



## **Calum MacKenzie's View From The Shore:**

### **Peace**

#### **Who amongst ordinary everyday Canadians is not supportive of promoting peace?**

Some would go so far as to support the inclusion of courses on peace-keeping and peace-making in school curricula. School bullying is getting increased attention in our increasingly violent society. So why not apply that attention to international bullying, inter-racial bullying, civil war, etc. laying out in stark details the appropriate approaches and remedies?

Even those in the armaments business who know that their products are meant to inflict personal and property damage, also know in their heart of hearts that peace is a worthy goal. It shines out brilliantly as an ultimate goal for the human race. Every religion on the face of the Earth, with the possible exception of the Thugee followers of the Goddess Kali in India, is strongly in favour of promoting peace. Civilized nations build institutions to maintain peace, abhor and abrogate violence, and have procedures of education and remedy for those who stray from civilized behaviour.

**Negotiated settlements are possible in all conflicts if the parties to the conflict seek out the pathways that lead to peace.** This applies to all of the differences faced by our planet's people. No matter what those differences might be or how deeply ingrained over a long history, by sitting down face to face, in an atmosphere of cooperation, solutions agreeable to all parties can be arrived at. Given time, most of the world's conflicts can be brought to a peaceful and successful conclusion under collegial conditions with consensual decision-making. This belief could have been applied in Afghanistan and Iraq just as it can be applied in Iran, North Korea and Palestine.

**To do this effectively, the business model has to be thrown out.** Gone is one-upmanship, profit motive, competition, confrontational opposition, and enmity. These factors have to be replaced by sensitive listening and a desire to understand where the other parties are coming from, what their restrictions are and what they will settle for. The business model insists that anything which draws on the bottom line is unacceptable. In fact, corporate law forbids such activity. In seeking out the steps on the road to peace those aspects of the business model must also be cast aside to be replaced by a zero sum, no-loss-no-gain tie that all parties can live with.

**The corporate world has no incentive to develop peace initiatives.** I have never heard of a company that manufactured or sold peace for a profit. Although we all know that peace is a highly desirable state, it has failed to be commodified, and so it has no shelf life. Those are the unfortunate times in which we live. Similarly peace has no value-added industry, no dollar value, no secondary positives except in the touchy-feely world of easy relaxation and well being. Capitalism sees no peace dividend.

**Conflict, on the other hand, has wall to wall profit** with superior margins and the potential to be a growth industry of international proportions. Whether it's in transportation, armaments or personnel logistics, corporations know they have a gravy train that just keeps on chugging along. Further, the profits carry over after conflicts with research, replacements and new manufacture extending far down the road. All of the equipment and armaments used in conflict have to be replaced to ready the troops for the next deployment. Governments seem to support violence to maintain higher employment statistics, gain campaign contributions and even co-opt church leaders to further that end. The propaganda rhetoric of course, is Orwellian. Dwight Eisenhower warned 50 years ago that we must beware of the military-industrialists and overly powerful corporations. Apart from death of anonymous civilians, collateral damage and friendly fire casualties there is very little downside for the corporatists.

**In like manner we can't expect the fundamentalist religious sects to help our cause.** Their world view is narrow and extreme, bound up in promoting their own interpretations of right and wrong and saving the souls of a limited number of adherents. In many ways the actions of the Afghani Taliban are similar to the actions and teachings of the Saudi Wahhabi schools and the American fundamentalists. By way of example, we see the same narrow focus for religious interpretation and the sensationalism of statements by Iranian ayatollahs, the ravings of Rev. Falwell or Dr. Robertson's assassination call on Venezuelan President Chavez are the same horse of a different color. Their sermons inculcate various themes of intolerance and even hate. The mantra seems to extol that "God is on our side and everyone else is evil."

The mainstream religious orders have allowed the extremists to hog the limelight so that all religions get a bad rap. Moderation in religious thought barely blips the radar and although all mainstream religions have something to offer in the promotion of peace, any actions they may have are trumped by the fundamentalist rhetoric which bombards the media. Radical fundamentalists such as those listed above get widespread coverage and repetitive airtime, while the peace initiatives of the Council of Catholic Bishops, the Islamic Council, or the Synod of the United Church of Canada are available only if Googled.

