

Edmonton
SOCIAL PLANNING
Council

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Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suite 41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5
Tel. 403.423.2031 Fax 403 425.6244

We reserve the right to edit all contributions.

Managing Editor: Brian Bechtel

Editor: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk

Graphic Designer: Kathryn Valentine

Advisory Group: Jason Brown, Susan Crandall, Anne Fitzpatrick, Jason Foster, Evelyn Hamdon, Jack O'Neill, Kathryn Olson, and Jan Reimer.

Contributors: Ron Ghitter, James Read, Baha Abu-Laban, Kathryn Olson, Jean Forest, Jack O'Neill, Jayanti Negi, Dorothy Daniels, Steve Crocker, Don Mayne, Mark Kruger, Charlach Mackintosh, Katherine Weaver, Susan Crandall, Suzette Chan and Yvonne Stanford.

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Vision

A community where all people have a commitment to social justice and shared responsibility as the foundation for community well being.

Mission

Responding to the changing political and social environment, the Edmonton Social Planning Council will:

- Identify trends and emerging social issues.
- Create opportunities to debate and address social issues.
- Initiate and support community action through research,

We live in an increasingly diverse community. While diversity enriches our society, its value is threatened by those who fear change. Economic and social policy changes, and the rhetoric used by decision makers which marginalize groups of people, heighten tensions. With the political swing rightward, reactionary forces are at work.

We need to foster understanding and respect in the presence of diversity; to develop a language to address issues of inclusion, rights and culture; to develop a society in which all individuals feel valued.

Everyone is created equal. Each of us has inalienable rights. There should be no discrimination based on beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, language source of income or religion. The protection of human rights is instrumental in redressing social and economic inequities and in ensuring political freedom.

Human rights abuses know no political boundaries. They occur when the dominant group exerts power unjustly over others. It is about more than personalities, it is about privilege and efforts to maintain the privileges of some by depriving others of equality.

Human rights is about the relationship between citizens and government. We in Canada consider ourselves free, living within a free society. But history proves freedoms are fragile, even in Canada. The treatment of Aboriginal peoples, the interment of the Japanese and others, and more recently the suppression of evidence which led to innocent men being given life sentences in the Donald Marshall and David Milgaard cases, demonstrate how easily our rights can be discarded.

This is not to say that Canada does not have much which to be proud of. But these instances reveal how fragile freedom is. In the political move to the right do we risk stifling dissent and rejecting diversity in its many forms?

How we respond to the issue of diversity in all its dimensions is a fundamental reflection of the kind of society in which we want to live. Are all people fully included and valued as part of the community? Is this reflected in our public institutions?

In this time of rapid change and heightened tensions we need to ensure we do not infringe on the rights of others in order to secure our own place. We need strong voices to speak out about the value of protecting human rights and to talk about the kind of society in which we want to live.

Unsettling change

The 1990s will be remembered as a stressful period in Alberta's history. Our province has undergone serious and profound changes and, to an extent, we have all been part of an experiment created by an overall desire by government to rid itself of deficits and debt and to encourage more individual initiatives.

These are laudatory goals based, I submit, on a yearning by many for a return to the past, when life was simpler, when families were united, when our streets were safer, when there were fewer taxes, when the majority of Canadians were white, anglo-saxon, Christian and middle class, and when answers were much easier to come by, making issues easier to resolve.

But the real world of the nineties is very different. It is the age of technology. Our citizens are of many colors, races and religions. The middle class is frustrated and lacking optimism for its future. It is an unfamiliar society, a society composed of many single-parent families, and a society where there is too much abuse, sexually and physically, of children and women, and there is a growing intolerance towards our minorities.

It is a society where the traditional family is being replaced by peer-group associations that can be both positive and destructive. There are more homeless people on our streets, more chronic unemployment and a greater strain on our institutions and our governments, which are both morally and legally required to cope with the tensions brought to bear on our citizens.

And so, while governments reduce support for social development, education, health care and preventative programs, we discover that there has never been a time when people needed these programs more. And while governments rush

the political agenda to be deficit free by cutting programs, we read disquieting headlines that tell us of single mothers surviving on less than \$20,000 a year, of personal savings that have fallen to 23-year lows, and of young people who seem to be without direction.

Could it be that in our haste to tidy the balance sheet, we are overlooking many areas in our society that cry out in need. Areas that, if unattended, could present us with a host of greater problems in the future?

A case in point is the flagging commitment of the government of Alberta to human rights. Human rights means different things to different people. To some, it is the very essence of the democratic tradition, a way of life that emphasizes fairness, compassion and understanding of our neighbors.

To others in Alberta, human rights means an unnecessarily inflated bureaucracy creating special rights for those who are deemed unworthy. Unfortunately, too many Albertans know about discrimination. Our visible minorities, our seniors, women and members of minority religions and cultures well know the hurt of discrimination.

Human rights is not an academic exercise for lawyers, scholars, socialists or bleeding hearts. It is not about creating special rights for individuals who ask to be placed in a better position than others.

Rather, human rights is about the tragedy of human loss, pain and suffering that flows from the indignity of being treated, not for what you are as an individual, but as a nameless stereotype. This kind of treatment causes conflict, in small and large scale. It can lead to outright war and massive loss of life. It wrecks havoc wherever it is allowed

to housing, dividing communities and ghettoizing groups of people, impoverishing them economically, mentally and spiritually.

When we speak of human rights, we must understand that the concept is really very simple. It is that all people shall be free and equal in dignity; it means fair treatment, giving opportunity to every citizen to realize their own potential; it means that everyone has a place at the starting gate to do the best they can. It means that everyone in the community can live in peace without fear of discrimination, prejudice or the intolerance which blocks the way of equal participation in Alberta society.

Alberta has had more than its share of vivid examples of racism, discrimination and prejudice towards its minorities. This is the province of Jim Keegstra, of the marketing of fascist pins and posters, the province where, to some, being a redneck is considered a badge of honor.

But over the past number of years the government of Alberta has, notwithstanding our history, lost its patience and understanding, which is needed to provide leadership in educating Albertans in the field of human rights.

Seemingly mesmerized by an overreaching concern about sexual orientation, important members of the Alberta government have called for the abolition of the human rights commission and have argued for the reduction of the financing necessary in the commission's operation.

There have been too many comments from members of the government which seem to indicate an exclusionary rather than an inclusionary policy, and also seem to indicate a failure to understand that our elected parliamentarians must represent all Albertans, not merely those who happen to fall into more traditional electoral categories.

The recent controversy surrounding the amendments to the Individuals Rights Protection Act clearly illustrated my concerns.

The fact that the government refused to follow the substantive recommendations of its own review panel with respect to this legislation sent a message throughout Alberta to those who recognize its importance.

It is to be hoped that the premier and his newly appointed minister, Shirley McClellan, will respond by providing badly needed leadership and educational funding to build bridges that will bring all Albertans together in harmony. ❧

Senator Ron Gitter is Co-Chair of the Dignity Foundation, an organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of Human Rights in the Province of Alberta.

Dear Editors:

I have just had a chance to read your latest issue of *First Reading* with its focus on the future of children's services. Though most of the articles in this issue were excellent, I was disturbed that the view point of child welfare workers themselves was not actively solicited. Though you make reference to the fact that you sought out authors who were willing to write articles critical of the government and that many knowledgeable people were afraid of retribution. As a member of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees, I can attest to the fact that the child welfare workers, all of whom are members of this union are a courageous lot. Despite the intimidation tactics imposed on them through force of discipline for speaking out, they have found many ways to bring their concerns into the public eye. Provided you allowed some discretion, such as permitting the worker to sign a pseudonym or to speak through a staff member of the union, I feel confident that you could have had an article by a child welfare worker. Repeating the mistake of silencing those who deliver these services at the front lines now is a disservice to your readership. Who better than the child welfare workers themselves to inform your readership of the pitfalls on the new path to children's services?

When child welfare workers have attempted to participate in the working groups, they have received a range of receptions from welcoming to being shunned and asked to leave. At best they have been given token recognition in this entire process. They have often been labelled 'the problem', and this scapegoating has not been addressed adequately by the steering committees. For the most part their expertise in the field is not recognized, their social work skills in community work are not appreciated, and they have received little encouragement from employers. I find it very disheartening that you are repeating this mistake. I have not worked in any of the child welfare programs myself. I would not presume to know all that is entailed and how these specialized services could be delivered by "communities." I believe that we ignore those working on the "front lines" to our peril.

I especially appreciated the articles by Bernd Walter, Brian Bechtel, and Pat Kulscar. I don't know of any region that is "doing very well" (page 20). The process has been so flawed, the understanding of the community so limited, and the political agenda of privatization at any cost so pervasive, that Walter's dire predictions are destined to come true.

Yours truly, Yvonne Schmitz MSW RSW



Ethics in Government

Would she resign? Wouldn't she resign? At some point in the back and forth of events, when it appeared that Sheila Copps would not resign, my daughter said to me, "Isn't an honest politician a contradiction in terms?" Since my daughter had turned 18 just weeks earlier, answering the question took on a special pointedness for me. Here was a new voter. Someone for whom the question of the ethics of politicians and ethics in government was not merely academic. How would you answer? Is it reasonable and appropriate to expect politicians to be ethical?

Not everyone would say yes. They might say that ethics is no more relevant to being good in government than it is to being a good shortstop or a good violinist. We wouldn't want a philandering violinist for a spouse—they would say—but what's that got to do with whether we hire him for the orchestra? Violinists need not be virtuous to be virtuosos. People who think this way believe that governing is the art of wielding power. And they believe that the standards of excellence are set by those who have succeeded in controlling the destinies of nations over long periods of time, not by morally upright people who cannot even get elected. They would concur with the words of Machiavelli who said a "good prince" is "capable of entering upon the path of wrongdoing when this becomes necessary."

