

# Fair Sharing Instead of Rampant Greed

As I sit down to write this editorial, on the first day of fall, the world too seems to be falling into collapse mode: stock markets are tumbling; unemployment is at record highs and rising; the war in Afghanistan is mired in corruption and spreading to Pakistan; the USA, along with Canada, are poised to veto the Palestinians' legitimate application for statehood at the UN; Greece is bankrupt; Italy is bankrupt; Spain is bankrupt; the USA are bankrupt, and the gulf between rich and poor is growing exponentially everywhere; famine is becoming endemic in Africa; uprisings are spreading in the Arab world – and all this at the end of a summer that brought record climate disasters globally: record hurricanes, typhoons, floods, droughts, wildfires and earthquakes. Something is rotten in the state of the world.

There are three remarkable facts about these disparate calamities: one, that they are all interconnected; two, that they were foreseeable and foreseen; and three, that the world's political and economic leadership, as well as humankind at large, continue for the most part to act as though they weren't happening. Normally, only the behaviour of the pathologically insane is so absurdly disconnected from reality.

Two hundred years ago, the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, understood the pressures of population growth and predicted that famine would be the inevitable consequence. He was surely wrong in regarding famine as God's way of controlling population, but he was right when he wrote: *The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. (An Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798)*. At the time there were around 900 million humans living on our planet.

Few took his insights seriously.

In 1962, Rachel Carson warned the world about the alarming destruction of our environment by pesticides used extensively to increase food production to meet the needs of a growing population. Her *Silent Spring* was a wake-up call, but its effect on population growth was null.

Ten years later, a gremium of distinguished scientists gathered in Rome to examine the growing global problems. They published their findings in *Limits to Growth*, in which they demonstrated the devastating consequences of the continued growth of population and consumption. They warned that it would lead to a disastrous combination of depletion of resources and pollution of the environment. In 2004, the Club of Rome published *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*, which demonstrated that their predictions had come true and that the world was headed for economic and societal collapse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century unless dramatic changes were made immediately and worldwide. The international corporations' paid toadies in politics and the media were quick to label the report doomsday prophecy, and as a result no significant action was taken.

Since Carson's study, the world population, estimated in 1970 to be about 3½ billion, has doubled; next month, in October, the seven billionth human will probably be born in India. The result, according to Wikipedia, is that *worldwide around 852 million people are chronically hungry due to extreme poverty*, while up to 2 billion people lack food security intermittently due to varying degrees of poverty. Even in a developed nation like Canada, more than 3 million people live below the poverty line. Is it any wonder that the world is in an uproar?

Madeline Weld, in her article in this issue, clearly demonstrates that population growth is at the root of most of our troubles. Its negative manifestations are aggravated by the dominion of latter-day capitalism as the basis of modern economies. Neo-con capitalism has decreed that property and profit are articles of religious faith, thereby unleashing a tsunami of greed that has ungunned us all. The result is fairytale wealth in the bank accounts of a few at the expense of the majority. During the last financial crisis, some of us watched with disbelief bankers and financiers on Wall Street enrich themselves to the tune of millions of dollars as they bankrupted their companies (and the nation), blackmailed their government to provide bailouts from the public purse, and then awarded themselves multi-million dollar bonuses for their criminal conduct.

As the poet said: *The poor will no longer starve to death for us*. Today, modern communications not only allow the poor to witness the obscene luxury in which the rich in their own country and elsewhere live, the Net also provides them with information about the crooked ways the rich come by their riches. And, increasingly, the world's indigent, exploited majority is no longer willing to take it lying down. The current uprisings in the Middle East are driven by a variety of causes, but the calls for freedom and democracy are primarily propelled by the hopelessness and despair especially of the young generation facing a life of misery without employment, health care, or even adequate food. They are no longer willing to suffer the yoke of social injustice and inequality. And I say: more power to them!

The combination of neo-con capitalism and population explosion is a lethal mix, for it nourishes unbridled consumerism. Television bombards people around the clock with invidious advertising carefully crafted to seduce viewers to buy, buy, buy – buy what they don't need, buy what they can't afford. Newspapers and magazines, for the most part, serve the same purpose. When they don't sell consumer goods, they sell the neo-con politics that consolidate and perpetuate the mafia power structure that grows rich on consumerism. True journalism, investi-

gative reporting, is all but dead. The occasional journal which tries to provide the public with a true picture of what is happening and to promote a critical attitude to events has to struggle to stay afloat. Naturally, the corporate business tycoons who finance politicians and the media aren't going to tolerate journalism intent on exposing their corruption. I'm afraid the affairs of nations have fallen into the hands of people with the morals of crocodiles, and I see no way we can extricate ourselves in the short term.

