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Our Mission

The Boundary Peace Initiative represents a growing number of area residents of diverse backgrounds brought together over the Iraqi crisis.

We support multilateral action for non-violent conflict resolution, human rights, ecological integrity for the planet and international law, through education and dialogue locally and globally.

We encourage everyone's participation as we strive for peace and justice to build a better world for future generations.

BPI web site: www.boundarypeace.20m.com

Boundary Peace Initiative meets @ 7 pm on the 2nd & 4th Thursday @ the Slavonic Seniors Center on 72nd Ave. & 7th Street

To Do

There are no events scheduled for the BPI. As we focus on the upcoming holidays, let us remember to pay at least some head to the suffering locally and internationally that contradict what Christmas is about. Raise your voice and stand in concert with others who live and actively work for Peace with social, economic and environmental justice and equality around the world, in non-violent solidarity. Merry Christmas and May The New Year bring an end to the suffering of our global family. Thank you all for your on-going support and we look forward to working with you all.

On behalf of the Boundary Peace Initiative,
Laura Savinkoff

US Iraq War Resister Marks 3rd Year in Sanctuary

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA-- (Marketwire - Sept. 14, 2012) - On September 18, 2012 Rodney Watson will have spent three years living inside First United Church in Vancouver and never leaving the property.

Watson is a decorated US soldier who served in Iraq, was stop-lossed and came to Canada in 2006. Faced with a deportation order dated September 11, 2010, he requested sanctuary at First United Church rather than be separated from his Canadian wife and son. Watson maintains his position that no one should be punished for refusing to commit war crimes.

Rodney Watson witnessed intense racism and religious persecution while serving in the US military in Iraq. As an African American, he understood what he experienced and determined that he could not participate in it any further. While at home on leave, he received further orders that would keep him in Iraq past the time of his contract. Coming to Canada, he met other US military personnel who made the same decision as him and chose to speak out about it.

Rodney's anchor during the last three years has been his son Jordan. Helping to raise him and watching him grow up is what keeps him focused on his principled position. He is looking at the world from the inside out and really wants to be free to fully live life with his family.

Rodney remains in sanctuary and in solidarity with Bradley Manning (imprisoned whistleblower) and Kimberly Rivera (US Iraq war resister in Toronto facing deportation on September 20). He strongly believes that such people of conscience should not spend one day behind bars or in detention for following their conscience.

The actions of the Harper government will cause the break-up of his and Kimberly's families.

He echoes Kimberly's words to Canadians: "Did you oppose the war on Iraq? So did I".



017-11097 @newsch.com

Soul in Sanctuary--peaceful warrior turning pain into poetry (Greeting to StopWar 10th Anniversary party Nov. 23, 2012) {posted Nov. 25th}

By: Rodney Watson, Jr.

My friend Sarah read this out last Friday night for me. I'm told it was very well received and I'm pleased to share it here with you:

Hello ladies and gentlemen, my name is Rodney Watson Jr and I'm an Iraq War Veteran who risked my life for lies from October 2005 to October 2006. During my one year deployment I went overseas without any fear of death because I, like so many others fell for the lies that we were fighting for freedom and I had no problem at all risking my life for the good fight but it turned out to be a wrong and a very unjust fight. Even though there was no Draft like the Vietnam War, the Iraq war had an economic draft that was lead by Lies.

I am very thankful that I did not spill blood over in Iraq even though I was put into many situations where I almost had to. I often think of how I would feel if I had killed for the lies of weapons of mass destruction and Iraq's 9/11 false link or connection. I lost a friend over there and came close to death myself and it started a fire within me after I had learned that the whole war was based on fiction and not fact. That war is fading fast into history but for many like me, it's as if it were just yesterday and still a fresh memory. I have heard great stories of Canadian conscience coming together

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(From page 1) Soul in Sanctuary

by the thousands to protest Canadian government plans to join Canada into that Iraq war, I heard it was a great sight of real unity and solidarity.

