement from Union, Niebuhr had the place to himself, more or less, though his longtime colleague and friend John C. Bennett maintained a strong but much gentler influence at Union. I came to know Bennett much better than Niebuhr.

As described by Gary Dorrien, Reinhold Niebuhr Professor Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary,<sup>5</sup> the Social Gospel was an understanding of the New Testament “shaped by Herbert Spencer’s philosophy of evolution as a Darwinian process of continuous improvement and development, with the promise of the Kingdom of God to be fulfilled at the end of this process. Jesus proclaimed and initiated the Kingdom and the

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5. in *The Making of Social Ethics*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011

church was supposed to be a new kind of community that transformed the world through the power of the Spirit.”

Dorrien’s harsh evaluation of the Social Gospel Movement as “sentimental, moralistic, idealistic, and politically naive”, speaking “the language of triumphal missionary religion” and rationalizing American imperialism may be accurate. However, in evaluating the Social Gospel we must also consider the role it might have played in U.S. and global politics had it not been so self-righteously attacked by Reinhold Niebuhr, who held that Christian Realism was the only appropriate expression of Christian faith in the face of Soviet Communism and regarded any idealism or utopian thinking as simply irresponsible.

For Niebuhr, Communism was Stalinism, an evil that had to be contained by any means available, including the threat of nuclear war. His anti-Communism led him to become a major public voice and U.S. State Department influence in support of nuclear deterrence: if Russia had The Bomb, Niebuhr argued, the West (i.e. USA) was morally obligated to have as many or more nuclear weapons at the ready. It all had to do with balance of power, which had become Niebuhr’s working definition of politics.

While the Social Gospel may have been naive in its belief in Progress, it was at least hopeful, in stark contrast to the cynicism and dismissal of any utopian visions of peace, justice and equity by Christian Realism.

Niebuhr never did recognize, at least publicly, that his dogma of power politics and his cynicism about political possibilities contributed directly to the rise of state power, nationalism and militarism in contradiction to his old socialist advocacy. There was, of course, no way for him to foretell how his hatred of the liberal faith in the inevitable progress of

humanity would shape Western political philosophy and lead the west into the political and social disaster we now experience: the determined undermining of democracy, growing inequity, environmental destruction and climate chaos.

I now argue that the theology of Christian Realism as developed by Niebuhr was a crucial factor in the reorientation of social, political and military policy in the early 1950s from a pacifist-socialist orientation to an aggressive capitalist anti-Communist political program prepared to use any means at its disposal to contain and defeat the Russian 'threat'.

The consequence was the failure of radical politics in the 60s and the disappearance of any progressive, socialist party, program or movement. Even the New Left political activism of the '60s in North America that has long been described as radical was essentially conservative and anti-Communist, seeking only reforms in what was considered an acceptable political and economic system. The capitalist system and 'democratic' government were simply beyond question and have remained as such. Another factor not to be overlooked is the right-wing dogma that to be a communist is to be an atheist, particularly anathema to those evangelical Christians who regard atheists as agents of the devil.

Christian Realism, then, provided moral justification for the libertarian anti-Communism that ran wild during the 1950s and 1960s and has remained a foundation stone of western political life since then, though now the word 'communism' has faded from use - except by Stephen Harper, Canada's Prime Minister, who will contribute 4 million dollars of public funds to help build a monument to "the victims of Communism in the judicial precinct next to the Supreme Building in Ottawa. Such an excrescence would be better described as a monument to anti-Communism.

In her book *After Utopia*<sup>6</sup> Judith Shklar wrote about the disappearance of political philosophy in the years following WWII:

The sense of political helplessness induced by years of instability, war and totalitarianism manifests itself intellectually no less than in popular feeling. To think of politics in broad terms has come to seem futile ... the urge to construct grand designs for the political future of mankind is gone. The last vestiges of utopian faith required for such an enterprise have vanished.

The spread of romantic and Christian political fatalism has been accompanied by a virtual absence of the political ideas that dominated the last century. Above all, there is nothing that could be called a genuinely radical philosophy today.

The gradual decay of the radical aspirations of liberalism and the evaporation of socialist thought have left the Enlightenment without intellectual heirs.

The concentration on pure anti-fascism and then anti-Communism has left the socialists intellectually exhausted and has forced both the parties and the theorists into permanently defensive states of mind.

That was written in 1957, but poses a question that I set out to address in this book: Why is there still no utopian thinking or dreaming? What happened to the supposed radicalism of the 60s? Why is there no Communist, socialist, or simply progressive political program to be found in North America outside of tiny fringe groups? Shklar suggests: "We know too much to fall into even the slightest utopianism, and without

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6. Judith Schklar, *After Utopia*, Princeton, 1957

that grain of baseless optimism no genuine political theory can be constructed.”

*No utopia, no political program*

It was not only utopianism that dropped out of sight and out of mind. It was also the simplistic Enlightenment creed of Progress, which never meant much more than ‘every day in every way we are getting better and better’ and implied that the structures and powers of authority and exploitation should of course remain uncontested. Shklar suggests that consequently “the road away from the Enlightenment has led to romantic despair and to Christian fatalism. ... No laws of history are wanted any longer, for we do not really care to predict the future. Historical ignorance ... seems the only alternative to despair.

For many years, Niebuhr defined politics as a struggle for power and radical politics as a struggle for a just redistribution of power, and insisted that religion could serve the cause of justice only if it took what he regarded as a realistic attitude towards power and evil. His theology was based on what became his foundational dogma: that sin was an unavoidable human characteristic, “the tragic reality of life” and introduced a pessimism and fatalism that shut out the new beginnings that a less dogmatic and more creative attitude might bring to life. His Realism also excluded any form of unilateralism, particularly in regards to disarmament but essential to all forms of non-violence, and offered remarkably little vision of what a good society should look like. He simply identified justice with an approximate balance of power.

Without idealism, however, the ability to see beyond the present and imagine a society organized on a more healthy, hopeful and just basis is not possible. It was this that made

Realism in general, and Christian Realism in particular, anathema to me.

It was Niebuhr's advocacy of nuclear deterrence in the 1950s that brought him close to the White House and America's foreign policy advisors and, unfortunately, seems to have blinded him to the evils of state power that Ward was attacking, in spite of the title (and argument) of his 1932 book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.<sup>7</sup>

It would also appear that Niebuhr did not recognize, or deliberately ignored, the construction of the anti-Soviet Cold War (in the Potsdam Conference in 1945) by the United States, which attacked the USSR and sought to establish its own world hegemony by imposing the Cold War on the world.<sup>8</sup>

Union Seminary's cordial relations with The White House appeared to remain unchanged in 2013, as indicated by an email message to UTS alumni inviting Union Theological Seminary President Serene Jones and Executive Vice President Fred Davie to join President Obama and Mrs. Obama at the White House on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013, for a special commemoration of the 50th anniversary Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

With Niebuhr's retirement from Union in 1960, John Bennett took his place and a softening of attitude began. Christian Realism still stood for repelling Communist aggression, but Bennett felt that a considerable change of emphasis was needed away from America's "generalized hostility toward Communism as a monolithic and unchanging adversary," and he cautioned old friends that realism was an anti-utopian impulse.

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7. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Scribner's, 1952

8. cf. Samir Amin, *Re-Reading the Postwar Period*, Monthly Review Press, 1994

My own political perspective, Christian pacifist convictions and utopian hopes did not allow that politics was all about 'getting into power' in order to protect private property and Freedom. I wanted no part in the thinking that called for nuclear deterrence and some mythical 'balance of power', which basically amounted to the unacceptable philosophical position that the end justifies the means. For me, non-violence and unilateralism were, and continue to be, essential but not exclusively Christian ethical demands that require a congruence of means and ends.

Gary Dorrien nicely summarizes the ethical vacuity of Christian Realism: "Without a vision of a good society that transcends the prevailing order, ethics and politics remain captive to the dominant order, restricted to marginal reforms. The borders of possibility remain untested. ... No longer claiming a vision of its own in the public sphere, mainline Protestantism was reduced to support work for anti-Communism and other causes endorsed by the liberal establishment."<sup>9</sup>

Neither at Union, nor among the political left at that time, was there any evidence of utopian thinking. Christian Realism had virtually outlawed it except as the subject of the theology and peculiar history of the historic peace churches (Quakers, Mennonites), Anabaptists, and small collections of people scattered throughout the churches, often Black, deeply dedicated to racial and economic justice.

The abandonment, banishment, or burial of utopian thinking and dreaming has been politically and socially very costly. The dominance of Christian Realism, pragmatism and power politics has locked us into a determinist, if not fatalistic frame

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9. Gary Dorrien, *Making of Social Ethics*

of mind. The pursuit of satisfaction of personal desires and the vain quest for 'security' has contributed mightily to the culture of greed that drives capitalist accumulation, whatever more polite name it might be given. It is not too extreme to say that the absence of any utopian dream or vision is an open invitation to despair and exploitation.

Christian realism simply could not see any future beyond what could be extracted from the present, the present being a continuation of the past. It could not accept that there could be 'any new thing' under the sun – or in creation – except, perhaps, by some irrational divine intervention, even though the Biblical view is that some new thing – light in the darkness – is indeed always a possibility.

This is not to say that there was no place for hope, but as emphasized in 20<sup>th</sup> century liberation theology, hope is one thing, expectation is another. The coming of the Kingdom of God may be hoped for, but expecting it is very troublesome, and historically we have seen how this expectation has fueled far too much extremism and violence, within Christianity and, particularly now, Islam. The Social Gospel movement contained both orientations.

But the 1950s was still a time of prospering for the churches, Protestant and Roman Catholic, while the rising tide of virulent anti-Communism, religious and secular, successfully wiped away any lingering utopian 'fantasies' or visions (depending on your perspective). Instead of any serious consideration of how to overcome evil with good, what we got from Niebuhr's ethics was the unpalatable, unprincipled doctrine that our only ethical choice had to be for the "lesser evil".

While at Union, I spent one weekend with John Oliver Nelson, from Yale Divinity School, and a few others in a vigil



outside the primary U.S. Chemical-Biological-Warfare facility in Ft. Detrick, Maryland. At that time, an older Quaker couple had been standing every day, for more than a year, with simple signs, at the gate to the facility where everyone coming to work, and going home, had to see them. I will never forget that brief experience of standing in silent witness outside that evil place as workers came and went, eyes fixed on the road ahead, and not a word was spoken. What such a witness achieved, apart from its effect on those witnessing, including me, was a question not even asked, much less answered; a divine mystery setting it dramatically apart from the talk of Christian realism and power politics at Union.

I wrote a kind of prose-poem at that time, reflecting, I think, the effect of classmate Jane Stenbridge's powerful poetry on my spirit:

Civil rights. The problem of minorities.  
In every age, but the Jews could walk out on Pharaoh.  
No place to go today.  
So we talk of 'rights' *within* the system. That's integration.  
Incorporation into the white system.  
Civil pertains to the state, the government.  
That irresponsible 'them'.  
Perhaps one needs to talk of 'rights' if one talks of the state.  
Take away the state. What then of civil 'rights'?  
What are rights apart from authority and coercion?

Encountering this in my archives while working on this book, I was a little startled to find that what I wrote five decades ago about rights is exactly what I elaborated and expanded on in my 2009 book, *The Tyranny of Rights*.

I graduated from Union in June, 1961, having satisfied the academic requirements while maintaining considerable activity, together with John Collins, as co-chair of the social action

committee, agitating and organizing talks, demonstrations and protests for peace and civil rights and civil disobedience against Civil Defense drills.

The graduation service for my seminary class was held in the customary location of Riverside Church, the impressive full-city-block monument to the wealth and power of the Rockefeller family (next to which the Interchurch Centre, mentioned earlier, had been built). The speaker at the service was John N. Irwin II, a Wall Street lawyer and diplomat and member of the Union Seminary Board of Directors, who commended us for our commitment to the ministry of anti-Communism. I wrote to him immediately after, without knowing of his diplomatic experience, which included four years as Deputy Assistant to the U.S. Secretary of Defense, explaining that I did not go to seminary to learn to fight Communism and defend freedom and that I thought his remarks totally out of order. "I did not study for the ministry, and have no intention of carrying on a ministry of anti-Communism. Rather, I feel called to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As an Englishman described it to me this noon, your talk last night sounded like something from Moral Re-Armament."

Mr. Irwin responded with an invitation to lunch in his Wall Street club. The conversation was polite.

## *Pacifism and the New Left*

By then I was also deeply involved in socialist political activities in New York as well as civil rights and the peace movement. During my third year at Union I was employed as Youth Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a venerable Christian pacifist organization of British origin based in Nyack, New York, about 20 miles upriver from Union Seminary. After graduation my youth work with the FOR became a full-time

job working primarily with university students, counselling and encouraging conscientious objection to U.S.militarism and the draft, and helping with the organization of peace movement and civil rights actions, such as the 2000-strong Student Peace March on Washington in 1962. I was also a tax refuser, refusing to voluntarily pay the required income tax since most of it would go to building nuclear weapons and paying for the military. At that time, one was required by law to file an income tax return, but not required to actually pay any tax due – it was up to Internal Revenue to collect. So a principled refuser had two choices: don't earn a taxable income or leave what is 'owed' in a bank account where Internal Revenue can seize it. Barring such available monies, Internal Revenue could seize property to cover the 'debt'. In one case I knew about, Internal Revenue seized the automobile belonging to the refuser's mother.

Maurice Isserman provided an incisive description of that period as I experienced it:

Going into the 1960s, pacifism enjoyed distinct advantages over the socialist tradition in its appeal to the newly radicalized young. Pacifists did not have to apologize for their movement's past history; they were not stained with complicity in the crimes of Stalinism nor burdened with a sectarian heritage that was the product of too many years of battling the Communists. All varieties of socialism seemed tired, dated, and 'European' in their fixation on program and ideology; while pacifism, with its stress on 'values', seemed fresh, individualistic, and in tune with both popular cultural assumptions and the anti-ideological predilections of American intellectuals since WW II.<sup>10</sup>

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10. Maurice Isserman, *If I had a Hammer. . . The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*, Basic Books, 1987

While working with the FOR I lived in Nyack, twenty miles up the Hudson River from New York City. This made it possible to continue involvement with leftist politics in New York City and enjoy the lively off-Broadway performance of plays by Samuel Beckett, John Arden, Arrabal, and others whose works were identified as Theatre of the Absurd and dwelt on the search for meaning in the shadow of the nuclear bomb. It was also in some small off-Broadway theatre where I really heard, for the first time, as incidental music, the music of Bach, which became and has remained the focus of my musical imagination ever since. I remain deeply grateful for that exposure and introduction.

In 1962 I was a delegate to the national convention of the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation, the only party membership I've ever had. I was deeply disappointed with what, in a written note to myself, I described as "an extraordinary lack of clarity in what the SP stands *for*. There is good analysis, but it does not go beyond generalities in terms of program and definition." A 1960 SP pamphlet on political realignment stated, "The most basic and profound truth of politics in America today is this: We find ourselves with two political parties devoid of any principled political programs." Maybe this was what Estragon and Vladimir were waiting for in Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*: a principled political program.

Of course, this was shortly after the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956 and the mood of betrayal and bitterness among the old left – socialists and Communists – produced a degree of cynicism toward the emerging New Left which was more than I could stand.

While still at Union I had been recruited by Al Haber to join the Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) and the

board of its parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy, to help him renew the SLID, which soon broke away from the LID and became Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). I broke away at that point as well. I told the old guard in the LID that I could not accept their cynicism, and that I regarded their attitude that the New Left would outgrow their idealism and become as cynical as they were as the most poisonous attitude they could have.

I was thus a very early member of SDS, as well as actively supporting the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). SNCC was a prime leader in the Civil Rights movement, but for me it was mostly a question of alignment. My activities and work were primarily devoted to the anti-nuclear (Ban the Bomb) peace movement, though there were certainly points of congruence with civil rights, as when I met Father Phil Berrigan, a (white) Josephite priest who was then teaching in a Black high school in New Orleans, and introduced him to the peace movement. Phil reoriented his life and became a notorious non-violent direct-action practitioner, along with his Jesuit poet brother Dan. The two of them became famous for climbing fences at military installations and pouring blood - their own - on nuclear missiles and draft office files, and similar non-violent actions - and spending time in jail. Now, of course, they would be described as 'terrorists' for acting against the terror of nuclear war and the 'national interests' of the state, and their punishment would likely be much more severe.

## *The Bomb - and annihilation*

The '60s ethos was filled with dread of nuclear war and devastation, which reached a peak in Oct 1962 with the Cuban missile crisis. Around that time I was meeting with high school peace activists in Haverstraw, New York, when a siren went

off nearby. Everyone in the room froze, holding their breath while listening intently for the fire engines heading to a fire or for the end of the world. As the sirens moved away down the street, the group thawed. For me, getting into the skins, as it were, of a bunch of teenagers was a deeply disturbing experience of the psychic damage being caused by the Cold War and its doomsday threat. Fifty years later I can still feel the dread of that moment in the pit of my stomach, and I have to wonder what the effect of the 'fallout' from this period of existential fear and dread has actually been. I say 'has been' because I think we, collectively, have chosen to regard this as past, an episode that is closed, as if we could dismiss our history. But there are now thousands upon thousands of nuclear weapons, and no more reason than in the 60s to trust those who control them - whether China, Israel, Russia or the USA.

In his annual report to the U.S. Congress in 1965, Secretary of Defense McNamara 'set forth the Pentagon's more up-to-date estimate of the damage the U.S. could expect to receive and inflict in a nuclear war. . . Now, by Defense Department calculations, a general war would probably see the U.S. and Russia aiming for the destruction of 200 major cities in each nation and . . . the death of up to 149 million Americans and more than 100 million Russians. . . McNamara's view is that the additional expenses beyond the \$25 billion to reduce fatalities by 41 million would be more profitably spent on offensive rather than defensive weapons. . . Beyond a certain level of defense the cost advantage lies increasingly with the offense.'<sup>11</sup>

In May, 2010, the U.S. officially announced that it had 5,000 nuclear warheads (tactical, strategic, or non-

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11. Newsweek, 1/3/65

deployed). Of these, 1700 are operational, on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), submarine-launched ballistic missiles, or strategic bombers.<sup>12</sup>

Herman Kahn, the major spokesman of the right-wing think-tank Rand Corporation and founder of the Hudson Institute, had a few years earlier painted a dismal picture of survival – for some.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most important item is not the numbers of dead or the number of years that it takes for economic recuperation; rather, it is the question ‘Will the survivors envy the dead?’ It is in some sense true that one may never recuperate from a thermonuclear war. The world may be permanently (i.e., for perhaps 10,000 years) more hostile to human life as a result of such a war. Therefore if the question, ‘Can we restore the prewar conditions of life?’ is asked, the answer must be ‘No’.

Despite a widespread belief to the contrary, objective studies indicate that even though the amount of human tragedy would be greatly increased in the post-war world, the increase would not preclude normal and happy lives for the majority of survivors and their descendants.

Europe had gone to war in 1914 not for limited and specific, but unlimited ends, and at the sorry conclusion of it, retribution was demanded by the ‘winners’, setting the stage for the next war. “In practice, the only war aim that counted was total victory, what, in the Second World War, came to be called ‘unconditional surrender’. . . Certainly both the totality of the war efforts and the determination on both sides to wage war without limit at whatever cost made its mark. Without it, the

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12. Globe & Mail, 7/8/13

13. Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*, Princeton, 1960

growing brutality and inhumanity of the twentieth century is difficult to explain."<sup>14</sup>

In this context, there was a certain inevitability, or 'naturalness', about the atomic bomb with its total destruction, displayed so vividly in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The evidence of total destruction did not halt the arms race, but rather indicated that the idea of annihilation as an aspect of war had become acceptable.

Was the trauma of The Bomb, in the political context, gradually subsumed or internalized to become part of our unconscious framing of the world? The fallout from the prolonged Cold War might be described as a psychic numbing, with the result that 'we' learned to live with The Bomb. (*Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, was a popular 1964 film of black satire starring Peter Sellers.)

Five decades later, are we are replaying the experience of psychic numbing? Perhaps this explains the present denial regarding climate change and global warming by the Government of Canada and the energy sector. 'Extreme weather events' may be similar to the sudden destruction of nuclear weapons, and with a similar lingering effect of global warming, like radioactive fallout bringing slow death. Yet we still believe in the 'rationality' of 'progress' with its accompanying energy intensive economic 'growth'. And we name our collective folly "sustainability".

## *Something of a Watershed*

In 1962, as I mentioned earlier, a collection of student peace organizations, including the Student Peace Union, established

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14. Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, Abacus, 1994



in 1959, organized a massive demonstration in Washington. Its petition to then-President Kennedy was a compromise statement since it had to speak not just for radical pacifists, but for liberal democrats who only wanted 'arms control', as well as others who wanted total disarmament, unilateral if necessary. The petition began with the usual anti-Communist 'affidavit' and was infused with the essential anti-Communist fear of "Communist expansionism".

A Petition to President Kennedy, Student Peace March, Washington, Feb 1962:

We wish to meet squarely the danger presented to democratic values by Soviet ideology and communist expansionism. However, we find that the essentially military response of the United States to the Soviet challenge has been inadequate, self-defeating, and profoundly dangerous.

We do not accept our present foreign policy. Instead we urge all countries to take initiatives toward lasting peace. In particular we urge the United States to take the following initiatives:

- To announce that it will not resume atmospheric testing of nuclear capons, to invite the U.N. to establish a monitoring system within our territory, and then to invite the other world powers to follow suit.

- Not to provide nuclear weapons to those powers not presently in possession of them and to seek U.N. inspection of nuclear reactors in those nations which do not yet have nuclear weapons to insure that such reactors are being used only for peaceful purposes.

- To seek disengagement in Central Europe.

- To commit itself fully to the struggle against poverty, hunger and disease throughout the world. This massive economic aid should be channeled through the U.N. We should then call on the Soviet Union and other countries to follow our lead.

- To declare that fallout shelters offer no real protection from nuclear war.

We demand that our government cease to follow the Soviet Union in the arms race but that instead we lead it in a peace race . . . .

A previous draft of the final petition had contained language that was too strong for some of the peace groups participating, including explicit wording calling on the U.S. to “withdraw its missile bases from Turkey and Italy which are too vulnerable to be of any value as a deterrent to attack and can only be of value if the United States engaged in a pre-emptive war; as well as more particular language about foreign aid and the UN: “channel major economic aid to the nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America through the machinery of the United Nations, thus both strengthening the United Nations at a critical moment, and lifting the struggle against hunger and misery out of the context of the Cold War. Having taken this initiative, the U.S. should then call upon the Soviet government to end its economic penetration of the neutral nations by joining us in directing economic aid through the machinery of the UN”. This last sentence illustrates the double standard, as if the USA were not engaged in similar colonialist “penetration of the neutral nations”.

The weather in Washington on the day of the demonstration was about as miserable as it could be: just about freezing with a mixture of rain and snow. After we had been gathered in front of the White House for some time – not surrounded by shielded and armed police – a messenger from President Kennedy appeared, asking if we would accept an urn of coffee from the President. We debated – not for long – and agreed that we would. Out it soon came, to be greatly appreciated. I don't think our demonstration made any difference to Kennedy's policies,

but we were treated politely, not demonized or even just pointedly ignored.