By contrast, Aristotle wrote his *Politics* as a sequel to his *Ethics* on the conviction that ethics and government have everything to do with each other. On his view—with which I agree—the function of government is not merely or primarily to exercise power, but to use power for the good of the community. Its people are to prosper (not only materially) and they are to be treated fairly. Good government makes those things its goal. It follows that one cannot govern well without being deeply ethical, because attention to the

So, I think Aristotle would answer my daughter by saying that a dishonest politician was not only a poor specimen of a human being, but also that he really did not know what governing was.

This is only the beginning, however. Different ethical obligations fall to different professions. And so the follow up question is whether there are *distinctive* moral duties which belong to those in government; and if so, what they are.

I put integrity and impartiality high on the list.

In his article in the February 1996 *Atlantic Monthly*, Stephen Carter offers a useful definition of integrity. "Integrity ... requires three steps: discerning what is right and what is wrong; acting on what you have discerned, even at personal cost; and saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right and wrong." While everyone should possess integrity, it is especially difficult for and yet especially important for persons in government. It is especially difficult because the personal costs that Carter refers to can be so high. Why is it that politicians use "spin doctors" to ensure that they always appear in a good light? I think it's because if they even once make a mistake and don't do what seems right, they will be punished in the press and the polls. And yet, without genuine integrity in our politicians we cannot know who these people really are and what they really believe; and without knowing that, representative democracy cannot exist.

As for impartiality—in governing, a politician must have a sense of the good of the *community*, and aspire to the fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of membership in the *community*. That is a different ethical responsibility than most of us have. As a father I have a far greater responsibility for my own children than for anyone else's. I'm *supposed* to be partial towards them. And when I am a patient, my

kids when education policies are on the legislative order paper, and she will not push herself to the front of the medicare queue.

How do we find people who meet these ethical standards? By encouraging the cynicism of 18-year-olds? No. I think a big part of it is finding a readiness in the ordinary citizen to put himself or herself imaginatively into the politician's place. I have appreciated Aristotle's definition of a citizen ever since I first read it: a citizen is one who knows what it is to rule and to be ruled.

If my daughter wants politicians of integrity she needs to allow them to be fallible as she is, to make mistakes, to apologize and to change their minds in light of better information. Let us hope thereby to reduce the need the politician presently feels to call for the spin doctors. Similarly, if my daughter wants impartial politicians who promote *community* well-being and *social* justice she should resist lobbying for causes that simply reflect her own special interests.

We don't always get the kind of government we deserve, as the saying goes, but there is a connection. We are all in this together. Ethics in government is contingent not only on the moral character of the politicians but on the character of the voter too. ■■

James E. Read, Ph.D., is the Executive Director of the Salvation Army Ethics Centre located in Winnipeg, Manitoba send email to: saethics@mbnet.mb.ca



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HUMAN RIGHTS

individual or collective?

The Canadian people and government are in the process of exploring a vision of Canada in the broader context of contemporary social, economic, political and ideological challenges. Among the challenges being examined today are federal-provincial relations, regional disparities, the social safety net, job creation, and Canada's place in the global economy.

But a vision of Canada is incomplete if it does not encompass moral and ethical principles inherent in our understanding of human rights. As Walter S. Tarrapiosky, one of the foremost jurists in Canada, notes: "Human rights, claimed by individuals and groups, are considered so fundamental to human dignity that they receive special protection under the law and usually under the constitution of a country." While adherence to human rights principles alone can not fully define Canadian identity, it is important to remember that these principles are a central element in the articulation of a vision of Canada.

The question of human rights, which is hotly debated in different parts of the world today, is essentially an issue that relates to equality. Concern with the issue of equality is of long standing, dating back to the years before the Christian era, when Greek philosophers were addressing this theme in very explicit and pointed ways. Since then, these discussions have, more or less, dominated the intellectual discourses in Eastern and Western societies. In the Western world, these discussions accompanied the Industrial Revolution and eventually formed the cornerstone of Western intellectual thought. Today, the issue of equality is part of both the national and international discourse.

Western liberal democracies are highly industrialized and complex societies. Correspondingly, discussions of equality and of human rights have become increasingly complex and

rights within liberal democracies is characterized by what the famous Canadian political philosopher Charles Taylor calls tension in liberal thought regarding the achievement of equality. Is equality best achieved, he asks, by *difference blindness* (i.e., by ignoring human differences and treating all individuals and groups equally) or by *recognition of difference* (i.e., by giving attention to differences in the needs of different individuals and groups)?

The above -noted tension is part of the Canadian experience. This is so because of differences in the conceptualization of human rights. In times past, a unitary conceptualization, based on difference-blindness and on singular emphasis on the individual, was dominant. This conceptualization is no longer adequate to address a myriad of national and global situations in which human rights are implicated.

In modern times, the United Nations must be credited with advancement in our understanding and conceptualization of human rights. The first international instrument, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, was created by the United Nations General Assembly (December 9, 1948) in response to Nazi atrocities against Jews. This was followed by a remarkable declaration, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly on December 10, 1948. The human rights principles underlying this declaration are freedom, equality and dignity,

These two international instruments have had considerable influence on subsequent U.N. declarations, notably the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights. These latter declarations protect collective rights to self-determination, among other things.

National legislation pertaining to human rights in Canada, culminating in the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, has undoubtedly been influenced by these international instruments. The Canadian Charter, for example, guarantees fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights and equality rights. Further, the Canadian Charter protects minority-language rights and, under specified conditions, other collective rights.

The complexity of human rights principles, violations and claims in Canada is reflected in a typology developed by Evelyn Kallen in her book *Ethnicity and Human Rights in Canada*. Kallen distinguishes between *individual* human rights ("rights to life, freedom, equal opportunity, dignity"); *group/category* rights ("rights to life, freedom, i.e. group autonomy, equal opportunity, group dignity"); *collective cultural rights* ("distinctive ethnocultural design for living"); *collective national rights* ("self determination"); and *collective Aboriginal rights* ("right and title to Aboriginal



peoples"). The respective claims which correspond to these fundamental human rights are individual; categorical; collective; national; and Aboriginal rights claims.

Human rights, to be promoted and properly implemented, require government intervention. This is normally done by enacting laws against discriminatory treatment from individuals, groups or even governments. Typically laws provide administrative assistance to victims of discrimination and compensation for injury or loss of employment to the economically deprived. In that sense they differ from civil liberties which require restriction of government action. For example, the traditional Western value of freedom of religion and expression requires restriction of government action. To answer the question posed in the title of this brief article, it is clear that human rights are both individual and collective. Thus, equality is best achieved by "difference-blindness" as well as by "recognition of difference." While tension will probably always exist between these two forms of recognizing difference, judicious application of the cardinal principles of freedom, equality, and dignity is absolutely necessary to resolve this tension and to facilitate the achievement of equality. ■

Dr. Baba Abu-Laban is the director of the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration.



Have *you* had enough to eat?

food as a human right

Do *you* worry whether your food will run out before you get money to buy more?

Does *your* household ever run out of money to buy food?

Do *you* ever eat less than you feel you should because there is not enough money for food?

Do *you* ever cut back to eating just a few kinds of cheaper food because of not enough money?

Have *you* ever gone without food for a day or more because there wasn't enough money to buy food?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, then you know what food security in Canada is all about—it means having access to good quality, nutritious food at all times in order to lead a healthy, productive life. There are many people in the world, both at home and abroad, who lack food security. In 1991, the Edmonton Food Policy Council found that there were 77,000 people (1 in 8 Edmontonians) who were having trouble getting enough food on a regular basis. Things have surely worsened in the last three years of cutbacks as indicated by the threefold increase in numbers of people getting food from the Food Bank - 22,498 individuals in Edmonton were served by hamper programs in May, 1996. People are not hungry in Edmonton because there is not enough food; likewise, in the world there is enough food to feed everyone. People are hungry because they lack land on which to grow their own food, or they lack income to buy the food that is available.

If we are really concerned about eliminating hunger, we must stop treating food as a commodity. Food is a basic necessity and a basic human right. It is not something we can do without. When food is treated as a commodity, it means that it is bought and sold and that it must be produced most "efficiently" at lowest cost. For example, we are told that we need to exploit our comparative advantage to grow grain on the prairies and then export this excess.

This has led to globalization of the food system governed by

Agreement (NAFTA)—so that at breakfast we drink coffee from Brazil, spread our toast with peanut butter made with peanuts from Senegal, eat strawberries from Mexico and bananas from Honduras. Certainly we cannot grow all the things we like to eat and so some global food trade is necessary. However, exporting cheap basic food to other countries undermines their own agriculture and their ability to grow food for themselves. Globalization of agriculture threatens Canadians' food security as we import food from all over the world—the average food calorie in the store travels 2000 to 3000 km. Canada produces a 400 per cent excess of wheat which it exports—if it were not for this, we would be a net food importer.

There are justice and environmental factors which also call the global food trade into question. Much of the food we eat is grown in developing countries like Mexico. What are the ethics of this food production system? We in Canada are living high off the resources of the developing world, one-third to one-half of their land is used to grow cash crops for us and this makes it unavailable for them to grow food for themselves and hunger is increasing. Only 15 per cent of Mexicans are considered well-nourished. Forty million Mexicans live in poverty and 18 million live in extreme poverty. Mexican peasant farmers (40 per cent of the population) cannot produce corn and beans as cheaply as the industrial agriculture of the United States so they must stop production of these basic foods and buy them from the

little pay and they are often exposed to pesticides which have been banned here. Long distance transportation of food also adds to the environmental costs which are often ignored. So the cost of cheap food is maintained on the backs of exploited farm labor and pollution of the environment.

