

# Cathy Crowe Newsletter #50 - October, 2008

## **Protest and Matters of the Heart**

### **1. Does Art Matter?**

***It mattered to the Conservative Party's majority government.***

### **2. Does Housing Matter?**

***It matters to the 8 million men, women and children in Canada who are precariously housed.***

### **3. Does Peace matter?**

***It mattered to Marion Dewar.***

**Protest!** Why does this word stir up so many negative emotions when it has provided us with our human rights and continues to be the core of political, economic and social justice victories around the world?



Wikipedia provides a valuable history lesson on **protest** ranging from the French Revolution to women's suffrage to civil rights. See Wikipedia for more background. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protest>

The Oxford Dictionary definition of **protest** lays out the fundamentals:

**Noun:** **1)** a statement or action expressing disapproval or objection. **2)** an organized public demonstration objecting to an official policy or course of action.

**Verb:** **1)** express an objection to what someone has said or done. **2)** take part in a public protest. **3)** state emphatically in response to an accusation or criticism: *she protested her innocence.*

### **1. Does Art Matter? It mattered to the Conservative Party's majority government**

Politics usually happens between elections, not during them. So, I was excited to see Canada's recent federal election come alive with politics, thanks to the creative criticism, commitment **and protest** from artists, cultural communities and their supporters. They were reacting to Prime Minister Harper's \$45 million cut to

arts and culture programs and his September election campaign stop comments, which demonstrated his general disdain for the arts.

*“I think when ordinary working people come home, turn on the TV and see a gala of a bunch of people at, you know, a rich gala all subsidized by taxpayers claiming their subsidies aren’t high enough, when they know those subsidies have actually gone up – I’m not sure that’s something that resonates with ordinary people.” Stephen Harper in Saskatoon. (Toronto Star, October 9/08)*

Harper’s comments are said to have sparked a culture war. There were press conferences, rallies, concerts, YouTube videos, and a ‘**10 things you can do if you’re a visual artist**’ tool kit, even the creation of a people run ‘Department of Culture’. People were galvanized. People, even ordinary people, **protested** with the artists!

And there was victory! The arts and culture issue dominated the media for days. Opposition parties developed extensive platforms on what they would do to support arts and culture. A question specific to the arts was included in the nationally televised English and French debates and all leaders praised the benefits of the arts! Last week, Prime Minister Harper announced he wouldn’t re-introduce Bill C-10 (legislation that would have denied tax credits for Canadian films that the government deemed ‘objectionable’).

People were actually moved to the kind of grassroots action that forces political leaders to take note. ***Now, we must replicate this grassroots swell of interest and protest and apply it to fighting poverty and homelessness.***

## ***2. Does Housing Matter? It matters to the 8 million men, women and children in Canada who are precariously housed.***

My friend Don Weitz, an anti-psychiatry and poverty activist (who knows the meaning of **protest!**), wrote the following to the party leaders Jack Layton, Elizabeth May, Gilles Duceppe, Stéphane Dion and Stephen Harper the day after the English TV debate:

*“During the recent TV debate, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS, AND POVERTY got a 20-second or 30-second sound bite - more tokenism! Shame on all of you for refusing to discuss (not ‘mention’) what you will DO to reduce homelessness and poverty in Canada - national disasters demanding immediate action. In case you haven’t noticed or heard, there are roughly 1.5 million poor people, including hundreds of thousands of hungry and poor children, (including 50,000+ kids in Toronto) struggling to survive in every major city, on every Aboriginal reserve across Canada. In Toronto, the*

*vast majority of shelters are overcrowded, ridden with communicable diseases like TB and HIV-AIDS, and breed violence. In Toronto, 70,000+ families are still waiting after 3-5 years for affordable 'social housing'.*"

For the most part, during this federal election it was difficult to find any informed debate, media coverage or even people talking about the important questions. Does housing matter? Does health care matter? Does childcare matter?

There are even more nitty-gritty questions that Canadians should have been asking. Does having a bed in your own room rather than a mat on a shelter floor matter? Does having a toilet that you don't have to share with 60 other people matter? Does having running water matter? Does having a medicine chest, where you can reach for what your sick child might need matter? Does having private and quiet space for kids to do their homework matter? Does having enough money for food and essentials after the 12<sup>th</sup> of the month matter?