For me, as one of the organizers, the event was memorable, and has become more so over time as the deliberate isolation of government from the public has grown ever more physically and ideologically extreme, certainly in Canada. Yet our governments continue to talk much about democracy, 'transparency', etc.

The following year I recorded a conversation with several teen-age girls, which included these comments:

"But this hatred of The Bomb. ... Who put the Bomb there? Our society, bourgeois society, put the bomb there. ... Of course we don't wish it were here, and we resent it, and maybe we resent more things, the people who put it there we resent. ..."

"Most people are afraid to go against society; they are thinking that whatever society says is right is right. That's how they base their morals. ... But the Bomb is so obviously a symbol of society's being wrong that it makes it easier to go against society in other things also."

"I feel a discontent, a sort of hatred of 'them', whoever they are who put me in a situation where any moment I might get blown apart by a bomb."

Later that year I wrote in *Fellowship*, the magazine of the FOR, again mentioning the importance of utopian thinking:

One must describe the student generation, as revealed during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, as fatalistic. ... Society appears as given, and part of this given is The Bomb, with all that it stands for as collective-death-at-any-moment. "Absurd" is the only sensible way to describe a society that identifies itself in this way, and those who

accept the given as 'right' or 'good' are also absurd. ...  
We must think of the world as we would like it to be, or  
indeed as it must come to be, if we are to continue to  
inhabit it at all.

## 60's politics

There were three clear strands of political activism in the 1960s: disarmament and peace, civil rights, and New Left. Leadership and participation flowed back and forth, though there were clear organizational differences. Scattered around the USA, and to a lesser extent in Canada, were also many more or less autonomous groups, or tendencies, to use the political language of the time. Some of us, picking up the German concept, called ourselves the 'extra-parliamentary opposition' and, I think, still hold that position. There were also petitions and manifestos, the Port Huron Statement being the most well known, as well as innumerable expressions of the tendencies reflecting the politics and personality of local leadership or the most vocal agitators (often Trotskyists). There was no fundamental critique of capitalism apart from more or less sectarian Marxism. Economics entered the campaigns only as the target of reform – for improved wages, greater inclusiveness, and more worker engagement in management. Similarly, the major political call of the New Left, embodied in SDS, was for 'participatory democracy'.

Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the largest and most notorious 'radical' student organization/movement of the '60s, was considered to be on the side of the peace movement, but its emphasis was on the civil rights movement and the call for participatory democracy, at least at the local level. In June, 1962, SDS held its founding convention in Port Huron, Michigan. The Port Huron Statement, the first full official statement of SDS,

came out of that convention. The initial draft was prepared by Tom Hayden, now a U.S. Senator.

Below are extracts from The Port Huron Statement:

When we were kids the United States was the wealthiest and strongest country in the world; the only one with the atom bomb, the least scarred by modern war, an initiator of the United Nations that we thought would distribute Western influence throughout the world.

Freedom and equality for each individual, government of, by, and for the people – these American values we found good, principles by which we could live as men [sic]. Many of us began maturing in complacency.

As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First, the permeating and victimizing fact of human degradation, symbolized by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolized by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract “others” we knew more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time.

While two-thirds of man-kind suffers undernourishment, our own upper classes revel amidst superfluous abundance. Although world population is expected to double in forty years, the nations still tolerate anarchy as a major principle of international conduct and uncontrolled exploitation governs the sapping of the earth’s physical resources.

Our work is guided by the sense that we may be the last generation to experiment with living. ... we ourselves are

imbued with urgency, yet the message of our society is that there is no viable alternative to the present. ... Beneath the stagnation of those who have closed their minds to the future is the pervading feeling that there are simply no alternatives, that our times have witnessed the exhaustion not only of Utopias, but of any new departures as well. ... The decline of utopia and hope is in fact one of the defining features of our social life today.

The economy itself is of such social importance that its major resources and means of production should be open to democratic participation and subject to democratic social regulation . . .

There should be a way for a person or an organization to oppose Communism without contributing to the common fear of associations and public actions. ... As democrats we are in basic opposition to the communist system ...

The task of world industrialization, of eliminating the disparity between have and have-not nations is as important as any issue facing America . . .

A new left must include liberals and socialists, the former for their relevance, the latter for their sense of thoroughgoing reforms in the system.”

This last sentence says it all: what socialists have to offer is ideas on the reform of capitalism, and liberals are good for relevance to the status quo.

In retrospect it appears that we were so taken up by the reputation of being radicals and supporting revolution (at least in some places) that we did not take issue with the strong reformist, anti-Communist position actually defined in the Port Huron Statement. We apparently did not yet appreciate that

“Western influence” was actually considered a significant improvement of colonial domination, or that the emphasis on individual human rights would be at the expense of social and communal thinking. But as Samuel Moyn notes, “human rights became almost immediately associated with anti-Communism and was given the attribute of universalism, so that both anti-Communism and human rights took over the universalist character of communism.”<sup>15</sup> And of course industrialization – now carried out under the rubric of Development – has proven to be anything but a means to eliminate the disparity between wealthy and poor countries.

The Communist voice was nowhere to be heard. It had already been successfully silenced by violent anti-Communism in the USA and allies, and, post 1956, by the Russian invasion of Hungary.

On the Left there was no coherent radical left political program. In fact, there was no progressive political program, radical or not. One seasoned Old Left labour lawyer and respected civil rights advocate wrote: “The greatest weakness of SNCC and of all the radicals in the Movement is the lack of any long range perspective, of any sense of ultimate goal, of any political or economic philosophy. If I may hazard a formulation which is unpopular in some circles, I would suggest that what the Movement does not have and what it badly needs is an ideology.”<sup>16</sup>

I expressed a similar view in a letter to a fellow peace activist in Canada in 1966: “I certainly found SUPA (the Student Union for Peace Action) at low ebb out west – couldnt go much lower

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15. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*, Belknap Harvard, 2010

16. Victor Rabinowitz: *Studies on the Left*, Spring 1965

without drowning. . . There has to be some program of action, or an analysis, to build on, and when there is neither, the result is the sort of subjectivism that the Chinese speak of and which has all but ruined the Student Christian Movement.”

This absence of a progressive political program from the 1950s on is remarkable. For all the social and political engagement and the huge number of young people involved in what could be called ‘progressive’ political activities of one sort or another, from very local to national, no broad political program emerged.

Documents such as the Port Huron Statement were taken as political programs, but in fact they were calls for “participatory democracy” – for inclusion of Blacks as well as whites – within the existing political structures, and the workplace. (Labour unions had been virtually ‘captured’ by anti-Communist management.) Any radical collective critique of capitalism was absent, at least in North America. The student uprisings in Europe and the leftist political activity there was another matter. In the USA, Socialism and Communism were, in effect prohibited words and concepts even while Anti-Communism became the dominant ideology of ‘America’, closely allied, unfortunately, with Christian fundamentalism.

For its part, Canada took a step backward in 1961 with the formation of the New Democratic Party, marking an ideological shift from anti-capitalist democratic socialism to anti-Communist social democracy. This was the consequence of the alliance between the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) which had been founded in 1932. The Regina Manifesto setting out the party’s program, adopted at the CCF convention in 1933, concluded with, “No CCF Government will rest content until it has



eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full program of socialized planning.”

During the Cold War the CCF replaced the Regina Manifesto with the more moderate Winnipeg Declaration in 1956 to ward off the accusations of being Communist.<sup>17</sup>

The Communist Party had been decimated by the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956, though an intelligent Marxist voice – the Marxist Quarterly edited by Party stalwart Stanley Ryerson – remained. I contributed an article on Christian-Marxist dialogue in 1966 at Stan's invitation. He left the CP in 1968 with the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.

Along with, or undergirding, the new left and peace movements, however, was what can reasonably be called a cultural revolution. The rigidities and individualism of bourgeois family life and sexual and social relations more generally were undermined by a strong communal and feminist culture. The invasion of North America by The Beatles in 1964 heralded the birth of a vibrant youth culture. Of course the '60s were also marked by the contagion of the Hippie culture and the blossoming of the 'flower children' in the San Francisco Bay area, as well as the hallucinogenic tripping of Timothy Leary and his followers.

The shadow side of this personal liberation was the anger and resistance generated by the anti-Communist U.S. war against Vietnam. The powerful protest music of Phil Ochs expressed the despair felt by crowds of young people, along with the voices of others – Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bruce Cockburn, Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen – who broadened

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17. For an inside story of Canadian Communists and anti-Communism, see Merrily Weisbord, *The Strangest Dream*, Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983

the appeal for resistance to the oppressive dominant culture. Bob Dylan got religion, Phil Ochs committed suicide; Joan Baez and others carried on, and Pete Seeger continued to coax audiences to sing until shortly before his death at the age of 94.

A popular slogan among activists may have been 'the personal is political' but in practice it would be more accurate to say that the political was reduced to the personal. It was not necessarily an either-or, however. Millie Ryerson, Stan's wife for example, was a committed peace activist and mentor to young activists as well as a powerful supporter of artistic work, particularly by indigenous peoples, operating a craft shop in Toronto through which she sold their work. Later on she established an 'atelier' in Montreal fostering and selling craft work by marginalized and 'challenged' people.

*Where did all the radicals go?*

By the end of the '60s one had to wonder whatever happened to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Ban the Bomb movement, the student peace movement and the New Left organizing, along with a multitude of peace organizations around the world, from Japan to Germany, involving millions of people. Did they just evaporate as a consequence of their refusal - or failure - to develop an ideology and a political program? Or was the anti-Communism, particularly of the USA, so pervasive, powerful and subversive that no one would think or talk about a political program which might mark them as Communist, or even just socialist?

Perhaps the half-century episode 1948-2000 can best be summarized by the replacement of utopian visions and dreams of a Communist, or at least socialist revolution with the slogan of "social change" and the displacement of revolutionaries by

“change agents” – with change *from what* and *to what* left unidentified.

Or was the radicalism of the '60s really a deceit of traditional liberalism? Staughton Lynd comments:

What I regard as a syndrome of characteristically liberal attitudes: the belief that things are getting better; the necessary corollary that anything really bad must be a mistake and an exception; emphasis on the fact that we (that is, our friends in the pertinent bureaucracies) are trying; and above all, confidence that just a little more pressure of the right sort will make everything all right again.”<sup>18</sup>

Historian Tony Judt offered his reflections on the demise of utopian dreams and visions in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in his book, *Ill Fares the Land*. Judt himself typified the disillusioned Old Left that turned anti-Communist, but his analysis of what happened to the New Left and the peace movement over the course of the '60s struck me as all too true. It caused me some dismay that such a scenario, generalization though it was, had never occurred to me, but it did trigger my thinking about the splintering of the New Left.

“Above all, the new Left . . . rejected the inherited collectivism of its predecessor. . . Social justice no longer preoccupied radicals. What united the '60s generation was not the interests of all, but the needs and rights of each. ‘Individualism’ – the assertion of every person’s claim to maximum private freedom and the unrestrained liberty to express autonomous desires and have them respected and institutionalized by society at large . . . A short step to the fragmentation of radical politics, its metamorphosis

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18. Staughton Lynd, *Studies on the Left*, Jan-Feb 1966

into multiculturalism ... [and the] decline of shared sense of purpose."<sup>19</sup>

Was this just the reassertion of traditional American individualism or, at least in part, a reaction to Communist collectivism and a sense of betrayal by Soviet Communism?

"Indeed, the example of the 'anti-politics' of the '70s, together with the emphasis on human rights, has perhaps misled a generation of young activists into believing that, conventional avenues of change being hopelessly clogged, they should forsake political organization for single-issue, non-governmental groups unsullied by compromise. Consequently, the first thought that occurs to a young person seeking a way 'to get involved' is to sign up with Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch or Doctors without Borders."<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps I was too close to it all, too engaged, however critically, to be able to see what was happening, but without a coherent collective that could support members financially as they engaged in social justice efforts, the option of going to work for an NGO doing good work somewhere in the world did provide opportunities for the expression of personal vocations while still making a living.

Now, decades later, even some of the NGO groups once regarded as unsullied are increasingly found to be tarnished with partisan government requirements in return for financial support for their good works, too often now in alliance (as sponsors or 'partners') with corporate interests.

George Katsiaficas, professor at Wentworth Institute of Technology and prolific author on progressive social

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19, 20. Judt, *Ill Fares the Land*

movements, masterfully summed up the outcome of the 1960s in his 1987 book:

“In the aftermath of the 1960s, increasingly activists’ energies were directed into specialized and professionalized outlets. Some worked with political action committees as ‘professional’ activists, others devoted their energies to electoral campaigns ... still more focused their energies on particular instances of injustice... What unites these seemingly different tendencies is their professionalization and specialization, tendencies which have contributed to the fragmentation of the movement. ... Where there was once a focus of opposition to the system as a whole, today there are well-organized avenues of specialized protest orchestrated by professional activists and experts who reproduce the middle-class values of the system within the movement ... the fragmented logic of the system reasserted itself in the formation of specialized interest-groups (the social equivalent of individualism).”<sup>21</sup>

“in the 1970s . . . . With the exhaustion of reform schemes in the East behind the Iron Curtain, and in the West with the collapse of student dissent, it did not seem feasible to dream of a better world the old way—by proposing a genuine and controversial political alternative.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, a strong political movement with a vision did not emerge from these years of turmoil and hope. Instead, by the '70s the left had fragmented, the peace movement organizations evaporated and activists found work in good causes – but without a progressive political program or even a murmur of

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21. George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*, South End Press, 1987

22. Samuel Moyn, Interview of October 25, 2010, [rorotoko.com](http://rorotoko.com)

revolution. While the term radical was applied to, and by, the New Left, it was actually only reformist – except for factions such as the Weathermen and the Black Panthers that dreamed of violent revolution. This is not to make light of the real, hard-won gains of the civil rights movement, for example, but simply to be honest about the fact that inclusion into the ranks of eligible voters in a capitalist country may be a great reform victory, but it is not a radical achievement, any more than “participatory democracy” by itself would be.

It is not my intention to give the impression that the New Left and the peace movement were exclusively secular. There were strong peace elements in many Christian denominations as well as ecumenical associations of Christian pacifists and non-pacifist peace advocates, and a very active Catholic Peace Fellowship. But they were not revolutionaries calling for the overthrow of capitalism as a system built on and benefitting from the military-industrial complex (identified by none other than General/President Eisenhower), either. There was some work done on the economics of conversion from a military/war economy to a peace-building economy, but it was unfortunately very limited, not a popular issue.

Theology, apart from that of the small historic peace churches, primarily Mennonite and Brethren, was devoid of economics of any kind other than capitalist. “Holding all things in common” may have applied to the first disciples of Jesus, but was subsequently practiced only within the religious orders. There was, however, an identifiable stream of Christian radicals to be found among the university chaplains across the country with whom I could identify.

Similarly, the peace movement consisted of radical pacifists and those prepared to go to jail for their peace-mongering civil disobedience, like the Berrigan brothers, but also many people

who believed that nuclear weapons could be limited and controlled even by a government strongly influenced (to say the least) by the arms industry. The broad peace movement was secular and religious and wanted to be all things to all people, as illustrated by Turn Toward Peace, which was as liberal as its name suggested.

In mid-1964, for example, Turn Toward Peace held a Youth Committee Conference with participants from a wide range of religious and secular organizations with a peace concern. TTP was itself such an agglomeration, intended to build a broad movement for peace by avoiding any issue or position that would limit participation by well-intentioned individuals and organizations. But this meant that there was no definition of peace other than an absence of war, some measure of arms control, and a curb on the militarization of society. At the same time, any hint of socialism was absent, the practice of non-violence was not discussed and Cold War anti-Communism was only thinly veiled. In other words, no substantive alternative to the Cold War Society was put forward or even mentioned. TTP disappeared soon after.

### *The journey continues*

I worked for the FOR 1961-64, but with increasing discomfort as the organization was being pushed by its staff leadership into a metamorphosis from a Christian pacifist organization to a secular organization for the advocacy of what I refer to as ideological non-violence. I saw - and still see - non-violence as the expression of an ethical or religious commitment and principle, not simply a tactic. (Subsequently there was a major split between the International FOR and the U.S. organization over the issue as the International FOR, based in London, was determined to retain its Christian foundation.)

This pushed along my thinking about where I might go next to carry on my vocation. While I was working for the FOR, I found the university chaplains across the country to be my primary contacts and colleagues as I travelled from campus to campus (and community) counselling conscientious objection and speaking on non-violence and disarmament. The university chaplains were, by and large, progressive, intellectually alert and open to pacifism and non-violence and campus/university chaplaincy was an obvious type of work for me to consider. History, however, was working against me, and the mood of campus chaplains was approaching despair over the hierarchical authoritarian structures of the institutional church and its inability, or unwillingness, to support them in their important work with the growing student activism. This was both a political and theological difference, not between New Left and Old Left, but between those who had settled for the status quo and the security – personal and social – that it appeared to provide, and those of a generation whose security and even identity were overshadowed by The Bomb and whose energies were more devoted to making a more human life now than to saving for the future.

Campus chaplain William Yolton gave eloquent expression to the desperation affecting him and his colleagues: “The luxury of our separateness, our organizational embalment, the stability of our family lives – all these must be given up in the face of doomsday . . . We are approaching a crescendo of violence.”<sup>23</sup>

Could this not be said today in the context of climate change?

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23. Wm Yolton, January 1963



While working with the FOR I joined the editorial collective of *Our Generation Against Nuclear War*, a journal established by Dimitri Roussopoulos of Montreal. In 1963 Dimitri and I decided it was time to bring together a few credible older progressive peace activists, such as A.J. Muste, Dave McReynolds and Bayard Rustin, with the young New Left leaders, such as Tom Hayden, Richard Flacks and Todd Gitlin, and young peace movement activists from Canada, which included a young woman who was president of the CND at Carleton University in Ottawa. As Cathleen Rosenberg sat across the room from me, I found myself saying, "I like that one". We spent the night on the steps of the FOR headquarters talking poetry and politics - I had earlier promised Tom Hayden the use of my nearby apartment so he could pursue his relationship with Andrea Cousins. I don't know that the meeting, otherwise, was all that Dimitri and I had hoped for, but Cathleen and I courted during the winter, traveling between Nyack and Ottawa. She graduated from Carleton University in Ottawa two days after our wedding in 1964, which was presided over by a very dear friend and fellow FOR staff member, John Heidbrink.

Cathleen and I then spent most of a year in London, where I had intended to study at the London School of Economics (LSE), attracted by its long-standing reputation as a hotbed of socialism; but while that may have been its reputation abroad, it was far from what I found to be the case. Its major interest appeared to be the training of technicians to run the remnants of the British Empire. One course, billed as dealing with economic development in Africa, turned out to be one long lecture on the British 'groundnut scheme' in Kenya. (Peanuts had been introduced by the British as a monoculture export crop from their colony, but the lecturer gave no critique of the economic and social effects of this transition to monoculture for export, which I had to figure out on my own.) I did take a

couple of worthwhile courses, one I recall was on the Japanese economy, but that was all. My experience at LSE was not unique, as became apparent two years later in 1966 when, along with many other academic institutions in the UK as in France, LSE was forced by student rebellion to radically reorganize its course offerings.

LSE was such a great disappointment that I chose to devote much of my time to reading most of what was available in 'Dr. Williams' Library', the small private library of a deceased non-conformist minister, on Christian socialism, mostly dating from the '20s and '30s, being very engaged in the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference and with Cathleen in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the International Confederation for Disarmament and Peace. I also pursued my Marxist interest with frequent visits to Colette's Chinese Bookstore in London and other sources of Marxist and Communist publications, as well as attending lectures by prominent left wing figures such as noted economist Joan Robinson.

## *Back to the New World*

The unemployed honeymoon could not last forever, however. Our allowance for the year spent, Cathleen and I had to decide where we would settle after London, and how we would carry on with our peace-mongering vocation once we got there. The first question was partly resolved by the fact that as an identified tax refuser in the USA, life there might well be somewhat difficult in an unrewarding way. The more unambiguous reason was Cathleen's stated refusal to live in "that country". By then I had an invitation to oversee a six-week 'camp' in an old Toronto church for half a dozen students from Cuba and a like number of Canadian students. That would get us started, but not address the longer-term question of what we were going to do to make

a living. Then another opportunity presented itself: an invitation to become the director (sole staff) of the Canadian Fellowship of Reconciliation. With \$4,000 in its bank account, the scant membership thought I might be able to breathe some life into the movement. Worth a try, I thought, and it would keep us for a year, at least. (Remember, this was 1965.) So we moved to Toronto – but not before we made a farewell journey on our well-used Lambretta 175cc motor scooter across Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and down through West Germany right along the border with the DDR to Hirschluch, Bavaria, where we left our exhausted beast and sent a message to a friend in London that it was his for the taking if he wanted to come and get it. (He did, and sometime later sent us a cheque for 50.)

We were in Hirschluch to participate in a meeting of the Youth Commission of the Prague-based Christian Peace Conference. (I mentioned this earlier in connection with the memorial in Edinburgh for Milan Opocensky, and will come back to it shortly.)

Once settled in Toronto, we became active in the peace movement and were also among the founders of Rochdale Play School (a parent-run co-operative), the Latin American Working Group, and the Centre for the Study of Institutions and Theology (CENSIT), an outgrowth of a small group of progressive Christians calling itself The Christian Left.

The Latin American Working Group (LAWG) was created by a small group of church activists who decided that rather than trying to address global injustice in general we should focus on an area where local struggles and revolutionary movements deserved support and where we thought we could make an impact, for the better, on Canadian foreign policy. At the time, the Latin American desk of Foreign Affairs consisted of one man. It was some time before industry caught on and

created its own lobby group to counter our influence. While we accepted and supported revolution as desirable and necessary in some Latin American countries, we did not really expect to experience this in Canada.

Much of the energy mustered by the peace movement shifted in the late 1960s to forming groups such as LAWG in support of the struggles to overcome dictatorships and establish representative governments in Latin American, in countries such as Nicaragua and El Salvador. Across Canada there were support groups that held events for education and fund raising (with wonderful Latin American food and music) and continued to put pressure on the Canadian Governments for more enlightened policies in Latin America and support for the many refugees from Central America and South America, among whom the refugees from the 1973 U.S.-led coup in Chile were probably the most notable.

This was also a time of great - and wonderful - ferment in Toronto, the time of citizens organizing successfully to "Stop the Spadina" expressway, while reclaiming the waterfront for cultural and recreational activities took its place in the spotlight. (The Spadina Expressway was to have been an arterial highway running southeast from the outer suburbs of Toronto down to the core of the city just west of the financial district, cutting a swath through major residential areas of the city along the way.) It was also the time when the mighty Eaton's department store's plans for the demolition of Holy Trinity Church, where we had become active members, were scuttled by a small band of parishioners refusing to lie down and be walked over by commercial interests or the fearful church hierarchies who were preoccupied with property values. It was also a time of feminist assertion and an active questioning of the traditional definitions of human relations, sexuality and marriage.