Well I have been living in Sanctuary for three years now fighting to remain with my Canadian born wife and son and I tell you what, I see this conservative government for big oil changing the face of Canadian tradition even from my Sanctuary walls. When I first came here at the end of 2006 I rarely saw Canadian forces and militarism being promoted on TV BUT now it is incorporated into almost everything I see now that's Canadian. The current situation is bigger than my pain and struggle but I do highly suggest that all people of conscience unite in solidarity against this destructive path. Environmentalists, believers in God, atheist, Gay or straight and all races and colors MUST unite and bring back that passion of opposing the wrongs that affect us ALL and begin to work together in solidarity because we all desire a better present and future. I have been through many storms being here in Sanctuary fighting for Love and I have shed many tears but I know all storms can eventually pass in time, especially if we are on the right side of LOVE. So I tell you all to look beyond our differences and embrace each other with pure understanding that things must change before things really get out of hand through Corporate elite greed and corruption.

I love my wife and son with my whole heart and I would never be able to cross back across the border again if I let these conservative one's win in breaking up my Canadian born family. I often feel like the rain here in Vancouver is shedding tears with me and feels my pain but rite now I want you all to take my pain and turn it into something positive and use my struggle as a example of finding the courage within to fight the good fight. Reach out to those in your schools, neighborhoods, work places, And everywhere because I know that everywhere there is always people who want a better world to live in, they just need positive support and those to help them with finding their own personal courage.

So on that note I leave you all with this, I Love you all and I wish you all the best in changing this world for the better because it's only through great solidarity that Canada did not go to war in Iraq and once again the universal conscience is calling out once again for Canadians to come together in true unity. May Great Peace, Love and Safety be with you all as you all come together in changing the world for the better.



Blog site—[rodneywatsonjr](http://rodneywatsonjr.com)

Remembering Sr. Anne Montgomery

by Rev. John Dear (August 31, 2012 in Common Dreams)

One of the legends in the U.S. peace movement, Sister Anne Montgomery, died this week in California. A member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart, she spent over three years in prison for many civil disobedience actions against war, including seven plowshares anti-nuclear disarmament actions; many years teaching in Harlem, and many years living with the Christian Peacemaker Team in Hebron, Palestine-Israel. I first heard her speak to a packed church in Reading, Pa., in 1982, about her part in the Plowshares Eight and vividly recall my shock at her gentle proposal that some of us need to go to prison and offer our lives to stop the killings, abolish nuclear weapons and save the planet. Sister Anne Montgomery A few months ago, I interviewed her over the phone, and I share these notes to celebrate her peacemaking life and to encourage everyone to carry on her campaign for the abolition of war. -- John Dear

What led you to work full time for disarmament, justice and peace?

In the 1970s, I was working with students in Albany and Harlem. My awareness came from people who were poor and knew the government wasn't there for them. Eighteen year olds had just got the right to vote but didn't use it because they felt it was useless. I also read Jim Douglass' book Resistance and Contemplation which helped me to understand the issue of nuclear weapons from a spiritual perspective, that nuclear weapons were evil, and were the greatest reality and symbol of what was wrong. Then I heard Daniel Berrigan speak on the need to witness to the Gospel. The combination of my work with the poor, reading Jim Douglass and meeting Dan Berrigan challenged me to join the demonstrations and get involved.

In 1980, you joined Daniel and Philip Berrigan in the Plowshares Eight disarmament action in King of Prussia, Pa. What was that first action like?

I remember joining a demonstration in Washington D.C. and risking arrest and learning from Jonah House in their sessions on civil resistance that we need to join a community of people who were interested in doing something, getting to know each other, and planning an action together. We did a "die in" at the Pentagon, and I was jailed for one night. Then I was invited to join the Plowshares group. Molly Rush was the only other woman in the group. I went on a retreat, said yes, and did the action. It turned out that it was easy to get inside the General Electric Plant. I helped distract the guard, then went inside, and there they were: the nuclear nosecones. We were able to hammer on a nuclear nosecone to symbolize the need for nuclear disarmament. We used the Isaiah quote as the basis for our witness: (Continued page 3)



(From page 2) **Remembering Sr. Anne Montgomery**

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and study war no more.” We said people should start dismantling these weapons. It was a symbolic action, but it was also real because we made those nosecones unusable. I spent eleven weeks in jail. Molly and I were separated because they didn’t have a women’s jail in that area. Because we were separated from each other and the men, we were asked to come out to help organize the support work and prepare for trial.

