The time is now—join the call for a BC poverty reduction plan

A broad coalition of provincial organizations, including the BCTF, have been working together with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) to make a call for a bold poverty reduction plan, with clear and accountable targets and timelines. On February 5, 2009, CCPA held a press conference to ask all parties running in the next provincial election to commit to taking action on poverty.

How can you add your voice to this call to action?

1. Go online to www.bcpovertyreduction.ca and add your name or your local’s name to the open letter to BC political parties
2. Write letters to the editor of your local paper and call in to radio shows. Emphasize the need for clear targets and timelines. Remind people there is nothing inevitable about poverty.
Open letter to British Columbia political parties

BC needs a poverty reduction plan with targets and timelines

It is time for British Columbia’s provincial government to launch a comprehensive poverty reduction plan—a detailed and accountable strategy with concrete and legislated targets and timelines to dramatically reduce homelessness and poverty in our province. Five Canadian provinces either have such plans or are in the process of developing them, but so far, not BC.

As we approach the May provincial election, we are calling on all BC political parties to commit that, if elected to government; they will implement a comprehensive poverty reduction plan.

By any measure, BC has the highest rate of poverty in Canada. BC has recorded the highest child poverty rate for five years running. Despite years of strong economic growth and record low unemployment, over half a million British Columbians—13% of the total population—live in poverty, and homelessness continues to rise. As we head into a global economic downturn, poverty risks getting worse unless action is taken.

We all pay for poverty. Study after study links poverty with poorer health, higher justice system costs, more demands on social and community services, more stress on family members, and diminished school success. Effective poverty reduction will require the efforts of all segments of society (all levels of government, the private sector, nonprofits, and citizens generally), but the provincial government must take the lead.

The policies needed to make a dramatic difference are known, and other jurisdictions that are setting clear targets and timelines are getting results. A comprehensive approach needs to boost the incomes of those living in poverty, but also build the social infrastructure, public services, and assets that are vital to providing a path out of poverty.

We, the undersigned, urge all provincial political parties to pledge to adopt and legislate poverty reduction targets and timelines, and commit to implementing a comprehensive action plan.
We recommend the following targets and timelines:

Targets and timelines

- Using Statistics Canada’s low-income cut off after tax (LICO-AT), reduce BC’s poverty rate from 13% to 9% in four years, and to 3% in 10 years (meaning, effectively, a one-third reduction within the mandate of the next government, and a 75% reduction within a decade).
- Ensure the poverty rate (using the LICO-AT) for children, lone-mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, and recent immigrants likewise declines by 30% in four years, and by 75% in 10 years, in recognition that poverty is concentrated in these populations.
- Within two years, ensure that every British Columbian has an income that reaches at least 75% of the poverty line (using the LICO-AT).
- Within two years, ensure no one has to sleep outside, and end all homelessness within eight years (ensuring all homeless people have good quality, appropriate housing).

In order to achieve these targets, we call upon political parties to commit, prior to the May election, to specific policy measures and concrete actions in each of the following policy action areas. Special attention should be focused on the needs of those most likely to be living in poverty (single mother households, single senior women, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and mental illness, and recent immigrants and refugees).

Policy action areas

1. Provide adequate and accessible income support for the non-employed.
2. Improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce.
3. Improve food security for low-income individuals and families.
4. Address homelessness and adopt a comprehensive affordable housing and supportive housing plan.
5. Provide universal publicly-funded child care.
7. Enhance community mental health and home support services, and expand integrated approaches to prevention and health promotion services.

There is nothing inevitable about poverty and homelessness in a society as wealthy as ours. If we commit to a bold plan, a dramatic reduction in poverty and homelessness within a few short years is a perfectly achievable goal.

Signed,
Seth Klein, Director, BC Office
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
seth@policyalternatives.ca
CCPA web page: www.policyalternatives.ca
Please join us in taking the next steps in this campaign:

• Ask all your contacts—your e-mail lists, your members—to visit the site and sign the petition as individuals or add their organization to the list of signatories.

• Make this campaign a part of your activities during the election period.

• Send your own letter to the political parties, letting them know that you’ve signed the letter.

Premier Gordon Campbell  
gordon.campbell.mla@leg.bc.ca or premier@gov.bc.ca  
Room 156, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, BC, V8V 1X4  
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(The CCPA is a non-partisan, non-profit public policy research institute, dedicated to social and economic justice. We produce and promote progressive research on a wide range of provincial and national policy issues.)

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A grand march for housing

**Saturday, April 4, 2009—1:00 p.m. start time**

On April 4, 2009, thousands of people from communities across BC will march to demand immediate government action to end homelessness, build social housing, protect rental housing and mobile home pads, and raise welfare and minimum wage rates.

Begin the march at either Peace Flame Park (Burrard bridge) or at Thornton Park (Downtown East Side) and end up at the Vancouver Art Gallery.

For more information, go to

[www.my-calm.info](http://www.my-calm.info)
For the last four years, British Columbia has had the worst child poverty rate of all the provinces in Canada. According to First Call BC’s annual Child Poverty Report Card, this year is no different—for the fifth year in a row, BC has had the highest child poverty rate in the country. This is a dubious distinction. In 2006, at the height of BC’s economic prosperity, the child poverty rate was 21.9%. A province where 181,000 children live in poverty is not the “best place on earth.” That was more than the combined populations of the cities of Nanaimo, Prince George, and Cranbrook.

BC’s child poverty rate is far above the national average. Campaign 2000’s national Child Poverty Report Card, showed the national child poverty rate to be 15.8% in 2006. November 24, 2008, marked the 19th anniversary of the House of Common’s all-party resolution to abolish child poverty by the year 2000. The 2006 national and provincial child poverty rates are both higher than the rates in 1989, when the promise was first made.

Poor families in BC were not just falling a little below the poverty line—they were falling FAR below the poverty line. Families living in poverty had incomes that fell on average more than $11,000 below the 2006 pretax poverty line.

Why are child poverty rates so high in our province?

Low wages, inadequate income assistance rates, and growing inequities all contribute to our high poverty rates.

Low wages
In 2006, employment rates in the province reached a 20-year high. However, not all jobs are good jobs. In fact, 245,000 people earned less than $10 an hour. An individual working full time would need to earn $10.76 an hour to reach the poverty line in a large urban area. BC’s $8 an hour minimum wage has not kept up with the cost of living.

The large majority of poor children in BC live in families with some earned income. Over half of BC’s poor children live in families where the adults worked the equivalent of a full-time full year job or more.

As in 2005, BC again had the highest proportion of children living in poverty where at least one member of their family had a full-time full year job—1 in every 10 BC children were living in families where at least one
person had full-time full-year work were poor. By comparison, the national rate was 1 in 13.

When so many families are working one and two jobs, but are still raising their children in poverty, it is time to question why their wages are so low. Given the real costs of raising a family in this province, both public and private sector employers need to consider paying wages sufficient to lift a family out of poverty.

**Inadequate Income Assistance**

For those who are temporarily unable to work, the BC’s welfare rates keep families on income assistance well below the poverty line. The total annual income of a lone parent with a four-year-old on welfare is currently $16,492 a year—or $11,370 below the estimated before-tax poverty line for a large city. For a couple with children ages 10 and 12, the welfare income is $20,637—or $20,951 below the poverty line.

BC’s income assistance rates have not increased since the early 1990s. The small increases in 2007 only restored the loss of purchasing power to 2002 levels. Even with the recent increases, families (with children) on welfare can only cover three quarters of their basic living costs.

**Growing Income Inequities**

The gap between the rich and poor in our province is increasing. The income ratio between the richest and poorest 10% of families with children in BC has increased from 9 to 1 in 1989 to 13 to 1 in 2006. The government of BC does a poor job compared to other provinces at reducing these inequities.

If BC parents had been forced to rely only on earnings, income from investments, and other sources of market income, the proportion of families with children living in poverty would have been 29.0%. In BC, government transfers only reduce the market child poverty rate by 24%, which is meagre compared to other provinces. Newfoundland and Labrador has a poverty reduction plan, and government transfers reduced the market child poverty rate by over 57%. Quebec reduces their rates by 48%, and even Alberta does better, reducing their child poverty rate by 46%.