Parallels between Mexico and Canada can be seen, although Canadians are much richer. The depopulation of rural Canada continues with only 3 per cent of the population on farms and the farms themselves are having to get bigger and bigger to be able to survive and be competitive. Family members work off-farm and youth move to the city in search of work, but jobs here also seem scarce. Budget cuts at the provincial and federal level lead to a widening gap between rich and poor.

We need to ask the question: "How are the most disadvantaged, both here and in the developing world, affected by Canadian policies?" We need to encourage our government to enact policies that provide a more ethical approach to trade. Farmers in the developing world ought to be able to grow food for their family and their country first, rather than producing food for export to pay debts that have already been paid back many fold because of high interest rates.

In Canada, we need an economy which supports job creation in the sectors which pay adequate salaries and we need support for education and training for people to access those jobs. We must advocate for support programs where people can earn enough to have the dignity of having enough money to provide their own food, rather than being forced to depend on handouts at the food bank. Hunger is associated with poverty, since those with money will always eat.

Agriculture which shortens the distance between producer and consumer needs to be encouraged. For example, by buying locally grown food at farmers' markets or in food buying clubs, or being a part of community shared agriculture, where city people buy a share in market gardener production and get fresh produce delivered each week. Community gardens give people a chance to grow their own food.

Food is a basic human right, not a commodity to be sold only to those who can afford it. Eradication of hunger is a question of having the political will to encourage local food production and distribution, and to provide jobs with adequate income, so that all people can enjoy food security. ■■

Dr. Kathryn Olson has a PhD in organic chemistry and has worked on environment, development, food security, and social justice issues, both locally, nationally and internationally. She is particularly interested in community development and public participation in decision-making. She is currently Executive Director of Earthkeeping, an environmental

As The Pendulum Swings...

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HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIAL RIGHTS

In 1972, the newly elected government of Alberta signified its commitment to human rights by proclaiming as its first two pieces of legislation, the Alberta Human Rights Act and the Individual Rights Protection Act. This commitment was further emphasized by the fact that these bills were enacted as primary legislation, meaning that all other acts had to conform to human rights legislation.

These acts put our province in the forefront with respect to human rights legislation in Canada and I recall the great enthusiasm and high expectations with which their enactment was greeted, particularly by those Albertans who had suffered from unfair discrimination. The members of Alberta's first human rights commission which had been set up by the government to ensure fair treatment of all our citizens were quite confident that with such strong legislative backing they would be enabled to carry out their mandate with success.

In its preamble the Individual Rights Protection Act stated that: "It is recognized in Alberta as a fundamental principle and as a matter of public policy that all persons are equal in dignity and rights without regard to race, religious beliefs, color, age, ancestry or place of origin." Later amendments added gender and physical and mental disability as grounds for protection.

The act stipulated that these grounds for discrimination applied to the areas of employment, housing and services customarily available to the public. That is, for example, no person could be fired from a job, evicted from a home or denied a service available to other members of the public purely because of their race, religious belief, colour, etc.

As members of Alberta's first Human Rights Commission we were not long into our mandate before we began receiving complaints of unfair discrimination based on sexual orientation, complaints which we could neither accept nor process because this was not one of the protected grounds in the act. Subsequently we received briefs which outlined the character and prevalence of such discrimination experienced within the province and we met with these individuals and groups most

to have sexual orientation included in the act as one of the grounds on which discrimination would not be allowed.

This being over 20 years ago, there was considerable controversy over the issue and consequently the commission undertook to study the situation in an effort to discover and understand the basis for the complaints and the extent of the discrimination being suffered.

After reviewing the extensive input received, the commission members held lengthy discussions on the issue and finally, later in the 1970s, after a great deal of soul searching, recommended that the government amend their act to include sexual orientation as a protected category. The government declined to approve the recommendation with the generally supportive minister of the day candidly admitting that to do so would be political suicide. Succeeding commissions over the past two decades have made the same recommendation and received the same response.

The Alberta Human Rights Review Panel which was set up by the government in 1993 to review provincial human rights legislation and the operation of the commission also recommended that sexual orientation be protected under the legislation. It should be noted that their report, "Equal in Dignity and Rights," which contained this recommendation, was compiled by the review panel only after extensive public hearings were held and many written briefs representing a broad cross-section of Albertans were received and reviewed. As the Honorable Gary Mar, the minister who had appointed the members of the review panel wrote in his report: "They went into the communities and listened to thousands of Albertans." Having done that and then made their recommendations on the basis of what they had heard the members of the review panel felt that the government no longer needed to fear "political suicide" if the act were amended with respect to gay rights. They were wrong. Once again the government declined to adopt their recommendation. They were puzzled as to why a government which "recognizes as a fundamental principle and a matter of public policy that all persons are

In the opinion of many people working in the field, the government has been unduly influenced by a strong lobby speaking out for a group of people who are opposed to granting protection to gays and lesbians; people who do so in the mistaken belief that such protection would constitute a "special right" for gays and lesbians and that this would have a negative impact on the rights of other Albertans.

It was interesting to note that in response to questions from members of the review panel, most of these people insisted that they were not prejudiced against gays and lesbians and bore them no ill will. Many also acknowledged that they did not think it fair or right that citizens who were gay should be denied employment, or a place to live, be denied services available to other citizens or be the victims of verbal or physical "gay bashing." They did, however, insist that, in some way, protecting gays and lesbians from this unjust and unfair treatment would in effect give them "special rights" and that this would somehow impact negatively upon other Albertans, particularly in the area of family values. Their fears were not allayed in spite of the fact that there is no evidence of this having happened in provinces in which legislated protection has been in force for years.

Opponents to gay rights who are fearful for family values seem not to recognize that gays and lesbians come from families, belong to families; that they have parents and brothers and sisters and indeed, some have children. They do not seem to recognize the suffering which these families are forced to endure because of the negative attitudes and actions of some other Albertans, actions which are seemingly condoned by the inaction of our government. The government seems not to realize that its refusal to grant legal protection against these abuses constitutes a sorry blot upon our province's record of social justice. Education is undoubtedly the best way to stem unfounded fear and unhealthy attitudes but until these are diminished legislation against unfair discrimination is needed to protect all those who suffer from it. Gary Mar, minister formerly responsible for human rights in Alberta, has written: "By preserving the rights and dignity of each citizen, every person in Alberta can fulfil her or his potential" and "Clearly human rights protection is a vital part of the 'Alberta Advantage'."

Some years ago it took the heroic efforts of "Alberta's Famous Five" to prove that women were persons. I would suggest that it is now time for all fair-minded Albertans to convince their fellow citizens and their government that gays and lesbians and the members of their families are persons too, and that we owe them the protection of their dignity and rights. In so doing we will help them to fulfil their potential as contributing citizens gladly promoting the "Alberta Advantage." ¶

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Looking Back

why the U.N. declaration of human rights was created

"Human rights considers the non-negotiable essentials which are necessary in order that life may be life."

Michael Czerny S.J., writing from El Salvador shortly after seven Jesuits were murdered for alleged political crimes.

This brief article describes how the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into being, its purpose and its effect. Some have referred to the declaration as the new Magna Carta, some have even given it a place alongside the Ten Commandments. Basically the declaration, following on the heels of the worst war in history, is about peace.

The topic of human rights has been on the world stage for many years, though perhaps never so much than from 1948 when the declaration was introduced. Looking back in history, far back to 1685 B.C., we find the Code of Hammurabi hailed as the first Charter of Human Rights. The King of Babylon was seen "to cause righteousness in the land ... that the strong not harm the weak".

We know that the ancient countries of Greece, China and India had policies respecting the dignity of individual persons. Plato, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas wrote extensively on justice and rights. Mohammed (571-632) in the Koran writes: "The individual is regarded in Islam as the most important unit in the Cosmos. Born free with a right to choose...".

In the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, we read: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." In the first half of this century, the end of the First World War marked the launching of a concerted effort for the advancement of human rights on an international level. Before this period, rights were the concern and jurisdiction of each separate government.

In 1919 the League of Nations was formed as a step towards finding lasting peace. The league's efforts focused on protecting minorities in whatever country they resided. But the issue

of whether the sovereign power of states overtook the rights of individuals was not addressed until the United Nations supplanted the League of Nations.

On April 25, 1945, the founding meeting of the United Nations opened in San Francisco, with Canada participating. At the conclusion of this historic gathering, the United Nation's Charter, in which human rights protection found expression, was signed. The second paragraph of the preamble to the charter explicitly reaffirms "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person."

The charter also established the U.N. Human Rights Commission. Its first item of business was the preparation of an international bill of rights. The chairperson of the commission was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt who guided the commission's work with the aid of notable international lawyers, including John P. Humphrey of Canada.

The backdrop for the urgency of this international bill was, of course, the Second World War, when the world woke up to the atrocious nature of human rights abuse carried out during that conflict, notably the tragedy of the concentration camps.

The rights described in the declaration were not the result of abstract philosophizing. Rather, they were a response to the specific needs of 20th century humanity. States and their leaders were making distinctions between citizens because of race, religion and ethnic origin. Russian pogroms shocked the world. The treatment of blacks in the United States was a scandal. Ruthless dictators in many developing countries seized wealth and power at the cost of countless innocent lives.

On December 10, 1948, the U.N. National Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

declaration is a further step in the search for world peace. It offered a common ground for hope. Without respect for the individual, there could be no peace. The late U.S. President Truman addressing the United Nations said: "The U.N. charter is dedicated to the achievement and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Unless we can attain those objectives for all men and women everywhere—without regard to race, language or religion—we cannot have permanent peace and security."