Following the lead of President Kennedy's creation of the U.S. Peace Corps, in 1966 Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau established the Company of Young Canadians. Those of us of a cynical bent regarded it as a clever Liberal move to buy off the young leadership of the peace and social justice movements and turn them into tame salaried managers and bureaucrats. Though it did not achieve its desired ends in many cases, it did siphon off able organizers by providing an acceptable alternative - and pay, with career opportunities - to radical shoestring organizing activities on \$35 a week and a diet of peanut butter sandwiches (we had not yet heard about peanut allergies).

## CENSIT emerges

My major initiative and preoccupation in the late '60s was what I referred to as a 'free seminary' and was formally named The Centre for the Study of Institutions and Theology. CENSIT began as a weekly seminar without agenda in the office of Farrell Toombs in the Advisory Bureau at the University of Toronto in January, 1969. Farrell could have been called our guru, but he was far too political, with an Eastern Orthodox Christian formation, to accept such an appellation. It is better to recall him as a very gentle, and very thoughtful, host for CENSIT, which became the 'theological faculty' of the infant 'free university' of Rochdale College.

On page one of my first notebook for CENSIT I wrote, "How am I theological?" This was followed by "The Acme Theological Company," which might have been a more appropriate name for this project than the more grandiose Centre for the Study of Institutions and Theology.

CENSIT was an ambitious, audacious initiative that refused to accept theology as the property of ecclesiastical institutions.

It was a self-selected, self-defined collection of persons concerned with the meeting of theology and political life and aligned with the blossoming Liberation Theology of Central and South America which was also part of the inspiration of LAWG. The only published 'program' for CENSIT stated: "Given that we cannot live our lives apart from institutions, it is a primary function of the Centre to analyse and identify the operative presuppositions and values in the institutions we live with day by day. ...The Centre is intended as a point of focus and a locus of activity for anyone seeking a clarification of personal faith and a deeper understanding of the social context and consequence of this faith." It was dedicated to address a question not dealt with in theological seminaries: What does it mean to be a Christian?

As I ask myself now what Cathleen and I were living on, I remember that CENSIT provided me with a small stipend gathered from among its 'members' and friends. There was also some income from speaking, writing and producing radio programs for the CBC's intellectual slot, IDEAS, as a freelancer. Cathleen also worked in 1970-71 for CBC radio as the first woman announcer (summer relief) and then as host of a CBC-TV religious panel program.

Through 1969 and 1970 CENSIT was one long conversation and I attempted to record the high points, making many notes during our weekly discussions – to say 'seminars' would be too formal, particularly because they were often followed, at least for some of us, by lunch together at the Brunswick Tavern. The following notes are extracted from my notebooks to provide some insight into the 'flavour' of our discussions. Some of the comments are my own, some are quotes from other participants.

A Christian must, per se, participate in an intentional celebrating community. Eucharist is both identification with tradition and proclamation concerning the future.

Liberation and Hope are Good News (Gospel). Without liberation we are liberals at best.

Being involved in church structures may be a way to help individuals, but socially it preserves the structures and the problem is, how to destroy the structures? (Henri, a French Catholic priest)

The church has nurtured dependency on professionally trained clergy, on authorized texts and authorized history which together authorize power structures. God-in-a-box produces fatalism, or at least determinism, and excludes revolution.

Jesus' goal was political; otherwise he would have organized his ministry in a quite different way. Jesus' goal did not, however, preclude the personal-social. Jesus dealt sincerely with each person he encountered: he was building a human association of liberated people for political action. The individual life was never an end in itself. The person found his meaning in his new context, his new political life.

... can we live with grace in the present? i.e., not to either succumb or withdraw?

... this is not to speak yet of apocalypse or millennium – we are only speaking about what may be possible for man [sic] in Creation – from Genesis onward.

The failure of faith is the lack of any real sense of newness, of possibility. We do not believe any new thing is possible and Utopia is a mirage, not a political dynamic.

Faith is the conviction that one can live out of the future. The function of the resurrection is to make it possible for a person to transcend their own life.

The premise of utopia is radical discontinuity with the present.

The apocalyptic tends to be paralyzing, eschatology tends to be energizing.

The front line of exodus is not emigration but transformation, except that we may speak of emigrating from the past into the future.

When common language has lost its meaning, we can no longer go on using it. A period of chaos may be unavoidable before a new language emerges that reflects a more stable or orderly metaphysics. (I added, speaking for myself), "I can't use the language that I used to use and I feel some absence, some want, some bereavement – where do we speak and hear the living word? Where do we learn the language? How do we speak the word in good faith, speaking the word and not the historical misuse of it?"

We started talking about the state of the church ... the 'tradition' itself – the language of the Gospel – is being forsaken. ... The question then is, do we want to affirm the tradition? Do we want to assert the validity of the tradition? If so, where and how?

This is the point at which I get troubled. We make a commitment, an assertion, but we have, like the church we criticize, balked at the point of incarnation, meaning politics, political life.



We cannot/will not solve the real problems – we will not undo in our lifetimes what we have achieved over centuries. Our justification cannot rest on our achievements, our justification lies in our faith, our hope, our experience of redemption, our conviction, so we can address ourselves to the needs of others, finding joy in the work, living in the knowledge of the redemption both as personal experience and as real social possibility.

Demands of a tiny minority (North Atlantic) are being reproduced around the world, polluting the social imagination. We reproduce demand for our reality even though this demand can never be met.

The humanization of poverty would mean defining your own demands in terms which are realistically available to all persons.

When Prime Minister Trudeau invoked The War Measures Act in October, 1970, in reaction to the Quebec October Crisis, the CENSIT group was alarmed and incensed by the iron fist treatment of Quebec citizens by the Canadian state and made the first public statement in Canada condemning the government for its extreme action. (Thirty-two years later, in May, 2012, there were massive student demonstrations in Quebec – the same issues, essentially, still unaddressed.)

The Centre (CENSIT) never made it institutionally beyond being a personal dream, even though while dreaming aloud in Toronto there were a number of people significantly involved. But I was impatient and their involvement did not go far enough or fast enough for me. I convinced myself with my own arguments, against the academic, against the metropolis, against the affluent, with nothing left but action.

In late spring, 1971, Cathleen, Jamie (5) and Rebecca (3) and I left the metropolis of Toronto to take up a new life in the Canadian hinterland of Nova Scotia. That radical move marked, for me, the conclusion of a period of intense, wide ranging intellectual activity that had begun in 1964. Thinking about this time more than four decades later, I cannot say that our intellectual and organizing activities were either 'successful' or 'productive', but then we were mostly with other Christians who placed more merit in faithfulness than in temporal achievement. We did not change the world – or did we?

Before I get to discussing the period in Nova Scotia and its profound effect on me (and the rest of our family) I need, as promised earlier, to talk about the Christian Peace Conference.

My engagement in the Christian Peace Conference in the 1960s was during what I continue to think of as a crucial decade in world history when the political and social assumptions of East and West, North and South were being challenged and, in some cases, attacked. It was a period of considerable creativity in the countries of Eastern Europe – particularly in politics and the arts – while their conservative Communist governments tried hard to maintain their control. The Youth Commission of the CPC during those years carried on highly significant political and social analysis, an analysis which holds as true today, unfortunately, as it did then, and is one of the reasons I dwell on it at some length here. The other reason, apart from the fact that the decade was an important chapter in my own intellectual and social life, is that it marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War and the 'balance' of the great powers – the USA and the Soviet Union – and the rise of U.S. hegemony, militarily, financially, and ideologically. The ideological hegemony of the USA was, and continues to be, expressed through financial capitalism (financialization) and the often-

disguised poison of anti-Communism – disguised as the ‘war on terror’ or the promotion of human rights.

## *The Christian Peace Conference*

*The following three sections, on the All Christian Peace Assembly, the Youth Commission of the CPC and the life and theology of Josef Hromadka, mark the 1960s as a period of great turmoil and betrayed hopes.*

Before we settled in London for the winter in 1964, Cathleen and I spent part of our ‘honeymoon’ in Prague in July attending the Second All-Christian Peace Assembly (ACPA) and participating in its Youth Commission. With this trip in mind, we got formally married, complete with surname change for Cathleen, rather than just celebrating our ‘relationship’ in the presence of friends and family. Because we intended to travel ‘behind the Iron Curtain’, we figured that the formality would make it possible, or at least easier, for us to travel together.

Cathleen was also convinced that my engagement in the ACPA would be a life-changing experience for me and, being ten years younger than me, felt that if I went to Prague alone she would never ‘catch up’ with me and our hopes for a long-term relationship would be in vain.

The First All-Christian Peace Assembly (ACPA) had been held in 1961 after several years of preparatory work by an ecumenical team of church leaders and theologians (Russian Orthodox, German Lutheran, Czech Reformed and British Anglican) that formed the Christian Peace Conference. Major efforts were made, right from the beginning, to include not just Eastern Europeans and Russians, but particularly church people from the USA. The 1,000 participants in the second ACPA in Prague in July included not only delegates from all over Europe

and North America, but also from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

I first became acquainted with the Christian Peace Conference as a staff member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which served as the base for the American committee for the CPC. For a number of years I played a leading role in the Youth Commission, which was chaired by Milan Opocensky, a past student of Josef Hromadka, the founder of the CPC. (It was Milan who made it possible for us to attend the IIACPA.) The Youth Commission was largely composed of white, male Russians, East Germans, Czechs, some Western Europeans and North Americans, together with some strong 'western' women and a few Africans and Latin Americans. (The cost of travel was always a huge problem, hence the heavy European presence, which characterized the CPC as a whole.) We never particularly identified members by their church status or affiliation, although this was an important identifier for the CPC as a whole. What mattered to us was that they were willing to identify with the Christian Peace Conference, and we operated out of a theological premise as expressed by Joseph Hromadka. It was not a political theology *per se*, but a theology that shaped our understanding of humanity and history and provided the basis for hope, which in time became a key element in the Christian-Marxist dialogue developing in Prague.

In keeping with our New Left orientation, many of us in the Youth Commission became the rebels and upstarts of the CPC, causing varying degrees of distress to the senior body as we invited the radical spokespersons of the New Left (Rudi Dutschke from West Germany, for example) to our meetings and even going so far as to invite Chinese participation. This caused much unhappiness (not unreasonably) to the officials of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was the patron of the

CPC, paying the bills and minding the program. After the IIACPA, however, before we became so politically difficult, Cathleen and I were invited to spend twelve days in the USSR as guests of the Russian Orthodox Church, along with a couple of dozen Africans, thanks to the intervention of Milan who convinced the Russians that we were important people in the peace movement back home in Canada. The experience certainly did not alter our politics, but did give us some insights into life in the Soviet Union, particularly after being invited to address the congregation in the Baptist Church in Moscow and noting that the large congregation was using hand-copied Bibles and hymn books. On the other hand, we observed the wealth and power of the Orthodox Church, and actually had the opportunity to meet the Patriarch (similar to the Pope in the Catholic Church), which was a great honour, if a little unsettling, as knowing Cathleen was Canadian, he addressed her in French. (She did her best to respond despite her sketchy French.)

When we settled in London for the winter, in addition to my studies at LSE and Dr. Williams' Library, I read Mao, and Lin Piao and Ho Chi Minh on guerrilla warfare and people's wars, and tried to relate it to the practice of non-violent direct action. (It was 1966 when Chairman Mao initiated the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution.)

On our first trip to Prague for the Assembly, Cathleen and I fell in love with the city and some of its citizens and we returned to Prague from our London lodgings at Christmastime (1964-5) for an emotionally and intellectually intense cultural, theological and philosophical experience with Czech Protestant theologians, Marxist philosophers, poets, writers and musicians, including Marxist philosopher Julius Tomin, his interpreter wife Zdena, and poet Inka Machulkova. At the time, Tomin was a graduate student in the Charles University studying philosophy

with the Marxist scholar Milan Machovec. It was Machovec who initiated the Christian-Marxist dialogue with the participation of Tomin. For his dissident views, Tomin was excluded from the university and then worked as a night watchman in a power plant. He told us he didn't mind as it gave him lots of time to study Marx.

We spent quite a bit of time with Julius and Zdena, walking, talking, drinking wine and really falling in love with each other, and on subsequent trips to Prague I always visited with Julius and Zdena. The last such visit was in June, 1969, after the Russian invasion of 1968 that put an end to the Prague Spring. At that time, they said they were going to go to Hawaii for a year to teach. Julius later visited us on our farm in Nova Scotia. I don't think either of them ever went back to Czechoslovakia – a great loss to their country. I remember Julius remarking, during the height of the turmoil there, that patriotism is the understanding of the unique contribution your country can make to the world, clearly referring to the vision embodied in the Prague Spring. The stirrings of the Prague Spring of 1968 were already evident in theatre, music, poetry, literary journals and heated discussions in 1965.

I recall one hilarious evening in one of Prague's wonderful centuries-old pubs. We were on the street trying to find our way to U Flecku, one of the oldest, brewing the best of beers for something like four centuries, when we encountered a man who offered to lead us there, though he actually said nothing. We were obviously tourists so we assumed that he figured we spoke no Czech so there was no point in speaking with us. Soon he stopped on a street corner and whistled. Four floors up a window opened and a man appeared. There was then a conversation without words and we realized that our guide was a deaf-mute. We went to the pub with him and his friend

and joined the crowd at one of the long tables and the conversation carried on with sign language, mime, drawings on paper napkins and all sorts of wild gestures – until word was quietly passed along that there was a police agent nearby and the group drained away.

## *The CPC Youth Commission*

I became a fixture of the Youth Commission, doing much of the drafting of reports, and as such I traveled to Prague a number of times in the years following the ACPA, (on a few of which I carried messages from Vietnamese war resisters in Canada to the office of the Vietcong in Prague), as well as to meetings in Hungary, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the German Federal Republic (West Germany). One of the reports I helped to draft was of our meeting in Berlin at Hendrik Kraemer Haus in July, 1967, with 44 participants from 17 countries, including Brazil, Japan, Spain, the USSR, Holland, Sweden, Berlin-East, Western Germany and Berlin-West, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, the USA, and myself from Canada, and also with significant Roman Catholic and Marxist participation. In my report, (a far more radical political analysis than anything produced by the North American New Left), I wrote,

In its meeting during the Second All Christian Peace Assembly in 1964, the Youth Commission came to the conclusion that its basic concern for peace (shalom) necessitated serious consideration of revolution. Some people have been uncomfortable about this as they feel that there is a contradiction between peace and revolution, but in our study and discussion we have come to feel that institutionalized violence – the violence of the status quo, hunger and disease – is not a reasonable or even

possible basis for peace. On the contrary, peace will be possible for many people only after their societies have undergone a revolution, not only within themselves, but in their relations with other states as well. Only revolution is adequate to overcome or transform the existing and deepening disparity between the rich and the poor, exploiters and exploited.

As our concern with the prerequisites of peace has brought us to the conclusion that the major contradiction in the world is between rich and poor, North and South, industrialized and un-industrialized, we have come to see the East-West conflict, Capitalism versus Communism, as a secondary aspect of the major contradiction.

We then focused on the question of The Relevance of the Russian Revolution and the Socialist Revolutions of Eastern Europe to the Development of the Third World, as well as on the question of Aid and Trade and the Needs of the Third World. We discussed both subjects not only from the perspective of the Third World, but also from the perspective of the Socialist countries and the West.

As we worked together, we developed the position that the Socialist Revolutions were not of primary importance since the countries involved are essentially industrialized societies with the same pattern of relationships to the Third World as the Western countries, but that they are of secondary importance in that they prevent the USA from being the only world power and may provide some alternative of development to that of Americanization. The exception of China was noted by all, and apart from Cuba it remains the socialist country most relevant to the Third World.



On Aid and Trade, we tended to conclude that all aid is bad unless it is in the form of outright grants without restriction. Even this is open to question since all aid seems to support the status quo by strengthening the economic position of those presently in control and furthering the contradiction between rich and poor. The primary beneficiary of foreign aid is the donor country itself, since almost all aid is actually a governmental subsidy to the commerce of the donor country. In this regard, little difference was noted between capitalist and Communist countries.

Against this, it was felt that trade is of much greater importance, if we mean by this stabilized and fair commodity prices for the primary products of the countries of the Third World.

Perhaps even more important than the objective results of our meeting are the subjective results. Those of us who have been working together for three years or more, even though we may meet only once a year and are working in widely separated areas of the world – Tokyo, Geneva, Prague, Toronto, Berlin – found that more than ever we are using the same language, reaching the same analysis of society, developing the same strategy and the same theology, and in all manifesting a common consciousness as part of a world-wide development of consciousness. ... As Christians, we increasingly find ourselves in a radical leftist, independent Marxist, New Left position. Theologically rather orthodox, we are post-Existentialist and even “pro-Chinese” in the sense of finding Mao and China more relevant than the USA or the USSR. But no classification in traditional terms can adequately describe what is a new historical phenomenon.

1968 was a tumultuous year in many places: all over Europe students were in the streets demanding an end to the Cold War, disarmament, and radical educational and economic changes, and by April the 'Prague Spring' was in full bloom. The Third All-Christian Peace Assembly in March overflowed with lively and heated debate about the changing context and the place and role of Christians in it.

Being in Prague at that time was exhilarating, and very beautiful. In January the Central Committee of the Communist Party had demonstrated its response to the changing public mood by electing Alexander Dubcek to replace Antonin Novotny as the country's President. The bursting out of pent up energies and creativity was a fountain of hope for a new kind of socialist society: "Socialism with a Human Face". One could say that there was even a blossoming of badly needed utopian dreaming and our Youth Commission colleagues felt a deep solidarity with the socialist radicals.

In his opening address to the Third All-Christian Peace Assembly, Prof. Hromadka said the turmoil of the changes in the Czech government and release of the pressure from the Communist state was not a sign of the end of socialism, but "a struggle that is being waged for socialism." However, he said, "I am talking about this ... to address a serious question to myself. Are we Christians ready for this new situation? Do we understand what we have to do? I have time and again had a great fear that we Christians do not understand what is happening, that we withdraw into our self-righteous ghetto, and abandon the world to its own fate."<sup>24</sup> In his customary manner, Hromadka addressed first himself with his questions,

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24. *Seek Peace and Pursue It*, the report of IIACPA, 1968

then those around him. He made no demand on others that he did not first make on himself.

The meeting of the Youth Commission at the Third Assembly was a very lively affair with a great deal of very frank discussion and critique building on the work we had done in Berlin the year before. We invited Rudi Dutschke ('Red Rudi') to participate in the meeting and in an informal talk with us, he stressed the anti-authoritarian character of the German new left.

“We believe that an international opposition is necessary to fight against all forms of authoritarian structure, whether in socialist or in capitalist form. We differentiate very seriously between authoritarian socialism and the authoritarian structure of capitalism, of course, but that doesn't mean that we haven't to fight against the authoritarian form of socialism. ... This production of authoritarian personalities in all institutions of our society is the basic reason for our anti-authoritarian movement. And we think that the modern form of fascism is in the institutions.” Dutschke then referred to “structural fascism”: “We are very interested in the process of democratization in the authoritarian socialist countries. We could very much improve our political and emancipatorial work if democratization, in the DDR for instance, would develop. ... This double strategy is to make subversive work within the system of institutions, and to build up a new form of human relations outside of the institutions, outside of the parliamentary system .... If we cannot establish new forms of more human relationships between us in our extra-parliamentary area, then we will not be able to overcome the society. ... It means to build up our own forms of institution in direct fight against the state apparatus. ... The problem is not

to liquidate any authority. The problem is to liquidate authoritarian structures.”<sup>25</sup>

Dutschke’s remarks set out a political philosophy, and almost a program, contemporary with The Port Huron Statement of the parallel movement in the USA, but radically different in its attitude toward the state. SDS was calling for reform, the German left was calling for revolution of a new kind. Referring to Chairman Mao and the Long March of the Chinese revolution, Dutschke called for ‘a long march through the institutions’.

After this meeting I went to Berlin and made a short interview with Dutschke. On my way back to Toronto I got news that he had been shot in the head. (He partially recovered, but died in 1980.) I got off the plane in Ottawa and managed to get a segment of my interview on CBC’s prime time news program. Even now, four decades later, I feel the tragic loss of a great leader.

In the report of our meeting, the Youth Commission said,

In the experience of struggle, young people are discovering how the phenomena of injustice are not disconnected and accidental. Instead, young people find they are struggling against an international system of imperialism, economic exploitation, and militarism which produces the injustices we oppose. . . . But imperialist aggression, international militarism, racial injustice and the selfishness of the rich affect us all. . . . And before us stretches the unfinished task of creating the participative democracy and co-operation that can overcome bureaucracy, authoritarian institutions and pretentious experts.

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25. Transcription from my recording

The Prague Spring was tragically short-lived. The Soviet Union, recognizing it was losing control, both politically and over the Czech economy with its advanced heavy industry, sent its army, along with Hungarian, Polish, German and Bulgarian troops, into the streets of Prague and throughout the country to quell the uprising and 'restore order' on August 21, 1968. A day later Prof Hromadka sent an open letter to the Soviet Ambassador in Prague, saying, "The Soviet government could not have committed a more tragic error. It is an immeasurable misfortune. The moral weight of socialism and Communism have been shattered for a long time to come."

There ensued a struggle over the future of the Christian Peace Conference, and in October 1969 the Russians demanded the resignation of Jaroslav Ondra as secretary of the CPC. Hromadka's response was to send the Russians his own letter of resignation as President of the CPC. There followed, literally around the world, much discussion about the CPC by its friends as well as enemies, but the Russians and their hardline allies, particularly in the DDR, made it clear that they would not tolerate the CPC as the dynamic movement for peace and reconciliation it had become. This was another tragic error of immense significance, leading to its demise not long after.

Needless to say, the Christian-Marxist dialogue that had been unfolding in Prague from the early 1960s under the leadership of Hromadka and Milan Machovec also came to an end.

## *Christian-Marxist dialogue*

My engagement in the Christian-Marxist dialogue took the form not of a formal academic debate, though I spoke and wrote on the subject at the time, but of an intense human relationship with Machovec's student, Julius Tomin, and Julius' wife Zdena, as described earlier. It was the proper way to start a dialogue

on an existentially important subject in a time of profound ferment around the world when previously unquestioned cultural, religious and political institutions were being called to judgement. Christians were challenging the authoritarianism of the church with its fatalism and deterministic views of Man [sic] and history, while Communists were also beginning to more openly challenge the authoritarian character of socialist states and their historical determinism that feared human creativity and left too little space for it.

At issue for everyone engaged in Christian-Marxist dialogue was the issue of responsibility, which meant responsibility for their historical behaviour and actions. For Communists this meant acknowledging the evils of Stalinism as part of their history just as for Christians the evils of imperialism and puritanism, and episodes such as the Crusades, called for repentance so that they could be moved beyond. Dialogue thus had to begin with an attitude of humility and a desire to understand the Other so that the encounter would not lead to self-justification of the past and present, but to forgiveness and the emergence of a new person on both 'sides'. In other words, the central topic of Christian-Marxist dialogue was the doctrine or philosophy of Man<sup>26</sup>

This should have, and might have, grown beyond its European genesis into a worldwide recognition of historic relations between peoples and their transformation into a global culture of respect and peace. Unfortunately, it was too utopian.