**What needs to be done to reduce child poverty in BC?**

BC needs a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Given that we are coming up to an election in May 2009, First Call is calling on all provincial political parties to articulate and commit to a poverty reduction strategy as part of their platforms. The poverty reduction strategies should include targets and timelines so that the party that forms the government can be held accountable to the public.

Last year, First Call proposed reducing child poverty by 25% by 2012 and by 50% by 2017. As the most recent child poverty report shows, things got even worse in 2006, so the government is going to have to work even harder to reach these targets.

Fighting poverty requires a wide range of policies and programs. Some key provincial policy changes that will help reach these targets include:

- raising the minimum wage to reach the poverty line for a large urban area and increasing it every year to keep up with the cost of living.
• raising welfare rates to meet the income levels in the federal government’s Market Basket Measure and indexing them to inflation.
• making sure government contractors pay living wages to their employees.

We recognize that the provincial government cannot do this alone. Therefore, the federal government will need to:
• increase the Canada Child Tax Benefit to $5,250 per child.
• restore more inclusive eligibility rules and higher wage replacement rates for Employment Insurance coverage to protect family income during temporary periods of unemployment.

The federal and provincial governments need to work together to:
• create a universally accessible high-quality childcare program. $100 a month for children under six years provides income support, but it does not create high-quality childcare spaces nor does it come close to covering childcare costs.
• increase their efforts to build social housing for low-income people.

In 2010, BC will be hosting the Olympics. Our province will be on display for the world to see. For these proposed polices to have any impact on our shameful child poverty record by then, the government needs to act now.

One might argue about how we can afford to pay for the implementation of this poverty reduction strategy as we face a global economic crisis. The report card shows that child poverty rates tend to increase in times of recession. If our province was leaving one in five children behind during an economic boom, how many are going to fall into poverty with a looming economic crisis? Social infrastructure is an important economic stimulus. Poor people, after all, spend all of their income on necessities, which in turn stimulates local economies.

What teachers can do

Teachers have an important role to play in the fight to end child poverty. Here are some things you can do:

• Download the BC Child Poverty Report Card from the First Call website (www.firstcallbc.org) and familiarize yourself with the facts and proposed solutions.
• Think about how poverty affects your work as a teacher and the students you teach. Help educate your students, their parents, and your fellow teachers about how child poverty affects your community. Together brainstorm ways of reducing poverty, not just the effects of poverty, in your community.
• Take the BC Child Poverty Report Card to your local government representatives and talk about the impacts of poverty for you as a teacher and on your students. Ask your local representatives what they are doing to reduce poverty in your community.
• Talk to your MLA about the need for a poverty reduction strategy. For more ideas about what a poverty reduction strategy might include go to www.policyalternatives.ca and download their report called, “A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC.” Ask your MLA if his or her party will commit to poverty reduction targets.
• Propose motions to take to your union’s annual general meeting that support poverty reduction policy changes.

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• Propose motions to take to your union’s annual general meeting that support poverty reduction policy changes.
The alarming increase in the number of BC families with food security issues is a concern for teachers because our own students may come to school malnourished or undernourished. Teachers spend time and effort organizing food drives in their school for their local food bank. Thousands of kilos of non-perishable food are collected and donated, with the hope of helping others.

Food banks seem to be part of a solution to food issues suffered by individuals and families in our communities. Food is donated and is distributed in an orderly manner by caring agencies. In a way, through this process, some wealth is redistributed in the form of food. By working on food drives and other such activities at the school level, teachers raise awareness of the existing poverty in our communities, and promote the value of generosity amongst our students. This last feature of the process is probably the most important!

However, we need to spend time thinking through issues of poverty and food security, and explore what our actions individually as teachers, and collectively as a union, can and should be.

Perhaps we need to analyse what we are doing with our food donation efforts in the larger picture. Shannon Richardson opines in her book, Taking it Global, that “the problem with food banks is that they are not proactive. Like many charities, they do not solve the problem of poverty. Instead, they exacerbate it by making people dependent. They are a source of aid to those suffering from food insecurity only after they have fallen through the cracks of society’s social safety net by little to no fault of their own. Since being food secure requires that a person can obtain food in a manner that maintains human dignity, the use of a food bank, despite the provision of food, cannot ever fully absolve food insecurity, seeing as the use of a food bank can be very stigmatizing. Justice is preferable to charity any day.”

So if food banks don’t solve the problem of poverty, how do we as teachers begin to address the root causes and contribute to solutions? Solutions to poverty probably lie in the area of policy creation and implementation, which is usually understood as government action. To get governments to act demands political activism, which teachers, as active and articulate citizens can do. Collectively through our union, we can put pressure on the government to put into place policies that truly help people escape poverty and the effects of demoralizing dependence. We need to demand policy changes to address the appallingly low welfare rates, the low minimum wage, high tuition rates, housing shortages which drive the rent rates through the roof, and fees for services that are basic human rights, such as access to basic education, healthcare, etc., and lack of access to quality childcare. All these decisions made by the government affect the lives of people living in poverty, and all are areas we could lobby our government to improve.

So should we or shouldn’t we participate in food bank food collection or hamper-filling? Probably in the short term we need to, because schools, through the efforts of teachers, have become important sources of food that people in our communities need. However, we should do so while analyzing the impacts of our action. Children are able to understand complex issues, especially about what is going on around them, more than we sometimes give them credit for. If we are collecting food for a food bank or hamper distribution, we should have a robust discussion about it, unearthing the underlying issues so that the results for our students go beyond a “feel good” gesture. As union members and as individual teachers in our communities, we can also work to end poverty in our province by pressuring government to create policy and act to change the situation for poor people.
My teaching colleagues are always aghast when I tell them my story. They say, “But you are a teacher. How could you be poor? You make a good salary.” I am a relatively new teacher with a temporary full-time contract this year. However, last year I worked a 60% temporary contract and on the other two days, I was a teacher teaching on call (TTOC). I “subbed” two days a week.

I am a single, working mom, with a 13-year-old child, and I have a student loan that is $606 a month. I have 12 more years to go until it is paid off. The government says I make too much money for it to be an interest-free loan. Last year, I worked at the local Subway on Saturdays and Sundays to make ends meet, which often meant working seven days a week. I will start this job again after spring break so I have it for the summer, when I have no income. I am reluctant to go back to this job because my students often come into the store and they wonder what their teacher is doing working in a fast food restaurant.

At the beginning of my career, I taught up north in a full-time assignment. I grew up in Salmon Arm and wanted to return to teach in the community I had grown up in, and I wanted the support of my family while raising my son. This has meant part-time and temporary work, and teaching on call. I have had it better than some. Because I have roots in the community—a father who worked in the school system here and a sister who teaches here—they put the word out to their teaching colleagues that I was looking for work. With a preferential call-out system, I benefitted. As well, I have taken extra course work so I may teach in areas requiring special training. That has helped. Teaching on call is very competitive. TTOCs keep job opportunities quiet as each one of us is looking for full-time work. Although, I benefitted from the preferential call-out system, I don’t support it. There is no transparency, no fairness in this kind of call-out system. If you are not called back to a school or a class, there is usually no way to find out why. I support seniority call-out as a transparent and fair system. Seniority call-out would mean a way out for TTOCs who are the working poor.
“Rally in the valley for Social Justice 12!”

by James Chamberlain, BCTF staff

Having grown up and attended schools in Abbotsford, I never thought I’d ever see the day when students and their allies would be marching in support of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit, and queer (LGBTQ) issues.

That’s exactly what occurred on December 6, as I marched along with 300 other courageous people through the streets of Abbotsford to the University College of the Fraser Valley.

Contrary to what some people might envision when they think of a rally or a march, there were no defiant protests or angry rants. A tone of celebration filled the air as rainbow flags (a symbol of pride for the LGBTQ community) flew everywhere! Students and their allies were clearly marching for LGBTQ people’s equality with pride. Cars honked their horns in support as the student’s voices could be heard all along the route as they chanted, “Rally in the valley for Social Justice 12!”

Students from W.J. Mouat Secondary School headed the procession with brightly coloured placards hung around their necks. Their placards clearly stated their desires:

“Honk for Social Justice!”
“Education for an inclusive nation”

“Celebrate Diversity”
“Don’t Fear Queer”
“Education should be OPEN”
“Mouat needs Social Justice 12”

What sparked the rally?