The U.N. declaration acknowledges that sovereign states cannot be counted on to protect the rights of their own citizens and the minority groups within their own borders. During the writing of the declaration, the Soviet Bloc argued that the document would take away the sovereignty of the state and acknowledge the sovereignty of the individual.

Human rights declarations, charters, legislation, wherever they exist, are meant to protect people from the power of governments. It has been said of the Declaration that "it has become an international standard by which the conduct of governments is judged." Again, "the Declaration constitutes an obligation for members for the international community," and, "the declaration has become a common standard for all peoples and nations."

John Diefenbaker, when he introduced the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960, stated that the document "reflected a growing concern that an expanding government should respect the rights of those it was there to serve."

Referring to Canada's own Charter of Rights the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Brian Dickson observed: "The charter is first and foremost about government's obligation to respect human rights. It is a decision on the part of government to subject itself to new responsibilities."

In light of the above, it is alarming and frightening that in Alberta, members of the legislative assembly have stood up in the legislature and advocated the abolishment of the Charter of Rights and our own human rights commission. These documents, it seems, prevent elected members from getting tough on their people. The Chinese government, without human rights legislation, got tough on its people in Tiannamen Square.

The declaration has no legal binding power. However, since its proclamation, courts and countries have endowed it with authority and power. Many treaties, constitutions and international agreements are made "in compliance with the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights." The principles of the declaration have been expanded upon in two other documents which do have binding power on the nations which endorse them. They are the U.N. International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural rights and the International Covenant on Civil

To get a sense of what is in these documents, it is worth looking at a couple of passages from the declaration. Article 23: "Everyone has the right to work ... to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment." Article 25: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services." Article 26: "Everyone has the right to education."

The declaration is not a perfect document. Mrs. Roosevelt, chairperson of the committee which wrote it, stated: "Naturally it is not a perfect document. Being, as it must be, a composite document to meet the thoughts of so many different peoples, there must be a considerable number of compromises. On the whole, however, it is a good document. We could never hope for perfection no matter how many times we revised the declaration, for we could always see something a little better that one might do."

The declaration has spawned a number of human rights documents in Canada. Every province and territory has its own legislation and commission or council to administer it. The primary Canadian human rights legislation is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is part of our Constitution and therefore obligates all levels of governments to observe it.

Some persons complain that the declaration focuses on the rights of individuals, not on their responsibilities. This may be true. But it is also true, keeping in mind the Second World War, that the time had come to stress individual rights. Nonetheless, the declaration addresses our community responsibilities. Article 29: "Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible."

Because Canada has signed the declaration, all of us have a responsibility to protect the rights of one another in our own country and throughout the world. This is a "universal" declaration. It applies to everyone in the universe.

In 1994, the Government of Alberta appointed eight citizens to review human rights in this province. The following is a passage taken from the panel's report, "Equal in Dignity and Rights":

The year 1993, the 45th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ... Canada joined with the other participants in Vienna in reaffirming that the universal nature of human rights is beyond question and that "it is the duty of states, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to protect and promote all human rights and fundamental freedoms."

The year 1997 is the 50th Anniversary of the proclamation of

NO LEISURE

*for many
immigrant
senior
women*



she sat down and began to cry. She asked for help that I could not give. She wanted to be sent back to her home country. She thought that some agency or the government would help. She had been here for six years. She was 70 but did not qualify for an old age security pension as she was a sponsored person under family class and therefore did not qualify for social assistance. She could not carry on all the household and babysitting duties for her son and daughter-in-law who were by sheer economic necessity compelled to go out and work minimum wage jobs, leaving their school-going child, a preschooler and a baby to this frail lady's care. She said she worked from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. Could I somehow arrange to send her back home to her other sons who had farms, trucks and servants? I asked if she would allow me to reveal her name, and her son's name to the community so that I could raise money for her. *NO! NO!! NO!!!* I understood. She had her dignity and the family's honor to think of. In that case, would she let me talk to her son? No. All senior or near senior women are not widows, but they all assume roles of babysitters to grandchildren, cooks and full-time housekeepers. The husbands, also seniors, may find other male seniors in their linguistic and religious groups and while away their time in shopping malls playing cards. In fact, one such senior proudly told me that he never made his bed. Some newly arrived grandmothers might even be happy in this situation, but in time, they fall prey to age-related or isolation-related illness. Think of the eight months of cold when they can't leave the house at all. They get sick and depressed. If they are very lucky they might be treated with respect and given attention, especially, if they are mothers of the man in the family. If the aging couple has been sponsored by the daughter, the level of respect and warmth may be very low. Even though the family might be loving, the fact is there is isolation, lack of independence (financial and other). There is also a role reversal here, the mother is powerless in her daughter or daughter-in-law's house. Roles are reversed, seniors used to giving to their children are now in an asking position. Pensions at home don't amount to much in Canadian money.

There is a dynamic here that inevitably results in CONFLICT and possibly abuse. The expectations on both sides are unrealistic. The working adult children expect reliable housekeepers and babysitters while they are trying to make it in their new country. The parents come here expecting to be taken care of by their adult children. They come with dreams of enjoying leisure and rest, after a lifetime of paid and unpaid work (as is in the housewife's case). Quite often upon arrival they discover not only do they have to bear the brunt of most household chores, but they have to go out and

language skills they work in the service industry. There is nothing wrong with that, some of them can do a lot of work both in and outside the house, but their existence is joyless. The grandchildren mostly do not or cannot converse in the language spoken by their grandparents. The relationship between grandchildren and grandparents, because of language problems, is polite, not close. The adult children have no time. The elders and the adult children often get into generational conflict because of old values and norms. Women are the ones who are worst off. They have nowhere to go except when taken to places of worship. At least there they have the opportunity for limited socialization, but that is about all.

Nothing prepares them for this kind of life.

They often come from an extended family system where the daughters-in-laws lived in meek submission and the sons were mostly out earning a livelihood and were very respectful when at home.

In Canada the immigrant communities, in this case South Asian (although there are commonalities in many ethnic communities), need to address these problems with care and compassion. As statistics show, nearly 20 per cent of the Canadian population will be over 60 by 2001, and approximately 22 per cent of all seniors report an ethnic origin other than English or French. Approximately 6,000 seniors immigrate to Canada each year. Among seniors twice as many women as men speak neither English nor French. It is not just the family class-sponsored, middle-aged or senior people we should consider, we should also consider those independent class immigrant seniors who are retiring; their needs will be different.

Elder abuse or exploitation and neglect are well hidden. Only when sponsorship breaks down and the older person comes seeking support and social assistance does it come to light. Then too, there is great reluctance on the part of all parties concerned to reveal anything. Women, I cannot emphasize enough, suffer more. They come from a gender-segregated society to a gender-integrated society. How and where can she go for recreation or support? She has been socialized into thinking that during childhood the father will look after all her needs, during youth the husband, and, should she be widowed, the son will look after her. In the new country she is voiceless, friendless and clueless. Feelings of insecurity, rejection by loved ones for whom they have sacrificed all can make them mentally ill.

When sponsorship breakdown occurs and there is proven elder abuse, social assistance should be provided by the government (as is the case in wife abuse).

participants emphasized this fact. However, they called for accessible, appropriate information and services no matter what it takes. Mainstream agencies provide services appropriate only to the culture of the majority. I believe there are ample such services. In order to accommodate new Canadian seniors in programming and policy, various key community people should be consulted. Community based services should be encouraged and funded.

Seniors should be given free English classes so they have functional literacy and survival conversational skills in English. Currently Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC) classes are free and available to seniors but not if they are CITIZENS! Immigrants can apply for citizenship in three years, and it may not have been possible for them to access these classes during that period because of lack of information or because of the economic necessity to earn money. Ethnic seniors do want an opportunity to participate fully as Canadians. One senior told me he wanted to learn to speak English like me because he saw himself as a resource person who wanted to share his knowledge and skills with Canadians! Ethnic seniors can be trained to be volunteer mediators and peer counsellors. Settlement service agencies could be funded to hire appropriate staff to coordinate these activities. As well, there should be funding to reimburse volunteers for out of pocket expenses.

There should be recreational tours organized for immigrant seniors specifically to acquaint them with the history of Canada. They are interested in learning about their new country. Some Canadian recreational activities could be initiated and taught. Ballroom dancing may not work, but then again who knows, we haven't tried.

There should be language-specific awareness workshops on access to services, finances, rights, and health issues (nutrition, exercise, depression, menopause, etc.).

Nursing homes should be encouraged to hire multilingual minority staff to interpret and perhaps cook food that seniors are used to. I see this issue as a settlement, integration and adaptation issue, not so much as a human rights issue. However, it becomes a human rights issue when a Canadian senior citizen and a new Canadian senior citizen are not treated the same in areas of access to information and services. It is time that families, communities and the government deal with this issue honestly and generously to provide ethnic- and gender-sensitive services that meet the social, financial, emotional, psychological and health needs of all seniors.

Aging well is a human right. 11



human rights in Alberta: **AN ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE**

I have been asked to write an article on human rights and relate it to a newspaper clipping on health woes and social problems involving Alberta's Aboriginal people.

Before I comment on the newspaper clipping, I would like to practise a long-standing traditional feature of my Aboriginal culture and tell you a story related to the overall idea and concept of human rights. I must explain first that I was taught about human rights at an early age. My father, Stan Daniels, who later in life became president of the Metis Association of Alberta (now known as the Metis Nation of Alberta), served in the Second World War on the front lines. He saw conditions first-hand and witnessed some of the results of concentration camps after the Allies defeated Nazism.

