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SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25th

12:45PM

AGENDA: Recommendation re. Lay Chaplain
 - Arrangement with the Rev. M. Campbell
 - 2009 Budget



Sunday Services

January 4 *Shambhala Meditation Centre: How does ones life change when meditation becomes part of ones daily discipline?* Spiritual Leader **Veit Weber** will present on the spiritual value of meditation. Lorna Drew will be the service leader.

January 11 *How Aunt Bessie took care of her family and the world.* **Virginia Bjerkelund**, historian and author, examines the life of her Great-Aunt, Elizabeth Robinson Scovil (1849-1934) – nurse, caregiver, foster mother, writer, millionaire – who left a fabulously successful big-American-city career in order to take care of her sister's family on the Scovil farm in Gagetown, NB. Bjerkelund, the grand niece,

considers: Did Aunt Bessie's devotion to her orphaned nieces and nephews enlarge her influence on the world, or did this service to the family cramp her style? What is the spiritual value in caring for our own?

January 18 *Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, Lost His Head.* Poet, archivist, professor emeritus, **Robert Hawkes** initially found it difficult to like his subject, William Laud (1573-1645). However, in examining Laud's life and times, Hawkes managed to find a way into his soul. It is often that trip into another person's soul that touches us as individuals, and as a congregation, particularly when the result is a work of art.

January 25 *What does having Barack Obama as President of the United States mean to Black refugees, and Black people all over the world?* In honour of Martin Luther King Day (Jan 15), presenter, **Saa Andrew Gbongbor**, an STU student, and refugee from Sierra Leone will offer his thoughts on having a Black family in the White House. (Gbongbor was featured in a recent *HERE*, and Joan says that in his photos, he is wearing a TUFF scarf !)



Message from the Board President

Greetings everyone, and best wishes for the New Year! At this time it is the custom to reflect on the events of the past year. The changes we experienced, the surprises we encountered, and the new friends we made were all major personal events in our lives. This time of reflection is often a time when we choose to go in new directions, resolutions as it were, for a better, more meaningful and more satisfying life.

So it is with our Fellowship. We have had an eventful year. Our increased participation boosted our revenues and kept us solidly in the black. Our committee work has included an enhanced program for the children, numerous workshops for the adults and an associate minister for the last four months. What direction are we going to take in the New Year?

There will be a special congregational planning meeting on January 25, 2009, after Service, to consider three items:

1. The 2009-2010 budget
2. The contractual arrangement for an associate minister
3. The appointment of a lay chaplain

This will be a critical planning meeting, and we need your participation and guidance. Budget wise, the pledges have been slower to come in than last year. Do you like the concept of an associate minister, or would you suggest changes? Learn more about the duties of the lay chaplains.

It is important that we have your support to continue with the initiatives developed this year. Please send your pledges to George deMille if you have not already done so. Send in your response to the survey concerning the associate minister contract. Be there for the discussions.

There will be a preliminary discussion in the Fellowship library, Thursday, January 8, 2009 at 7 pm. The Board meeting to discuss these matters will be held after Service, January 18th. Tom Hanley has kindly agreed to chair the Board meeting and the Congregational meeting on January 25th in my absence. Tom will act as President of the Board while I am away.

Goodwill and
good luck in your deliberations
John van Abbema
President



Announcements

January 8 *First Thursday pot-luck and discussions resume.* The topic will be our possible continuing relationship with the Reverend Mac Campbell. Come at 5:30PM for the pot-luck or 6:15 for just the discussion.

January 11 *“Congregational Conversation” (con-con)* following the service on our possible continuing relationship with the Reverend Mac Campbell.

January 18 *Board of Directors’ meeting* following the service. Board meetings are open to members of the Fellowship.

Please note: *Survey Form* The Committee on Ministry has a survey form with cover letter which is available in paper form at the Fellowship and will be included with the copies of this newsletter mailed to members and may be downloaded from the web site. For download, go to <http://uff.ca> then choose the “Administrivia” link on the left of the page. The

survey form will be the first link on the “Administrative Resources” page that should come up. Please complete and return the form to George DeMille c/o 874 York Street, Fredericton, NB, E3B 3R8.



Small Group Ministry Program

Are you looking for a way to form authentic connections with others and build an even better community?

Do you enjoy discussion about a wide range of spiritual topics?

In Small Ministry Groups...