Once again, students were standing up for social justice in response to the Abbotsford School Board’s decision in September. At that time, the school board banned Social Justice 12 from W.J. Mouat Secondary School where 90 students had already enrolled in the course. Trustees objected to, and singled out, one part of this elective course which focuses on different forms of oppression and examines and analyzes LGBTQ issues. They insisted that the teacher who had planned to teach Social Justice 12 delete all references to LGBTQ issues from the course, despite the fact that this is ministry approved curriculum.

Why Abbotsford?

This is one of the more conservative school boards in the province. They’re typically not known for being socially progressive. Fundamentalist Christian values run deep in this community. Trustees and school board officials have been silent about LGBTQ issues. They are not known as being advocates for LGBTQ people. So within this vacuum of leadership a perfect storm began to brew.

The storm and the silence

For months there were a series of letters written to local newspapers on both sides of the Social Justice 12 issue. Rather than focus on the course content, many of the authors took the liberty to pen letters which viciously attacked LGBTQ people and their families. They
claimed that LGBTQ people were “sick, immoral, disgusting, perverted, abnormal, etc.” Some writers claimed the Social Justice 12 course was an attempt by homosexual activists to recruit children into homosexuality. Some even equated LGBTQ people’s lives with bestiality and pedophilia.

Through all this hate, school board officials and trustees were silent. They did nothing to quell the homophobia, ignorance, and fear within the community. Why? Perhaps because elections were coming.

A group called Abbotsford Families United began circulating e-mails prior to trustee elections claiming: “The top issue here is the Ministry of Education’s pro-homosexual agenda and the Corren Agreement. What about Social Justice 12? It’s just the icing on the cake. You can expect to see pro-homosexual indoctrination right down to the kindergarten level in the public schools starting next year. The ONLY candidates who have been willing to take a clear stand against these attacks on parental-rights have been the five candidates we’ve selected. Yes, there are other candidates who are running, some of whom are Christians, but their stand on Social Justice 12 isn’t strong enough for us to endorse them.”

Their e-mails also lashed out at some mayoralty and city council candidates while endorsing others. They claimed the city was in need of “strong leadership and godly vision and that the mayor and city hall needed the resolve to say “No” to things like gay pride parades and fringe activist causes.”

So, what did the trustees do? Rather than be strong leaders speaking out against intolerance against LGBTQ students, they maintained their ban on Social Justice 12 and remained silent. Consequently, all of the trustee candidates endorsed by Abbotsford Families United were re-elected.

**What do these students say they want?**

“The right to access uncensored education; this stance is particularly important in our community, since the cancellation of Social Justice 12. It is our right to be taught courses prescribed by the Ministry of Education, without having them modified or unjustly removed by the local school board.”

“To make aware to the community the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the rights that we have as citizens to be free of discrimination. This includes being able to learn and develop in a non-judgmental and safe environment.”

**From silence to social justice activism**

Despite the setbacks in Abbotsford, students remain strong and united. They are tired of homophobia and transphobia in their community and want an inclusive, LGBTQ-friendly school system where they can learn to their full potential. Students plan to make a presentation to school trustees on the need for an LGBTQ policy to protect them in schools.

Today’s students are fighting for a socially just world and proving to trustees and others that they are meeting all the goals of the Social Justice 12 course (and more) through their advocacy, action and resiliency. LGBTQ students and their straight friends, families, and allies are refusing to be silent. Their actions have proven highly successful as the Abbotsford School Board recently reversed their decision to ban Social Justice 12. Schools will be allowed to offer Social Justice 12 starting in September 2009. This sudden change of heart was probably motivated in part by student and teacher activism, negative press, and the regional social justice conference being held in Abbotsford. These students and their allies have taught us that they are proving to be the social justice leaders of the next generation.

**What can we do?**

As teachers, we have a responsibility to stand shoulder-to-shoulder and support all students interested in Social Justice 12. Each of us must do our part to speak up for discreet LGBTQ school board policies and advocate strongly for Social Justice 12, no matter where we teach. It is our professional responsibility to every student to make our schools socially just places where everyone can learn and not just survive, but thrive!

*Editor’s note: Quotes in this article are from e-mails, letters, and press releases on the part of the groups mentioned.*

BCTF Social Justice Newsletter, Winter 2009
Social justice in the BCTF rocks my world

by Shannon Lanaway, CASJ—LGBTQ Action Group

Following the BC teachers’ strike action in 2005, I walked into my local teachers’ union office for the first time. After more than two weeks without work, as a newly certified TTOC, I was applying for some form of financial relief. With a stroke of pure luck, I happened to look on the wall and see a BCTF posting for a facilitator training position for Global Education for Gender Equality. I applied and was accepted for the training program and my life as a social activist with the BCTF began.

I turned 36 with a group of professional educators brainstorming how to create gender equality for students in the classroom with creativity, compassion, and fun. Our vision was global and we were given the opportunity to step out of our ethnocentrism and listen and learn from international educators. As a feminist, I couldn’t have asked for a better birthday, listening to the fantastic stories of activists from the Status of Women. The great changes they had achieved through their creativity, humor, and brilliance was humbling and inspiring. I was impressed at what and how change had been accomplished in our union.

Up until the opportunity to become a trained facilitator for the BCTF, I had been completely uninterested and uninformed about the history of the BCTF. However, with encouragement and support from fellow activists, I started attending the BCTF AGMs, became a social justice representative for my local, and had the honor of becoming a member of the Committee for Action on Social Justice working on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Action Group. Through the entire experience, I have been extremely impressed at how important taking action on social justice issues in the classroom, school community, provincially, nationally, and globally has been to teachers at the BCTF.

Life is in the details, and the reason I have been able to play an active part in the BCTF social justice movement has been the BCTF’s financial support for childcare. Without childcare, single parents are simply limited in their ability to contribute. I haven’t been.

Recently, I spent a day planning and organizing a social justice gathering in Nelson for the new social justice staff reps. I realized that I simply love my union work! I invited a friend of mine with indigenous ancestry to give the blessing with gratitude and humility to the original people of this land. I booked guest speakers on transgender issues, the Red Cross youth programs, and a Keep It Wise workshop. Teachers at the gathering will be encouraged to talk about what kind of social justice education is taking place...
in their school communities. I am asking teachers to help their students write paragraphs about what it is they loved, learned, and will remember about their social justice lessons, projects, and activism for the upcoming newsletter. The local social justice newsletter I am putting together for February (the United Nations Social Justice Day is on February 20), will be a collaboration of motivation and inspiration from our local. At the gathering, we are offering coffee produced by a women’s collective in Peru. Partial proceeds go to the oldest rural women’s organization in Canada, the West Kootenay Women’s Association.

I am grateful, humbled, and courageous enough to want to see less talking, more caring, and more action. It truly is the little things that count. Special thanks to all the compassionate teachers who are working to make a difference in this province and to all those young people who are courageous enough to try to learn how to be an activist. Social justice action is helping make someone’s day better, rather than worse, and starts with each of us. In Velcrow Ripper’s second documentary, Fierce Light: When Spirit Meets Action, there is a clip of the environmentalist heroine, Julia Butterfly Hill. After two years of living in a majestic cedar, a political action taken to stop clear-cut logging, she spoke of hope and action, as not something in the future, but something that must live within us, in the present, and done now.

There are so many admirable programs on how to preserve fresh water, discourage the sale of bottled water, build wells in majority world countries, and provide inexpensive water filtration systems for-at risk areas. I have been thinking about the best strategy to advocate for safe drinking water considering the UN World Water Day on March 22. I feel the most important strategy is to oppose the privatization of water. Throughout the world, water privatization has created increasing divides between the rich and the poor, corporations and individuals, and the haves and have-nots. My South African water study revealed that the privatization of water, in effect, has created a water-based genocide and is reproducing divisions in the population similar to that of Apartheid.

When water was privatized in South Africa in 1994, corporate water companies began to charge citizens for access to their household water. Water taps were turned off for those who couldn’t afford to pay the service charges! Ten million non-paying households were terminated. As well, those who didn’t have clean drinking water before Apartheid still didn’t have clean drinking water, despite structural readjustment programs. Many turned to contaminated water supplies including cholera-infected sources. Hundreds of thousands died from water-borne infections.

According to the US National Intelligence Council, “by 2015… nearly half the world’s population (more than 3 billion people) will live in countries that are water stressed.” The potential for conflict and war over water...
is steadily increasing. Water is a cultural, political, and economic issue and is not limited to marginalized nations.