After the war he got married and raised four daughters. Being the eldest I was privy to many of the wartime movies and to dad's commentaries about Canada's efforts. He often spoke of 'man's inhumanity to man,' about the Nuremberg trials and about the primary necessity to develop human rights on a world-wide scale. He also spoke about how we as human beings build systems, usually with the intent to bring out the best in us, but how these can also turn into 'heartless' systems. As president of the association, one of his most common sayings was, "This system has no heart, but it is Metis people who will give it heart."

An example of the heartless system he spoke of was a situation that was brought to his attention in the latter part of the 1960s. At that time deceased Aboriginal babies who had been receiving medical attention were being sent back home in plastic bags. Their tiny stiff bodies were delivered to community airstrips where parents were notified to claim the bodies. My father was able to bring attention to this situation and procedures were changed.

As he started to bring more of these types of issues to the attention of authorities, to the media and to the general public, an up-and-coming politician was hard on the trail to becoming

he became premier, the Individual Rights Protection Act (IRPA) was enacted.

We viewed the IRPA and the resulting Alberta Human Rights Commission (HRC) as an official vehicle by which change could be affected in the way various systems and those working in them delivered services to Alberta's Aboriginal people. As well, Metis Association staff were encouraged to apply and work with the new commission. Times were changing for Alberta's Aboriginal people... or so we thought!

Prior to the 1970s, there were two authorities that operated and controlled Aboriginal communities, the church and the Indian agent representing Indian affairs on reserves (and the Metis colony supervisor representing the provincial government on Metis settlements, formerly called Metis colonies). Even if Aboriginal people at the time, wanted to go to a non-Aboriginal authority to complain about the sometimes degrading treatment they received, they just were not practised at doing so. In addition, the system(s) were not practised at handling complaints from Aboriginal people. The few times when Aboriginal people did complain, there were even fewer times when something was done in the community so that people could see results. This did very little to build people's belief and confidence in the system(s).

The following story I believe, describes why Aboriginal people, even today, may find it difficult to use the systems set up to assist us and other Albertans.

In the mid 1980s, a group of educated, concerned Aboriginal people provided a copy of a research report on an Alberta residential school to a government film agency, with the recommendation a film be produced. The research had been conducted by an Aboriginal university student.

After reading the report, the agency worker asked if the contents of the report were real. The report revealed the conditions and some of the abuses that were experienced by Aboriginal children who attended a residential school. The film did not get produced.

was on sexual abuse in an Eastern Canadian boys' school.

For many years, our concerned group was left with the feeling that when we, as Aboriginal people tell our story, it is not received with the same benefit of belief as if someone else tells our story for us, or that it is not 'believable' until someone else tells a similar story like that of *The Boys of St. Vincent*.

I recently spoke to one of the Aboriginal film makers who went with the group to the film agency years ago and she informed me that producers now seek out the assistance of Aboriginal people when developing material on Aboriginal topics, and that the disbelief shown in the 1980s has indeed changed.

It was also in the mid 1980s when the Director of Alberta's Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Centre inferred (just short of directly stating) that the rising rate of STDs at the time was due to the increased number of Aboriginal people contracting such diseases (according to public health record statistics). As members of an Aboriginal community we took issue with the director. First of all, we questioned her use of medical records of patients attending a publicly funded health centre; how she determined that the people she referred to were Aboriginal; and what purpose she had in mind by singling out Aboriginal people in such a derogatory way in the media. We also questioned if she had access to the private medical records of Albertans who visited private doctor's offices for STD treatments and whether she included them in her assessment of the STD situation in the province.

Eventually she did apologize to the Aboriginal community. However, we never did find out what the purpose was for singling us out. Nor did we find out why the use of public health clinics would be jeopardized by making public statements about one group of people.

Here we are in the mid 1990s and we now have a member of the legislative assembly making statements that link alcoholism to northern Alberta Aboriginal people and the high rate of low birth weight and infant mortality in northern Alberta. Because Aboriginal life expectancy rates are lower it "skews the figures" when it comes to discussing health funding allocations between Edmonton and Calgary. (*Edmonton Journal*, June 14, 1996: "Cash won't solve health woes—MLA, Social problems at the root")

Once again, as an Aboriginal Albertan, I question first of all if any of these "officials" (the standing committee on health reform) have included in their numbers and percentages the private medical records of those Albertans who visit private doctor's offices for treatment of one kind of health problem or another as a result of alcoholism, and why we are singled out again.

Secondly, I question why we are not discussing the need for

some circles. Such attitudes perpetuate the problem and result in inadequate services for Aboriginal people. We might begin by redirecting some services and by allowing Aboriginal health professionals to deliver services.

The recent Dalton inquiry (only the first name is being used although this was a public fatality inquiry), serves as an example why some services can and should be redirected. Two and one-half-year-old Dalton, who was still seriously ill, died while being transported from one hospital to another in a taxicab. His mother asked for, and then demanded better service, but the fiscal constraints took precedence. Budget cuts affected both the use of technology to detect just how serious the little boy's illness was, and the mode of transportation for transferring him from one hospital to another.

I attended part of the inquiry into Dalton's death. A lot of time was spent on determining why certain procedures were administered and some procedures were not. Very little time was spent, however, on the root of the problem.

The problem from an Aboriginal viewpoint is that some systems, no matter how much money is sunk into the operation, do not utilize their resources "to create the human edge" which is very much needed when delivering services to Aboriginal people. Then there are other systems who have administrators and employees who know how to deliver quality services to human beings regardless of race, color, etc., even in tough economic times. These systems, we find, are more accepting of our involvement as Aboriginal people, and are more respectful of the way we do things.

The greatest conflicts exist in systems with employees who either do not want our involvement for whatever reason, or those systems and employees who expect Aboriginal employees to totally "buy into" the existing organizational behaviour, structure and procedures regardless of whether these are having negative affects on Aboriginal individuals and communities. The inference is that the existing process and procedure is the way to get things done. If we continued to accept that idea, deceased Aboriginal bodies might still be delivered in plastic bags to their parents up north. After all, the cost was within budget... wasn't it? ■■

Dorothy Daniels worked within government systems for 11 years. She has worked with the Alberta Human Rights Commission and is currently studying law at the University of Alberta. Throughout her years working with government and after, Ms. Daniels has maintained ties to her culture and to the Aboriginal communities she travelled to with her father when he was President of the Metis Association.





Edmonton Community Loan Fund

Approximately 18 months ago a group came together to discuss the possibility of establishing a loan fund here in Edmonton. As a group we saw a need to provide low income individuals access to funds to start businesses. We knew that low income individuals, perhaps those who are unemployed, or with no assets or security have great difficulty accessing loans from traditional mainstream financial institutions. We also believed one of the ways to improve a persons economic position is through the establishment of a small business.

Early last year we began to research other established loan funds and found in fact there are many successful examples right here in Canada. We contacted operating loan funds in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg and reviewed their organizational structure, their programs and services, and their operational procedures. We hired a researcher to assist us and document the information that had been collected.

We contacted a law firm and they provided pro bono legal services and advise and assisted us with incorporation of two entities, the Edmonton Community Loan Fund Society and the Edmonton Community Loan Fund Corporation. After completing our research (mostly through volunteer labor) we were convinced that we could establish a similar fund right here in Edmonton. It was then that we began to raise funds and accept applications for loans.

There is no doubt that small business plays a very important role in our economy. It is estimated that over one-million Canadians operate their own business and it is quickly

small business creates over 75 per cent of all new jobs in Canada. However, statistics say it all. The majority of businesses fail within the first three years and the main reasons given for these failures are lack of management expertise and lack of capital.

Traditional lenders know these facts and are very reluctant to finance new business start-ups. It becomes impossible to borrow funds if you are unemployed, have a lack of security, or do not fit the computer credit model of the lender. That's where the community loan fund comes in.

World wide there are many successful multinational corporations that started as small businesses. McDonald's Restaurant started with one hamburger stand set up by the McDonald brothers Ronald and Mac. Their first stand flourished and they opened a second and third. At that time the milkshake equipment salesman convinced the brothers to give him the franchise rights and the rest is history.

Ikea Furniture started in the basement of Ingamare's home in Sweden shortly after the Second World War. In order to get his furniture out of the basement he had to design it in such a way that it could be taken apart and then reassembled later on. Today Ikea has large retail outlets in many urban centres around the world.

Apple computers was started in a garage by two university students. Bill Gates is now the richest man in the United States started his software business in his bedroom. Hewlett Packard started in 1948 with a \$500 loan not from a bank, but from Friends and Family. work hard, they started on a

shoestring budget plus loans from family and friends and they all started small. (Today we refer to their businesses as micro businesses).

It just proves that with the right idea, a lot of hard work and a bit of seed capital, the sky is the limit.

Our first loan fund recipient, Tom Keating set up Tomik Creations. He designs, develops, and sells unique wood products using recycled wood. He required funds to purchase equipment and tools, but was unable to obtain financial assistance from traditional sources. He prepared a comprehensive business plan and submitted it to our loans committee and after meeting with our committee Tom's loan was approved.

Our second recipient is Snjezana Sanjevic. Snjezana wanted to open a day care facility in her home. She has all the necessary qualifications and was working with a licensed day care at the time, but she needed capital to purchase beds, appliances and equipment to meet the standards of the day care. She prepared a detailed business plan and submitted it to the loans committee. After a couple of meetings the loans committee came back with a positive recommendation.

Without the help of the Edmonton Community Loan Fund, both Tom and Snjezana would not have been able to start their businesses. Over the summer the committee is reviewing three applications and recommendations will be made to the fund's board. We do not have paid staff, but hope to be in a position to hire someone part time next year. We are continually looking for people to sit on our committees, researchers, or mentors who are willing to work with our loan recipients and give advice to help keep their businesses profitable.