*Joseph L. Hromadka*

As I have indicated, the CPC reflected the theology of Josef Hromadka, who felt very strongly that the responsibility of

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26. cf. Adam Schaff, *A Philosophy of Man*, Monthly Review Press, 1963

Christians was to be peacemakers, not as political players, but as people who brought a deeper dimension of repentance and human solidarity to political life. It was this attitude that later made Hromadka a leader in the Christian-Marxist dialogue that upset both conservative Christians and hardline Communists. In my 1969 interview with him, Hromadka told me that he was never a Communist, but that he could not imagine that a Christian could not participate in a socialist society.

In his introduction to the full report of the First All-Christian Peace Assembly in 1961, Hromadka wrote,

“If we speak of repentance we should not merely think of some pious mood. We have to understand repentance as an inner liberation, courageously facing realities, seeing the other man realistically and wrestling with him creatively and positively. We hope that the readers of this report will be able to feel that we did not want to be satisfied with cheap emotions and unctuous official brotherliness, that we stated our opinions, our often contradictory conceptions, freely and concretely in order to see a common answer. ... We can declare that unlimited freedom of speech prevailed. If anybody should have felt himself limited, it would not have been for objective reasons but on account of the reserve and caution he brought with himself on his journey to the border of the two worlds where the Iron Curtain was expected. ... We can claim that the Christendom of the East in all its denominations and trends had the opportunity to say its word, that the western monologue prevailing so far no longer determined the issue.”

In Hromadka's writing and speaking, one was always aware of the presence of history – and of Hromadka's mindfulness of living in a particular historic context which, for him, included,

as he spoke of it, “the disintegration” of seemingly great powers. In his remarks at the opening of the Second All-Christian Peace Assembly in 1964, for example, Hromadka pointed out that it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First World War, which included the Communist revolution in Russia and the disintegration of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War with its refiguring of Europe. For me, Hromadka was describing the context of my life, which all my schooling in the USA had failed (and never intended) to provide.

Hromadka’s theology, which not only formed and guided his personal life, but was also the foundation of the Christian Peace Conference, was profoundly Christological – focused on the life and teachings of Jesus and particularly on his death and resurrection as expressions of God’s intervention for the sake of humanity. This comes out very strongly in the documents of the All Christian Peace Assemblies and his ‘directions’ and appeals to the participants, as well as in his own descriptions of his theology. As Hromadka said in my interview with him – in stark contrast to the fatalism of Christian Realism and the determinative place Niebuhr gave to human sin – “The victory of Christ on the cross was not individual, but an act of universal and cosmic dimension, the ruler of human life. We have a responsibility to radiate the joy and determination of that victory over death.”

“... the real meaning of life is the awareness that we live on the basis of forgiveness of sins, granted as a gift of the sovereign grace of God. We can find no just relationship with the people around us if we do not realize that we need the forgiveness of sins and that we are called to forgive.



“My Christological view of the Old Testament, of the Early Church and of the history of Christianity has made me sure of the fact that there is, outside the Christian faith, no intellectually more penetrating view of history, society and man. And the deeper a man descends towards the centre of the apostolic message of the Cross and Resurrection, the better he understands the meaning of the life of Jesus, and thus the more courageously he can devote himself to today’s personal, social and political sufferings and tasks.<sup>27</sup>

I had come to know Josef Hromadka personally through my involvement in the CPC and hosting him and his wife on a speaking tour in Canada, and after the Russian invasion I felt very strongly that he would probably not live much longer after giving so much of himself, for years, working for peace and reconciliation between East and West. Therefore I returned to Prague in June, 1969, to record a long interview with Prof. Hromadka about his life. I found Prague subdued and very sad. The dynamic and creative writers, poets and intellectuals I had come to know well in earlier visits were no longer to be found. My interview turned out to last four engaging hours and I subsequently edited it into a one-hour special for the CBC (for which I got paid well and was thus able to cover my travel expenses). It was really a labour of love, as he was very tired and I had to edit out hundreds, if not thousands of “um”s, which with the reel-to-reel recording technology of the time meant literally cutting them out with a razor blade and splicing the tape back together.

I recently had the 4-year-old tape transformed into a CD. After listening to it a couple of times, I began to recognize how

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27. Josef L. Hromadka, *Thoughts of a Czech Pastor*, SCM Press, 1970

much my own theology was influenced by Hromadka's life and convictions. I also recalled that one of the reasons I made the long interview with him was to try to understand what shaped the man, his theology and his political philosophy.

As he told me, he was born in 1889 into a pious farming family, and his father expected him to inherit the farm. But as Hromadka put it, he was lacking in skill and dexterity and a poor candidate for operating the farm. So his father sent him to school. He also said that he was never comfortable with "pious utterances" such as the ones he grew up with. On the other hand, he also disagreed with 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalism and felt a "spiritual uneasiness".

Hromadka described how he came to study theology at the urging of a friend as a way to try to address the "spiritual vacuum" of rationalism, and then served briefly as a pastor in a big Prague church before being drafted, as an Austrian citizen, into the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1917 as a chaplain. Then the Russian revolution took place, Lenin made a treaty with Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Austrian soldiers were being returned home in one direction while the Russians went the other way. Hromadka was assigned to a camp for returning soldiers and in the ensuing chaos, he realized that what he was witnessing was the disintegration of the great powers. This had a profound effect on his lifelong work for peace as he realized that even the biggest powers could disintegrate almost overnight. This reinforced his essential skepticism about Great Powers and power politics that remained with him to the end, but also impressed on him the need to take care of human life and to help people prepare for new possibilities.

For me, Hromadka's attitude was almost the polar opposite to Reinhold Niebuhr, and a far more profound approach to

Christian life and responsibility. His realization of the essential brittleness and vulnerability of the *apparently* great powers clearly constituted the ground of his hope and vision beyond the present moment.

After the war Hromadka was a pastor and professor of theology until 1939, when friends advised him to leave the country immediately as his name had been seen on a Gestapo list of people to be sent to concentration camp. He was invited to Princeton Theological Seminary in the U.S. where he remained until 1947. His decision to return to his country, now with a Communist government headed by Klement Gottwald elected in 1948, shocked many of his friends and colleagues, who felt it was impossible to be a Christian in a Communist country. They urged him, in vain, to remain in the US.

At the end of my interview with him, Hromadka said, "I wish I were a few years younger – there is so much work to do."

Hromadka died just after Christmas that year – of a broken heart, I felt. For him the Soviet invasion, and then its move to tame, if not destroy, the CPC, was a betrayal of the peaceful and respectful relations he had laboured so hard over decades to achieve. As historian Samuel Moyn has succinctly written, "Socialism with a human face died in Eastern Europe in 1968. ...While Prague in 1968 proved that no revisionist socialism would be tolerated in the Soviet sphere, Santiago [Chile] in 1973 brought home the lesson that no revisionist socialism would be tolerated in the American one."<sup>28</sup>

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28. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia*

## Middle generation

After the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the core members of the Youth Commission discussed the possibility of having a meeting of the radical element in the Youth Commission. I wrote in March, 1968, "I would want us to discuss the Czech situation, Christian-Marxist dialogue, and, fundamentally, the radical movements and the problems of resignation and despair. ...I grow increasingly concerned at the inability of even the best radicals to think creatively about the future, not as utopia, but as historical process. (CENSIT was initiated in January 1969)

Some of us did meet informally, but decided that the time of the CPC was past and that we would have to find new ways of working together, if possible. In May, 1970, seven of us sent a letter to the Christian Peace Conference, stating our concerns, and concluded: "In view of what we have said above it seems proper to us to refrain for the time being from participation in international meetings taking place within the old structures of the CPC and to foster better discussion and action at the local and national level. It may be that the time has come for the CPC to make way for other groupings, which are in a position to deal with the most urgent issues in a more effective and relevant way."

The Youth Commission dissolved along with the CPC itself, but our activist core accepted my suggested name 'The Middle Generation', and engaged in some substantial discussion, mostly on paper, of where we found ourselves, between the short-term activism of the New Left and the caution and authoritarianism of the old left. Margaret Flory, a free spirit on the national staff of the Presbyterian Church USA who roamed widely beyond the bureaucracy of the church, used the financial resources

available to her to facilitate creative efforts of younger Christians such as Bi-National Service and the World Student Christian Federation. Sadly, Margaret's work marked the end of an era in the life of the church, but despite the changes in the church and its bureaucracy she did make it possible for the Middle Generation to meet a couple of times post-1969 and to circulate discussion papers.

The following is an edited and abbreviated paper for which I wrote the initial draft in September, 1969, for the Middle Generation group. Written 45 years ago, its contemporary relevance is striking, particularly the importance attached to utopian thinking and questioning the state, which is why I include it here.

We used to call ourselves, in the context of the CPC, the Younger Generation. Since May, 1968, we have chosen to pass that term on to those younger than ourselves. ...We are no longer the Younger Generation, and, indeed, stand in an ambiguous relationship of both solidarity and criticism to the new activists and radicals, but at the same time we are unwilling to associate ourselves uncritically with the older generation, from whom we have felt consistently estranged, not to say alienated.

We are in our late 20's or early 30's. We are predominantly single, and if not single, then entertaining fairly radical questions about the family structure and function which we have inherited. Our political education began with the Cold War and the so-called East-West struggle. Our theological formation took place essentially during the period of domination by neo-orthodoxy and we experienced the achievements and excitement of the international student Christian movement at its best. We were Depression babies, but have not known the financial

insecurity and the economic anxiety of our parents. We are young enough to understand the implications of technology and advanced industrialization, but we are not the computer programmers. We do not expect that traditional patterns of work, career, or vocation will hold true for us.

Politically, we are not conservative. Nor are we either liberals or social democrats. Our basic criticism is that politics and, indeed, all institutional life, including the church, has been dominated, in our lifetime, by authoritarian attitudes and arrangements, combined with strong tendencies in the direction of self-serving bureaucracies and opportunism. We are familiar with the pleas of pragmatists and realists in every area of our life, but *we are more interested in exploring the possible and the necessary than with explaining the impossible and trivial.*

We accept the stress in anarchist thought on decentralization of decision making and the composition of society as a complexity of natural local and regional groupings. *The elimination of the possibility of state warfare may be achieved only by elimination of the state as our culture knows it.* This is not to suggest that there need be no institutions. We fully understand the need for and benefits of institutions and are continually working to institutionalize what to older generations are regarded as strictly personal problems and concerns. But institutions, including law itself, are to be maintained only as long as they continue to serve the needs of man [sic]. This includes the church. Strategically this could mean a “long march through the institutions” as we know them, a commitment to a kind of guerrilla warfare on the

institutions which cripple mankind and delay the future of man — a struggle for liberation.

In economics we are socialists. Public good and not private gain must be the basis of economic organization, the liberation of all must be the goal of economic activity. The socialization of public wealth and the equalization of private wealth must be an objective. Housing, health, education, nutrition and clothing must be considered as essential for all rather than luxuries for those able to afford them. Decentralization and radical transformation of distribution facilities are as essential as humane development of technology and industrialization.

If we once entertained expectations of a settled life, of a public career or a quiet job, we no longer even hope for these. On the contrary, we are beginning to understand the freedom that comes when a career is forsaken, when instability in work is accepted as a consequence of a vocation to work for human growth and liberation. We now understand the need to acquire skills, not in order to achieve stability, but as tools with which to create instability and possibility.

It is in the area of theology and the church that our situation as the Middle Generation is most clear. We are committed to the church, the Body of Christ, and we are committed to the theological enterprise. We neither feel that God is Dead (though we recognize the truthfulness of this assertion that the culture and its deity are dead) nor are we apologetic about the responsibility of theology. We assert that there is a crucial role for theology in the development of the future social order. For us theology is political or it is not theology. This means that theology is a social enterprise, a commitment that cannot tolerate

a contradiction between the personal and the political. Theology is not an academic pursuit, but a critique of social development and the visionary motivation for political construction. But it is precisely this notion of theology and its importance which we feel is shared by neither older nor younger generations.

The older generations never understood theology in this sense and this, together with their commitment to the institutions of the church, has caused younger generations to lose respect for both theology and the church. We feel a compulsion to assert that the church is not by its nature authoritarian, that it can be a community of believers, and that persons within the church can find new life and hope with which to embark on the construction of a humane social order.

The gap between the older and the younger generations is deepening. We feel there is little time left in which to relate what we feel of value in the Christian tradition to the new societies struggling to be born, little time left in which to speak the words of criticism and love that we feel to be the Gospel in the present time. We do not look forward to the violence and bitterness that will come if the Christian tradition is forsaken by the young and betrayed by the old. Our task is to find the style and structure to manifest our faith, to provide hope and not resignation, gentleness and not bitterness, to those who are shaping the new world.

The old church is dead, the old Christian movements are dead. The bodies are being forsaken or embalmed, and we must leave the dead to bury their dead. Our task, having known the joy and hope of a dynamic Christian



fellowship, is to create new forms and possibilities of experience for those who have not heard the Gospel. New “schools of theology” and new churches are our responsibilities. We cannot expect those older or younger to take on our work.

Those of us who accept the characterization “Middle Generation” would by now, in another time, have begun our careers, established our families, and be looking ahead to years of stability and improving financial and social status. As it is, many of us have not established families, have no career, have little financial stability or security, are not approved of by much of society or even by the church which we call home, and have little prospect of ‘success’. We are not offering a complaint, only an observation. . . . It is hard to see any existing institutional context within which to work. If there is no present institution to which we can turn, which can provide us with the structure and community to grow as an international movement of socialist Christians, then we have to face the question of institutionalizing ourselves, of taking on the responsibility for proclamation in our own terms and on the strength of our own resources.

Sad to say, we did not find a way to work collectively and it was time to move on personally. Our global engagement was expressed by the directions in which people were moving: political science professor in Australia; social justice institute in a South India theological school; law in Boston; clergy in Britain, and on around the world. I know that at least some of The Middle Generation, regardless of occupation, have remained steadfast leaven in the lump of life.

## Revolution, Utopian Thinking and anti-Communism

I have, so far, referred to utopia and utopian dreams approvingly, but also noting that 'utopian' is commonly used as a term of derision or dismissal by those who would best be described as pragmatists and cynics, or simply as liberals. Christian-Marxist dialogue, for example, was described as naive utopian fantasy by those whose 'realism' allowed for no hopeful dreaming or visioning and all too often viewed 'reality' in simplistic black and white terms.

The Old Left, by and large, simply abandoned any utopian dreams, at least outwardly, while The New Left basically personalized its utopian thinking, as Maurice Isserman put it in his 1987 book:

Old Leftists discarded dogmas they once passionately believed in, and what remained to them was a commitment to a cautious pragmatic reformism and the hope that in the distant future all those reforms would incrementally add up to some sort of democratic socialism. New Leftists repudiated dogmas they had never shared and then turned with the passionate intensity of the newly converted to building a movement based on what was left to them: personal morality, ethics, and sincerity.<sup>29</sup>

In her book *After Utopia*, published in 1957, Judith Shklar comments, "the fact that socialism no longer exists as an intellectual faith has . . . deprived many of the last possible 'cause' and thus indirectly forced them into complete social alienation." Now "we know too much to fall into even the

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29. Maurice Isserman, *If I had a Hammer*

slightest utopianism, and without that grain of baseless optimism no genuine political theory can be constructed.”<sup>30</sup>

While utopianism may have disappeared, at least for a time, as a vision of social good and equity, in the technocratic realm today, utopian visions are used to sell political, economic and social promises – for a profit. Perhaps the most extreme domain of utopian promises is the drug (pharmaceutical) and genetic engineering industry, with its barrage of promises of feeding the hungry with genetically engineered crops, salvaging the elderly with gene transplants to cure Alzheimers, and creating designer babies for those too poisoned by the environment to procreate on their own. This is not, of course, genuine utopianism, as in all the discussion of genetic engineering there is a total absence of ethics, not only on the part of biotechnology advocates and profiteers, but also on the part of critics, whose arguments remain almost entirely on the issues of ‘safety’. Only a few scattered voices ever ask, “Should we do this?” or, “This is unethical” or, “It is dishonest to promise what you can’t deliver just to attract speculative investment”.

## *The promise of the '60s*

The dramatic decade of the 1960s generated both hopes and fears while threatening the stability of authoritarian regimes of all sorts, but by the end of the decade disappointment and disillusion were displacing hopes and expectations of radical reform or even possibly revolution, accompanied by a fatalism about The Bomb. The decade did bring some reforms, and some very significant reforms, such as Blacks gaining the vote that should have been theirs all along, and there was no nuclear war, even while the U.S. carried on its global anti-Communist

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30. Judith Shklar, *After Utopia*

warfare which in time became global anti-terrorist warfare, and capitalism continued to consolidate and profit by it all.

While the remnants of the collective utopian dreams of the 60s littered the fields of protest, activists were already working with, or creating, good-cause organizations – often dismissed derogatorily by the Right as ‘special interest’ groups, such as Amnesty International, or the Nature Conservancy, or church groups such as Kairos and Development and Peace and various civil rights groups, “Leaving behind political utopias and turning to smaller and more manageable moral acts,” as Samuel Moyn succinctly described the shift.<sup>31</sup>

Through all of this, the labour unions played only a minor role. Anti-Communism had so successfully frightened and intimidated the unions that elementary maintenance of their membership took precedence over social justice and peace.<sup>32</sup>

“Less than two decades since the New Left reached its high point, however, it is difficult to find obvious traces of that movement, particularly in the United States...”<sup>33</sup>

I think it is fair to say that the New Left really believed, or at least seriously hoped, that giving personal life some communitarian or communal form and structure would facilitate the overthrow of the authoritarian and patriarchal social order and make it possible to develop a just, more cooperative economic system. It is also reasonable to think that there was an expectation that religious institutions would

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31. Moyn, *Last Utopia*

32. cf. Richard McIntyre, Labor Militance and the New Deal: Some Lessons for Today, in Collins and Goldberg, *When Government Helped*, Oxford, 2014

33. George Katsiaficas, *The Imagination of the New Left*

provide support in this. But in any case, there was little talk of overthrowing either capitalism or the state. (Except for the ultra-radical Weathermen faction of SDS and the Black Panthers.)

However, in the course of the 1960s the churches also fell on leaner days, a very significant downfall from the heyday of middle- and upper-class building, literally and figuratively, of the '50s. United Church of Canada membership, for example, peaked at one million in the mid-'60s. By then, the preoccupation of the institutional church with its own survival, and the failure of the churches to whole-heartedly identify with and support the progressive/radical social struggles for civil rights and disarmament, had alienated many young people who had been raised in the church and took the Gospel message seriously, but in a social rather than individual sense.

In reporting on the triennial meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches in 1969, I noted "the total absence of anyone concerned with theological education, or Christian education. The delegates were mostly the people concerned with mission, social service and administration and their age tended to be rather more over 45 than under 35. ... Defensiveness of the status quo, protection of property and office appears to be the function of the bureaucracy of the churches." Fortunately, there are always a few of the faithful with a greater vision.

At the time, I also wrote, "Our theological language has been essentially personalistic, pietistic, subjective, and a-historical. Theology today raises no questions about the structure of the language it has come to speak, the language of psychiatry, psychotherapy, sensitivity training, human relations, etc. ... All of this language is essentially the language of adjustment, the resolution of personal problems." The most notable example of this was Therapeutics, which, for all the personal good it did, had a way of distracting people from political and social goals.

I think that Therafields was one of the reasons that CENSIT, in the language of psychotherapy, never “reached its full potential”.

Political commentator and author Tariq Ali expressed well the contradictions of the '60s in a 2008 article:<sup>34</sup>

If the Vietnamese [in 1968] were defeating the world's most powerful nation, surely we could defeat our own rulers? That was the dominant mood among the more radical of the 60s generation.” In February 1968 the Vietnamese Communists had launched the TET offensive and attacked U.S. troops in every major south Vietnamese city. ... By May trade unionists and students were occupying the streets of Paris . ...in Prague the Czechs had proclaimed ‘socialism with a human face’ and in August the Russian tanks crushed the reform movement. “The '60s [also] marked a break with the hypocritical puritanism of the '40s and '50s...

Were the dreams and hopes of 1968 all idle fantasies? Or did cruel history abort something new that was about to be born? Revolutionaries wanted the whole forest. Liberals and social democrats were fixed on individual trees. The forest, they warned us, was a distraction, far too vast and impossible to define, whereas a tree was a piece of wood that could be identified, improved and crafted into a chair or a table. Now the tree, too, has gone.

## *Anti - Communism at home and abroad*

By the 1960s, fear of Communism had become embedded in the American way of life so thoroughly that we carried on

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34. . Guardian Weekly, 28/3/08

virtually unaware of it, except for the sideshows and dramatic productions staged by U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy after the '50s heyday of the House Un-American Activities Committee with its witch hunts and blacklisting of professors, artists and anyone providing any excuse at all to be labeled as a Communist subversive. The power of the term 'subversive' lay in its relation to 'patriotic'. 'America' – the United States of – has long considered 'patriotic' as a highly complimentary term implying a strong nationalist character, while 'subversive' was the worst possible denigration of anyone said to be seeking the overthrow of the beloved 'American' state. (These same patriots subsequently evolved into state-hating populist libertarians and gathered under the name of the Tea Party.) I should note here that the virtually universal use of 'America' and 'American' expresses an imperial orientation or assumption. The United States of America is, after all, only one country among many in the Americas – North, Central and South.

Of course the subsequent replacement of 'subversive' by 'terrorist' was a logical and simple step. As Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau wrote in 1966,

In its attempt to create an anti-Communist empire throughout the world, America is committed to a permanent defense of and military alliance with any regime willing to share her anti-Communism. The American economy and political system have become inextricably linked to the building of the anti-Communist empire. Thus anti-Communism has become a structural need, translated into every level of life, from Communist villains in the comic strips and TV series to the perpetual existence of the international Communist threat as a precondition for the permanent war economy.<sup>35</sup>

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35. Paul Jacobs and Saul Landau, *The New Radicals*, Vintage, 1966

The mainstream magazine Newsweek commented editorially in May, 1970: “The history of the movement over the past decade is, in many ways, a record of rediscovery, a return to a tradition of socialist thought and agitation that was largely severed in the U.S. during the ’50s by the witch-hunts of Joe McCarthy. ...Most of all, they retain the early SDS idea of restoring people’s sense of personal participation in the decisions that affect their lives.” Of course, a restoration – or construction – of democracy could hardly be considered a radical political program, or even an antidote to the reign of anti-Communism. Nor does a favouring of democracy necessarily require a socialist economy; and anyway, even the very words ‘socialist’ and ‘socialism’ had become, in effect, taboo.

Overlooked was the long-term damage being done to an ostensibly democratic politic. The viciousness of official anti-Communism and the house-cleaning it required to drive the Communists out of public and political life effectively silenced any socialist voice, no matter how reasoned. The political spectrum ran from centre to right, with the centre being dragged steadily rightward – a process still going on six decades later. In Canada this process, described by Sheldon Wolin as “inverted totalitarianism”<sup>36</sup> is facilitated by the regime of Stephen Harper: systematic clawing away of the infrastructure and institutions of democracy, including the sacred cow of free and fair elections, and their replacement with what Josef Stalin called ‘democratic centralism.