As I write this, civil unrest is spreading across the USA, picking up the protest that began in the Middle East. There are signs that the demand for social justice is spreading around the globe and turning into a grassroots movement. The men and women whose work makes civilization possible are fed up with being lied to, exploited and abused by banks and financial institutions, by the privileged rich who have acquired their wealth by gangster methods. Unless we put an end to the fraudulent manipulations of the likes of Goldman Sachs and put those responsible behind bars, social order will break down around the world.

Just as this protest movement give us hope that change is coming to the nations' economies, so there is hope for the future of our environment, ironically, from the most dire consequence of the misalliance of population explosion and neo-con capitalism, i.e. from climate change. Consumerism has devastated the planet. With over 50% of the world's forests already lost, the planet is wheezing on only one lung; global temperatures are rising at an ever increasing rate, melting polar ice and mountain glaciers at a rate that sees oceans rise and drinking water evaporate; storms are striking the earth with increasing intensity and frequency, devastating especially coastal lands; the warming of air and water has triggered the largest global species extinction since the last asteroid struck and wiped out the dinosaurs; and, evidently, the frequency of earthquakes is on the increase. These developments will continue to accelerate and intensify in the years to come.

The good thing is that such environmental disasters, along with the imminent economic col-

lapse, affect us all. They are there for all to see. The spitlickers of the world's profiteers in politics and the media cannot hide these calamities from us behind their customary demagoguery. As a result, in the last decade, protest has been growing everywhere. People are waking up. A plethora of books has been and continues to be published that analyze our dilemma and offer ways of dealing with it. Organizations and communities have sprung up to work towards and establish a self-sustaining way of life. As yet they're but a drop in the bucket, inadequate to the force of the catastrophes facing us. But many drops make a river, and our best hope is that this river soon gathers enough strength to sweep away the ideologies and practices responsible for the destruction of our planet.

It's not too late to preserve a viable habitat for some of our children's children. And Humanists want to be in the vanguard for change that enables a sustainable presence of all creatures on this earth. Last week, as part of a celebration at the University of Waterloo's Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, I heard the eminent cosmologist Stephen Hawking speculate that if human activity makes life impossible for us on this planet we may have to travel out into space to find

another planet to populate. That dream is an expression of the very hubris that is our undoing. Neither sci-fi fantasies nor appeals to some supernatural intelligence are going to save us.

Humanists know that only a bold rational approach to our problems may enable us to survive the disasters that are now upon us. That is why, as we go to print, the national association of Humanists, *Humanist Canada*, is hosting a conference in Toronto entitled "Planetary Overload – Survival of the Human Species". Its president, Simon Parcher, has gathered eminent specialists from different fields, including environmentalists and behavioural psychologists, to address the biggest challenge of historical time. The conference is designed to help put humankind on a viable path into the future – a future that demands from us a profound change of lifestyle, one that calls for modesty and humility, respect for the earth and all its living creatures, a commitment to retrenchment instead of obsessive growth, to fair sharing instead of rampant greed, and for the active acknowledgment that we are not masters of our earth but its children, ever at the mercy of its intricate superior powers.

–Henry Beissel

## Letters

Dear Yves,

We may not agree on a lot of things, but I certainly admire your willingness to print a letter that contained criticisms. I admire people who are willing to acknowledge views that are different from their own.

In the second paragraph of your reply, you state that if all those who did not vote, as well as those who voted against Harper, were added together then 75% of Canadians did not vote for Harper. Do you think it is fair to include everyone who did not vote? In my letter I said Harper and his fellow conserva-

tives have a lot of support, and in our democratic government he was returned with a majority. He received more support than any other party. And who knows, using your argument perhaps all those who did not vote would have voted for him.

More disturbing, though, was your suggestion that the people of the United States are governed by largely hollow democratic institutions. Try suggesting that to people who are actually governed by non-democratic institutions. I believe they will tell you things are quite different from the USA.

Finally, I was not being

ironic regarding the G20. That is insulting. I said the heavy police presence during the G20 was there because not all demonstrators were motivated by ideals. Some were criminals intent on taking the opportunity to destroy public property, and to physically threaten the G20 delegates. If you doubt this you need to read more about groups who regularly use these summits to engage in criminal activities. If you think all the demonstrators were law-abiding citizens you are naïve.

–David Reeve, Toronto, ON





**Buy 2 subscriptions, GET 1 FREE. Over 200 titles!**  
**Don't miss the Annual Great Magazine Sale. ORDER NOW!**

Subscribe today at [1free.magazinescanada.ca](http://1free.magazinescanada.ca) or call 1-866-289-8162  
 Special offer code: PAEA

Keep all 3 subscriptions for yourself or GIVE some as a gift.  
 Choose print or digital subscriptions. With this much selection  
 it's easy to find the perfect titles to read or share.

**Magazines  
 Canada**

Scan for your  
 chance to win  
 an iPad.