Our annual general meeting will be held in September and we are looking for new board members, especially from the business community.

To date we have not received any money from the government and we intend to remain self-supporting. We plan to raise funds in three ways: by selling memberships to individuals, organizations and corporations, by accepting direct donations to help offset operating costs, and by accepting investments that go toward increasing the loan fund. With investments we will pay a rate of return to the investor and then will mark up the rate once the money is lent out. For more information about the Community Loan Fund please contact Steve Crocker at 432-1009. ■

Steve Crocker is an Edmonton consultant and is a director

Death by Starvation



I attended an appeal hearing against a death sentence a couple of months ago—death by starvation. In case you weren't aware that sentences of death by starvation are handed out regularly in Alberta, this was an appeal by a single mother against being totally cut off social assistance. In Alberta, if you cross your social worker by taking sick, having a sick child, not going for an employment interview, not attending a compulsory course, or, as in this case, by failing to receive a letter which they believe was sent to you, then you can be cut off social assistance for "noncompliance." Then you get no money for rent, no money for food for yourself or your children, and no money for medicine. You can appeal the decision, but the appeal will be at least a week away, and the results will be mailed to you a week later, and if you haven't starved to death by that time, you will either be reinstated on social assistance, or allowed to continue your slow death by starvation.

It is by such policies as this that our former Minister of Family and Social Services, Mike Cardinal, was able to reduce the "welfare rolls" by huge numbers. What has happened to all those people who have been cut off supports for independence, is not known. Or if it is, nobody is talking. Remember, this was the minister who threatened to fire his staff for talking about their work.

In the appeal that I attended, Betty (not her real name), had been told that she was required to attend a certain "self-help" type course, but no date was given. A letter was supposedly sent to her with the date, but she did not receive the letter, so did not attend the course. For this heinous crime she was cut off social assistance, no money for rent, no money for utilities, no money for medicine, no money for

misaddressed, because the letter sent to Betty telling her of this appeal hearing arrived back at the social services office the morning of the appeal, and was never delivered to Betty.

THIS IS NOT THE CARING SOCIETY THAT I WANT FOR ALBERTA. WE NEED A MINISTER OF FAMILY SOCIAL SERVICES WHO IS COMMITTED TO SAVING PEOPLES LIVES, HELPING THEM WHEN THEY ARE DOWN AND OUT, GIVING THEM A HELPING HAND RATHER THAN A KICK IN THE TEETH.

In hearings of the Quality of Life Commission we were told that social assistance recipients get cut off assistance for all kinds of petty reasons, but I couldn't comprehend the savagery of the department's actions until I attended this appeal. In a society where we have a premier who "listens" and who "cares," how can we refuse the basic necessities of life, food, shelter and medicine, to anyone? No human being is so terrible, so depraved that we have the right to sentence her to death by starvation.

In any court of law a death sentence would never be handed out by a judge without the accused being represented by legal counsel and the media in attendance to report the actions of the court. But in the Alberta Family and Social Services department a social worker (financial worker, employment worker, etc.) apparently can impose the sentence of death by starvation without any outsider being present, no legal counsel present to assure fairness, no media to report on the sentence. And if there is an appeal hearing, they can apparently rule against you without you being present in the hearing.

The right of a minister of the Crown, elected by the people, to order his staff to cut off citizens without food, shelter or medicine, must be curbed. It is immoral, to say the least. If it is not illegal, it certainly ought to be.

This is not the caring society that I want for Alberta. We need a minister of family social services who is committed

the teeth.

The appeal committee graciously agreed to fax their response to the social services office the next morning, so Betty could find out the results without waiting a week for a letter. I hope it was because their consciences would bother them if she starved to death before their decision was made known.

The result of their decision: the appeal was denied. So Betty and her daughter were left with no income, no food, no home, no medical care.

Actually, the department did let her go to her doctor because she was depressed and suffering from tension during this appeal period. The doctor gave her a note indicating that she was medically unfit to work. The worker refused to accept the note, presumably because accepting it and including it in her file should result in Betty being reinstated on welfare.

As a result of being cut off, Betty has lost her home, because she was not able to make her monthly mortgage payments. She has found a job working long hours in a laundromat. She was trained as a dental assistant and worked in that profession for 29 years, from the time she was 15, until the death of the dentist with whom she worked. She would like to be working in her profession again, but will work at this job to support herself and her daughter until she finds something more appropriate.

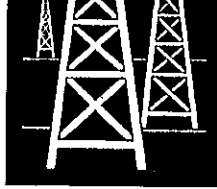
Betty is now a statistic—another family successfully removed from the welfare rolls by the department. But at what cost? Surely there must be a better way than this example of the "Alberta Advantage." ❧

Don Mayne is a Commissioner of the Edmonton Quality of Life Commission which prepared the report "Listen To Me" after meeting with 21 community groups who are affected by the government's cutbacks. He is a retired public servant and United Church minister, and is active in numerous seniors and interfaith groups in Edmonton and the province.

**The Edmonton Social
Planning Council is a
member of the**



**United Way
Alberta Capital Region**



setting industry standards

At Syncrude Canada Ltd., human rights has never been an issue. It's simply part of the job. For the over 3,600 employees who work at the world's largest oil sands operation, fair and respectful treatment of their colleagues has been a way of doing business for over 30 years.

Syncrude, in fact, has built up a diverse, highly skilled workforce that incorporates a rich blend of different cultures, languages and attitudes. Throughout the period of the company's recruitment activities in the 1970s, people from around the globe descended upon Fort McMurray, the neighboring city to the Syncrude site, and quadrupled its population.

Basic company policy encourages employees to treat each other with respect and consideration. Syncrude's "*vision and values*" statement includes guiding principles which promote a culture based on high performance, taking measured risks, mutual respect and teamwork. Discrimination or harassment is not allowed on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, or mental or physical disability. This also applies to relationships or dealings with such external parties as contractor employees, sales personnel, consultants or applicants for employment. Formal procedures are in place for any potential complaints or concerns.

Syncrude's non-discriminatory policy eases the transition for administrative, professional or technical employees who choose to pursue a different job path within the company. In some cases, female secretaries have become heavy equipment operators in the mine, driving huge trucks weighing over 240 tons. In other cases, accountants have become technicians in the utilities and upgrading plants.

Karen Jones was one employee who took the plunge. She

to 12-hour shift work as a power engineer. Syncrude helped Jones go back to school to obtain the skills base she needed for her new career and, combined with on-the-job training and colleagues who made her feel immediately like one of the team, she's never looked back. "It was something I always wanted to do," said Jones. "When the opportunity came around, there was no way I was going to pass it up."

Gender is no barrier. And neither are mental or physical disabilities. Philip Groves, an upgrading process operator, never let a back injury he incurred on the job get the worst of him. While recovering from the accident, Syncrude set up a computer in his home. Soon, Groves was back at work part-time updating procedure modules. He later returned to his regular job. "Recuperation is 90 per cent attitude and I was determined to return to work in the same capacity as I left it," said Groves. "While some companies would have considered me a liability, Syncrude made it clear I would return in at least some capacity. There's comfort in knowing you're not left out in the cold. And that gave me something to aim for."

By far, Syncrude's most well-known success story is its commitment to equal opportunity employment for Aboriginal people. The company's Aboriginal development program dates back to 1974, four years before the company even started production, when it was recognized that oil sands development would have a significant impact on the local and regional Aboriginal communities. From that point on, a concerted effort was made to achieve a workforce that reflected the population makeup of the local community, of which Aboriginal people represent 13 per cent.

Syncrude has provided Aboriginal people opportunities to upgrade their education and their skills if required. This includes scholarships, apprenticeship training and work experience programs. The company also offers all employees cross-cultural training which focuses on aboriginal cultural



Source of Income added into protections

New human rights legislation in Alberta prohibits discrimination on the basis of source of income, improving protection for persons social assistance and unemployment insurance.

The addition of this new protection is one of the key changes to the province's legislation under the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act* proclaimed on July 15, 1996. Source of income protection was one of several key amendments to the province's original legislation, The *Individual's Rights Protection Act*. Fifty-six of the 75 recommendations from the review panel became a part of the *Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*. This strengthened legislation shows that the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission is alive, well and stands ready to provide a fair, efficient and responsive service to Albertans wherever illegal forms of discrimination occur or Human Rights education is needed.

The proclamation of the legislation allows the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission to start taking complaints on grounds of "Legal Source of Income." Pensioners or widows on spousal benefits also receive protection under this ground.

Source of income protection covers complaints arising out of discrimination in the areas of tenancy, accommodation and public services. Adding this protection to the legislation was a recommendation in June 1994 from a government appointed review panel.

"This ground is of particular importance to people whose income is from social assistance and unemployment insurance. When a person's income is perceived as unstable or has

The Alberta government responded to the panel's recommendation and added source of income as a protected ground. Special interest groups, including the Building Owners and Managers Association, have raised concerns over the new protection. These concerns, however, are based on misinformation.

The new legislation allows landlords to complete full reference checks on their clients.

Source of income is an important element of Bill 24 as it protects responsible renters from being discriminated against based on the origin of their lawful income, such as pension or government assistance. ■■

Charlach Mackintosh is the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights and Citizenship Commission

What will this mean to tenants and landlords?

The Individual's Rights Protection Act is now the Alberta Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act. Three new prohibited grounds of discrimination have been added: marital status, source of income and family status. These grounds apply where there is discrimination in: publications and notices; goods, services, accommodations and facilities available to the public; and commercial tenancies and residential tenancies in a self-contained dwelling unit. They do **not** apply to other residential tenancies, such as those in rooming houses or

to protect tenants from being refused housing because of how they obtain their money. Sources could include public funds (e.g. social assistance, pensions); private companies; or (in theory) crime. The amendment also provides a mechanism for investigating complaints.