In all these actions, the Holy Spirit is with us in a very real way. People are able to enter places, and witness to the evil that’s there in a way that’s unexpected. Doors open, people look the other way, and you’re able to get where you want to go. Even if we are willing to try and fail, the effort is in right direction.

Tell me about your other Plowshares actions and what you learned for this nonviolent resistance to nuclear weapons.

In July 1982, the “Trident Nein” group went to the Electric Boat shipyard in Groton, Connecticut. Four of us got into a canoe and boarded the Trident “U.S.S. Florida,” and hammered on several missile hatches. Five of us went to the storage yard and hammered on two Trident sonar spheres. We waited there three hours before we were arrested. We always take responsibility for what we have done. It’s interesting that later, women in prison always understand our actions because of their familiarity with injustice, but they never understand why we wait to be arrested. We take responsibility. I was also part of the Kairos Plowshares and the Kairos Too Plowshares in New London, Ct. I spent the most time in prison, nearly two years, for the Pershing Plowshares action, for trespassing at the Martin Marietta plant in Orlando, Florida. We hammered and poured blood on Pershing II missile components and on a Patriot missile launcher and displayed a banner, which read, “Violence Ends Where Love Begins.” Certainly the Plowshares Eight action stands out because it set in motion a whole movement, but the Thames River Plowshares also stands out because of the sense of vulnerability I felt in the face of our nation’s addiction to power and greed, in the face of such blasphemous power. On Labor Day, 1989, we swam in freezing water for an hour and a half in the Thames River, in Connecticut, to reach the Trident nuclear sub, which was being readied for sea trials. Three boarded it from a canoe; those of us who were swimming got caught in the tide. Some reached the side and hammered on it. I’ll never forget the vulnerability of that swim in the face of the most powerful and deadly weapon on earth. If we want to change hearts and minds we have to come from that position of vulnerability and trust in God.

What was your time in prison like?

After the Plowshares Eight, I wasn’t afraid of the women in prison, that they might think we were crazy. I always noticed that the women immediately offer you something and ask you what you need. They’re very welcoming. That was a big relief and a wonderful experience. There wasn’t any violence usually. The women support one another, and they hunger for something spiritual. So we always started prayer groups and scripture study groups and the women liked that. That was always positive. But you become very aware of the injustice poor women suffer.

Tell me about your most recent Plowshares action.

In November, 2009, five of us, the Disarm Now Plowshares,



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Victor Hugo set forth an inspiring vision at the opening address to the Peace Congress in Paris, on 21 August 1849:

“A day will come when your arms will fall from your hands! A day will come when war will seem as absurd and impossible between Paris and London, between Petersburg and Berlin, between Vienna and Turin, as it would be impossible and would seem absurd today between Rouen and Amiens, between Boston and Philadelphia.

A day will come when you France, you Russia, you Italy, you England, you Germany, you all, nations of the continent, without losing your distinct qualities and your glorious individuality, will be merged closely within a superior unit and you will form the European brotherhood, just as Normandy, Brittany, Burgundy, Lorraine, Alsace, all our provinces are merged together in France.

A day will come when the only fields of battle will be markets opening up to trade and minds opening up to ideas. A day will come when the bullets and the bombs will be replaced by votes, by the universal suffrage of the peoples, by the venerable arbitration of a great sovereign senate which will be to Europe what this parliament is to England, what this diet is to Germany, what this legislative assembly is to France.

Book & Film Recommendations

Small Wonder—Essays

Writer: Barbara Kingsolver

Publisher: Harper-Collins Copyright 2002

Soulful and soul-searching.. A passionate invitation to readers to be a part of the crowd that cares about the environment, peace and family. San Francisco Chronicle From the Author: This book isn’t meant to be a commentary on specific political policies, though inevitably the day’s headlines, like my children and all the other notable stuff of my life, have provided for me anecdotal entry into issues of more general and enduring interest. The several pieces that open and close the book respond most directly to current events, while many of the others form a collection of parables and reveries on parts of the world that may seem at first very distant from the epicenters of global crisis—a village at the edge of a Mexican jungle, for example, or my daughter’s chicken coop. I ask the reader to understand that these essays are not incidental. I believe our largest problems have grown from the earth’s remotest corners as well as our own backyards, and that salvation may lie in those places, too.