***Will these questions matter to our newly elected Members of Parliament?***

### ***3. Does Peace matter? It mattered to Marion Dewar.***

In my last newsletter I wrote about ***Treeless Mountain***, a film I saw at the Toronto International Film Festival. Marion Dewar was at that film fest where she suffered a serious fall that led to her untimely death. Marion Dewar was many things, she was a nurse, city councillor, Mayor and a Member of Parliament, but it was her views and actions as a nurse that inspired me. I described why in a speech I gave in Ottawa earlier this summer:

<http://tdrc.net/uploads/Cathy/newsletter/inspiration.pdf>

The following is an excerpt from an interview that nurse Bonnie Burgess did with Marion in 1986. It was the feature article in the launch edition of the newsletter Nurses for Social Responsibility which evolved into the former magazine ***Towards Justice for Health***.

*About a year ago Marion Dewar gave up her high profile position as Mayor of Ottawa to be the National President of the NDP. As an avowed feminist, socialist and Christian she is probably best known for her maxim "Think globally – act locally." It is her nursing background and involvement in peace and social justice issues which NSR wanted to explore in this March 1986 issue.*

***Has your nursing influenced you politically?***

*Marion: Yes. I first came to recognize priorities in the health care delivery system at the local level. Many boards and committees have little nursing representation.*

*Nurses are on the front line and have never been involved in this kind of decision making. Nurses have knowledge and experience; they know what decision making is all about. If nurses mobilize – change could happen overnight.*

### ***Why should nurses get political?***

*Marion: A feminist view of society recognizes male modelling and hierarchy. Change won't happen until the structure changes. Nurses have to realize that they are paralleling the same thing as other women in society. We need to determine what values we hold most dear. Nurses know in their hearts what we need is public education and health care, but they haven't any confidence and must recognize that internal change is necessary.*

### ***Is there a unique perspective nurses can bring to peace and politics?***

*Marion: Peace is a mainstream issue. I can't think of another group that should be more responsible to the community or is more respected by it than nurses. The military-industrial complex is destroying life, not creating it. Destruction of society is the major issue – nurses understand this.*

### ***How does peace fit into the national political agenda?***

*Marion: Canadians must understand that peace is a domestic and foreign policy issue that affects lives. We are part of the military-industrial complex. I really feel strongly that Canadians haven't engaged in this kind of debate. There is a concerted effort by this government to diffuse this debate. The decision about Cruise Missile Testing was made without consent. We need MPs to look at how these decisions affect our daily lives.*

### ***What should nurses be doing? What's the greatest challenge to Canadian nurses today?***

*Marion: We should link with the community on peace and social justice issues. Nurses need to inform themselves. We have a responsibility to the human race to get involved. We do not have the right to be uninvolved. We need to know how to lobby premiers, the PM, whoever. They tried to leave women out of the constitution, and only when women spoke out collectively (editors' note i.e. protested) did they realize that they couldn't do this.*

### ***Peace matters even more today.***

Fortunately, Marion's son Paul Dewar, Member of Parliament for Ottawa Centre is carrying on the leadership shown by his mother on this issue. Earlier this year Dewar requested a government investigation and a report on the costs of Canada's Afghan mission. Parliamentary Budget Officer Kevin Page released his study last week reporting that the cost of the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to

2011 will reach \$18 billion. Canada's Rideau Institute released a report on October 8 that states the war will cost the government of Canada \$20.7 billion. In addition, they propose that the loss to the Canadian economy from wounded or killed soldiers will be \$7.6 billion, making the total cost of the war to the government and the economy more than \$28 billion.

Increasingly, world and even military leaders are calling the war in Afghanistan unwinnable. The senior British commander in Afghanistan, Brig.-Gen. Mark Carleton-Smith added his voice to that declaration last week.

Here at home, we witness the loss of more than 300,000 jobs in the manufacturing sector, less than 40% of unemployed workers eligible for Employment Insurance benefits and increasing homelessness and poverty. A growing recession and a deepening economic crisis combined with war-making abroad do not bode well for health care, child care, housing or for the elimination of poverty.

What can you do? Protest! ***Protesting against the war or working for peace*** can take on many shapes and forms – letters to politicians and the media, attending rallies and marches, donations to anti-war and anti-poverty groups, developing school curriculum and projects, joining a peace group, supporting US war resisters in Canada or making your voice heard. Our basic human rights and the things that matter will continue to depend on your ***protest***.

Here are a few resources:

[www.nowar.ca](http://www.nowar.ca)

[www.housingnotwar.ca](http://www.housingnotwar.ca)

[www.resisters.ca](http://www.resisters.ca)

[www.ceasefire.ca](http://www.ceasefire.ca)

[www.operationobjection.org](http://www.operationobjection.org)

[www.rideauinstitute.ca](http://www.rideauinstitute.ca)

***Cathy***

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View Cathy's previous newsletters at: <http://tdrc.net/index.php?page=newsletter>.

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