**One would think that our elected representatives would be front and centre in supporting moves to bring us peace in our time.** Although they often pay lip service to that accord, they seem to have a conflict of interest. The emphasis is on economics and trade as western politics continues to move further to the right of the political spectrum in every nation. Embassies around the globe have the promotion of beneficial trade as their primary objective. They are in effect the advance sales force for the corporate world.

Diplomacy, tact, human rights, fair trade, environmental protections, and even international law take a back seat to hard ball trade negotiations. Bribery, corruption or worse are not unknown. Branches of government are all primed to support thriving trade although much of that support is kept secret. Trade agreements are often more powerful than national governments. Internal and foreign government initiatives must pass the filters of trade agreements before they can be considered for action. Given the above mind-set, it is quite a stretch to assume that governments are primarily interested in peace, although at election time few other words flow from their lips.

Politicians who are obtuse enough to try working for their individual constituents at home, soon find themselves out of the loop, shunned by their colleagues, and on a failing career path. Those who toe the party line and respond to the donors of campaign funds, receive favoured status as good team players. The rewards are realized down the road as the career path develops. That they have been coerced, bribed or in conflict with their electoral mandate does not enter the equation and gets a pass. For those reasons it is extremely difficult for good politicians to promote peace in any meaningful way. So who have we left to turn to?

The UN has the organization and personnel to promote peace. Each branch of the UN is headed up by very competent leaders who have always impressed me as they articulate ways to move the peace process forward. Yet the UN is structured in such a way that its very good intentions are thwarted often to the point of frustration.

If UN funding was up to snuff, its ability to respond would be much more effective. But some of the most powerful nations remain in arrears for decades. If the UN was a truly democratic institution with one nation-one vote provisions or even some form of proportional representation based on population, that would give some cause for hope. The shortage of adequate funding, the use of the voting veto, and the inordinately oppressive influence of the richer, stronger nations often makes the UN peace process an exercise in futility. By use of veto power, China can thwart the wishes of the entire international community, as can any of the other four permanent members. So when it comes to support for the promotion of peace, the wishes of the international community of nations is often stymied by the veto power of one.

**That the UN is in need of massive overhaul goes without saying** but the status quo for international institutions, where the powerful rule the roost, must give way to a democratic system of organization. The veto enjoyed by the permanent five must be given up and democracy be practiced with clarity and transparency. Further, if membership is to be meaningful, membership dues must be kept in the black.

If we try really hard we can get past the individual, corporate and national greed that allows immense inequalities to exist. Perhaps if we try really hard we can get past the historical, national, sectarian and racial barriers to peace. With some semblance of support for peaceful co-existence, sharing the planet's bounty, and with good stewardship of the commons, we can move beyond the present rhetoric of strife. Perhaps then a global system of governance can rise to promote peace everywhere.

There is a lot to be said for the notion of constituency assemblies at the local grass roots level creating inputs to government policy. In the Canadian provinces of PEI, British Columbia and Ontario, constituency assemblies met over an extended period of months to discuss the pros and cons of proportional representation. They received inputs from ordinary folks and traveled widely to give the populace an opportunity to have their say. Letters were also encouraged as well as email correspondence. This is the bedrock of democracy and is likely to be much more in touch with peaceful intentions than the remote capital city seats of power. Establishing an on-going process and permanent peace would stand a chance once freed from the influence of lobbyists, corporate money and narrow

sectarian fiats, as would the ability of local constituencies to recall an elected assembly member. If nothing else the constituency assemblies would create local interest in a bottom-up political process.

**Some would argue that such a system would move ahead far too slowly on issues of importance.** The counter to that is to consider the time taken for government to enact any piece of meaningful legislation and count the roadblocks which crop up to impede that already arduous process. Needed legislation is not always enacted and dies on the order paper precisely because progress is deliberately impeded.