I campaigned alongside activists like Trevor Ngwane and argued for water policy reform in South Africa, expecting it wouldn’t change things. We won! Read about the High Court decision in Johannesburg on April 30, 2008. (apf.org.za/article.php?id_article=272) We can do it in Canada too! Write a letter to your MP and Prime Minister Harper requesting that Canada oppose water privatization and recognize water as a basic human right. You never know where your efforts may take an issue! Some ideas for your letter can be found at www.canadians.org. Sign a petition at www.thepetitionsite.com/petition/158126988 sponsored by the Council of Canadians.


Choose Your Voice

Choose Your Voice (CYV) is a new school resource developed by the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee, in partnership with FAST (Fighting Antisemitism Together). This useful antiracism and antisemitism education program helps to educate Grades 6 and 7 students about the dangers of stereotyping and racism. Choose Your Voice helps empower students to stand up against prejudice and hate and is a powerful component of bullying prevention programs. Students will learn about contemporary and historical incidents of racism such as the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver, the tragic 1998 murder of Nirmal Singh Gill, and the March 2004 arson attack at Pickering Mosque. The program also shares experiences of antisemitism and antiracism against the Jewish, African-Canadian, First Nations, Chinese, and Asian communities, including stories of Holocaust and Rwandan genocide survivors, and a former racist turned antiracism advocate.

In November, CYV was launched at Sir William Osler Elementary School in Vancouver. Principal Milana Christie and teachers Patti Milsom and Elaine McGauley used CYV to teach their students about the dangers of prejudice and empower them to stand up when confronted with racism.

One highlight of the launch was the performance of “Stand Together” and “Children of Hope,” by the school choir. The students’ poems, performances, and artwork reflected the powerful messages about the harmful effects of racism. Watching children from diverse backgrounds stand together, united in a single voice promoting peace, love, and acceptance was a delight to see. The students sent a powerful message—a message of hope. They eloquently demonstrated the need to not be bystanders when bullying occurs, to support their friends, and speak out against racism in our schools.

CYV is specially designed to help teachers meet provincial learning outcomes in the areas of Social Studies, Language Arts, and Fine Arts. This resource also includes four lesson plans, an assessment strategy, and an educational DVD. For more information about Choose Your Voice, please contact the Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee by phone at 604-622-4240 or e-mail cjcpr@cjc.ca.
The importance of intellectual self-defence

by Clay McLeod, CASJ—Peace and Global Education Action Group member

The 1992 documentary film, Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media, explores Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman’s “propaganda model” which seeks to demonstrate how the profit-driven media in “free and democratic” capitalist societies serve to further the interests of dominant, elite groups in society. In other words, our media helps to consolidate and perpetuate existing power structures and the status quo. This model proposes that our media is not really free and democratic, in the sense that a truly free and democratic media would provide a diverse and open range of ideas and viewpoints that reflect the thoughts and aspirations of the range of people and interests in society. Rather, the media, as it currently functions, can be characterized, as Chomsky does, as “propaganda, American-style,” designed to “manufacture the consent” of people by controlling their thoughts, usually through the subtle acceptance of certain foundational assumptions that nobody dares to question in the mainstream media (e.g., that capitalism is the preferable way of organizing economic relationships in society).

Thus described, the role of the media stands in stark contrast to the position of critical theory, which seeks to examine all texts and media (as well as social situations) in order to understand whether and how those texts and situations work to support socially unjust structures, and to understand how best to work towards emancipation and liberation from social injustice and oppression. In other words, critical theory is a way of looking at words (and the world) that helps us to critique oppression and take action geared towards social justice. Naomi Klein’s (2007) recent bestseller, The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism, is an example of critical theory at work. This masterful work explores how free-market thinking has seized upon “shocks,” both natural and manufactured, to create opportunities for the implementation of unpopular, undemocratic, laissez-faire, neo-liberal policies that wouldn’t have been possible had the people not been in a vulnerable state as a result of some kind of shocking circumstance. Tellingly, for teachers concerned with the democracy of education, the book opens with the example of how the New Orleans public school system was privatized in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

On The Shock Doctrine website, the book is promoted with the message, “Information is shock resistance. Arm yourself.” This alludes nicely to Chomsky’s idea of intellectual self-defence; the only way to ensure that you are truly free to think for yourself is to practice intellectual self-defence. The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called this conscientização, which he defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality.” Other words used to describe this skill and attitude (intellectual self-defence is both a skill and an attitude) are “conscientization” and “critical consciousness;” it is a kind of consciousness and awareness that makes you aspire to consider things with a view to making the world a more socially just place, and it is a set of skills that allows you to see through indoctrination and to see how social and ecological relations can be managed in a more socially just way.

All progressive teachers (i.e., all teachers who value the notion that it is ethical and emancipatory for human society to progress towards a cultural expression that represents and reflects equality, justice, sustainability, and compassion) should aspire to practice and to teach their students intellectual self-defence and create the conditions in their classrooms for the generation of conscientization. Since education works to “preserve and distribute” ideology and propaganda that serves the interests of the wealthy...
and powerful (i.e., we learn things and in ways that serve the interests of people with power and that serve to support existing power structures), schools can be places of indoctrination. Think of how racism is presented in the materials students read in school. If texts and course content present racism as acceptable, students learn to see racism as acceptable; conversely, when texts and course content present racism as problematic, students are able construct a critique and take action against racism more easily.

In this way, classrooms and schools should be places where students are encouraged and given the intellectual tools to raise questions about social and environmental justice in and across all subject areas. Students should be encouraged to constantly ask, “What can I learn from this text/subject/situation that will help me to understand oppression and injustice and take effective action to ameliorate it?” Schools should be places where students learn intellectual self-defence.

10 top tips for practicing intellectual self-defence

1. Know your history! (not just the textbook history)
2. Learn the facts relating to your topic of concern, especially the neglected ones!
3. Learn to explain your ideas simply to critical, non-specialist audiences.
4. Use, support, and, if possible, develop sources of alternative media.
5. Use the Internet to its full advantage: read widely, read often, and be careful with the reliability of sources.
6. When in arguments (at least ones you wish to be productive), try to seek common ground with opponents rather than “defeat” them.
7. Develop listening skills.
8. Know your opposition in detail rather than simply dismissing them. Read their publications, get to know and understand their arguments properly.
9. When forced to justify your position, do so. But don’t just accept a subordinate status in the hierarchy of ideas, also go on the counterattack: make people holding mainstream positions justify themselves to the same standards of evidence that they are holding you to! (i.e., Ask them questions as well.)
10. Be honest! Admit when you don’t know things!

For more information:
www.zpub.com/un/chomsky.html
chomskyat80.blogspot.com/2008/11/workshop-report-intellectual-self.html
After becoming a member of BCTF’s Committee for Action on Social Justice in September 2007, I decided to try and form a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) Club in the Prince George School District. One of the goals of the LGBTQ Action Group has been to provide support to our colleagues who are trying to form GSAs in the northern and central part of the province. Starting a GSA club in the largest northern district seemed like a good starting point.

After making posters, travelling to every secondary school to speak with administrators and counselors, and putting announcements on screens and PAs, the first meeting was called. Students from all seven secondary schools were invited to come to Lakewood Junior Secondary where I teach, and nine students from four different schools showed up.

Needless to say, everyone was very nervous and not quite sure of what was going to happen, or where things were going to go. But with the Timbits and juice, everyone relaxed and started chatting. Some general introductions were done and expectations for the group were outlined. The students and I, as their sponsor teacher, were all soon very relaxed with each other, and things just took off from there.

Over the course of the first year, meetings were held every Tuesday and over 50 different students attended from every high school in the district. After the first six weeks, students started to run the meetings and plan the activities and events. These have been wide-reaching indeed. Students have had guest speakers come in to make presentations, played board games, prepared for events (Antihomophobia Day and Week, Day of Silence, Antibullying Day—wear pink, and Prince George Pride events). They have discussed important topics relating to the LGBTQ community, such as coming out and dealing with parents, peers, and school climates. They organized activities like Frisbee, sledding, softball, a barbecue, and movie nights. The film Transamerica was a great success, with a transgendered student discussing the movie and then describing the transition he has gone through. A dance and barbecue were held the last Friday of June to celebrate the first year of the GSA club.