How will this affect residential landlords? Landlords must have a reason other than "source of income" when they refuse to rent to a tenant. They can still, and should, screen tenants to ensure that they will be good tenants and not interfere with other tenants. In order to show that their decisions are motivated by business considerations, and not personal prejudice, landlords should have a standard practice for screening and approving their tenants. This standard practice should include, as a minimum: a written application; checks of rental and other payment histories, as well as tenant histories with past landlords; and a policy for determining how much income a tenant will need in order to meet the rental payments. For many landlords, this will be nothing new. For others, this amendment will necessitate better documentation and business practices.

Some landlords have expressed the view that a person on social assistance is, by definition, a credit risk because they have no assets or income which can be seized if they do not pay the rent or they damage the property. However, this amendment would appear to prohibit the use of this reason as the sole reason for refusing to rent to someone.

How will the amendment affect tenants? Prospective tenants can still be rejected for reasons other than "source of income", such as not being able to afford the rent or having a bad tenant or credit history. They can be refused the tenancy even for failing to agree to these checks being made. As well, tenancies can be terminated if the tenant does not pay the rent (the tenant can be "evicted").

In practice, it is unlikely that this amendment will have a major impact because, the legislation does not apply to rooming houses, a type of accommodation rented by many low-income persons. It will be difficult to show discrimination, unless the landlord specifically says something like "I don't rent to people on welfare". Landlords have the right to do credit, reference and other checks which may still camouflage discrimination based on income. ■

HELPING CHILDREN BEAT THE ODDS



THERESA BENJAMIN

[HEALTH PROFESSIONAL]

Yesterday, she travelled 8 miles on foot, crossed 1 river by canoe, provided health counselling for 20 mothers, met with 40 traditional birth attendants, and immunized 100 children.

[It was an average day.]

Theresa lives in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where she is part of an international team of health professionals working to rid the world of six preventable child-killing diseases. **The odds can be beaten... and you can help.**

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Telephone: (613) 725-3769

Fax: (613) 725-9826

E-Mail: infociip@cpha.ca

Canada's International Immunization Program is financially supported by CIDA

*S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s' i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo.*

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted
streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the
window-panes
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the
window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the
evening.
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains.
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from
chimneys.
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap.
And, seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the
street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the-faces that you
meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me.
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"

Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]
Time to turn and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a
simple pin-
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are
thin!"]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute
will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known
them all:
Have known the evenings mornings after-
noons,
I have measured out my life with coffee
spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known
them all--
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a
pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and
ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known
them all--
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light
brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a
shawl. And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through
narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the
pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of
windows? ...

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so
peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep... tired ... or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and
me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have I the strength to force the moment to its
crisis?

A Quiz on REFUGEE RIGHTS

With all due respect to Eliot scholars,
(whose views I am cheerfully setting
aside here), Eliot's poem has, for me,
always resonated with a sensibility
which is disturbing because so
comfortingly familiar--white, middle
class, self-absorbed.

The endless conversations, the cups,
marmalade, tea and porcelain, all
suggest to me that when Prufrock
assures that "there will be time to
prepare a face to meet the faces that
you meet," he could not possibly have
had in mind having to meet the eyes
of the child imploring from the poster
on the wall in front of my desk. Or
having to face the woman and her two
children from Nigeria who are waiting
outside my office to discuss their
slimming prospects of ever being
reunited with the husband/father and
three other children who are still in
Nigeria and are missing. Having to give
them no good news.

Prufrock's avoidance of "overwhelming
questions" in favor of the trivial "Shall I
part my hair behind"? "Do I dare to eat
a peach"? thus seems to me to provide
the perfect backdrop for a consideration
of refugee rights awareness.

Imagine: a determination process for
refugee rights awareness as cocktail
party frivolity, elaborated in the form of
a game show quiz, being played in those
very rooms "where women come and go
very prettily indeed." My research

I. **Spot the oxymoron in the following list:**
civil engineer; business ethics; refugee rights.

(Laughter and nudges for the first two. The third brings conversation to an uneasy silence. Why?)

II. **Buddhists have noted that there are three kinds of giving: the giving of materials, the giving of teachings and the giving of fearlessness. Order these in terms of importance from a refugee's perspective.**

(Of course everyone will agree that all three are relevant for rebuilding a life. There will be some dispute about the order. Someone may suggest that without fearlessness the other elements, no matter how abundantly present, can not ever be shaped to offer a satisfying life experience).

III. **"Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice."**
(Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 7)

"Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art.14)

True or False: It is against the backdrop of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that the concept of the giving of fearlessness begins to be comprehensible as more than simply a call to cultivate an attitude of detached acceptance.

(Animated discussion ensues. The conversation gradually drifts off to comparisons of techniques of mindfulness, and the general consensus is that True is the correct answer. Someone suggests that there is no right answer and that questions II and III have their value merely in the raising of the questions.)

IV **Which of the following have the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) identified as being currently of concern in the area of Refugee Rights?**

1) **Head Tax** — Canada is the only country in the world which charges refugees a "right of landing fee." Since February 1995, a fee of \$975 is imposed on every adult refugee applying for permanent residence in Canada.

2) **Landing Fees** — Refugees recognized in Canada also have to pay \$500 per adult and \$100 per child as processing fees for landing. There is no loan program available.

3) **Identity Documents** — For the last three years the law has required refugees recognized in Canada to produce identity documents before they can be landed. Many refugees are in legal limbo because they cannot get documents. Women are disproportionately affected because in many societies

4) **Family Reunification** — Refugees in Canada still face long delays and procedural difficulties in reuniting with their spouse and children. These delays leave family members abroad in situations of risk and put enormous stress on all concerned, sometimes leading to family breakdowns.

(All of the above, but everyone probably got this answer. What about the right to welfare? Yes, the CCR has raised this as a concern too, and you can imagine that there are refugees in British Columbia, for example, for whom this is urgent).

IV. **Circle the correct answer:** On June 12, 1996, Mr. Osvaldo Nunez, M.P. for Bourassa (Montreal North), Official Opposition Critic for Citizenship and Immigration, introduced Bill 306 at the House of Commons. Bill 306 is:

a) an act outlawing child prostitution except in those circumstances where it can be proven to be unequivocally to the advantage of the child or its family;

b) an act respecting a national refugee awareness day on April 4 each year.

(Choice "b" is perhaps the too obviously correct answer since this has already been identified as a quiz on refugee rights awareness. However, if you were in doubt, please re-read "a" and consider how you might have thought that this could have been anything but a set-up? Which of course leads to an entirely different discussion.)

V. **True or False:** Refugee Rights Day is celebrated April 4 every year to mark the 1985 Singh decision in which the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that refugees are entitled to fundamental justice under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since the Singh decision, Canada's refugee determination system has had oral hearings, ensuring that fundamental justice is respected, and helping to make Canada a world leader in the protection of refugees, who are among the most vulnerable in any society.

(True. And if you didn't know about this, don't be surprised. Most people don't, which is one of the reasons why we might be pleased that Bill 306 mentioned above is before the House of Commons).

VII. The silence after the first question signifies that some people recognize refugee rights as a matter of life and death, not a game. **True or False.**

(I leave this one to your imagination) ¶¶

Susan is a consultant on staff at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers where she is Program Development Coordinator and Coordinator of the Edmonton Centre for Survivors or Torture and Trauma (ECSTT) — a community based mental

Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order

By Anthony H. Richmond

Oxford University Press, 1994

270 pages, \$24.50



strong sentiments *weak arguements*

Humans are migratory animals. Global migratory trade networks took Caucasians to China thousands of years ago and Chinese goods to ancient Egypt. Global trade was the impetus for the extensive colonial expansion of European nations in Africa and America from the 1500s to the late 1800s.

But the new brand of "globalization" promoted by world governments and transnational corporations seems to have led to social and economic contraction, rather than expansion.

Anthony H. Richmond, author of *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*, attempts to assail the myth of globalization with a battery of statistical tables and sociological paradigms. But lashed tenuously to

a research base lacking in anthropological, historical, political, psychological and personal context, Richmond's grand statements amount to a rousing speech to the converted.

Richmond's thesis is that the postindustrial organization of global trade patterns centralizes production in metropolitan centres. The only work outside these centres is limited to smaller distribution "nodes" which employ less workers. Migrants—whether seeking brighter economic futures, political asylum or a haven from environmental disasters—funnel into these metropolitan centres. Too often, migrant workers become scapegoats for any real or perceived strains on local resources. In the case of visible minorities, scapegoating can take the form of racist attacks, attitudes, and ultimately exclusionary immigration policies. As Richmond puts it:

One of the major contradictions inherent in the current process of global change is that, notwithstanding residual protectionism (particularly in the agricultural sphere), money, goods, and information flow relatively freely across borders, but people do not.

Richmond does attempt to contextualize his statements by devoting the first third of the book to sociological theories on migration. But these chapters amount to strings of sound bites from other authors' work, which are presented as *a priori* truth. For example, referring to French philosopher Michel Foucault's 1978 book, *The History of Sexuality*, Richmond writes: "Foucault also demonstrated the relation between sexism and racism." I do not suggest that Foucault's work was specious, but that Richmond has made a leap to convert *Sexuality's* validity as a philosophical text as scientific truth.

Typical of the first 100 pages of the book, Foucault's cameo appears on a page which also features drop-ins by five other writers. Lay readers will be frustrated with the flurry of unelaborated ideas, while readers more familiar with the material quoted will be frustrated by the disembodied presentation of the quotes.