To summarize: Politics in the service of humanity was defeated and ruthless anti-Communism won, with its truncated spectrum of right-wing, neoliberal politics and an unrestrained

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36. Sheldon Wolin , *Democracy Incorporated*, Princeton, 2008, 2010



economic philosophy of individualism and greed wrapped up in the ideology of 'The Market'. But other outlooks were not totally eliminated. They were maintained, quietly as they had always been, as civil murmurings.

Communism and radical Socialism (but not Social Democracy) understand that peace and justice cannot be built on capitalism; but both unfortunately shared in the Enlightenment philosophy and adhered to the same ideology of technological determinism and progress. The Soviet experiment turned into a kind of state capitalism, but the West, with its belief in capitalism as the only way to achieve material progress, was shocked by the rapid and large-scale industrialization that it facilitated. Mystified by the successes of the Soviet economy, the common response was ideological: "You can't trust the Russians", implying that you can trust 'us'. The old left shriveled and visions of justice and peace evaporated in the hatred and fear nurtured by the ogre of anti-Communism and the Cold War it generated.

And the question remained, How are we going to live together? Events taking place in the world in the last decade (since the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq) suggest that finding and building ways of living together is not high on the state agenda in many places.<sup>37</sup>

*Day Care, free university and church*

For me, the '60s was a time of great agitation and hope. Without expecting revolution, we did try to create at least a common discourse of radical restructuring of social and economic life. But our talk of communal living in some form, and with it the overcoming of financial individualism, was

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37. cf. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject - Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, 1996

unable to move Cathleen and me to a new way of living together, though we did practice more child-sharing and more open marriage relationships with the conviction that no two people alone, as parents or a married couple, could meet all the emotional and spiritual needs of each other or their children. But when we tried to actually find a way for two families to live together, we found it impossible to find a house that could accommodate this at a price we could afford in or near the city of Toronto, even if I did the necessary renovations.

We recognized that one of the major obstacles to actually fulfilling our dreams was the individualism of our culture, our own upbringing, and Christian theology with its strong inclination to individualism and idealism. Bourgeois culture and class simply *is* individualistic, and overcoming or transforming that individualism might be virtually impossible outside the context of a social or cultural revolution.

There was one place in Toronto where something of a cultural revolution did take place in the '60s. It was Holy Trinity Anglican Church, which was home not to a congregation from the "parish" which was the city core, but a diverse community drawn from various areas of the city. As I mentioned earlier, in the 1960s the small but highly committed congregation waged a virtual street war against the Anglican hierarchy and its bankers who wanted us to vacate the venerable landmark church to make way for development (yes, precisely 'development') of the entire block by Eaton's, whose department store and warehouse contained the church on two sides. It took us street fairs, special events, and hard political work to get the Anglican Diocese of Toronto to agree to the church remaining, with the diocese having to accept a much smaller endowment for the church than would have been the case if they could have moved or simply demolished the church buildings and sold or

leased the land to Eatons. But we were a church of non-violent militants, a church that provided living space for U.S. Army deserters during the war against Vietnam, and welcomed gays and gay and lesbian couples into its leadership. As an inner-city church it also welcomed homeless and hungry men and women to the services and the potluck lunches which generally followed. Members of the congregation provided leadership and support to many social justice causes in the city, to the point where one journal referred to the church as “the NDP at prayer”. Until a more organized ‘reception committee’ was created by a Quaker militant, we found ourselves at the receiving end of a stream of US draft refusers who found us because of my pacifist work around the USA. One night a guy from Alabama turned up on his motorcycle and told us that his dad had said to him, ‘Son, get on your bike and go North – and don’t stop until you get to Canada’.

Holy Trinity was also a leader in worship, with many theologians, male and female, as well as ordained priests in the congregation, to say nothing of hymn writers, fabric artists, and musicians. HT, as we often lovingly referred to it, quickly became our ecclesial home when we settled in Toronto in 1965. Soon after we started attending church there, the congregation decided it was high time to unscrew the pews from the floor and move them into semi-circles facing the altar that became the communion table. In due course, the communion table was moved out of the chancel and down to the nave so that for the Eucharist we could gather around the table in a circle and pass the (often home-baked) bread and wine from hand to hand for all to share, practicing ‘the priesthood of all believers’. The role of the parish priest was basically pastoral care and counselling and to be only one of many leader-organizers of Sunday worship. Cathleen became a skilled liturgist at HT. We took “question authority” very seriously.

Thinking back on it now, the theology of Holy Trinity was very similar to the theology of Josef Hromadka, with the emphasis on repentance: acknowledging responsibility for what went before, our history, as well as what is yet to come; Incarnation, making the Word real in the life about us; and thinking critically about structures, which, for Holy Trinity, certainly included the structure of the Anglican Church as well as the political and economic structures of the city and world.

I elaborated on my own theology in an article titled "The Vocation to Theology" published by the journal Cross Currents in 1971, not long before we left Toronto for Nova Scotia and reluctantly gave up our struggle to create CENSIT:

Theology is not philosophy. There is no way of detaching theological language from concrete history. The future does not lie beyond the present, but is simply what the present is becoming. It is important, then, that we give more thought to what we are doing today as it is, whether we intend it or not, the direction of the future. ...It is not man [sic], who defines possibility. Man's job is the exploration of possibility and the construction of the future. ...

The Gospel is social, just as the religion of the Hebrews has always been social. The Exodus, the Promised Land, the Peace of the City, Shalom - all these are utterly social concepts, just as they are also utterly personal. The welfare of the people of Israel depended on their faithfulness, but faithfulness, while being a personal response, was always a social expression. Collective salvation was to be the outcome of individual faithfulness. ...

Somehow we have accepted that to be hopeful requires blindness to past injustice. But the inability to bear and

repent of the injustice of the past as our own past is directly related to the privatistic attitude we have been given by our culture. If our faith is private and individualistic, then, of course, we cannot confess the evil we have been part of historically. Only if we understand ourselves as part of a people, a people who have been both faithful and faithless, loving and violent, can we accept our real history and face the prospect that any future action we might take might also share in the violence and evil of the past.

It is probably a contradiction in terms to have a career as a theologian. That is, if one wants a career, in contemporary terms, then one should not choose theology. If one is to be a theologian, then one should give up the idea of a career, with the accompanying tenure, pension etc. ...I am not saying that we cannot work in and through institutions, but that faithfulness to our vocation must take precedence over our institutional loyalty. I could put it most simply this way: theology is the rediscovery of man as subject. Or theology could be described, in Herbert Marcuse's words, as "remembrance and constructive abolition of the past."<sup>38</sup>

In a letter to seminary classmate and friend Jeff Rowthorn around the same time I further elaborated my theology:

Three years ago we were talking and you used the phrase - from 1 Peter, I think - 'some new thing'. That phrase has haunted me since then as I try to understand the oecumene - the 'economy' of the world - and the Christian vocation within the oecumene. Now that I think of it, Advent and Christmas are appropriate times to consider the phrase, 'some new thing', for surely that was what

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38. Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, Beacon press, 1968

some people thought was coming to pass two thousand years ago. And in a nutshell it seems to me that the Christian vocation is still that of the proclamation of the possibility that 'some new thing may yet happen'. The proclamation, the incarnation of the hope we have, is what we have to offer to the world.

These days, for me, this proclamation requires continued work on the demystification of the economy of which we are a part, the illumination of the ways we produce injustice by our social organization and economy, and the exploration and acclamation of some ways in which we might live together with a greater and more profound justice and love. My work on problems of 'development', on the structure of our economy and its premises, on the reasons why the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, accompanies the deepening of my convictions that the heart of the matter is theology. So my economic work is simply the attempt to act out, to incarnate, my theological work. If the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, is it not because we believe that some men [sic] are better than others, particularly ourselves? And if our economy is based on this conviction, then it cannot produce justice. But to face the injustice and deprivation we produce with our institutions requires that we see ourselves apart from them, as having an identity that transcends the present. As Christians, this is our faith: that we are more than our present. But if we are more than our present, then the present can be overcome, transformed, given up so that some new thing may actually come to pass.

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In practice, we did take small steps away from individualism in the direction of cooperative and communal living after we

settled in Toronto. The arrival of our first child in 1966 led to Cathleen's serious involvement with Natural Childbirth from a feminist perspective: if you are interested in family power relationships, the moment when a new person arrives in the family can be a fruitful time to explore different and more egalitarian modes. This led to more cooperative parenting which led in turn to the establishment of parent-run cooperative play school mentioned earlier on the 17th floor of Rochdale College, the newly constructed building intended to be the start of a free university. Rochdale included communal living spaces (referred to as 'ashrams') and meeting/classroom spaces. While the play school fitted the model, the city licensing authorities forced it to move to a nearby church basement, saying that the fire truck ladders would not reach to the 17th floor. That may have just been an excuse to get the children away from what was deteriorating, in the era of soft drugs and flower power, into something of a mess, and certainly a far cry from the intense intellectual discourse that characterized its beginnings.

Cathleen also got involved in the intensely personal and social issue of breastfeeding. At one point Bonnie Ward, who was deeply committed to breastfeeding because of a strong family history of severe allergies, got an infection and was not permitted to nurse her young baby. It seemed perfectly natural for Cathleen to step in and nurse him along with our daughter, who was older but still nursing. Interestingly, as an adult he has none of the allergies that his older brother has.

Our attempts to find a house in Toronto that we could share with Bonnie MacLachlan and Doug Ward were unsuccessful, as mentioned above, but we did continue to try to blur the boundaries of the nuclear family to create more of an inclusive community by sharing our children back and forth. Rochdale Play School arose out of that relationship, as did the Church of

the Messiah parent co-op daycare started a few years later, both of which continued when we left Toronto.

*A little irony:* In 2012-3, the most luxurious custom condominiums, blocks from Toronto's old Yorkville, were being advertised for sale. One of their selling points: "The green escape of Ramsden Park is steps away with pleasant walkways, tennis courts and a skating rink." Ramsden Park, on the east side of Avenue Road, is still there because we saved it from the developers in the late '60s. We lived then just a few blocks west of Avenue Road and were accustomed to take our kids in their prams and tricycles to the park. When word got out of a deal between the University of Toronto, which appeared to own the park, and a developer, we mobilized the kids and their parents for well publicized parades around the park. It made great press and the developers and UofT decided to leave the park alone. Perhaps even then they could see the long-term 'market-value' of Ramsden Park

## *Transition*

By 1971 our children were two and four years old and we recognized that we were expending a substantial amount of energy in what was coming to seem like a futile pursuit of a dream. At the same time I realized that I was becoming an established character: writer, broadcaster, teacher, consultant. In other words, I was making a good living as a 'professional', and I had proved the point that I could contribute to academic books and journals without having a PhD and university status - and be a serious, if sometimes difficult, member of church committees and community boards. I had also become recognized as a freelance radio broadcaster for the CBC, producing current affairs and Ideas programs for Janet Somerville and, in 1967, working on a one-hour TV special titled



*Therefore Choose Life.* At that time, the CBC was fairly informal and open to different program content and styles, and freelancers were reasonably paid for their work. (I also had the support of a variety of church people and friends who contributed to my travel expenses for participation in the Christian Peace Conference.)

My long-time concern with 'development' and the inequity it was supposed to address but actually frequently fostered led to thinking about moving from metropolis to hinterland to better understand the process from closer to the ground. The process of development was obvious enough in the metropolis, particularly since we were living in downtown Toronto in close proximity to both established wealthy and working class neighbourhoods. We observed the rebuilding of the business core of old Toronto by insurance companies and banks, knowing that such businesses do not produce anything but do suck up and accumulate wealth from all over, including the hinterland. I became increasingly uncomfortable with what I saw taking place around me.

The more traditional response to such concerns was to work with some international development agency in the Third World, as it was called then. Development meant Third World people becoming middle class like us and sharing in our democratic political system. There were no serious questions about the economic and political structures of our society.

But I felt that it was too late to go to the Third World. It was my understanding that the problem was 'here', not 'there'. Latin America was certainly a hinterland, but so were the Maritime provinces of Canada.

I did not recognize it at the time, but our next move was more than a relocation within Canada. It was also a rather radical shift from the urban intellectual to the rural, from the

conceit of 'global' thinking to the reality of (often petty) local and provincial politics, from Christian-Marxist dialogue to the theological vacuum of small marginal churches, and social justice on a small scale.

Before we moved, however, I wrote two companion documents for Christian ethics and what was then called development education. The first was a brief essay titled *The Right Hand and the Left*, the second a 32-page description and analysis of *The Economy of Sugar* and our place in it, intended as a kind of workbook to accompany *The Right Hand and the Left*. The first, still written in pre-feminist language, was intended as an introduction to a program of Christian formation "to confront the contradiction between what we say as Christians about how man must relate to man, and what we do as members of North American society through our collective life and structures, particularly our economic structures."

"If man wants to know about God, he looks at what God has done, the ways in which he has incarnated His word. . . . If we want to know about man we should look at his incarnations for his revelations of himself. . . . If we really want to understand what we are convinced of, then an examination of the lives we live, the institutions we build, the structures that we defer to and depend upon may be far more honestly revealing than our professions of faith and our personal explanations of what we are doing."

*The Economy of Sugar* was a detailed analysis of the financial and structural aspects of the Canadian sugar industry from kitchen table to cane field to illustrate how we are all part of the global economy and the distribution of power and wealth (and impoverishment) within it.

When we left the city I was unhappy to leave behind what I had started with these two documents, and had to hope that

good use would be made of them. I was delighted when Reg McQuaid contacted me some time later and asked if he could inherit all my sugar files so that he could use them in his work with the ecumenical social justice organization GATT-fly. So the boxes returned to Toronto and Reg carried on the sugar work for many years, relating closely to the sugar workers' unions.

Of course, in moving out of the city and our active engagement in various streams of the New Left – peace movement, Christian Left, etc, – we were embodying the very splintering of the New Left that I found so defeatist and for some of the same reasons.

On the other hand, our move could be described from the outside as a quest for utopia, or at least nearer to a utopia than we figured downtown Toronto could ever be. In fact, there were moments in Nova Scotia – telling stories with good friends in front of the kitchen wood stove, drinking rum and dancing to Eric's accordion in Jim and Paulette's kitchen, and barn dances with our hippie 'back to the land' friends across the river (in the days before most of them moved back to the city), coupled with the physical and intellectual challenges of farming, that felt like unadulterated utopia at the time.

## *Life on the Farm*

The move from the metropolis of Toronto to the hinterland of Nova Scotia to gain a real-life understanding of 'development' and how the deprived get that way under the rule of capital, turned into a 15-year 'apprenticeship' as a commercial sheep farmer, co-op organizer and rural activist.

We had picked Pictou County as the place to settle largely because we felt at home in its Scottish landscape of rolling hills and streams. It also had distinct 'third world' characteristics,

such as seasonal fishery, traditional small-scale agriculture and woods work, along with three transnational corporations: Hawker-Siddley (British) railroad car plant (where the tradition was for the workers to go on strike for a couple of weeks every summer during hay-making season); Scott Paper pulpmill (USA); and, moving in at the same time as us, a new Michelin (French) tire factory.

So I drove our brand new green Datsun pickup from Toronto to Saltsprings where I set up camp next to West River in a small provincial park. Then I started scouting West Pictou. I attended the little Presbyterian Church – identical to the United Church across the road – where I met a dairy farmer who took it upon himself to help me find a farm. I also started scouting for small business opportunities, such as the ax handle factory that utilized local ash to make essential tool handles. There was also D. Porter & Sons, a very efficient saw mill and building supply business run by one of the Porter sons, Clarence. It was a very successful local business, much of the wood originating in the carefully-managed woodlot of Clarence's grandfather. Clarence's two sons, being groomed to take over the business, had been killed in an accident not long before our arrival, and I think Clarence saw me as a potential 'heir'. I realized that it would be a tremendous challenge, but if I pursued that career it would leave little time for anything else.

The ax handle factory would have provided a more limited challenge, and maybe a living, but Clarence's sawmill and building supplies business was clearly part of a global economy. In a conversation Clarence pointed out the absurdity of Nova Scotia's fresh fruit (except for apples) coming overland from California rather than by sea from Cuba. After all, years earlier Nova Scotia exported timber to the Caribbean and imported

rum. Maybe I should have embraced the challenge to develop that kind of business with Clarence's backing.

Years later, in September, 2012, I had the opportunity to visit Pictou County. While remembering and visiting places of interest, I discovered the pillaged and deserted remains of D. Porter & Son. Down the road was the big-box retailer with its made-in-China goods, including lumber, that had probably driven Porter's out of business.

The dairy farmer was generous with his time – he said more than once, after devoting most of a day between milkings to drive me around the area looking at farms that might be for sale, "I'll never miss a day at the end of the year". Then he heard about a farm that actually was for sale, so we went to check it out. It seemed the farmer's wife had left for Toronto, saying he could come along if he wanted. He had been an industrial worker without a disposition for farming and was apparently abusive of both wife and cattle. So the place was for sale, with its dilapidated century-old house and barn, two-decade-old farm machinery, some beef cattle, and 201 acres of very beautiful fields, woods and streams; our 'career' choice was made and overnight we became farmers, with no previous experience. Crazy, yes, but it did not seem to contradict my sense of vocation and provided the context for carrying on with my big-picture analysis. (Having sold our house in Toronto for \$45,000, we bought the farm, complete, for one third of that!)

I went back to Ottawa and retrieved Cathleen and the two children where I had 'parked' them with Cathleen's parents while I went hunting, and we drove to our new home. As we came around the curve just before the house, we saw a tent pitched in the front yard under an ancient apple tree. A couple of socialist friends from Pittsburgh had beaten us to it! The tree, we eventually learned, produced absolutely wonderful tart

apples in the late fall, after a hard frost, which kept beautifully in the cellar until spring. The tree was obviously as old as the farm – a century, give or take a few years – and unidentifiable by the horticulturalists. After we left the farm and learned more about biodiversity, we regretted that we had never grafted some of that tree onto younger root stock to maintain the variety.

What we had, quite literally, bought into, was a continuing discovery and the kids loved it. Our century-old farm house, with a minimal bathroom installed in a corner of what had been the dining room, was a far cry from what we had left in Toronto, the yard was covered with rubbish and what had once been a garage was collapsing from rot. The aged barn was structurally sound, but full of hazards to hands and feet. For the first year, at least, we did not allow the kids out of the house without something on their feet. (We have a photo of our daughter in the yard with nothing on but her rubber boots.) We couldn't dance on the living room floor ('the room' in the local parlance) because the wooden posts in the cellar supporting it were rotten – we had to jack it up and put in some new ones.

Because the farm we bought came fully equipped – a Hereford bull (a miserable creature we should have made hamburger out of immediately) and a dozen cows and their calves, plus a more or less basic line of equipment (the tractor consumed gasoline and lubricating oil in equal quantities) – and it was by then July, we immediately set to work harvesting the hay which was, after all, the winter feed for the cattle. Shortly after we started storing it in the barn it rained and we found out how much the roof leaked, so the next job was putting a new steel roof on the old barn – with the help of our friendly dairy farmer. That made us serious settlers in the minds of our old-time neighbours.

Soon it was time to sell the calves at the annual local 'feeder' sale – a feeder calf being one that would be fed until ready for slaughter something like twelve months later. But that required building handling facilities and pens so that the calves could be separated from their mothers and kept in a pen for pick up the next day. I built what I thought would work just fine and we got the cattle penned and sorted and the mothers turned out to pasture. Our bedroom was on the road side of the house so we did not hear most of the bawling and mooing during the night, but when we went out first thing in the morning, the pen was a shambles and the calves were back out with their mothers in the pasture. Repeating the exercise of the previous day, we actually had the calves in a pen without their mothers so that when the truck came, we were able to load the calves and off they went to the auction barn. When we got the miserable little cheque for them, it was a shock to realize how little we got for the results of a year's work (not all our own, but still a year's work). All my academic knowledge did not, or perhaps could not, prepare me for the realization of just how disconnected and arbitrary our economy is. I gained a great deal more practical knowledge about the irrationalities of capitalism in the ensuing 15 years on the farm!

Among these irrationalities was the idea of treating a farm as an industrial business with the accounting (double entry bookkeeping) that is assumed to go with it. In this game, everything has to be given a value for purposes of accounting and, ultimately, to determine if the farm was profitable. (I never could see the merit, or honesty, in assigning an arbitrary value, or cost, to things like the hay off of Rod's abandoned fields for which the only 'cost' was that of my labour and maintenance of equipment.) I kept good records of our cash expenses, but never did produce a farm budget or balance sheet. Our 'balance sheet' was whether we were still making a living at the end of the

year without any debt. We'd look at the farm, and at each other and the children, and conclude that we were well fed, kept warm in our house with the heat from the wood stove burning firewood I had cut from our woods, appropriately clothed, and healthy: obviously, in our own eyes, we must have made a good living. There were other farmers, mostly dairy farmers, who did operate more like an industrial business and could report the kind of numbers the Department of Agriculture and the Farm Loan Board liked. But still, we were referred to as 'successful farmers'.

We learned a great deal from the land and the livestock – first the Hereford cattle, then sheep – under our care, or for which we were responsible. We learned, some from other farmers and some from books and magazines, but mostly by 'listening' and observing. We learned how to, or not to, intervene in the seasonal changes of the fields or the life processes of the animals – which included chickens, a dairy cow and a couple of pigs for our own food.

I remember how eager I was, in the first spring on the farm, to hook up the new plough I had purchased and plough up a field. (In the Maritime vernacular, the customary spring greeting of "Are you farming yet?" meant "Have you started your spring plowing yet?") Of course I was not familiar with the field, not having walked it, and the ground was too wet, and I did not know how to plough or even to set the plough, with the result that I turned the field into a royal 8-acre mess. It became, in time, a good pasture, but it never fully recovered from my crude and ignorant intervention. I should have left well enough alone in the first place.

Every year we also learned from – and taught – our summer and year round visitors and help. We actually took on hired hands a few summers, but mostly it was a matter of working in



exchange for housing and food and drink and recreational activities, such as 'swimming' in the brooks. In our first year on the farm we had two women living with us for the year: Janet Somerville, as a founding member of what we originally envisioned as some kind of community who was with us to help get it started and provided welcome help with farm work, and her friend Marion Ronan, who made it possible for us to keep Jamie out of school for that first year, as she taught him to read before he had to face the local schooling system.

We never gave up our hope and desire for a larger, or more complex, communal 'family'- and a more practical sharing of the farm work among more than two adults and two growing children. For our first year on the farm we had to accommodate Janet and Marion, literally, so one of the first things I had to do was add two bedrooms to our small house so they had some place to sleep. After that, we often had another man living and working with us, sometimes just for the summer, but once for a whole year when Tom came for a 'sabbatical' from his work developing 'barefoot' medical care in Chile. Tom had been attracted by CENSIT and followed our move to the farm trying to decide if the priesthood was really his vocation. He travelled light: typewriter, poncho, and guitar along with a few clothes. He was a hard worker and easy to get along with, and Cathleen stayed in touch with him for many years.