Films donated by the No Boundaries Film Club to the Grand Forks Public Library

{Ed note: I do not have a description of the below films but they are worth the effort}

Schooling the World

Fresh

Call of Life

(From page 2) **Remembering Sr. Anne Montgomery** entered onto the Bangor, Wash. Trident base, cut through a fence, walked for 4 hours without being stopped or questioned, and cut through the last two fences where over 24% of all US nuclear weapons are stored, in large bunkers, that look like little cement huts. Our goal was to reach them. I wanted to be vulnerable in the face of these weapons. Later, the government tried to cover up that we got that far, that we faced those bunkers. They knew we were nonviolent, that we were nonviolent demonstrators. Each of us was treated differently. I was given two months in prison in Seattle, and four months under house arrest.

You have traveled many of the world's warzones, and went to Iraq at least 15 times since 1990.

I go to love our enemies, but I actually don't consider them enemies because of the great hospitality the people of Iraq show us. I was with the Gulf Peace Team in 1990, just before the first Gulf War.

We were a diverse international group in the desert, on the border of Saudi Arabia, and we were there when the war began in 1991. It was a very vulnerable place to be and we heard the bomber planes go over us that first night, and later saw the devastation caused by the war, the bombing of Iraq's infrastructure, and the sanctions. The presence of internationals who opposed the war was welcomed by the people. It was appreciated. I went again after the 2003 Gulf War began, and I learned again that our wars are not about freedom but oil and global, political control.

Tell me about your years in Hebron, Israel-Palestine, with the Christian Peacemaker Team.

I had participated on a peace walk in Palestine, and was looking for some way to work for peace. Then I discovered CPT (Christian Peacemaker Teams). They are faith-based, ecumenical and community-oriented, and maintain a peace presence in each place, such as Palestine and Colombia, over many years. We stayed there and were consistent. You get to know the people, what they are suffering and how they feel about the U.S.

Where is God for you in this journey and work for peace?

I couldn't do this work without faith in God. Two quotations are dear to me: First, from Isaiah 2: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more." The other is from Ezekiel: "Hearts of stone have to turn into hearts of flesh." I've come to believe through prayer and bible study about God's presence in the heart of the earth. People need to change their hearts before they can change anything else. God is love, but unless we can love each other, we can't know God. We can learn about ourselves and our own hearts of stone as we reach out in love toward others. Even though things don't change right away, and we're not immediately effective, it does happen. It just takes time. Change has to come from ordinary, vulnerable people at the bottom, because the power structure is not going to do it. Just before he died, Phil Berrigan wrote in his last public letter on the need to "embrace our

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The Boundary Peace Initiative (BPI) welcomes articles, which are the sole responsibility of the authors and may not be common consensus. To contribute please contact **Laura** at **250-442-0434** or **l4peace@telus.net**. The BPI is a member of: Southern Interior Peace Coalition, Canadian Peace Alliance, Abolition 2000, Lawyers Against the War, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace and an affiliate of the Fellowship of Reconciliation as well as other local and global groups.

(From last column) **Sr. Anne Montgomery**

powerlessness." As we do, we become agents for the power of God to work among us. So we have to deny the self, take up the cross and follow. I recall too how St. Paul wrote about the Spirit groaning within the earth. That spirit gives us power and prays through us. That means a lot to me right now. Even when I feel I can't pray, all I have to do is be aware of the Spirit and try to let it lead me.

What are you learning these days as you face cancer?

I'm learning more about powerlessness. I'm learning to let go, to be detached. I've been upheld by our elderly sisters who pray for me and support me, and that power of prayer is very real to me. I feel it. So I'm learning again that God does the work, not us.

What advice do you have for those who care about peace, justice, nonviolence and disarmament?