Richmond refers extensively to his own writings on the topics of migration and racism, which date back to the 1950s. However, he passes up the opportunity to test his previous statements in the "new world order" context, begging the question of whether "globalism" truly is a new catalyst for prejudicial and discriminatory intransigence.

Richmond's strongest chapters are those in which he remembers that the migrants he means to defend are independent, salient people, and not just statistical bombast to use against

the barons of the new world order. In the middle part of the book, he compares Canadian migrant and multicultural populations and policies with those in the United States, Great Britain and Australia. The following passage sheds light on how immigration policy can select for traits which feed into nascent stereotyping on the part of the receiving country:

Caribbean and Asian immigrants and their children in Canada were better educated than their counterparts in Britain, due largely to the policy of greater occupational selectivity exercised by the Canadian immigration authorities. However, more emphasis on family reunion in recent years resulted in some increase in immigrants with elementary education only, but the overall educational level remained higher than the national average. In 1986, 22 per cent of the Canadian population fifteen years of age and over had some university education compared with 36 per cent of immigrants from non-traditional [i.e. non-European] source countries. Generally, Asian immigrants had higher qualifications than those from the Caribbean.

Through prejudicial eyes, Asians seem "smart", while Caribbean migrants seem less so, despite the fact both groups are generally better educated than the average Canadian-born citizen. While immigration workers and policy makers cannot realistically be asked to accept responsibility for racial hostility on the part of its citizens, they can and have helped shape the way the hostility is played out.

Richmond concludes *Global Apartheid* with prognoses on migration policy in various parts of the world. He makes some of his strongest statements in the following diagnosis of Canadian immigration policy:

The delayed reaction of Canada and many other countries to the prolonged plight of refugees in Somalia and other regions of Africa, compared with the response to those in former Yugoslavia, suggests that the "huddled masses" should be preferably "White" [his quotation marks] if they are to receive much help at all.

The problem with *Global Apartheid* is not that I disagree with Richmond's ideas. The problem is that I *do* agree, from the start if the book through to the end. The problem is that in relying heavily on numbers to tell the tale, Richmond forgets that statistics do not challenge assumptions, make persuasive arguments or convert uneasy suspicions into concrete evidence. ■■

Suzette Chan is an Edmonton writer. She is also the Administrative Assistant at the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Resource Available!



Choosing Quality Childcare is available on video and has an accompanying booklet.

This 36 page booklet outlines options for childcare including day care centres, family day homes, out-of-school care centres and private caregivers.

Question lists are included to guide parents in their search for quality childcare.

It provides information on how to apply for subsidies as well as subsidy rates.

The 11 minute video tours parents through a typical centre and points out things to look for.

This resource is available in English, Vietnamese, Spanish and Cantonese.

For more information please contact the Edmonton Social Planning Council at 423-2031

Working for *change* some success stories

During a time of sometimes overwhelming opposition to human rights, and political and economic forces that are racing backwards in providing for the well-being of all of our people, it is perhaps a worthy effort to tell success stories in resisting these forces, and finding allies for justice in our communities. We need to count our victories in what Joan Kuyek calls "building up the soil, and creating a culture of hope instead of despair."

(*Fighting for Hope: Organizing to Realize Our Dreams*. Black Rose Books. 1990)

Here are two stories from the community of Calgary:

The Alberta Disadvantaged:

State of Alberta's Children 1995

In the fall of 1995, to commemorate the United Nation's 50th anniversary in a meaningful way, seven community groups organized a round table on children's rights. The first Report of Canada on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child had been tabled and our Alberta Legislature had again refused to endorse this convention. In the midst of a significant restructuring of our social programs it seemed timely to look at the spirit and intent of the convention and the reality of the lives of children in Alberta.

We invited a diversity of providers of services to children and advocates for the rights of children to participate in a round table consultation to take a reality snapshot of the lives of our children in Alberta. The question posed was whether or not the assertions of the province that it is in compliance with the Articles of the United Nations Convention are in fact true.

The round table produced authentic, honest stories of discrimination, neglect, poverty, denial of basic human rights, barriers to access services, and the devastating effects of cuts to programs and services for children with disabilities, Aboriginal children, children of color, children with another first language other than English, children of single parent mothers and children who have

Coalition on Human Rights in Alberta

Picture this: A reactionary minister of the Government of Alberta, listening to those in our province calling for the abolishment of the Human Rights Commission and human rights legislation, initiates a public review into the operations of the commission. A government appointed panel receives over 1,700 submissions in province-wide public hearings and workshops. The resulting report *Equal in Dignity and Rights*, surprisingly to some, affirms that human rights are for everyone and recommends extensive strengthening of the legislation and the operations of the commission. People interested in social justice are united in their support of this report. The new minister responsible for human rights publicly supports many of the recommendations, including independence for the commission. The community continues to educate and lobby. We wait, and wait for the government's response. Finally the government tables Bill 24, an act to amend the Individual's Rights Protection Act. The amendments are not what were recommended. The government intends to quickly approve this bill, and presents it as a "balanced" response. What do we do now?

One response from the community was the formation of a new coalition on human rights in Alberta to

support provided by the Oxfam two human rights initiative, this coalition grew to over 100 member groups in two months.

Activities included community meetings with broad, diverse representation, a widely distributed analysis of what was wrong with the bill, extensive media coverage beginning with a well-attended press conference announcing the coalition, supportive editorials, a letter-writing campaign, opinion columns, letters to the editor, two large paid ads ("Say No to Bill 24") which listed coalition members, a request to meet with the premier and the Calgary Caucus, attempts by the premier to marginalize and label the opposition "abnormal" and eventually a meeting between over 70 representatives of the coalition and most of the Calgary caucus (but not including the premier).

The Round Table's Successes:

- two important amendments to the bill, that will positively affect many people, including source of income as a prohibited ground of discrimination, and extension of the limitation period to file complaints from six months to one year;
- the visible presence of a large and growing countervailing force to those in our province who would deny equality. We made them "nervous" and strengthened the hand of our supporters;
- education of the broader community on human rights issues and the tactics of our government;
- the maintenance of unity behind all of the recommendations of Equal in Dignity and Rights by a diverse, nonpartisan and fragile coalition including mainstream service agencies, civil libertarians, academics, anti-poverty activists, gay rights groups, organized labor, feminists, multicultural and ethno-specific groups, disability rights organizations, arts organizations, churches and students;
- we are learning again that we could work in coalition with those groups that differ from us in political philosophy and strategies for change, including stretching to the point of discomfort in our tactics, if we are focused in our scope of action, and very clear in our purpose.

We are empowered by these successes, and want to continue our work together.

The coalition formed to oppose Bill 24 was formally disbanded following closure of debate in the legislature and passage of the amended bill. The Dignity Foundation will provide the "thread of continuity" until we rally together again, in the new strategic alliances. For further information contact Dignity at 403-245-2077, or Oxfam at 403-283-0831.

experts (those groups and individuals who are on the front lines in caring for our children), the key failures to comply, and selected recommendations for change. Other groups joined us in presenting our findings to the media and the decision makers.

Responses included a discussion in the legislature, national attention to the findings, government denials of the findings and attempts to marginalize and divide the groups involved. As well as a backlash "gay-bashing" from some of our elected officials and media commentators, we were invited to discuss our recommendations with decision makers federally and we received funding to continue the work on children's rights. As a result of the findings the United Way of Calgary set up an endowment fund for poor children. The "gay-bashing" was a response to our inclusion of a peer support group for gay, lesbian and bisexual youth in our round table, and the recommendation to include sexual orientation as a prohibited ground of discrimination in our human rights legislation. Some of our participating organizations dedicated to serving children were particularly vulnerable to this tactic.

The Coalition's Successes:

- the attention we generated to children's rights in our province;
- the improved profile of the convention and the international movement for the rights of children in our community and with local service agencies;
- the new or improved communication among us;
- the preservation of our unity in spite of some vicious attacks;
- the commitment to continue our work together as allies.

The Alberta Disadvantaged report card and summary report of the proceedings are available from the Committee on Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding at 231-6265. ■

Yvonne Stanford is a community organizer, a board member of the Dignity Foundation and coordinator of the Oxfam Human Rights Initiative.

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (continued from page 26)

Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in
upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along
the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

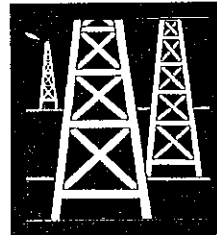
No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old ... I grow old ...
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

Setting Industry Standards (continued from page 23)



values and creating a better understanding between Syncrude staff and Aboriginal participants.

Today, Syncrude is the country's largest industrial employer of Aboriginal people. As such, the company is a well known name at human resources and Aboriginal development conferences across Canada. "We feel a great responsibility to help educate other companies and Canadians in general about Aboriginal culture and to replace negative stereotypes with positive realities," says Syncrude chairman, president and CEO Eric Newell. "We are committed to assisting Aboriginal people in creating opportunities to participate meaningfully in all facets of Canadian life, whether it be economic, social or cultural."

Elaine Cardinal-Baker, a planning assistant in Syncrude's Mine Mobile area, is one of the company's over 300 Aboriginal employees. Her personal credo says a lot about the people who have made Syncrude what it is. "We depend on each other a lot," she says. "And because of that, we have to be open and willing to try new things. We have to be willing to help each other. We can never stop learning and moving forward."

Moving forward is exactly what Syncrude plans to do. Currently the largest single source of crude oil in Canada and the nation's second largest producer, Syncrude plans to invest over \$2 billion on expanding its operations, making crude oil from the oil sands a competitive source of energy. Yet with employees committed to working together and treating each other with respect, Syncrude has already increased the value of the most important commodity of all — people. ■

Mark Kruger is an Alberta-based writer, editor and communica-