Early on, when we still had some of the cows that we inherited with the farm and which had learned from the previous owner to stay as far as possible from people as they could, I looked up the road along the pasture one day and there was one of the most unruly cows standing in the middle of the road. I walked slowly up the road toward her and she just stood there. To my surprise, she did not move away while I looked her over to see what the problem was. Then I noticed a badly

infected sore on her leg which clearly was both painful and in need of treatment. Again to my surprise, she let me walk her down to the barn, put her in a pen and then patiently stood there while I cleaned up and disinfected her wound. After a few days during which her wound healed, I put her out and she ran off like her old rambunctious self. Obviously she had grown to trust me, and when she needed my help, she made that known to me and let me care for her. But there was, quite clearly, some mutuality in the trusting and the respect on which that rests.

I never regarded my farming 'career' as part of my vocation, though I have often referred to it as an apprenticeship in light of the years since devoted to writing and teaching about the food system. Farming certainly demanded a great deal of learning on our part: learning about the land, the water, the trees, the animals and the culture of agriculture, which included humans and everything else. Many years later, we heard our Indigenous neighbours in B.C. use the expression "all my relations" which is how I felt about the world we lived in and with on the farm.

There are numerous references in the Bible to the proper relationship of God's people to the land and the creatures inhabiting it. The Biblical story of Creation relates how "God said, Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep along the ground." (Gen. 1:26) We are to be masters, stewards, caretakers and we are to name all the other creatures, but all with a relationship of domination. This was embedded in my own theology, not crudely, but nevertheless there. So when we started farming, I expected the animals to be obedient and I thought it was up to us to decide how to treat

the land. It did not take long for that attitude to begin to change, but it took a long time for it really to be replaced by humility and a deep respect for the ways of creation. Those Bible stories were expressions of a very anthropocentric culture.

Even as mythology this story has long troubled me. 'Man' has stood for 'people' for far too long; but worse is the language of mastery. It is precisely our intent to master nature that drives genetic engineering to 'improve' seeds and the ecological destruction of industrial agriculture, which might better be described as an extractive industry, along with much commercial fishing and forestry.

In a 1972 article for the United Church Observer magazine (July 1972), I wrote about our move from the metropolis of Toronto to the hinterland of Nova Scotia. I concluded the article:

"The question I want to live with is, how can we organize ourselves in a non-exploitative way that will meet our real human needs while at the same time offering a hope for similar experience to other peoples. For me, this will be doing theology, and I want to do it where I feel my own life is based on hard work and integrity."

That same year I wrote an article for the alumni magazine of the high school I attended. I cast it in the form of a letter to the teacher mentioned earlier, 'Jiggs' Reardon:

In my work as a freelance theologian the Biblical theme that came to seem most crucial was that of incarnation. It is my conviction that the Incarnation – "the Word became flesh" – is the heart of the Gospel, meaning that 'faith without works is dead'. If we hold certain values and beliefs, then it is incumbent upon us to act them out, to embody them in our social lives. And it is this conviction that led me from the comfortable and fashionable

metropolis and an identity with the exploiters to one of the poorer regions of Canada and to one of the poorest (monetarily) ways of making a living. To put it simply, it just became necessary to put my body where my mouth was – and I think, Jiggs, that you were the one who first put this notion into my head.

... I place no faith in North American 'progress' – either for ourselves or for others. My real hope is that through our life here we may gain the opportunity – for ourselves and others – for some honest thinking and writing, hard physical work and the integration of minds and bodies. Perhaps we will also be able to help others see beyond their present lives into a future society that must be organized politically and economically in a radically different way if there is to be any peace and social justice in the world.<sup>39</sup>

It would be fair to say that this was yet another illustration of the utopian thread that runs through my life and thought, and it is still there, though more subdued and less optimistic: it's hard to see any silver lining in the clouds of the climate change our proud anthropocentric culture is causing; still, the utopian vision is strong enough to hold back despair.

After our move to Nova Scotia I continued with some of my metropolitan activities, teaching a course or two at the Centre for Christian Education in Toronto, serving on a United Church committee and doing some writing, but as the farm grew and I became fully engaged in farm organizations, such as becoming secretary of both the Sheep Producers Association of Nova Scotia and the Eastern Livestock Sales Society, I became more 'localized' of necessity. The metropolis faded from view – except

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39. Western Reserve Academy Alumni Record, Fall 1972

for the more or less steady stream of visitors: not only old Toronto friends, but other farmers who heard about what we were doing (particularly with electric fencing for our sheep) and Third World visitors being 'toured' around by OXFAM staff and others. Because our farm was just five miles off the TransCanada highway, we were a convenient stop for people driving their international visitors to Cape Breton from Halifax. We probably had more meaningful encounters with visiting Central Americans and others than we would have had in our over-crowded lives in Toronto. We did not have a TV, but Jamie and Rebecca met real people from Africa, Central America and Asia and we kept a big world map on the kitchen wall to give all of us some idea of where these people came from and to provide some geographic context for news of the world on the CBC.

So the context of all our lives was far larger than the insular world of rural Pictou County and the rural consolidated school the children attended. Fortunately, they did well enough academically that they could skip school if something particularly interesting and educational was happening on the farm, such as foreign visitors, or demanding their help, such as shearing, and still keep up to the point that the school could not credibly complain about their absences.

Radio brought us news of the world, but the news also went from the farmhouse to the metropolis as Cathleen did a weekly 'farm diary' for Radio Noon in Halifax. She quickly realized that she couldn't do the broadcast from the very old ring-down telephone in our kitchen, but had to go down to the highway to Mrs. Roblee's because she had the switchboard (a.k.a. 'Central') in her kitchen. Otherwise, anyone on the line could pick up their phone and join in - in fact, that was one of the important ways of spreading news; there was no sense of privacy on the

phone. Cathleen carried on with this weekly farm diary until one day she raised the subject of abuse of rural women by their husbands. No sooner was she done than the president of the Nova Scotia Federation of agriculture called the CBC and demanded that she be taken off the air: "I don't beat my wife!", he said! Sadly, the CBC meekly complied.

When Mrs. Roblee was in her 80s it was becoming clear that there was no one to take her place and that we would have to 'sell' the Saltsprings Mutual Telephone Company to Ma Bell. Actually there was nothing to sell, except possibly the switchboard as an antique. No money changed hands. The individual crank phones belonged to the people in whose homes they were. The new owner put the wires underground and tied us into the central network. That meant the loss of a very real community 'binder' that no technological improvement could replace, though the old timers turned to Citizens' Band radio for the essential neighbourhood news/gossip.

Also gone was the possibility for any other newcomer to be introduced to their neighbours as I was the first autumn we were there, when a work party was organized to repair the single phone line - bearing a striking resemblance to old wire coat hangers - that snaked along the gravel back roads, as often on the ground as on a pole. One Saturday we gathered at Donalds (he was president') and started up the road, replacing broken or rotten poles with new ones old Herbie had cut from his woodlot and skinned and loaded on a tractor-drawn wagon, and then picking the wires up off the ground and attaching them to the new pole. Digging the holes was mechanized: Brian had a small backhoe. When we ran out of poles and another one was needed, one of the crew would step into the nearest woods and cut one.

Otherwise, it would have taken me years, probably, to get to know our neighbours – the men, anyway – as well as I did in that one day.

It was not just the mutual phone company that introduced me to the community amongst whom we were now living – there was St. Luke's Presbyterian Church, still bearing the marks of the hasp and padlock that were installed as a result of the union of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Canada with the formation of the United Church of Canada in 1925. The union split the congregation of St. Luke's and once the ecclesiastical court of the Church of England (which 'owned' Anglican church property) had settled the issue of which faction was entitled to the building, the other literally crossed the road and built an almost identical church for themselves.

After sampling both churches, I opted for St Luke's Presbyterian over the United Church, partly out of deference to my own family tradition and partly because the dairy farmer who had befriended me was a member of St Luke's. There was nothing to choose between the two churches otherwise, though in due course I found the totally reactionary hate-filled Paisleyite Irish preacher intolerable. It was when he offered prayers for President Nixon and the U.S. war against Vietnam one Sunday that I finally stood up in the choir in the middle of the service, made a short statement about the blasphemy of such prayers and politics and left the church, never to return. To my amazement, no one ever said a word to me about this, though we remained friends with many of the congregation. Later I learned that as an elder of the church, the farmer who helped me find our farm was the very one who over the years had torpedoed every initiative taken by the United Church to reunite by throwing their letters into the church stove before anyone else had seen them – to keep the fire burning, so to speak.

We still wanted and hoped for some meaningful church involvement both for ourselves and our children, and St. James' Anglican Church in Pictou, with a younger priest who appreciated our involvement, was welcoming. Since it was a half-hour drive to Pictou, the timing was right for us to listen to Bob Carty's solid political reporting on CBC's "Sunday Morning", so we were able to combine theology, political affairs and worship on our Sunday mornings.

Gathered around our big round kitchen table, we remembered the larger world in our grace before dinner and particularly during our Sunday Bible Study. However far removed physically, global reality was never far away. One day a young Vietnamese man turned up, a fugitive from the Vietnamese army, sent to us by Nancy Pocock, the Quaker who set up the 'reception committee' I referred to earlier. He enriched our lives for the short time he was with us. He was an accomplished photographer (we still have his wonderful picture of the family, complete with sheep and sheepdog, on our wall) but he wound up as an automobile mechanic in Toronto.

No sooner had we sold our first calves at the provincially organized fall feeder-cattle sale than I became a director of the Eastern Livestock Sales Society that ran the auction, and then secretary. That ensured my engagement with the Department of Agriculture and a quick way to learn about government policy for livestock farming via Dick Huggard, the very decent Director of Livestock in the Department of Agriculture.

While we were rapidly expanding our cow herd to get up to a practical one-bull size (thirty cows was considered serviceable by a single bull), we also started building up a sheep flock. This, in turn, got us involved in the Sheep Producers Association and soon I was secretary of that, a position I retained until 1980 when I was ousted by a classic coup after I described to a



meeting how the drovers (middlemen) were making a killing off of us (I used real numbers) and saying that it was time to organize and take control of our lamb sales. By then I was well known and trusted and all my excess energy went into organizing a marketing cooperative of sheep farmers.

Meanwhile, Cathleen had organized what became an annual Sheep Fair which was initiated to boost sales of a flock of imported Scottish Blackface and Clun Forest sheep and to boost the standing and self-respect of sheep farmers. It was great fun and a great success. Our fairs took advantage of the growing interest at the time in all things natural and the high quality fibre craft of Nova Scotia with wool-craft competitions and displays. In addition to the sheep and lamb sales, the Sheep Fair also included a lot of down-to-earth fun with basic farming skills: not only shearing demonstrations and competitions, live and carcass judging of lambs, and sheep dog trials, but kids' activities including a hoof-trimming competition for the older ones. There was always a 'ramburger' barbeque and a dance. In the years following, annual Sheep Fairs became regular events across the country, wherever there were goodly numbers of sheep.

As we expanded our herd and built up our flock (starting with about a dozen rag-tag sheep) it soon became obvious that we would have to have more land and more livestock if we were actually going to make a living on the farm. So we built two new barns, replaced the cattle with sheep, and added rented and 'borrowed' land in the area for both hay and pasture. The pastures all required fencing for sheep, which are much more demanding than cattle, but the old standard page-wire fencing was totally unsuitable, being difficult to install and maintain, and too expensive for sheep. So I imported and experimented with high-power electric fencing from New Zealand, which

worked so well that I imported, demonstrated and sold Gallagher fencing supplies. Eventually this became the standard sheep fencing for the whole province. Farmers coming to the farm to look at our fencing, talk about it, and buy equipment made it possible for us to become familiar with most of the sheep farmers in Nova Scotia. It also helped that along with the fencing equipment I also sold sheep supplies of all sorts as an agent for Canadian Co-op Wool Growers. The combination provided the small actual cash income with which we bought coffee, olives and rubber boots. Cathleen made our beer and wine.

Cathleen had started potting in Toronto, and over the years on the farm she refined her skill and augmented our income with the sale of her graceful and practical earthenware pottery. We turned an old, solid granary into a studio, but then had to move it across the road so we could extend the barn it was next to. So we got our neighbour Billy, with his small bulldozer, to drag the granary across the road. That worked for about twelve feet but the building was too heavy for Billy to drag any further. There it was, stuck in the middle of the road. Fortunately, at that point the road grader appeared on the horizon. We stopped it and asked the driver to finish what we had started. He obligingly hooked up to the granary, climbed into his cab, closed the windows and pulled down the throttle. The granary moved alright, but I had to practically jump in front of the grader to get the driver to stop before he pulled the building to pieces. We thanked him for his help and sent him on down the road. Then Billy helped us get the building just where we wanted it.

About that time we were in a dispute with the school transportation office because they had decided to alter the bus routes (with little consideration as to how many kids lived where) which would result in our children, and others, having

something like a two-bus, hour and a half trip to school, a trip which, non-stop door-to-door, would take about twenty minutes. We were getting nowhere with our rational appeal to the 'authorities' so I had the bright idea of blocking the road with a big boulder that was in the way of our planned barn extension with the help, again, of Billy and his 'dozer'. I had advised the bus driver (Isabel lived a couple of miles down the road from us) to be prepared and that this was *not* a personal issue, but a bureaucratic one. So early one morning Billy began to move the boulder but 'found' he couldn't move it beyond the middle of the narrow gravel road. Along came the school bus and Isabel could go no further. She refused our offer to use our telephone and said she would back the bus down the road, over a narrow bridge after a sharp curve. No way was I going to let her try that so I got in my truck, drove it around the loop and parked it right behind the school bus. The local newspaper reporter turned up (having been invited) as did the police, who parked right behind my truck. The police asked me to move my truck and I replied, sure, when you get your car out of the way! The cop left, backing down the road, since there was nothing he could do. Billy managed to move the boulder and the school bus picked up our kids and headed to the school. Jamie and Rebecca started their political education at an early age, and our notoriety advanced a bit more.

Sometime a little later we heard that the Highways Department had decided to straighten out an intersection just down the road from us. Doing so would require cutting down three very old pine trees that were a well-known landmark. The highways people said they were old and diseased. Old they were, but we got expert advice that they were indeed quite healthy. We then organized the Brookland Historical Society (Brookland being the old informal name for our area), Cathleen made up some Historic Monument signs, and we got the

neighbourhood old timers to come to the special occasion of chaining the signs to the trees. Of course we had the local press there - the New Glasgow Evening News and the Pictou Advocate, who had become accustomed to us providing them with local news and photo ops - and the Highway Department dropped the whole silly idea. There was nothing wrong with the intersection, and the trees are still watching over it.

Of course we also had a large garden under Cathleen's management that benefited from sheep manure and provided for us year 'round, together with milk and butter from her house cow we all took turns milking, pork from the two pigs we raised every year, eggs (and chicken) from our hens, and mutton from older sheep, augmented by wild blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and blackberries, apples from the long abandoned farms around us, and whatever else we could find. One summer we had a student using our farm for his research and he would bring in, for lunch, a salad mix of what we regarded as weeds - to the horror of Rebecca's little school mates who were there for lunch that day.

Meantime, our sheep flock grew to number about 400 ewes and by then we had organized a lamb marketing coop (Northumberland - more on that later) and were sending lambs to market year 'round. This meant that we could have up to a thousand animals on the place at any one time. That kind of a farm requires virtually 24 hours-a-day attention in lambing season, and long days all year. One spring day, when we were still lambing but had to get the fences repaired so we could put the sheep out on pasture, and shorn before putting them out, I woke up and realized that I was so physically exhausted that I could not get out of bed. I had to lift first one leg then the other and put them on the floor. So, I am mortal, I thought to myself and said to Cathleen. We then cut down our flock some and

made efforts to operate more 'efficiently', though I don't think we ever used that terrible term. By then our handling facilities were excellent, our fences were all in good shape, and the sheep well trained to observe them and to respond to the commands I gave to our wonderful border collie, Jule, who was my four-legged partner for ten years.

While our flock was large – among the largest in Eastern Canada at the time – the sheep were all familiar with me and with Jule, who was by that time fully trained and highly skilled. I could simply say to Jule, "sheep, Jule," and she would proceed to round up the sheep scattered all over a hillside and move them toward me. She loved to show off, whether at the county fair or in the field next to the Trans-Canada highway where the tourists could stop and take pictures of her working the sheep with me. While the sheep respected Jule and would do as she 'commanded', I could walk right through the flock with her at my side and the sheep would barely take notice. They clearly trusted us.

When we had sold the sheep and were preparing to move, one evening, Jule, arthritic, old, and tired, with no more work to do, 'told' me, as I sat on the doorstep with her, that she was through. She died peacefully that night.

In spite of what I have said about exhaustion, one of the earliest of the joys of farming for me was being able to work, physically, as hard as I could or wanted to, without others being intimidated. I did not have to restrain myself for fear of making someone else feel bad. It did not matter whether I was shearing sheep with Cathleen, cutting fence posts and firewood, or making hay with the crew of children and available adults.

The beauty of the land, trees and streams around us, summertime and winter, was always a source of joy and thanksgiving.

## Principles and pragmatism

Over the years we made a number of attempts to form some kind of partnership with other families. Some of these efforts did not get far beyond impromptu romantic relationships, but there was one couple that almost made it to the point of a legal farm partnership. We enjoyed and got along well with them and their young children and we were looking forward to years together. This dream came to a sad ending that had nothing to do with our relationship. When Robbie applied for a job as a Special Ed teacher, she was told that despite her excellent qualifications and training she could never be more than a relief teacher since she was not born in Pictou County, which effectively shut her out. The drought that year was also hugely discouraging since the dry ground made it virtually impossible to drive fence posts – which were essential for building wintering facilities for Munro's flock. We amicably, but sadly, pulled apart what we had already begun to knit together and they returned to their home territory in the USA. They left Jule with me, for which I am still grateful.

Such endeavours are extremely complex and energy-demanding, particularly when they involve, as farming must, a solid long-term commitment. The deeply rooted individualism of North American culture also makes any form of larger-than-nuclear-family very difficult, as we had already learned from our attempts in Toronto to move beyond the nuclear family in some way. On the farm, we finally decided that these efforts were too time and energy consuming, and we simply could not afford such 'investments' any longer. Our idealism could not overcome the real obstacles, including our strong personalities.

That did not leave me barren of social engagement, however. Forming a marketing co-operative among sheep farmers took up a great deal of my time and energy from about 1978, half-way through our farming 'career', but it was rewarding both with the benefits of cooperative marketing of our lambs and the social side of the organizing. We did not have formal membership – it was a matter of who wanted to co-operate – so every meeting included some kind of dinner, sufficient beer to please and ease everyone, and storytelling.

A typical story: David, in his inimitable disheveled style, perched on a stool in the middle of our kitchen, telling us about the burial of his neighbours dog, which had turned up as David was back-filling a new barn foundation. Now this dog had been harassing David's sheep and the owner refused to do anything to control it. This was a serious matter, because harassment can cause pregnant sheep to abort, and shepherds were permitted by law to shoot a dog to protect their flock. So David took advantage of the situation, whacked the dog with his shovel, put it in the ditch and resumed shoveling. When his neighbour turned up looking for his dog, David asked, "Dog? What dog?" – as he kept shoveling.

Or I would report on the latest coyote episode and the grand efforts of Harry, a Lands and Forests officer, to catch or kill the coyote that was having regular feasts of fresh leg-of-lamb in our pastures and on Andy Richardson's farm about 20 miles away through the woods. The critter killed more than 50 lambs, alternating between the two farms.

Initially we thought the culprit might be a cougar, or perhaps a pack of dogs, since coyotes had never been seen in Nova Scotia (and there was county compensation for dog kills). By the time we realized that it was in fact a coyote – which has a powerful sense of smell – we had trained it to our scents and

movements. The losses went on for two years – during which time we also had to wrestle with the Provincial Government that refused to arrange for Harry to use a military night-scope.

One day, at the suggestion of a Lands and Forests guy who was having lunch with us, I called the CBC in Halifax. They responded that if I could get the fresh carcasses of two bloody torn-up lambs down to Halifax right away, they would display them on the 6:00 TV news and advise the Minister of Lands and Forests to watch. So down the 90 miles to Halifax I went with the carcasses to the CBC, where the film crew put them on display on the lawn with me to explain the issue. Even before I got home, the Minister called and asked Cathleen how he could help. Cathleen was happy to explain about needing a night-scope. The response was immediate, and did the trick. Every night for several weeks Harry's wife would drive him out to a tractor sitting in the middle of the pasture and leave again, to fool the coyote, while Harry 'hid' in the tractor cab (he was a big bear of a man, and sitting all night in a cramped space was hard on his back, though he did not complain) until, finally, one night he was able to shoot the coyote.

We were woken up that night by loud honking coming down the road from Andy's farm. Then there was a thunderous knocking on the kitchen door and Harry burst in and flopped a dead coyote onto the floor. Two years of stress and expense, finally put to rest!

Or we would discuss flock health and any problems we were having. We also periodically held workshops, rotating from farm to farm, to learn from each other. All that could be described as two years of groundwork building the solidarity among sheep farmers that was essential in organizing the marketing co-op – when everyone told us we would never get sheep farmers to work together.



The organizing of the Northumberland Lamb Marketing Cooperative was a significant activity for me over several years before – and after – it became a legal entity in 1982. Essential to the whole enterprise was a school teacher turned sheep farmer, Michael Isenor, who drove the truck, delivered the lambs to the stores and looked after ‘social’ relations with the store meat managers. My ‘job’ was to organize the delivery of lambs to the family-operated abattoir that custom butchered them, the number being determined by the orders from Sobey’s stores, mostly in Halifax. Ron Young, Sobey’s meat buyer, worked with us from the start because Frank Sobey, who was still leading his company at the time, wanted fresh lamb in the family stores. So Michael, Ron and I formed the ‘management’ team. When the family running the abattoir wanted to get out of it, we knew we had to buy it to keep the co-op going. I was in Ron’s Young’s office, and I said to him, “What am I going to do? We need a downpayment of \$5,000 by Friday to secure financing from the credit union, and I have no idea where to get it!’. Ron thought for a bit, and replied, “Frank is in. Why don’t you go and see him.” So I went to Mr. Sobey’s office door across the hall; he invited me in and asked, “What can I do for you?” He listened while I told my story, and then said, “Pick up a cheque on your way out.” The cheque was for \$5,000, interest-free for a year!

Those days are long gone, I fear, but not the trust and mutual respect between Michael and the farmers, the in-store meat managers, and the abattoir workers. I observed this for myself one day not long ago as Michael and I were having a conversation in his little office at the abattoir and employees came in with a question or to report on something. Watching that interaction, and the clean-up at the end of the day, made it obvious to me that the workers all felt a real responsibility for the business. They had no need for a ‘boss’.

Northumberland Lamb Marketing Co-op still delivers around one hundred fresh local lambs to Sobeys (and others) every week of the year, and as I write Michael is still the manager.