I remember Liz McAlister saying once, "Whatever issue you work on is connected to all the other issues." That means, we have to go deep into the heart of our issue. Also, people should try to join or form a community for this work of justice and peace. We want the world to become a community, and it's hard, so we have to try to do that ourselves. And we want to form a community conscience that can take a stand on these critical issues. We need other people to help us. With others, we can reflect together on how to resist, and take action that comes from a place of prayer and faith and depth.

What gives you hope?

What gives me hope is the ordinary people who get involved, who take one step out of their comfort zone and join the work for peace, such as the many people in the streets right now with the Occupy Movement. We're all learning that when we powerless people come together, we have power. I also have hope in knowing that God's power and God's nonviolence are stronger than violence and war. Love is stronger than evil, hate, fear or war. The opposite of love is fear, and the government tries to keep us in permanent fear. But when we come together in love and struggle for peace, we are no longer afraid and we can change things. As we trust each other and God, our fear lessens. So we can't be afraid to do the right thing. Love is always stronger, and that gives me hope.

*Rev. John Dear is an author, activist and lecturer who teaches nonviolence in the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day. He served for years as the director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the largest interfaith peace organization in the U.S. After September 11, 2001, he was a Red Cross coordinator of chaplains at the Family Assistance Center in New York, and counseled thousands of relatives and rescue workers. John has traveled the war zones of the world, been arrested some 75 times for peace, led Nobel Peace prize winners to Iraq, and given thousands of lectures on peace across the U.S. His many books include: *The God of Peace; Transfiguration; Lazarus, Come Forth!; You Will Be My Witnesses; Living Peace; Seeds of Nonviolence; The Questions of Jesus; Put Down Your Sword; Our God Is Nonviolent; Jesus the Rebel; Peace Behind Bars; Disarming the Heart, and his autobiography, A Persistent Peace. He is featured in the DVD film, "The Narrow Path."**

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Friendly Peaceful Canada Actually the Worst Place on Earth? (From War Is A Crime July 11, 2012)

By: Douglas Ou-ee-ii-jay-ii Jack OH – CANADA

As a Canadian, I would like to propose that Canada is a much larger belligerent aggressor per capita in the world than media, the public and organizations like the United Nations recognize. Canada's silent role as a (perhaps 'the') major world leader in living off of the trade proceeds of war, death, injury and destruction, remains outside public consciousness. Canada and the USA seem to act as indivisible twins of death, yet Canada hides behind a media-military-industrial-complex, which continues to portray Canada as a 'pacifist' nation.

Canada has only 33,000,000 people, 1/10th the US population and seemingly not a leader, when in fact the world's leading aggressor. This article addresses Canada's infamy 'per-capita' meaning livelihood generation 'per-person' in energy, materials & arms as proportions of our national economy. We can understand both Canada and the US as leading aggressors, # 1 & 2, because of un-matched histories of colonial genocide against the First Nations of the Americas, which form our 'world-view'. Mutual-Aid and compassion are not the foundations of the societies we have formed. We've only barely gained a sense of the massacre in which we are involved as part of our lifestyles and colonial-chauvinistic attitudes. The Residential-Schools death / abuse is a point of popular confusion but not yet of moral direction.

In the following seven categories A – G, Canada is and has been for over 150 years (# = Number):

A. # 1 Mine developer and mineral extractor around the world per capita as found in Canada's mining corporations. Simultaneously Canada is the world's worst recycler of metals in terms of not reducing, reusing or recycling domestic, commercial or industrial metals.

B. # 1 Forestry exploiter around the world per capita as found in Canada's forestry corporations. Simultaneously Canada is the world's worst recycler of wood and paper products in terms of not reducing, reusing or recycling domestic, commercial or industrial paper & wood products.

C. # 1 Energy developer, infrastructure supplier and consumer per capita, primarily from Hydro electric dams but as well from Canada's CANDU nuclear reactors in Canada and worldwide. Canadians are the most consumptive worldwide users per capita of electricity, natural gas and oil. Canadians are the world's worst energy consumers in terms of not: avoiding conserving (eg. Insulation), reducing (eg. 1/10th of Canadians have 2nd home as a cottage), reusing (complementary design for capturing such as waste-heat), transforming (eg. Passive Solar design)

D. # 1 Consumer worldwide per capita for all major non-renewable materials. Canadians identify themselves & lifestyles as consumers, without reserve buying plastics, metals, wood, paper & composite things for every occasion. Superfluous use of non-essential energy and things, in a finite world sadly displace human relationship. Where most humans don't have access to these for essential services because of foreign ownership of their lands and resources, then superfluous-use is a lost opportunity for human solidarity and relationship.