September 2008 saw the group’s first meeting of the season and it came after several phone calls from the students saying “please, please, please, can we have the club again?” This year, the club has not had quite the same numbers, but the students have been keen and enthusiastic, and continue to do a wide range of activities during the meetings. They are planning to participate in some upcoming national events and are also looking into the possibility of making a short film on the various facets of “Being LGBTQ” in Prince George. There will be a GSA conference in Prince George on the PSA day, October 23, 2009, and the students have lots of ideas for that.

Last year, a reporter with the Prince George Citizen did a story on the GSA, and that was received very well in the community. He came back just before Christmas to do a follow-up story, and spoke with the students for almost two hours. The students described the GSA, talked about being LGBTQ in Prince George and the North, and discussed every topic under the sun with him. Two students made comments that impacted me in a very profound way. One boy remarked to the reporter that he could not function without the GSA, and that the GSA meeting was the highlight of his week, and the only thing in school that he really looked forward to. Another remarked that since his parents did not know he was gay, and he was not out in his school, the only time of each week that he could truly be himself was at the GSA. He said he would like the GSA to be every day.
Upon hearing these comments, I realized the great importance of having a GSA club in the district. I have tried, with the students, to form clubs in each school, but this has been difficult. Last year, a group met weekly at Prince George Secondary during May and June, after a sponsor was found. However, the only GSA this year is the district meeting every Tuesday.

So as the group enters 2009 with a lot of enthusiasm and positive spirits, the GSA will continue to provide a safe space for all LGBTQ students and their allies to meet and be themselves, even if it is just for a very short moment in time each week.

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**Gender-based violence against girls still a serious concern for schools and communities**

*by Louise Gonzalvez, CASJ—Status of Women Action Group member*

The pervasiveness of violence against girls was underlined in a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) review of schools on January 10, 2008, precipitated by the shooting death of Jordan Manners on May 23, 2007, at C.W. Jefferys Secondary School. Gender-based violence was reported at alarming rates. In one study, 1 in 14 girls reported that they had been sexually assaulted in the last two years (in answer to the question: “Has someone forced you to have sex against your will?”) and 1 in 5 reported knowing someone who had been sexually assaulted. Sadly, 8 out of 10 students would not report their victimization to police or school officials.

With an increasing focus on mean girls, gay bashing, and poor performing boys in schools, the issue of gender-based violence can be lost. All of these issues are significant and require attention and it is when we address marginalized groups and institutionalized oppressions that society can move forward. The sad reality is that, “According to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services’ Domestic Violence Death Review Committee’s 2007 Annual Report, in Ontario there have been approximately 30 domestic homicides a year from 2002 to 2006, and over 90% involve men killing their intimate female partner.” A longitudinal study of 23 secondary schools in Toronto by the Centre for Prevention Science, a division of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Ontario found that, “almost half of the students (43%) reported experiencing sexual harassment in Grade 9. Although the rates were similar for girls and boys, the types of harassment experiences differed. The girls were more likely than boys to be the recipient of sexual jokes, comments, and unwanted touching, while boys were more likely to be subjected to homosexual slurs. Sexual harassment was associated with a range of negative outcomes for girls that included suicidal thoughts, self-harm, maladaptive dieting, early dating, substance use, and poor grades.” (February 2008)

Denying these issues only escalates the situation and socially reproduces the behaviours over time. It is students, teachers, families, communities, and society at large that pay the price for not establishing policies, education programs, and consequences for gender-based violence that insidiously disguises itself as “only” teasing or “borderline” harassment. Jaffe and Hughes (2008) have established key strategies for preventing violence against girls. In summary, they are:

- liaison with community service groups to establish a safe school environment
- integrate the topics of gender-based violence into classroom lessons
- complete a survey to conduct a site-based analysis
• raise awareness
• develop intervention skills
• celebrate successes.

More information and curricular materials can be located at: www.osstf.on.ca/educationforum?cat=publications.


Challenging covert racism through bargaining

by Treena Goolieff, CASJ—Antiracism Action Group member

Racism still exists in profound and visible ways within our society. However, its covert sites must not be ignored. Our collective agreements are subtle examples that must be examined with equal concern as all forms of racism are damaging and prohibit the realization of an accepting multicultural society. At the upcoming 2009 AGM over Spring Break March 14–17, the Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ) Antiracism Action Group will be actively seeking the support of other teachers to pass the following policy recommendation to become one of the objectives in the next round of bargaining:

That Policy 3.B.01 be amended to add “the provision of up to three employer-paid days per year for teachers to participate in religious and/or culturally-based celebrations” as a bargaining objective.

Currently, various locals around the province have language within their collective agreements that grant teachers leave to attend and celebrate religious holidays. That said, in all cases these days are either without pay, or are granted with pay but at the cost of the TOC.

Surrey teachers have recently secured parallel language to the policy recommendation outlined above and have been granted up to three days with pay to attend and celebrate religious holidays. The success of the STA may be linked to presence of Surrey’s diverse demographics both among their teachers and the students they teach. However, this issue must be taken to the provincial level to ensure that a teacher’s ability to celebrate and share time with their family during religious holidays without financial cost not be predicated on their postal code but rather determined by a right we have within a multicultural society. This agreement must be used by the BCTF to address the systemic inequity of the current language within local collective agreements.

Kogila Moodley (2000), antiracist educator and retired UBC Education Studies academic discusses the responsibility of actors within a multicultural society to ensure its structures enable cultural preservation of groups whose culture may be at risk. The accessibility and granting of leave by the employer to attend religious days is a nuance within this framework. Although much of Moodley’s work focused on the application of these principles to promote diversity and honour difference within her multicultural education model, her work validates the necessity to tackle the institutionalized racism at other sites. Eliminating racism is not possible through selective address, both overt and covert prejudice must be examined, and challenged on all fronts in order to see change.

Public education is one of inclusion, honouring, respecting, and promoting diversity as outlined in ministry policy and educational and learning outcomes of the classes we teach. Therefore, we have a responsibility to highlight and lead our employer to assume its role to mirror collective bargaining language to educational principles of multiculturalism. As well, there is a cost of inaction by teachers in failing to move forward, as it expresses the same disconcerting disconnect between the practices in the classrooms and what we
believe for ourselves and our colleagues.

School districts like Surrey, with the leadership of Surrey teachers, have solidified values that honour the religious rights of teachers and recognize that these rights should not come at a financial cost. A collective BCTF strategy must be developed to ensure the province mirrors the treatment of teachers to the belief of cultural acceptance and diversity that fills the curriculum we teach and it is the responsibility of our union to protect and uphold the rights of all our members.

I urge you to support this motion at the AGM and to speak with other colleagues about the significance of realizing this objective in the next round of bargaining.

If you would like to speak to and motivate this recommendation at the AGM, please contact your local teachers’ union. Or if you would like to share your concerns on this issue, contact your local president and/or members of the Committee for Action on Social Justice Antiracism Action Group: Michael Aaku, maaku@bctf.ca (Surrey); Daniel Shiu, dshiu@bctf.ca (Surrey); John Petersen, jpetersen@bctf.ca (North Vancouver); or Treena Goolieff, tgoolieff@bctf.ca (Vancouver Secondary).


What is “Peace It Together”?

In the summer of 2008, thirty Palestinian, Israeli, and Canadian teenagers gathered in and around Vancouver, BC to participate in an extraordinary dialogue and filmmaking experience. Based on the successful 2006 program, the youths lived and learned together for three weeks, discovered their personal strengths, and created inspiring short films.

Peace it Together is a year-long curriculum for Palestinian, Israeli, and Canadian youth that begins with an intensive residential program on Canada’s West Coast. In and around Vancouver, we teach creative and practical conflict resolution skills to youth as they work in teams to create short films related to the conflict. We then work with the youth over the course of the year to become leaders in their communities, and use the films they created as educational tools in the conflict region and around the world.

Our goals:

- Empower youth to discover their personal strengths and ability to make a difference in their communities.
- Shift the negative attitude toward the other and promote the concept of dialogue and tolerance.
- Create innovative tools for teachers and youth to educate in classroom setting and beyond.