All along, I kept reminding people that there is more than one way to run a business. It was not just the relationship of trust and respect between Michael, Ron, and me – and all the sheep farmers supplying the co-op – or the old-fashioned ‘business on a handshake’ of Frank Sobey. When we had to create a legal entity, we deliberately set Northumberland up as a non-share-capital cooperative, unlike the co-op structures we were all familiar with which were owned by their shareholder members and regarded it as a necessity of being successful for the co-op to grow and get richer, like any other capitalist enterprise. Northumberland, not having any ‘members’ or shareholders and being structured to exclude capital accumulation means that it works more like a service agency than a capitalist enterprise. The co-op pays its farmer-suppliers at a price known in advance, receives payment for the lambs it sells to the stores (mostly Sobeys), with the difference covering the cost of running the co-op, including staff wages and maintenance. Any ‘profit’ goes to the farmer in the price they get for their lambs. This system has worked for thirty-plus years.

Meanwhile, there were two children to raise. There were no skateboards, and the rough gravel roads did not encourage bicycle riding, but there was fun to be had playing in the brooks and in the snow, and doing chores – feeding sheep and lambs before the school bus came, and whatever else the season and the animals dictated. The daily chores were not play, but they were certainly educational as well as essential to running the farm. The summer months were more physically demanding,

particularly making hay, loading wagons with the 35-40 pound bales and then putting it all in the barn. We were all very physically fit.

After struggling with Jamie's boredom in the consolidated school, we came up with the idea of having him adopted by Bonnie Maclachlan (the family we tried to live together with back in Toronto. We had remained close friends ever since ). They had moved to Ottawa, so he could attend grade ten at the best high school in the city as a local resident. We couldn't afford the fees for an 'alien'. Jamie returned home for his last two years in West Pictou High and graduated with top honours, winning a number of scholarships, including one from Scott Paper. He was, however, passed over as valedictorian in favour of a girl who could be counted on not to say anything challenging (which was certainly not the case with Jamie, then or now). So he helped with the haying until it was time to show up to collect his prizes and attend the party. One of the scholarships covered tuition at McGill University in Montreal, where he went that autumn. We never did get around to adopting him back.

At the same time we were tearing our hair out over the way the school was crushing Rebecca's spirit and imagination. She had already skipped one grade, so that wasn't an option. Then we found that she could enter Mount St. Vincent University out of grade eleven. We, and Rebecca, breathed a great sigh of relief, though it was a sudden and unexpected transition for all of us.

With Jamie and Rebecca abruptly gone, we quickly realized that the two of us could not carry on without them – our indentured labour, as we sometimes referred to them – that is, the two of us could not manage a breeding flock of 350 ewes with lambing in the winter and the spring, and year-round marketing of lambs. That left us with three options, as we saw it: reduce the flock to a size we could manage on our own – but

that would still tie us to the farm seven days a week; hire help – which would require a larger flock to pay for the help and a substantial investment to upgrade our old machinery; or quit altogether. I was by then feeling the need to move back into the larger urban world, physically and intellectually, though Cathleen was deeply engaged with a group of women trying to alter the culture of abuse of women and would have preferred to stay.

I felt that the die had been already cast. I was by then back on the United Church agricultural committee and had dreamed up a new project which got the name Scotsburn Nutrition Policy Institute (Scotsburn being the name of the village nearest us). It came to naught but did aim me in the direction of my first book. So we moved back to Toronto, but not without some angst about Rebecca. We didn't feel good about abandoning her in Halifax at Mount St. Vincent so we drove down there to see her, with no idea of what her response would be to our decision to move. To our very great delight, and relief, almost as soon as she heard the news she said, "I need more parental guidance. Can I come and live with you?" She eventually completed her BA at Concordia University in Montreal.

We left the farm in 1986, having carefully sold off machinery, sheep, and land, leaving us with not a great deal of cash to start over with in the city. Since we refused to put the sale of the farm into the hands of an agent who was really only interested in his, or her, commission, and knew little, if anything, about farming, we tried selling it ourselves, advertising it widely, including in the Toronto Globe & Mail, without success. We knew, regretfully, that no farmer could afford to buy the whole farm for a price anywhere close to what we had put into it, so in the end we split the land into three rational parcels and sold them to people nearby, the piece with the house and barns going

to a school teacher with five children. One of the neighbours commented at the time, "That farm always raised a good crop of kids."

As for the breeding flock, the specialized sheep equipment and the machinery, we had two 'private' auctions for sheep producers only, one for the sheep, lot by lot, and the second for all the machinery and specialized sheep equipment. Because I knew all the sheep farmers and what they really needed and wanted, this approach made it possible for me, as auctioneer, to 'guide' the sales so that we got a fair price while our sheep farmer friends got what they needed and wanted and everyone went home feeling fairly treated and satisfied. The customary auction vultures, however, were not pleased with us for depriving them of their expected 'loot'.

In an article on what we faced at the end of this chapter in our lives, I wrote, "Our collective hostility to Creation, to Mother Earth, forces choices we would just as soon not make, like staying on the land or living in a community. Anyone staying on the land becomes daily more isolated. It should not be so, because it is in a way also an illusion, as there is no isolation from the consequences of our Civilization, be it acid rain or nuclear war." To which now must be added, climate change.

## *Hinterland to metropolis*

Having decided to move on, we faced the question of where to? We explored the possibilities of living in a small Maritime or Ontario city where we could know the whole community, but ended up in our default, Toronto, where we knew many people and our way around – we could hit the ground running, as it were. We would have liked to settle in the neighbourhood we had left 15 years earlier but we found that the house we had sold for \$45,000 when we left in 1971 was priced at literally ten

times that amount. We settled for a 12 foot wide Victorian-era workers' row house in South Riverdale, but once the farm sale was completed we moved to a nicely converted commercial garage with enough space for me to work at home and, with a little modification, space for Cathleen's pottery studio.

Our return to Toronto generated a fair bit of public notoriety – a feature article in Harrowsmith Magazine, for example – which made it easy for us to slip back into some old familiar patterns of living, such as being part of the Church of the Holy Trinity, now isolated and surrounded by the development of the Eaton Centre, which opened in 1977. Cathleen went to work as administrator and fundraiser with the Latin American Working Group which we had helped to found two decades earlier.

Once resettled in a familiar urban habitat, far from our deeply physical farm life, I started on a new chapter in my life, speaking and writing on the food system and our experiences of it, trying to explain to the public, including farmers, how the food system in which we all participated was organized and for whose benefit. At that time, the idea of a 'food system' was a novelty, so when I spoke of "the food system" the usual response was, "what food system?" I also read virtually everything available at the time on the subject of food systems, which was not very much.

We continued to publish The Ram's Horn, an eight-page newsletter, the first issue of which we put out in November, 1980, mimeographed on our own farmhouse machine, to explain to Nova Scotia sheep farmers what was going on in their provincial association when I was ousted from my position as secretary. The Ram's Horn remained devoted to all matters concerning sheep for several years and then we began

broadening our content to what has remained since then on our masthead, “food system analysis”.

What had become of my theology? Janet Somerville, who has been a companion on this journey ever since our first Toronto days in 1965, commented that in my writing, including *The Ram’s Horn*, I have always been doing theology. It just wasn’t in the traditional language of Christian theology.

I had already begun to work on my first book while still on the farm, at the urging of Norman Endicott and his wife Caroline Walker, publisher of NC (New Canada) Press, using a 35lb Olivetti luggable computer with no memory and a four inch screen. Norm suggested a “Ram’s Horn Reader” but I felt that it was too journalistic and that a clearer overall structural description and analysis was needed. So I set out to describe the logic of the industrial food system so that people could recognize and identify it (and the major players in it), whether on a package label, the dinner table, a store banner or an ad in the paper. The key to the logic of the food system, as I elaborated it, was ‘distancing’, meaning the creation of distance between the sources of food and the eater’s mouth, whether that distance was simply geographic, or produced through processing, or centralized distribution: the point being to maximize distance to maximize profit. The ideological starting point was, of course, the transformation of food into market commodities.

While the book was taking shape in my head, a seasoned academic friend told me about the Independent Scholars Program in the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, so I applied for a grant to do research on technological determinism. The grant I received, plus a second smaller one, was sufficient to get us settled in Toronto; the topic became an underlying thread in my work and contributed to three of my books, particularly *Farmageddon*.

At the time, Recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone, the first commercial product of genetic engineering, or biotechnology (called by the obscure name *bovine somatotrophin* by its developer, Monsanto) was making its debut. For me, this meant creating the Pure Milk Campaign to try to block the approval of the drug by Health and Welfare Canada. Lorraine Lapoint, a dairy farmer in Eastern Ontario, was my partner in this. The opposition to rBGH that we initiated caught the government by surprise and was successful in buying time for broad opposition to get organized; the drug was finally blocked from approval by the Bureau of Veterinary Drugs because of the harm it caused cows.

The first edition of *From Land to Mouth– Understanding the Food System*<sup>40</sup> was published in 1989 by NC Press and by 1993 I had to expand the book for a second edition to include a chapter on all the creative initiatives to build alternative food systems, piece by piece, that were by then taking place across the country. Clearly, as people began to understand the logic of the industrial food system, they began to think about more acceptable alternatives, and I found myself in a running ‘conversation’ with farmers and rural people across the country, people with whom I felt a deep identity and shared culture after my 15 years as a sheep farmer.

For me there was an essential continuity from *The Economy of Sugar* to writing on the global food system, and this was encouraged by the nutritionists, sociologists and food justice workers in Toronto who were beginning to form a core group working on food issues and social justice that gave itself the name of Food Chain. Cathleen and I provided the farm-end-of-the-food-system perspective to this group, which became a major focus for both of us, though more for me as Cathleen left her administrative job at LAWG and started working as an



editor for NC Press. She later became executive director of the Assaulted Women's Help Line, a position she retained, with some considerable stress, until we decided to move out of Toronto in 1995.

I was working with the United and Anglican churches nurturing lay leadership in rural parishes, again utilizing my farm experience and identity as a commercial farmer and, still, a theologian. While I was and remain formally unilingual, I was 'multilingual' with the languages of farmers and theologians.

Food Chain started discussing how we could create a food policy addressed to the needs of the people rather than corporate profit and decided the logical place to start would be the City of Toronto. It took a couple of years to develop the concept and gather support from the city administration before we were ready to launch the Toronto Food Policy Council, carefully positioned to report to City Council through the Board of Health, chaired at the time by Jack Layton, in line with our position that good nutritious food was essential to good health. The TFPC was the first such organization in the country.

This encouraged me to keep on researching and writing on agriculture, corporate control and along with frequent speaking engagements to nurture the public understanding of the industrial for-profit food system, an understanding essential if any alternatives were to be developed. *The Ram's Horn* became a major vehicle for this, as well as an on-going conversation with farmers and rural people.

The growing experiments and projects being carried on through the entire food system, from agricultural land trusts

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40. Out of print but available in PDF format at [www.ramshorn.ca](http://www.ramshorn.ca)

to organic farming to local processing and delivery systems for fresh foods, particularly for the deprived, were not an economic revolution, but I rejoiced in and tried to contribute to these initiatives. The simple overall goal was, and remains, healthy food for all, with respect for the environment. Without such a vision, I doubt that the Toronto Food Policy Council would ever have come to fruition: we had to see beyond the current configuration of the omnipresent capitalist industrial-corporate system, and the leverage for this was a vision of radical alternatives and utopian food systems, not minor reforms of an industrial monoculture.<sup>41</sup>

My part in all this, in addition to my writing and speaking, included pushing the churches to address the issues of food justice, such as getting the Council of Catholic Bishops to produce a statement titled "Deepening Distress in the Food System," and getting the Anglican Church of Canada to hire me to work with rural parishes across the country to help them learn about the state of agriculture and what was happening to their communities and churches as a result. Unfortunately, when I could not raise any more money to keep the project going, the national church was not even interested in the annotated mailing list I had built up. Sadly, but tellingly, it just dropped the rural-agricultural dimension altogether.

The larger issue, however, was the fate of the New Left, the peace movement and all the social justice and political activity of the 1960s which we had, in effect, stepped out of with our move to the farm in 1971. Were we just another example of the fragmentation of the New Left? We certainly did not see it that way at the time. What I felt was my frustration in trying to work within the dominant structures and institutions and my desire to work more from the bottom up than from the top down in seeking to bring about radical changes in the political and

economic structures of our society. Similar steps were taken by others in the Canadian New Left who went to work with Indigenous peoples in various locations around the country, including the North, and in community organizing in smaller cities and communities. I think we felt that these were steps in the larger 'long march through the institutions'. For example, our experience as the Middle Generation in the Christian Peace Conference was a 'long march' through that institution, while at the same time the CPC was itself making a 'long march' through the church and state institutions of the time.

Stepping back into the activist life in Toronto after 15 years away, and trying to appraise the situation, it was clear that while there were, as one would expect, many efforts, projects and organizations addressing social justice concerns and 'doing good', there were really no calls for economic or political revolution and little apparent collaboration between them, and certainly no united front, in spite of personal solidarity and mutual respect. There seemed to be, certainly not contentment with the major structures of North American society, but a fatalism about the chances of achieving any radical changes in them. Any serious dreaming was considered, I think, as utopian and a distraction. In other words, the situation politically was pretty much as we had left it. The damage wrought by the anti-Communism of the '50s and '60s remained: the words and thoughts of socialism were taboo, and 'Communism' was deadly poison.

*Hope and expectation*

But still, whatever happened to the idea of the coming of the 'Kingdom of God' that had been such an important element

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41. See Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, *The Subsistence Perspective*, Zed, 1999

in the Social Gospel movement of 70 years earlier? Did it succumb to the 'God is dead' fad of the '60s, or was it because the capitalist juggernaut seemed to be invincible? Was Margaret Thatcher's proclamation that "there is no alternative" actually accepted, however ruefully? Or was it because, as with the Social Gospel, there had been too much naive optimism about 'progress' within history, too much expectation rather than hope, and work, for the unexpected?

In the work and writing of the CPC Youth Commission and then the Middle Generation group, there was no overt systematic theology, no doctrine or creed, but it was all suffused with utopian visions and dreams. We did not expect to welcome the Kingdom of God in our lifetime, but we were not cynical, just prepared to be surprised. As our 1969 'Middle Generation' paper quoted earlier stated:

"The old church is dead, the old Christian movements are dead. The bodies are being forsaken or embalmed, and we must leave the dead to bury their dead. Our task, having known the joy and hope of a dynamic Christian fellowship, is to create new forms and possibilities."

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In 1986 there was a very substantial International Conference on Liberation Theology in Vancouver that attracted three times the number of participants planned for. I attended because it seemed like a good way to find out what, if anything, was going on amongst radical Christians and Christian radicals. It was that, but disappointing. The presentations and discussions seemed to lead only back to the individual persons and programs and not to a much larger movement for liberation in and from the churches. In my notes I wrote that if any single issue or theme ran through the 15 concurrent sessions, it was

the issue of authority: who owns the church? This was a distinct echo of the CPC Youth Commission 20 years earlier.

After the conference I wrote that I was “very concerned about the fatalism of Christians and the church, the attitude that we have to accommodate ourselves to the injustices of the world because there is little or nothing we can do about them . ...I know that, without faith, if one realistically looks at the growing poverty and violence around the world, at the growing likelihood of nuclear war as we carry on with our militarization of country after country - including our own - despair is a logical and reasonable response.”

In the same notes I expressed my theology in liberation terms: “The God of liberation theology is the God of history, the God who became flesh and lived among us. ...Liberation theology might say that Jesus did not die for our sins but was killed for resisting our sins. Jesus was killed for threatening the structures of power and authority in the name of the people. In the same way, we are to resist evil. We are able and empowered to do this with hope because of our life together in community. This life together is already a sign of the new life that is promised and struggled for.”

That the conference did not appear to cause any turmoil or distress in the Canadian churches can perhaps be explained with reference to the emphasis in the Christian tradition on the individual, starting with Hebrew radical monotheism (in contrast to its collective practice) and carried on through the unique figure of Jesus. Social responsibility and justice have been treated as matters for the individual to address, the most notable and over-used example being the Good Samaritan. This is all well and good, but there is now a growing awareness that the economic and political structures that serve a minority very well are the same ones that create exploitation and deprivation

around the world and create the need for 'Good Samaritans' and good Samaritan forces. Personal charity is not enough.

Two years later (June 1988) the "Summit Citizens Conference" was held in Toronto. It illustrated the fragmented nature of social justice interests with a great variety of subjects for workshops, public meetings and speakers, but no broad political program to address capitalism and the mechanisms of deprivation, no call for socialism or revolution, no apparent utopian dreams. Its expectations were reformist, at best. Poverty was the focus, not wealth, deprivation and the structures of violence.

### ***Mapping Corporate Territory***

The next step in my journey through the food system was to write a book about the operations in Canada of the world's largest grain company, Minnesota-based Cargill, when it burst openly onto the Canadian farm scene with the purchase of a chain of Ontario feed mills and a fertilizer distributor. No one I talked to in the feed, seed and fertilizer business knew anything about the giant that had just moved into the neighbourhood, so I set out to remedy this. At that time I was also trying to understand whose interests were being served by what appeared to be Canada's agricultural policy – beyond 'Get Big or Get Out'. What I found was that Canadian agricultural policy was essentially being written by and for corporate interests. In fact, I found that a Canadian Cargill V.P. had an office next door to the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, as part of an 'executive exchange' program, helping him make up policy, while the Government pretended to be rewriting the old policy in the interest of Canadian farmers. Hence the title of that book, *Trading Up: How Cargill, the World's Largest Grain Company, is*

*Changing Canadian Agriculture*.<sup>42</sup> This carried on my style of writing established with *The Economy of Sugar*: meticulous attention to detail so that while the subject, such as Cargill, might object to what I have written, they cannot fault it for accuracy and truthfulness and any debate would have to be on business practices, ethics and philosophy. Cargill's response: keep quiet.

Over the next two years I wrote *Invisible Giant: Cargill and its Transnational Strategies*<sup>43</sup> about Cargill's global operations, much of it based on personal travel and research (from Warsaw to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, India, and the USA with some quiet financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency) for first hand research, and then a second revised and expanded edition. *Invisible Giant* was eventually published in Japanese, Korean and Spanish and I became known around the world as the Cargill expert. (Perhaps the only one not employed by the company.) While I was writing the book I kept asking academics and journalists if there wasn't any other book that examined in detail just how such a giant corporation works and how it goes about organizing the world to suit its business interests. The answer was always, No. Books about corporations in general were being written, but nothing about particular corporations, the ones who actually make policy, the ones a farmer actually meets.

Along the way, I had become alarmed by what was taking place in plant breeding with genetic engineering, or what the practitioners preferred to refer to as biotechnology'. I did a crash

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42. Brewster Kneen, *Trading Up: How Cargill, the World's Largest Grain Company, is Changing Canadian Agriculture*, NC Press, 1990

43. Brewster Kneen, *Invisible Giant: Cargill and its Transnational Strategies*, Pluto, 1995; second edition 2002

reading course in biology and read with particular relish the feminist critics of science, such as Ruth Hubbard, Sandra Harding and Evelyn Fox Keller, whose holistic perspective was much more to my liking than the usual reductionist [male] approach to biology. In this I was guided by Martha Crouch, the first biologist to publicly quit the field and publish her reasons for doing so. Marty was engaged in some high-powered consulting on the basis of the techniques in genetic engineering that she had developed, and when she discovered that one of her clients, Unilever, was using her knowledge to design, create and clone oil palms for their oil palm plantations in Malaysia, she decided she could not continue in such work on ethical grounds. She quit the field altogether to work in organic agriculture.

I also began learning about what was happening in the traditional breeding of rapeseed to turn it into what became known as canola by public sector scientists in Winnipeg and Saskatoon, and the subsequent efforts by Monsanto and others to genetically engineer canola to make it resistant to Monsanto's Roundup (glyphosate) herbicide. Out of that came another book, *The Rape of Canola*<sup>44</sup> (My feminist friends, including Cathleen, approved the title on grounds of cleverness and this statement on the inside cover page: "Rape is always an exercise of power and control".) The canola industry was not happy with my very carefully researched story which included interviews with the public sector scientists about their work upon which the transformation of rapeseed into canola was based. The book was about the privatization – and the capture – of both the product and the process (i.e. research) by industry, leading to the demise of public research in Canada. The book was shunned, but remains, to the best of my knowledge, the only complete

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44. Brewster Kneen, *The Rape of Canola*, NC Press, 1992



and truthful story of canola, which is now virtually all transgenic and privately owned.

Genetic engineering was then becoming big time research, with corporate players such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer making all kinds of wild promises about what genetic engineering could do for agriculture worldwide, though the hype was actually just to attract investors and speculators, since for years the promoters had nothing to show for all their efforts. There was very little critical examination of what biotechnology was all about and the cultural and philosophical assumptions embedded in it. It was routinely and deliberately hidden behind a screen of 'sound science' as if that eliminated the need for any critical examination of either the 'science' or the culture it emanated from, and the manipulation of life forms was insistently referred to as a 'technology'. In one discussion with me, some professional engineers said they really objected to the term 'genetic engineering' since the scientists did not meet the qualifications of real engineers whose steel ring, worn on their little finger, indicated that they had, and had to, sign off on all their work, taking full responsibility for it, something the 'genetic engineers' did not and could not do.

The scattered opposition being generated by genetic engineering and its first commercial product, recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone, was (with the exception of the Pure Milk Campaign) not on ethical grounds, but largely on grounds of food safety, which I found totally unsatisfactory when so much more was at issue. So after we moved from Toronto to Mission, British Columbia in 1995, I wrote another book, *Farmageddon: Food and the Culture of Biotechnology*<sup>45</sup> providing a radical critique of the 'science' of genetic engineering and, more importantly, an analysis of the rationalist masculine

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45. Brewster Kneen, *Farmageddon: Food and the Culture of Biotechnology*, New Society Publishers, 1999

culture that bred it. What I was actually doing was theology: looking critically at the ideology of ‘improving’ biological organisms through violent intervention whether they liked it or not. My convictions about the integrity of organisms, and respect for life, were nurtured by this research, as was also my critical thinking about the false utopian assumptions of the Enlightenment about ‘progress’.

With the encouragement of our publisher, we posted *Farmageddon* on our website<sup>46</sup> after a plea from a teacher friend in Africa who wanted to use it in his classes. The only affordable way for him to get it was electronically. Since then we have posted all of my writing for free download. (Of course this sidesteps the issue of copyright and how intellectual and cultural workers get paid – if at all.)

## *Farmageddon*

*Following are some excerpts from the book:*

The social construct of modern industrial biotechnology is based in the western cosmology of linear history and progress. Linearity itself has two directions of equal value, like a railroad track, but progress has to be both linear and unidirectional by definition. The arrow of progress carries us to our destination, into the future, for better or for worse. We are just along for the ride.

In this determinist context, technology is both a means and an expression of progress. It is both the process (or collection of processes) by which we achieve progress and, in turn, a product of the progress. Whatever is classed as “technology” needs no explanation or justification in this system; it simply is, and we are expected to give it due

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46. [www.ramshorn.ca](http://www.ramshorn.ca)

respect and allow it to carry us forward. We are not to ask who classed it as technology or why.

I do not like to use military metaphors or language and I avoid the use of words such as 'fight' and 'struggle' unless their meaning is very precise. The notion of 'totalitarian occupation', however, is broader than a military term and seems to be a reasonable way to describe the campaign of the biotech industry as it works to create a command economy of life. One might describe this as a Stalinist approach to life.