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(From last column) **Friendly Peaceful Canada**
<https://sites.google.com/site/indigenecommunity/relational-economy/solidarity>

E. # 1 Source of Depleted Uranium per capita. The Depleted Uranium coated artillery, ammunition, bomb and missile shell-covered bombing of sites is an extreme war-crime against Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Pakistan, Libya, now Syria and other countries wherever our depleted uranium is used as a shell casing for penetration of all forms of defensive cladding in buildings, vehicles and equipment. These nations and all humanity are victims of this Canadian-made radioactive warfare.

F. # 1 Source of Refined-Uranium for Nuclear Power per capita. Canada's heavy-handed uranium-energy industry, which is key to nuclear arms development such as India and Pakistan's nuclear arms programs, is a crime against humanity. The spreading of human genetics and health damaging materials or technology, never responsible for constant spill-releases, accidents, mine tailings, refinement wastes and finally massive volumes of highly radioactive post energy production wastes radioactive with no reliable storage for millions of years.

G. # 3 Arms Producer and Sales per capita (after Israel, USA) when the above six raw material and energy factors are added to Canada's already high standing in advanced weapons system components. Canada is # 1 supplier of major arms components / capita to the US arms system per capita in both assembly and parts supply.

99.999% of Canadians are completely unaware of their nefarious status as world leaders in the above categories. Careless and destructive consumption and production are part of our colonial worldview, taking what we feel are god-given resources without consciousness of the suffering we cause for others in the destruction of their eco-systems and biospheres for our extractive resource policies. It seems from Canada's military involvement in arming insurgents in dozens of countries worldwide but particularly in Islamic and Hispanic American countries, way out of proportion to our population, that Canadians are world leaders in war on Islam and attempts to destabilize dozens of countries worldwide.

Even as Canadian governments occasionally may take an official non-intervention stance, our industries fully arm insurgents and support belligerents such as the USA in destabilization programs for acquisition of resources and geo-political advantage.

No public controls or conditions are ever placed on Canadian arms and component exports to belligerents and insurgents worldwide. This was true of our role as # 1 supplier / capita of the US war-effort in Vietnam where we paid no war reparations for the results of the Canadian arms industry collusion in decades of destruction in the Vietnamese abundant Polyculture orchards and many dozens of conflicts in which Canada has played a role in stirring-up and festering dissent. Presently social-media is being used to foster what George Orwell characterized as 'hates' in his book '1984' mirroring his experience of 'hates'

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(From page 5) **Friendly Peaceful Canada**

against the Axis powers during World War II. Social Media has the great-unused potential to bring both sides of conflict into dialogue through formal debate. Canadian corporations are always #1 war-benefactors per capita in the world. Is Canada the dog that wags the US war tail? In order to bring the US government in alignment with world law, the issue of its silent but belligerent war-twin Canada will have to be addressed.

Douglas Jack, Sustainable Development Corporation,
Indigene Community - www.indigenecommunity.info

Random Acts of Kindness Not Enough to Fight Inequality (September 25, 2012)

By: Lynne Fernandez (Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives)

It's noteworthy how much media attention Mr. Doubledee's random act of kindness is receiving. He and Mayor Katz were in New York this Saturday to appear on CBS TV. Doubledee, a Winnipeg Transit driver, told the story of how he stopped his bus and got out to give a homeless, barefoot man his shoes. The passengers on his bus were brought to tears. Winnipeggers are touched and inspired. Mr. Katz is proud to be his mayor.

Kristian Doubledee, a modest man, did not help the homeless man because he wanted to be a hero, as Mr. Katz called him. He clearly acted out of a desire to help someone in need. Touching as his deed is, Mr. Doubledee said something that should grab our attention more than that one action: he said that he hopes the anonymous homeless man will now receive as much attention as he's been getting. And that sentiment brings us to the crux of the matter.