Israeli and Palestinian youth are growing up in an environment of pervasive cultural alienation, anger, and fear. This discourages them from working toward peace while encouraging them to maintain the cycle of violence. Any solution to this conflict will undoubtedly involve painful compromise between the two nations that have legitimate claims to the same land. To negotiate and get support for that compromise, citizens and leaders must:

- surmount the hurdles of alienation
- legitimize the other side’s point of view
- acknowledge the contribution of one’s own side to the conflict
- have empathy for the other side’s suffering.

Public education program

We are designing the public education program in order to increase the positive impact of the activities and philosophies of the young participants of the Peace it Together programs to wider communities. Targeted for high schools and post-secondary institutions in Palestine and Israel, and around the world, the educational program includes:

- the best of the short youth-made films at Peace it Together summer programs
- a 20–30 minute “Behind-the-Scenes” documentary showing how the films were made and highlighting the
conflict transformation process
• a teacher’s guide that includes questions for discussion, sample exercises, and guidelines for dialogue.

A fresh perspective
The youth-made films provide a fresh and real perspective on the conflict that is of great interest to young people around the world. While the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the most notorious and intractable in the world today, most young people outside the conflict region don’t understand what it is about or how it impacts everyday people. Mass media and classroom curricula generally fail at conveying to students what they really want to know—that is, the concerns and interests of their peers.

A unique approach
In Israel and Palestine, these films are completely unique. It is the first time the two sides have come together to make films that directly address the conflict. The films have already captured the imagination and curiosity of many Israeli and Palestinian students. Educators have given us enthusiastic support to show these films in their classrooms.

The response
We have been testing the educational program in our local community and in the Middle East by showing the youth films and the “Behind-the-Scenes” documentary to teachers and students, and leading dialogues and classroom discussions. The response has been very enthusiastic. As one local high school student recently said, “I really didn’t have a good understanding of the conflict before, but now, after analyzing the film made by my peers, I really have a sense of what it is about.”

Youth-made films
The following eight new films have the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of people in public screenings throughout the world and will serve as educational tools in classrooms and beyond.

Inspired
(10:31 minutes, documentary)
Palestinian, Israeli, and Canadian participants discuss the inspiration they found in each other during the Peace it Together summer program. They reveal what they learned from the experience and how they hope to make a difference when they go back to their own communities.

Heaven Forbid
(4:09 minutes, drama)
Two girls, one Israeli and the other Palestinian, meet on a deserted island. They have no memory of their past, but as their friendship blossoms they start to remember how they got there.

Listen to This
(2:14 minutes, animation)
Two musicians living on either side of a wall compete to see whose music can be the loudest. When the noise breaks the wall between them they realize that by playing together they can make something beautiful.

Burdened
(7:05 minutes, drama)
A young boy carries an unusually heavy load—a basket of stones. One-by-one, people from all walks of life come and take a stone from the basket while revealing their personal burden.

Turning the Lens
(9:26 minutes, documentary)
Participants explore how the mass media has contributed to their personal misimpressions.
and stereotypes. They discover the power of engaging with their own experiences to shift paradigms through media.

**Checkpoint of Humanity**  
(3:48 minutes, drama)  
An Israeli and a Palestinian meet at a checkpoint. Flashbacks reveal the tragic circumstances in which they had met before and which now threaten both of their lives. Something changes for both of them when they are able to see the humanity in each other.

**Freedom**  
(2:25 minutes, animation)  
Hand-drawn paintings and meticulously rendered rotoscope images blend to create a poetic meditation on individual freedom and hope.

**My Enemy**  
(11:32 minutes, docudrama)  
Mohammad and Tom, two teenagers from Palestine and Israel, discuss the difficult issues that come between them. The more they talk, the more their friendship grows.

All films can be viewed for free online at [www.creativepeacenetwork.ca/](http://www.creativepeacenetwork.ca/).

If you are interested in pre-ordering our educational program or purchasing specific films for your school, please call the Peace it Together office in Vancouver at 604-568-1413, or e-mail us at info@peaceittogether.ca.

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**Alternative all-candidates’ meetings—a model**

*by James Chamberlain, BCTF staff*

Democracy works best when citizens engage in dialogue on important issues. Traditional all-candidates’ meetings allow for questions, but they offer little opportunity to genuinely engage candidates or educate them about issues important to electors about social justice issues in their community.

**Event format:**

**Introduction** (15 minutes)

The moderator introduced the format of the alternative forum.

**Part one: Round table discussions (45 minutes)**

Candidates participated in a 45-minute round table dialogue on four selected social justice topics. Candidates knew in advance of the meeting what the format of the meeting would be and the four social justice issues chosen.

- Candidates were randomly assigned to a specific table grouping.
- Community members self-selected which table they wanted to sit at.
- Tables were labeled with a specific topic.
- Candidates were not allowed to discuss their party platforms until the end of the discussion.
- Community members could move between topics if they wished.

Facilitators were at each table to help move conversation along and make sure everyone’s voices were heard. This also helped to keep candidates from dominating discussion. They were not allowed to discuss their party platforms until the end of the meeting.

The notes below give a summary of the event format and describe some of the lessons learned.

The response was generally favourable. Interestingly, one comment they received from many attendees was how much they would be interested in this type of event in between elections, as an opportunity to speak with other community members about social justice issues they see as important to their community.
meeting. Therefore, candidates were required to actively listen to the concerns of community members on a specific topic.

The social issues tables were:

child and youth issues
poverty reduction and housing
women’s issues
immigration issues.

Part two: Candidates report back (20 minutes)

Each candidate had five minutes to report back to the large group what they had heard or learned about a specific social justice issue. The order of the reporting back was decided by random draw.

Part three: Questions from the floor (20 minutes)

Audience members had one minute to ask a question directed to the moderator based on the four topic areas discussed in the evening. The moderator randomly assigned each question to a specific candidate, ensuring that each candidate had equal opportunity to answer questions. A second candidate was then chosen to respond for one minute.

Part four: Candidates’ summary remarks (20 minutes)

The moderator again invited each candidate to provide summary remarks on their party position and plans on addressing the social issues discussed at the forum. Each candidate had three minutes for summary remarks.

So give it a whirl! Try an alternative and make candidates truly listen to voters in your community. You have the potential to drive the social justice agenda rather than sitting listening to candidates and hoping your community concerns hit the floor and come up for debate amongst candidates. Take charge! You might be pleasantly surprised by the results.

Ways to spotlight social justice issues in elections

by James Chamberlain, BCTF staff

Tips on questioning techniques for public forums

• Keep your comments concise. Use a one-sentence opening statement and a one-sentence (specific) question.
• Be calm and do not be derailed by emotional comments or rhetoric from others.
• Use the phrase, “As a teacher/voter/parent...” in your opening statement.
• Use “I messages” in comments in the media to personalize the issue based upon your observations/experiences as a classroom teacher.
• Consider sound bytes. What is your key message in 30 seconds or less? This should frame the content of your opening sentence and question.
• Focus on “motherhood issues in education or your community” when making public comments. Ask yourself when crafting your question, “Where is the buy-in from most educators or community members on a particular social justice issue?”
• Try to get the candidate to respond in the affirmative or negative without avoiding the question.

Sample questions for candidates:

LGBTQ issues: community safety and legitimacy as a community

“As a voter, I see far too many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning (LGBTQ) people being harassed and isolated within our community. If elected, would you work with the LGBTQ community and their allies to establish a drop-in space and a crisis line so that LGBTQ people can come together as a community and be safe?”
Every year Canadians are invited to take part in the festivities and events that honour the legacy of black Canadians, past and present, during Black History Month.

This is a time to celebrate the many achievements and contributions of black Canadians, who throughout history, have done so much to make Canada the culturally diverse, compassionate, and prosperous nation we know today. It is also an opportunity for the majority of Canadians to learn about the experiences of black Canadians in our society, and the vital role this community has played throughout our shared history.

Despite a presence in Canada that dates back farther than Samuel de Champlain’s first voyage down the St. Lawrence River, people of African descent are often absent from Canadian history books.

There is little mention of the fact that slavery once existed in the territory that is now Canada, or that many of the Loyalists who came here after the American Revolution and settled in the Maritimes were black. Few Canadians are aware of the many sacrifices made in wartime by black Canadian soldiers, as far back as the War of 1812.