If five or six giant corporations have control over every seed of all major commercial crops planted anywhere on the earth, that is totalitarian. Add to seeds control over the genetics of all major lines of commercial animals and it will be somewhat more totalitarian. Then engineer all the genetics – plant and animal – to be hybrids, sterile, or both, and the achievement will be without question totalitarian. It will amount to the occupation of the land – the earth itself – by foreign troops and their local mercenaries. At the other end of the food chain there is a growing occupation of the land by a handful of global supermarket chains, and an occupation of the supermarkets themselves by transgenic foods and food products, unlabeled, so that the public cannot identify the invaders and thus avoid and reject them.

In the name of Progress, these new powers would like us to believe that there is no alternative to their biotechnological project. They are simply the agents of destiny. We should adjust to their rule with gratitude for their leadership and their efforts on our behalf, whether we asked for them or not.

They would also like us to accept their confusion about life and death. Genetic engineering is about the

“improvement” of life through its reconstruction, but it is only the data that can be reconstructed, processed, and delivered, not life. A corporation cannot control life. It can threaten, it can intimidate, it can take you to court, and ultimately it can kill. Like the state, it may have the power to take life, but neither have the power to give life.

Unfortunately, while my book was widely acclaimed and well read, the public opposition to genetic engineering continues to be confined primarily to the issue of the ‘safety’ of genetically engineered seeds, foods and crops. Almost two decades later, the discussion has still not gone deeper into the cultural-ethical issues of human intervention into life processes with the aim of asserting total control over Creation. Nor has the violence of genetic engineering appeared in the public discussion. In other words, the approach and assumptions of genetic engineering – the reconstruction of life – remain anthropocentric and unquestioned, presumably because the reductionist philosophical system which gives rise to genetic engineering is taken as a given, along with the ability to patent and ‘own’ life forms.

One of the highlights of our sojourn in Toronto was the Jack Russell Seminar. For a while this was a weekly meeting of 4-8 academics and clergy of a wide age-range in the Jack Russell Pub (hence the name of our group) for free-wheeling theological-political-personal exploration, with an initial focus on the state of the church in general and the inter-Church coalitions in particular. It was intellectually challenging and great fun, and the beer was good. (One of the small conversations I remember was a suggestion that to be feminist we should stop speaking of ‘seminal’ ideas and use ‘germinal’ instead.)

## Heading West

Our move to British Columbia in 1995 was instigated in part by the realization that my respiratory system did not like the air of Toronto, polluted with the drift from “chemical valley” to the west (Sarnia), and in part by the realization that apart from our deep engagement in the Toronto Food Policy Council and associated activities we were not really taking advantages of what Toronto claimed to offer as a city. I also felt that my ‘term of office’ as a member of the Food Policy Council had run out and I needed to move on, much as I enjoyed the working/ social relations with the food ‘gang’- and still treasure them. In addition, a year as an adjunct professor in the faculty of environmental studies at York University convinced me that I did not want to pursue an academic career. I love the intellectual life, but not the careerism that seems to be a significant aspect of it, at least in university settings, as I discovered not only at York University and the University of Toronto, but later at the University of British Columbia as well. I simply preferred my ‘insecure’ life as a public intellectual to an institutionalized ‘security’.

There was little else to keep us in eastern Canada. Our son Jamie was working with CUSO in the Talamanca Forest Reserve in Costa Rica at the time and had not yet settled in Ottawa.

Our daughter Rebecca, however, had moved on west to Vancouver and kept telling us that the grass to the west was considerably greener than that in Toronto. So we headed west. We discovered that we could not afford to live in Vancouver and ended up in Mission, 30 km or so up the Fraser River valley on the ‘undeveloped’ north side of the river. Mission, as we had been advised, was politically and culturally a much

friendlier place for us to live than among the right-wing fundamentalist Christian folks on the south side of the river.

As soon as we landed in Mission we inquired about the availability of local organic food. "Nowhere nearby" was the answer, so we started a farmers' market. In doing so we quickly learned all about the politics and powers of a small town, which was great fun! The new commuter train from Mission to Vancouver made it relatively easy for me to carry on as the major national critic of genetic engineering and to organize the BC Biotechnology Circle, composed of grad students, professionals and a variety of activists primarily in Vancouver, nourished by nearly weekly pot luck suppers and discussion. Most of the group went on to university teaching. We gained a certain reputation with the biotech industry and with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for our vocal and very well informed intrusions into their cosy club.

For her part, Cathleen carried on with the food system portfolio, working with Farm Folk/City Folk in Vancouver on a series of contracts /grants to deal with 'food security' all over the province. She also put a lot of her energy into potting and began entering professional shows and sales.

Meanwhile, Rebecca, and her partner, Brian MacIsaac, were agitating and pushing us to look for a small farm where the four of us could somehow cohabit and they could pursue their dream of a micro-brewery integrated with an organic farm. Costs again led us further and further from Vancouver and we ended up in Sorrento, 400+ kilometres northeast of Vancouver, on a 10 acre farm with two houses (one old, one reasonably new) in 1999, just as *Farmageddon* was being published. The brewery for Crannóg Ales was built inside an already-existing very large garage and a hop-yard started. Cathleen and I helped with the maintenance and a lot of gardening. I found my

'specialty' to be grounds keeper (i.e., lawn mower, bush pruner and strawberry tender).

We soon learned that we were living in traditional Secwepemc (Shuswap) territory and only a few miles upriver (the South Thompson River) from the home of the Neskonlith Band of the Secwepemc people in Chase. My personal introduction to the community occurred when I was leading a workshop at the gathering of the B.C. Food Systems Network that Cathleen was organizing. During the discussion, a young woman said, "What about biotechnology?" It turned out that the woman was a Secwepemc from Chase and my relationship to her people followed from that. Their native culture and cosmovision have added a very important dimension to our lives.

As might be expected, my lifelong concern about vocation weakened with the years, the foreshortening of the future, and a recognition of the needs and desires of a younger generation. My sense of responsibility for the larger world did not abate, but it was a challenge to find ways to carry on. Sorrento was further from airports and cities than I had wanted to be, but the choice was really made by the others. However, the publication of *Farmageddon* and the publicity generated by the publisher ensured that I had a lot of speaking engagements and interviews, which held off the question of isolation for a while.

I was asked to join a research project in Democracy, Ethics and Genomics at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver in 2001 and was appointed to the Ethics Committee of Genome BC. These two activities required a certain amount of reimbursed travel to Vancouver which also made it possible for me to carry on the relationships established over the previous decade. My engagement with the UBC project turned

out to be, contrary to what I had looked forward to, not a serious wrestling with the ethics of genetic engineering, but a well-paid academic pretense. The finale came when I told the professor in charge that it would be hypocritical for me to continue to accept my generous stipend since the sort of critical ethical analysis that I was trying to contribute to the project was clearly not wanted. It was then that he told me the reason he wanted me on the project team in the first place was because I gave him credibility. What he meant was that I gave his proposal for funding credibility because I was well known as the arch critic of biotechnology in Canada and he had snared me. I was disgusted. Fortunately Cathleen was with me at the time to confirm what I had heard. Some of these concerns and issues found their way into *The Ram's Horn*.

By then I had already begun to establish a kind of base for an ambitious project I dreamed up and launched in 2004, The Forum on Privatization and the Public Domain. At the time, privatization was at the top of the neoliberal agenda and it seemed to me that a 'defense' of the public domain was essential and could possibly become a significant political movement. The conception of this was as grand as my conception of CENSIT had been, so my major effort for a couple of years was development of The Forum. This initially involved raising money and spending it on travel to talk with and recruit a very diverse and respectable advisory board who helped to formulate a statement of purpose:

There are many things that we assume to be 'ours' – from our immaterial thoughts and material bodies, to parks and pensions, hospitals and highways, and the land we may have long inhabited – until one day we find that they are no longer 'ours' but the 'property' of someone else: they have been privatized.



Privatization takes many forms, from selling off a public utility to the contracting out of social services. It takes the form of claiming 'property rights' over genetic material isolated from a human and the patenting of seeds. Privatization also describes the 'intellectual property' (copyright) claims of the Entertainment Industry and the ascendancy of corporate control over and benefit from university and public sector research and intellectual endeavours.

The privatization and commercialization of the public domain has changed the nature of our social and political relationships. This may best be symbolized by the marginalization, if not demolition, of the village square and Main Street by privately owned and policed shopping malls where citizenship is redefined as a matter of 'consumer choice' and 'lifestyle.'

A healthy society, however, requires a healthy public domain with a diversity of structures, spaces and management to nurture common interests and provide for the public good. These may take the form of public libraries, open source software, farm-saved seed, community gardens, public schools, roads, parks, and socialized health care.

It is not just a question of private versus public, individual versus the state. There is much collective activity in between that has historically been described as 'commons'. Indeed, in our daily lives we participate, perhaps unknowingly, in a variety of formal and informal 'commons.' These commons – material and immaterial – need to be recognized if social health is to be nurtured and restored and the economics of privatization brought under public scrutiny and examined in the context of broader social values and interests.

How cultural workers (including writers, musicians and artists) should be compensated for their contributions to society, if not by copyright royalties, shares common ground with the question of how indigenous peoples are to conserve their culture, land, language, spirituality and ecology without being forced to 'own' it according to the property laws of the dominant culture.

The Forum on Privatization and the Public Domain has been established to counter the destructive forces of privatization and promote a strong public discourse on the relationship between private property, various forms of commons, the public domain and public good.

For two years I laboured to build the Forum into a stable structure and a creative program. Reception of the idea was very encouraging, as was the initial financial support, but most of the people I contacted, not surprisingly, were already deeply committed to working for social justice and public good in a wide variety of fields and were not able to take on any more, however much they recognized the need for a progressive voice to counter the neoliberal privatization agenda.

I was able to raise enough money to hire a grad student to organize a conference on The Commons, but that failed to produce any follow-up, and finally I had to recognize that The Forum was my third attempt to organize a grand project (the first being The Centre for the Study of Institutions and Theology, the second The Scotsburn Nutrition Policy Institute), and I had to conclude that I was a better agitator than organizer. The exception was Northumberland, but that was a practical as well as a philosophical-political project. I also concluded from these various experiences that Sorrento, B.C., was not a preferred location for the kind of organizing and intellectual-political work I had hoped for with the Forum. While we knew many

fine local people, few had the breadth of our experience and intellectual life.

Then one day I said to myself, 'I don't want to grow old in a place where I have to drive and fly every time I want a conversation (beyond the farm) about the larger world and politics. However, we did have many good conversations and 'good times' with organic farmers and thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie among them and the educational work on the larger context of the organic movement. And it was certainly rewarding to see Crannóg Ales gaining a reputation and awards as the some of the best beer in BC, if not all of Canada, to the point where I was being introduced as Rebecca's father.

By this time a collection of food system activists and leaders across the country (including Cathleen) had succeeded in creating Food Secure Canada on the model of the BC Food Systems Network. It was based on the essential interconnection between three goals which broadly addressed the main strands of the food movement: access to food, quality of food (including free of genetic manipulation and contaminants), and economic and ecological sustainability of the food system as a whole. It was not accidental that it also reflected the principles I outlined in *From Land to Mouth*: proximity, diversity, and holistic systems. Food Secure Canada was formally launched at a conference in Vancouver in October, 2006, where Cathleen was elected Chair of the first "Steering Committee" of the new body, ending up acting as the unpaid Executive Director – for the next six years.

*Back East*

So we wondered about where next, and Ottawa was at the top of the short list. It certainly would be more convenient for Cathleen's new role with Food Secure Canada, but this was a

minor consideration. The major one was that our son Jamie had moved there from Costa Rica to help set up Mining Watch. He and his wife Soha had just given birth to our only grandchild Theo; we also knew a lot of the social justice activists there who were working in a wide variety of NGO and non-NGO organizations. I figured it would be a more suitable location in which to pursue my vision than somewhat idyllic and isolated Sorrento, and it certainly is easier to get around and to cities like Toronto and Montreal by train. Ottawa is also a small city with good outdoor recreational facilities, a decent public transit system, and very good bicycle paths. We moved in the spring of 2006 to the west side of the city near the Ottawa River in a location, Britannia Village, as rural as one can find in the city, but still within bicycling distance (weather permitting) of downtown.

While this brought us in closer touch with the more progressive NGO actors and old friends, as well as two large universities with some interesting faculty, it has the major detraction of being the home of the Federal Government, which was called the Government of Canada until the Prime Minister appropriated it and renamed it the Harper Government. Now a major distraction is the clawing away of democracy by the government-corporate elite.

## *GRAIN and the Larger World*

In 2001, just after we had moved to Ottawa, I was invited to join the board of Barcelona-based GRAIN, a small international nonprofit organisation that works to support small farmers and social movements in their struggles for communitycontrolled and biodiversitybased food systems. GRAIN is headed by a Dutchman, Henk Hobbelenk, (one of its founders) with a small staff scattered around the world serving as a resource to civil

society groups and organization. GRAIN's extensive and superb research and analysis is a global treasure that I had already admired for many years. I was on the GRAIN board from 2001 to 2006. The first meeting I attended was in India, Nov. 2002, and my last was Nov. 2006, in Durban, South Africa, to which Cathleen was also invited. I am very grateful for the wonderful experience of getting to know the staff and other board members.

Being closer to the world of NGOs and agencies, some governmental, some civil, I started noticing how the language of 'rights' was spreading like a virus. The word 'rights', it seemed to me, was being resorted to as a shortcut to avoid having to say what one really meant. 'Human rights' is now plugged into all kinds of documents and journalism to refer to almost anything, from right to food to right to life to intellectual property rights. Anything labelled a human right is a Good Thing, and bad behaviour is referred to as a violation or abuse of human rights. But the rights discourse also has a very significant social role. Rights are individualistic in the extreme and the rights language, besides transforming every moral issue into a legal issue, avoids addressing the structural causes of the 'abuses' claimed as violations of human rights. Thus advocacy of rights is also utterly reformist, since rights are always, of necessity, called for within existing political and economic structures.

Thinking this way, along with a lot of reading, led to my last book, *The Tyranny of Rights*.<sup>43</sup> I was surprised and disappointed by the lack of comment and discussion about the book beyond the lively questioning that took place at book launches in Toronto and Ottawa. I had fully expected that the

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43. Brewster Kneen, *The Tyranny of Rights*, The Ram's Horn 2009

people working in a variety of organizations that were using the rights language would welcome the challenge and that I would be engaged in follow up for some time. That was not to happen. I also asked several lawyers I knew if they would please read the book and comment. Several said they certainly would, but I never heard from any of them about the book again. As a friend said, What did you expect? You are questioning their theology!

## Conclusion

After our long walk, with its meanderings, excursions and explorations, it is time to stop and reflect.

I spoke early on of vocation and the directions it gave me as to what to make of my life. I've stayed pretty much on the same 'social justice' road, though the journey took some unexpected turns, always contingent on the context. One might say that my life has been something of a dialogue between principle and context.

If you wondered at times where I was taking you, I have to say that at times I asked that of myself as I dredged through archives and recalled many dear friends and allies over seven decades or so – sometimes with amusement, sometimes painfully, as when being immersed in the violence and hatred that often 'welcomed' civil rights workers to a town in the southern USA and which Jane Stembridge took into herself and cried out in her poetry.

Rudi Dutschke's term, "The long march through the institutions", derived from the philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, has stuck with me as the most appropriate description of my relationships to a wide variety of institutions. Dutschke was referring primarily to the structures of governance of the state

and economy, but he also included any or all authoritarian institutions, including universities and churches. With this in mind, I can see how many institutions I marched through, from Cornell University, in and out of the US Navy, then Union Theological Seminary and the various levels of church structures and bureaucracies that I tried to shape until I decided that it was a futile pursuit, at least for me. In each case it was a matter of entering by the front door and leaving by the back door, so to speak, to continue my quest for a more fulfilling institutional 'home'. This also applies to the language of the institution, for me particularly the customary Christian language, which I inherited and utilized for a good part of my life until I could no longer use language that had ceased to be meaningful and had become actually alien if not contradictory to my theology.

"Institutions" also includes my efforts to create the kind of institutions that could serve the public good through radical analysis of the structures and powers of the dominant, authoritarian institutions of our societies and lay the foundations for a more just and non-violent society.

As you have read, I attribute the failure of the institutions to relate creatively to the changing context of the 60s to their having fallen into the trap of anti-Communism: a fear that the world is not a friendly place, that their well-being must be guarded and maintained at all, or almost all, costs and that we are being surrounded by 'enemies'. Yet, at the same time, we conveniently overlooked, or simply ignored, the ceaseless efforts of The West, led by the USA, to literally encircle the Soviet Union with our offensive missiles, nuclear subs, and airbases – just as 'we' would like to include Ukraine as a NATO member right on Russia's border in 2014.

Communism is, ideally, founded on the idea of humanity as a social phenomenon, not a collection of individuals all competitively pursuing their individual gain – or corporate profit. It is perfectly reasonable, then, for ardent capitalists to fear and despise Communism – and socialism, for that matter.

For a century, more or less, from the Russian revolution and the subsequent reality of Soviet Communism, the long episode of colonization and decolonization, two ‘world wars’ and numerous destructive ‘lesser’ conflicts, right up to the refusal to contemplate a radically different concept of ‘economy’ in response to climate change, the West has been engaged in a massive effort to defend and extend its territory of exploitation and increasing inequity.

The government of Canada under Prime Minister Harper insists that the welfare of ‘the economy’ is more important than human welfare or the well-being of the planet. The beneficiaries of this ideology are, of course, the propertied, the 1% as identified by the Occupy movement, the elite of the wealthy who become wealthier by the day, creating and fostering ever intensifying climate change and increasing inequity.

Critical analysis of current political and economic ‘arrangements’ is an absolute necessity, but it is not enough. For me, in these politically bleak days, the major political-social question is about as far as one can get from the devotion to ‘economic growth’: How are we going to live *together*? The implications of this question are enormous. If we do not address climate change NOW, there will be no living together, there will only be a coterie of short term winners while the vastly



greater number of creatures, including human, will struggle to survive for a little longer.

If we are to live well and equitably together, respect, and mutually respectful relationships, must be the basis of the social ethic. To live together implies that 'all my relations' are living well. Accompanying respect is what I call an attitude of Gratitude. This is more than thanksgiving for something or somebody in particular. It is a characteristic of an attitude that can say, 'enough' rather than demanding more.

However, standing in our way is the institution and ideology of State. Somehow we have come to assume that State is the only acceptable form or context for living together when, in fact, much of the turmoil of the world arises from the arbitrary and absolutist forms of the state whether in North America or the Middle East or anywhere else. Fortunately this is being recognized, if not articulated, by peoples from many territories such as Libya and Palestine and Scotland and Catalunya, as well as by indigenous peoples worldwide. The rebellions against, or resistance to 'special interests' – such as corporations, authoritarian religions, and to states themselves that are subservient to these 'special interests' – are signs of hope, signs that people are ready to move beyond – or below – the State (which is, we must remember, is a very recent invention – primarily of the propertied class) and determined to act upon their utopian visions.

*Theo-logos* is literally God-word, the word of, or about, God, but I think that I have always regarded theology as about how relations are meant to be, with 'relations' being an inclusive term, as it is in Indigenous usage. So theology is not to be a sectarian

creed of absolute truth, but the expression of a whole culture, including the spirit world, of living together.

Faith is the conviction that there is more to life and the world than meets the eye, more than realism can see, more than all the scientists can name.

As I continue on my journey, I am thankful that around the world there is a growing crowd travelling in the same direction, sharing similar utopian hopes and visions – and that there are many, many more than I can name. So let's carry on.



*Books by Brewster Kneen:*

From Land To Mouth, Understanding the Food System, NC Press, Toronto, 1989;

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Trading Up - How Cargill, the World's Largest Grain Company, is Changing Canadian Agriculture, NC Press, 1990

The Rape of Canola, NC Press, 1992

Invisible Giant: Cargill and its Transnational Strategies, Pluto Press, London, 1995; *Japanese edition 1997; second revised and updated English edition, Pluto Press, 2002; Korean edition 2005; Spanish edition, Gigante Invisible, GRAIN y REDES-AT, 2005*

Farmageddon: Food and the Culture of Biotechnology, New Society Publishers, 1999; *French edition, Les aliments trafiqués, écosociété, Montreal, 2000*

The Tyranny of Rights, Ram's Horn, 2009; *Spanish edition, La Tiranía de los Derechos, Cienflores, 2013; French edition, La tyrannie des droits, écosociété, 2014.*

## **Chronology of selected global events**

1917 - Russian Revolution

1914-18 - World War I

1918-1965 - De-colonization of Italian, French and English Empires

1930s-40s - Hitler and National Socialism (populism)

1939 - 1945 World War II

1948 - Communist government elected in Czechoslovakia (Klement Gottwald)

1950's - McCarthy era and anti-communist crusade

1953 - Death of Stalin

1950 - 1953, Korean War

1953-1964 - Nikita Khrushchev First Secretary of the Communist Party and Premier of the Soviet Union

1956 - Khrushchev speech to Twentieth Party Congress attacking the crimes committed by Stalin

1956 - Hungarian revolt, Soviet occupation

1959 - Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro overthrows dictator Fulgencio Batista

1960 - First sit-in, by four black students in Greensboro, NC, Woolworth's lunch counter.

1960 - John F. Kennedy elected President of the USA

1961 - Berlin Wall built

1962 - Cuban Missile Crisis: The US blockades Cuba to force withdrawal of Soviet missiles.

1962 - 3000-5000 students stage biggest student peace demonstration ever, protesting nuclear testing

1963 - President Kennedy is assassinated.

Civil Rights march - 250,000 people hear Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech

1964 - Brazil Military coup, Dictatorship 1968 - 1979

1965 - The USA sends 75,000 troops to boost South Vietnam's army.

1966 - Argentine military coup - 1983 elections, turmoil to 1991

1966 - China: the Cultural Revolution begins.

1967 - Six Day War- Israel defeats its Arab neighbours, gains control of East Jerusalem and areas of Jordan, Egypt and Syria.

1968 - Czechoslovakia: The "Prague Spring", followed by Russian occupation

1971 - The People's Republic of China recognized by UN as the sole representative of China

1973 - Egypt and Syria invade Israel, Egypt and Israel go to war

1973 - Uruguay: military rule to 1985

1973 - Chile: military overthrow of Allende, Pinochet dictatorship to 1990

1975 - Vietnam: Fall of Saigon to Vietcong, U.S. ends its war against Vietnam

1980 - Marshal Josip Broz Tito, leader of Yugoslavia, dies.

1985 - Mikhail Gorbachev becomes leader of the USSR

1989 - Berlin Wall breached and subsequently torn down.

1990 - Lech Walesa becomes President of Poland.

1990 - GDR 'acceded' to the Federal Republic of Germany and ceased to exist.

1991 - 10-day war between Slovenia and the Yugoslav People's Army begins the war in the Balkans.

2001 - World Trade Centre destroyed Sept. 11

2001 - US and UK intervene in Afghanistan to get rid of Osama Bin Laden and expel al-Qaeda.

2003 - US invades Iraq.

2011 - US withdraws from Iraq, insurgency continues