It is a typical political ploy in Canada to publish a feel-good budget loaded with leftie planks and all the things that people would love government to do. The ruling party receives such glowing reports that their polling stats immediately rise. This is then followed by an election call. This spring in Nova Scotia, the ploy back-fired as the opposition also favoured the budget and agreed to its easy passage. An unnecessary election with its unnecessary expense is now in full swing. A black eye and embarrassment for the incumbents.

**Besides everything, we have a long tradition of local conflict resolution in certain areas should we wish to apply it.** Labour unions have engaged in such negotiations for almost a century. The fruits of those negotiations have enhanced democracy and furthered the cause of peace wherever practiced. In many ways the Labour unions have shown great leadership in conflict resolution and in promoting Labour peace. The post-Apartheid strategies in South Africa provide further examples. We recall Archbishop Tutu and the blame free process which allowed publicly open confessions of wrong-doing by the South African police and military to bring about some degree of reconciliation.

It would really be encouraging if that negotiated process was carried on year round so that Labour peace is maintained through constant vigilance. Elements which might work to diminish the peace would be pre-empted and deflected with positive results. Compare the exquisite beauty of such an on-going negotiated process with what happened last century in Central and South America as well as the Middle East and South Asia where top down edicts were handed out. Our colleges and universities offer courses to train folks in the process under the heading of Personnel or Industrial Relations. It is not a large stretch to apply those principles to all aspects of the peace process.

The Nuremburg Trials post WWII showed that the international community could arrive at sound and lasting agreements. The Bretton Woods consensus, although not perfect, also showed what can be done when all sides of conflict pull together. The Geneva Conventions confirmed that good agreements can be made when nations work together for the common good in a spirit of mutual cooperation. The Washington Consensus, on the other hand, shows the glaring negativity that arises from top-down decisions arrived at in secret by those who hold the inside track.

The annual Davos meetings have taken top-down decision making to an entirely new level in which CEOs from European and North American Round Tables meet with G8 government leaders and others to map out governance strategies for the planet. Last month, Steven

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Lewis the UN envoy for AIDS in Africa, speaking to a graduating class at an Ottawa University, mentioned how appalled he was by the process and the uncaring attitude of the participants for an international pandemic. In a year when one trillion dollars was spent on armaments, the international community could not come up with the \$17 billion which would not only feed and house the world's poor, but send their children to school, provide their retro-viral drugs and pharma cocktails, provide universal inoculations, take care of malaria, TB, polio, and childhood disease, and give the third world more than a shot in the arm. Those outstanding conflicts have yet to be resolved.

Conflict resolution is the way forward to establishing peace. The UN is far out in front of the individual nations in making conflict resolution operational and have many declarations and advisories which nations would do well to adopt. If only we could get past the corporate greed and national hubris, peace might even be allowed to flourish in our lifetimes.

### ***Suggested Readings***

Robert Skidelsky's *Keynes biographies*: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/index%3Dstripbooks%3Arelevance-above%26field-keywords%3Dskidelsky%252520keynes%26store-name%3Dbooks/102-4504759-1851337>

Barbara Ehrenreich's *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream*: [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0805076069/qid=1148233314/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0805076069/qid=1148233314/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books) and *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*:

[http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0805063897/qid=1148233314/sr=2-2/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_2/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0805063897/qid=1148233314/sr=2-2/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_2/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books)

Kevin Phillips' *American Theocracy : The Peril and Politics of Radical Religion, Oil, and Borrowed Money in the 21st Century*: [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/067003486X/qid=1148233503/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/067003486X/qid=1148233503/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books)

David C. Korten's *The Post-Corporate World: Life After Capitalism*: [http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1887208038/qid=1148233591/sr=2-1/ref=pd\\_bbs\\_b\\_2\\_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books](http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/1887208038/qid=1148233591/sr=2-1/ref=pd_bbs_b_2_1/102-4504759-1851337?v=glance&s=books)

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[calum@hungrypeasant.com](mailto:calum@hungrypeasant.com).

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