In an attempt to heighten awareness of black history in the United States, historian Carter G. Woodson proposed an observance to honour the accomplishments of black...
Americans. This led to the establishment of Negro History Week in 1926. Woodson is believed to have chosen February for this observance, because the birthdays of the renowned abolitionist Frederick Douglass (February 14) and former US President Abraham Lincoln (February 12) fall in this month.

During the early 1970s, the week became known as Black History Week. It was expanded into Black History Month in 1976.

In December 1995, the Parliament of Canada officially recognized February as Black History Month, following a motion introduced by the first black Canadian woman elected to Parliament, the Honourable Jean Augustine, MP for Etobicoke-Lakeshore, who at the time was Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. The motion was carried unanimously by the House of Commons.

Many sites, persons, and events of national significance related to black history have been formally recognized by the Government of Canada as defining important aspects of Canada's diverse but common heritage and identity. To learn more about other commemorations of black history in the system of national sites of Canada, please visit the Parks Canada website. Their black history portal can be found at www.pc.gc.ca/culture/mhn-bhm/index_e.asp.

Ten Canadian teachers arrived in the dusty town of Maai Mahiu, Kenya, in August of 2008 hoping to make a lasting difference. The volunteers saw a need and an opportunity to use their skills and experience to help mentor their comparatively under-supported Kenyan colleagues.

Being a teacher in Kenya is a challenge in the best of times. However, after the government initiated free and compulsory primary schooling, the number of children attending increased dramatically, without a sufficient increase in funding, classrooms, or teachers.

“There is so much potential here that will not be realised...those are future leaders, scientists, doctors, musicians, mechanics, even teachers, who don’t get to (become) what they want to be”, says Teachers Without Borders – Canada (TWBC) president, Noble Kelly. One Maai Mahiu school with 17 classrooms is bursting at the seams with 1,600 students; the teachers entrusted with their education are overworked.

Noble Kelly of Vancouver created the Canadian chapter in 2006 after a trip to Durban, South Africa to help a friend care for some local orphans. The experience “captivated” him and he returned months later with computers for their school that were donated by his West Vancouver school.
The necessity of setting up the computers led the computer science instructor to work with some of the South African teachers, most of whom, he realized, had little formal training or access to the professional development resources so readily available in Canada. From this came the recognition for the need of an organization that could provide mentors to those educators.

TWBC is a membership driven, grassroots initiative. Promotion and recruitment is generally through word of mouth and their website (www.twbcanada.org). The hope is that those who participate and witness the need first hand will then return to their communities and share their experiences and ideas, building a network with others who may then be motivated to participate. “Teachers will come back and want to do more global initiatives, want to connect their classrooms,” Kelly says.

“Any NGO’s biggest challenge (is fundraising),” laments Kelly. Until a more sustainable model of supporting this kind of work is achieved, TWBC is dependent on individual and corporate/foundation funding and grants. TWBC wants to recognize and thank the BCTF for one such grant that supported the BCTF members who were participants of the projects in Kenya and South Africa this past summer.

Funding is not the only challenge, however. When TWBC researches an area to present their unique workshops, they must identify and partner with a reputable NGO that is familiar with the community and its needs.

In the transient trucker town of Maai Mahiu, along the infamous AIDS highway, where 60% of the 30,000 residents are HIV positive, Comfort The Children (CTC) was that NGO. Part of CTC’s mandate is to promote education; consequently it was efficient to augment this CTC initiative. It is extremely valuable to have a reliable, long-term partner in the area to facilitate the follow up needed.

The workshops implemented included strategies for primary and secondary school instruction through various teaching techniques and subject area resources. Reinforcing effective teaching/assessment strategies and building teacher confidence will ultimately benefit the children in those communities long after the Canadian volunteers have left.

One major goal for TWBC is to build the capacity for Kenyan educators to be able to facilitate their own workshops by increasing the number of local facilitators in subsequent projects, while TWBC branches out to other communities. In addition to creating a localized professional development model, another goal is to facilitate lasting relationships between educators from around the globe and continue to mentor them by linking classrooms and communities via the Internet. Through these same means, Canadian students are also connected to their counterparts and informed of global realities.

“If you are not integrating global issues into your curriculum,” asks Kelly, “then I question how small is your classroom?”

“Even though we go with the intent of giving of ourselves, our resources, and our experience,” says Kelly, “we actually come back with so much more.”

Accepting applications for this year’s projects soon. For more information, visit www.twbcanada.org or e-mail noble@twbcanada.org.
Social justice calendar from January to March, lesson plans, and websites

by Joan Merrifield, BCTF Staff; CASJ Antiracism Action Group

January 15:
Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday (born 1929)

You can find a number of good timelines online. Check out the following websites:

•  www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/pages/buckman/timeline/kingframe.html
•  www.stanford.edu/group/King/about_king/interactiveFrame.htm
•  web.archive.org/web/20040202022006/www.wmich.edu/politics/mlk/
•  seattletimes.nwsource.com/special/mlk/king/timeline.html
•  isite.lps.org/khubbell/web/documents/CivilRightsTimeline.pdf

Websites with lesson plans:

•  seattletimes.nwsource.com/special/mlk/classroom/
•  www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson046.shtml

In addition, you can find information on King’s most famous speech and the song, We Shall Overcome, at:

•  www.usconstitution.net/dream.html
•  www.k-state.edu/english/nelp/american.studies.s98/we.shall.overcome.html

This is a link to information about the picture book, I Have A Dream, Dr. Martin Luther King, by Coretta Scott King:  www.education-world.com/a_books/books028.shtml

January 17:
Raoul Wallenberg Day

Raoul Wallenberg was responsible for saving 100,000 Hungarian Jews in Budapest. On January 17, 1945, he was arrested by the Soviet government and never seen again. In 1985, Canada bestowed honorary citizenship on him for his heroic acts. He is one of the few people to have received honorary citizenship in Canada. This day is acknowledged in Parliament each year.

Websites:

•  tinyurl.com/b4gejk
•  www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/pdp-hrp/trb-hom/raoul-eng.cfm

January/February:
Chinese Lunar New Year
tinyurl.com/8bq8ed

Check out this list of Chinese New Year books for preschoolers and K to Grade 6 students:

Preschoolers


Bright/vibrant collages illustrate this simple introduction to Chinese New Year.


A young boy describes how his Chinese–Korean family prepares for, and celebrates, the Lunar New Year.

K to Grade 3


Follow 10-year-old Ryan as he and his family prepare for Chinese New Year in San Francisco.

Ten simple crafts for Chinese New Year.


Basic information about the customs of Chinese New Year, profusely illustrated with Demi’s detailed drawings. The original Happy New Year (1997) is larger in format and contains a little more information.


This is the first time 6-year-old Ernie will be performing the lion dance in public. Follow him and his family in New York City’s Chinatown as they prepare, for and celebrate, Chinese New Year.


Dragon and Centipede trick Rooster into giving up his beautiful golden horns. Also explains how and why the zodiac animals were chosen. The colorful illustrations are reminiscent of traditional Chinese paper cutts.


Set in a modern-day Chinatown, Sam must decide how to spend his Chinese New Year “leisee” money. He is disappointed when he realizes that he does not have enough to buy the toy that he wants. In the end, he decides to give his money to a homeless man.


Cut-paper three-dimensional collage retelling the animals’ race, rat’s treachery, and explains why cat is not one of the zodiac animals.

Grades 3 to 6


Tells of the animals’ race, rat’s betrayal, and why cat is not one of the zodiac animals. The illustrations are charcoal and pastels on a dark background, making this more appropriate for the older crowd.


Large calligraphy like illustrations depict each of the zodiac animals and explain their strengths and weaknesses.


By taking a tour of a fictitious generic Chinatown, Chinese food, traditional medicine, language and writing, festivals, religion, and art are explored. Includes recipes and suggestions for activities.


Presents background information, related stories, and activities for five Chinese holidays: Chinese New Year, the Lantern Festival, Qing Ming, the Dragon Boat Festival, and the Mid-autumn Moon Festival.

February:

Black History Month

The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund (Canada) invites schools to celebrate Black History Month. The Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund (Canada) school-based program is a national initiative that changes the way society treats its children and youth and carries Mandela’s legacy by educating Canadian...
students about Nelson Mandela and South Africa’s rich culture and history.

Through educational and community-oriented activities, students are challenged to explore the issues facing children and youth in South Africa, the effect of HIV and AIDS, poverty, and social justice. The program empowers students by showing them the positive impact they can have locally and internationally through volunteering and fundraising.