What kind of attention should the marginalized receive? If we accept that something needs to be done (and judging by the international attention this story is receiving, many people do) how can we actually make a difference? Random acts of kindness, nice as they are, will not begin to deal with the complex array of problems facing most marginalized people.

As we contemplate possible strategies, it is instructive to remember that Canada, Manitoba included, was a more equal place forty years ago. Food banks were unheard of - because they weren't needed; homelessness was relatively rare; childhood poverty was less severe; the middle class was larger, with more people making decent wages. What happened? How did conditions deteriorate so? Why do we seem so helpless in the face of worsening social conditions?

We feel so helpless because the social contract that used to provide us with decent jobs that kept many people out of poverty, and comprehensive social services to help those who were poor, has been replaced with a neo-liberal agenda. Neo-liberalism claims that individuals are solely responsible for their own fate; that a free, unregulated market is the most efficient way to distribute scarce resources; and, most incredibly, that we all come into this world with access to the same opportunities. If we hear this discourse enough (and the media makes sure we do) we feel paralyzed in the face of suffering and need, even though many of us feel a sense of responsibility and shame for allowing such suffering in the midst of plenty. We are an increasingly rich society, but since the inception of neo-liberalism wealth is much more unevenly distributed; the top 1 per cent receive increasingly fantastic portions of wealth and income. Neo-liberal policies have made sure that income flows to the very top - through income tax cuts for the rich and corporations, and easier access to tax havens. But it hasn't just been the introduction of more regressive tax policy that has changed the landscape.

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Random Acts of Kindness

Globalization means we have to compete with less regulated jurisdictions where workers are treated shamefully and this competition has allowed governments, encouraged by business lobby groups, to launch a vicious attack on the labour movement and government run programs like Employment Insurance. Finally, a growing precarious work environment filled with low-paying, part-time jobs with no benefits makes sure that many more workers than before are unable to join or remain in the middle-class.

Neo-liberalism has delivered society a powerful double punch: it has decimated our progressive tax system and restructured our labour market to the disadvantage of workers. So more Canadians are pushed to the margins – and beyond – and shrinking government revenues means there are fewer social services to help them. At the same time, we're encouraged to donate to charity to appease our natural tendency to want to help those who have fallen through the ever-widening cracks.

That we have become a much more unequal society is indisputable. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, both nationally and in Manitoba, has documented the changes in Canada. Linda McQuaig and Neil Brooks document the shocking changes in wealth and income distribution in their book *The Trouble with Billionaires*. Canada's increasing inequality has been confirmed by the OECD. Eminent economists like Joseph Stiglitz document the same trend in the US. All these studies also explain why it doesn't have to be this way and how we can turn things around. They also point out how we have to make improvements if we are to avoid major societal unrest in the near future.

But it isn't going to be easy. We have to replace this powerful but corrosive neo-liberal narrative with a new one – one that affirms the humanity of building equal societies. We can begin by drawing on the findings from *The Spirit Level*, Wilkinson and Pickett's groundbreaking work showing that all members of society benefit from more equality, and how more equal societies outperform unequal societies on all manner of social indicators. We can take heart from the authors' observation that 90 per cent of Americans would rather see income distributed as it is in Sweden, one of the most equal societies, as opposed to the US, one of, if not the most unequal. CCPA polling has produced similar results in Canada: Canadians want a more equal society.

Our challenge is to provide a narrative that allows people to abandon the twisted logic of the free market and inspire them to pressure politicians to do the same. No number of random acts of kindness can ameliorate the growing inequality threatening us today. We need a societal response; a collective, sustained and forceful act of kindness. Making politicians understand that we want an end to: tax cuts for the rich and corporations; lousy jobs; and, cuts to social services would constitute a collective act of effective kindness. If enough of us deliver this message, we'll win back a more equal society.

<http://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/commentary/random-acts-kindness-not-enough-fight-inequality>

Web-site recommendations:

Canadian Peace Alliance: www.acp.cpa.ca

UN Wire—UN Foundations: sign up on-line here:
newsletters--un_wire@send.smartbrief.com>

Afghans For Peace: www.afghansforpeace.org

Independent Jewish Voices: www.ijvcanada.org