Black History Month is an opportunity to recognize the past and present contributions of African Canadians, but also to celebrate African heroes like Nelson Mandela. February is an important month indeed, as 19 years ago, on February 11, Nelson Mandela was released from jail, after spending 27 years of his life in prison.

For more information: www.mandela-children.ca or www.spiritofmandela.ca.

The following are links to other teachers’ resources related to Black History Month:
- blackhistorycanada.ca/
- edselect.com/black_history_month.htm
- www.cic.gc.ca/multi/mhn-bhm/index-eng.asp

February 16, 2009:
Heritage Day (third Monday of February)
tinyurl.com/d2o4k5

February 16–22:
BC Multiculturalism Week
- pep.educ.ubc.ca/anti.html
- www.cic.gc.ca/multi/index-eng.asp

For Secondary students, AMSSA has a youth program called “Racism Sucks.” For details, visit this site: www.amssa.org/racism_sucks/book_for_web.pdf.

This multicultural calendar website provides free educational programs. Kidlink is open for all children and youth in any country. Most users are between 10 to 15 years of age. Since the start in 1990, it has been used by children from 176 countries. www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/MCC/

For an index of all religious dates and a brief description of each date, see tinyurl.com/d9epda.

February 20:
World Day of Social Justice


March 8:
International Women’s Day

International Women’s Day has been observed since the early 1900s. The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women’s and society’s thoughts about women’s equality and emancipation. Many from a younger generation feel that all the battles have been won for women while many feminists from the 1970s know only too well the longevity and ingrained complexity of patriarchy. With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women’s visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality. The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women’s education, health, and the violence against them is worse than that of men.

However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers, women are welcomed into university, women can work and have a family, and women have real choices. And so the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives.

Annually on March 8, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. A global web of rich and diverse local activity ranging from political rallies, business conferences, government activities, and networking events through to local women’s craft
markets and theatri performances connects women from all around the world.

To learn more about the timeline of women’s rights, go to www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp.

**March 21:**
**International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1966)**

**March 22–28:**
**Week of Solidarity with People Struggling Against Racism and Racial Discrimination**

March 21 marks the anniversary of the Sharpeville Massacre (1960) in South Africa where police opened fire on hundreds of peaceful demonstrators against Apartheid’s passbook laws. Canada showed support by promoting a March 21 campaign. Go to www.march21.gc.ca.

Take a look at Cyberschoolbus’s curricula: UN intro, human rights, and peace education. In the resources section you will find briefing papers on human rights and children’s rights. Younger students will enjoy playing “Pook in the World.” www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/iderd/

Here are some sites with resources, lesson plans, and activities:
- www.media-awareness.ca/english/index.cfm
- www.accesstomedia.org/change
- tinyurl.com/b785z3

These quotes could be used in a classroom on days leading up to March 21 as an opener to daily discussions or just as a quote on the overhead or board to spark conversation or thought among students. www.betterworld.net/quotes/endracism-quotes.htm

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**2008–09 Committee for Action on Social Justice (CASJ)**

- advises the BCTF on social justice issues
- reviews and promotes social justice workshops
- liaises with community groups and NGOs
- develops policy on emerging issues
- reviews and develops materials for classroom teachers
- develops and supports networks of social justice contacts in the following action group areas: Antiracism, Poverty, Status of Women, LGBTQ, Peace and Global Education
- co-ordinates the work of the five action groups

**Antiracism Action Group**
- Michael Aaku
- John Peterson
- Treena Goolieff
- Daniel Shiu

**LGBTQ Action Group**
- Nancy Ingersoll
- Greg Laing
- Shannon Lanaway
- Noble Kelly

**Peace and Global Education Action Group**
- Clay McLeod
- Susan Ruzic
- Janet Stephenson
- Greg Van Vugt

**Status of Women Action Group**
- Maeve Moran
- Karen Kilbride
- Louise Gonsalves
- Sasha Wiley-Shaw

**Poverty Action Group**
- Roz Johns
- Stacey Kemp
- Chris King
- Julia MacRae

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**Please note:** The BCTF is not responsible for the content or links found on any external web site. Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the author.

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This newsletter is available on-line at bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6352

Winter 2009, PSI09-0013
Camp fYrefly is coming to BC!

A camp for sexual minority youth will launch its program off the coast of Vancouver in July 2009.

Camp fYrefly, a university-community educational project that has been operating for five years in Edmonton at the University of Alberta, is preparing to expand to BC. The camp is an educational, social, and personal learning retreat for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, Two-Spirit, intersex, queer, and allied (LGBTTIQ&A) youth, and is designed to help build social understanding, leadership skills, and self-esteem for LGBTTIQ&A youth between the ages of 14 and 24.

The camp operates with the guiding principle of helping youth to positively address the challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. Youth who attend Camp fYrefly BC will have the opportunity to build diverse networks of youth and adult mentors from across the province. In doing so, youth will gain connections and resources to become leaders in their own communities.

Camp fYrefly BC is set to take place on Gambier Island, 10 kilometres off Horseshoe Bay. On July 2, 2009, about 60 youth from across BC are expected to meet in Vancouver to be ferried to the island.

A youth advisory committee is currently being formed to help planners ensure the programming meets the needs of today’s LGBTTIQ&A youth living across BC. Camp fYrefly programming emphasizes a “by youth for youth” approach in which older youth and facilitators mentor and help to support younger youth.

The camp is being spearheaded at the University of British Columbia’s School of Population and Public Health with community, health, social, and educational partners from across the province.

To learn more about Camp fYrefly BC, or to help sponsor a youth to attend, contact Rod Knight, Camp fYrefly BC Steering Committee co-chair at 604-827-4568, or visit www.youthsexualhealth.ubc.ca.

Make a Case Against Racism

Make a Case Against Racism is a joint initiative of the ministries of Attorney General, Education, and Public Safety and Solicitor General.

It includes a teacher’s resource guide and is designed to complement the provincial school curriculum. The concept for Make a Case Against Racism was inspired by a project led by Abbotsford Community Services and funded by the Ministry of Attorney General.

Downloadable resources for teachers available at www.welcomebc.ca/en/diversity/racism.html:

Make A Case Against Racism: A Guide for Teachers of Grades 4 to 7

# BCTF Social Justice Program
## Calendar of Events

### January
- 15: Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday
- 17: Raoul Wallenberg Day, credited with saving 100,000 Hungarian Jews during the Second World War

### February
- 16: Heritage Day
- 16 – 22: B.C. Multiculturalism Week
- 25: Think Pink Day

### March
- 8: International Women’s Day
- 7 – 13: International Women’s Week
- 21: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 22 – 28: Week of Solidarity with People Struggling Against Racism and Racial Discrimination
- 22: World Water Day

### April
- 4: National Aboriginal Achievement Awards
- 17: Day of Silence (against LGBTQ name calling)
- 19 – 26: End Violence Against Women Week
- 18: Holocaust Memorial Day
- 19 – 25: National Wildlife Week
- 22: Earth Day

### May
- 3: World Press Freedom Day
- 9 – 15: National Forest Week
- 15: International Day of Families
- 17: International Day Against Homophobia;
- 25 – 28: Aboriginal Awareness Week

### June
- 5: World Environment Day
- 6 – 12: Canadian Environment Week
- 12: World Day Against Child Labour
- 13: Canadian Rivers Day
- 21: National Aboriginal Day
- 21: Miners Memorial Day—Ginger Goodwin, assassinated, Cumberland, BC
- 27: Canadian Multiculturalism Day

### July
- 17: Parks Day

### August
- 1: Gay & Lesbian Pride Day
- 9: International Day of the World’s Indigenous People
- 12: International Youth Day
- 15: National Acadian Day

### September
- 7: Labour Day
- 8: International Literacy Day
- 21: World Day of Peace (third Tuesday)

### October
- 1: International Day of Older Persons
- 4 – 10: National Family Week
- 17: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
- 18: Persons Day
- 24: World Development and Information Day

### November
- 11: Remembrance Day
- 16: National Child Day
- 25: International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women—16 days of action begins
- 28: Buy Nothing Day

### December
- 1: World AIDS Day
- 2: International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3: International Day of Disabled Persons
- 4: International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development
- 6: National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women
- 10: Human Rights Day