- we build the bonds of community, developing a deeper sense of belong and just having the fun of being in fellowship with one another.
- we have an opportunity for deep spiritual exploration and transformation by discussing a variety of topics about the ultimate questions of life. They can be life affirming and even transformative.
- we explore our reflections in a respectful, positive and supportive environment.
- we practise our U*U principles and our ideas about right relations with one another and the world, and nurture shared leadership.

Since spring 2006, the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton has offered an engaging and inspiring program of Small Group Ministry. As the 2008 year comes to an end, we are opening up our doors and inviting members of the Fellowship to join the program. Flyers providing information about our Small Groups are available on the table in the main floor hall. All those who are currently attending a Small Group or who are interested in joining one are asked to fill out the form in the flyer and leave it in the SGM box in the hall or return it to the coordinator, Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the program can contact the Small Group Ministry Coordinator, Jo-Anne Elder-Gomes, at elder@nb.sympatico.ca.



Canvass Report 2009

In November each year the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton conducts an every-member canvass in order to raise operating funds for the coming year. Our budget year coincides with the calendar year.

This year the Finance Committee decided to conduct the canvass by a mailout of a canvass package to all our members and friends. Last year we had a team of canvassers contact each of our members and friends on a personal one-to-one basis. In this report to the congregation I will summarize the results of this year's canvass. I am writing this report from Thunder Bay and do not have access to the the fellowship financial records so the numbers below are given from memory. I believe them to be substantially accurate however.

We distributed to the membership approximately 70 canvass packages and received 31 pledges in response, representing about 37 members. In some cases couples choose to be considered as a single "contributing unit" while in other cases couples wish to contribute separately. As of this date the total amount pledged is about \$24,900. This amount is down slightly from last year and is about \$500 less than we actually received in pledges for 2008. Most people pledged the same amount as in previous years. In a few cases the amounts pledged are more or less than their previous pledge amounts. We have had some who have been significant supporters move from the Fredericton area and we have had a few new individuals join our ranks, sometimes with considerable generosity.

For 2008 we have received over \$10,000 in donations which were not pledged in the campaign last year. It is probable that we will see a similar pattern for 2009. Of course, it makes financial planning much easier when those supporting our operations can make their intentions known at the start of the year.

On behalf of the Finance Committee and the board of directors I would like to thank all those of you who have responded so generously to our campaign. I would also point out that it is still not too late to make a pledge for the coming year.

George DeMille
Secretary-treasurer



Goods and Services Auction

Back again for 2009 The Fellowship Goods and Services Auction. Please reserve the evening of Saturday, March 14, for this major fund raiser.

- Bring a friend, bring a couple of friends!
- Auction starts at 7PM at the Fellowship
- Light refreshments will be served

Goods for the sale may be left on the counter in the wet bar off the library or make arrangements with Nancy Beltrandi. If dropping off an item, please indicate clearly that

it is for Nancy for the auction and from whom it is being given. Descriptions of services should be sent to Nancy. We will provide more details as the event approaches.

An explanation

Most members have experienced our G&S auctions in the past but for those who have not enjoyed that privilege and want an explanation: people donate physical objects (goods) or the offer to do something (services) and these are sold to the highest bidder, the proceeds going to the Fellowship. In the past, services have included elegant dinners hosted by the donor, lessons in the use of computer software systems, the writing of poems for special occasions, custom wine vinting, anything you might have a talent for and enjoy doing and are willing to donate. Goods may be anything in good condition.

Smaller items will be put in silent auction: set up in the library, each item will have a sheet of paper on which bidders enter increasingly higher bids until the auction closes at the end of the main auction.

The main auction will be held in the sanctuary with all the frenzied heat of bidding escalations which have seen fruit cakes selling for \$50 in the past. It is fun both as spectacle and as challenge.



Women's Pot Luck

The first women's pot luck dinner of the new year is planned for Friday, January 23th. at 6 PM. Janet Crawford will host the gathering at her home. The topic for the evening: **thoughts & reminiscences about New Year's Eve – the change of the years and how we greet the new and/or say goodbye to the old. What did/do you do?** For more information contact Joan at jebrewer@rogers.com or 455-5169



Children's RE

I want to thank all those who helped make our party a success. We had a great turnout. There were eleven children and ten adults. We want to thank all for helping launch the Holiday Season at the Fellowship.

Nafla Anderson and I had baked the gingerbread men, bells, and xmas tree cookies the day before. The children frosted and decorated them with sprinkles, and M&M's. We set up two tables in the library for decorating cookies. The cookies were colourful and creatively decorated. We have pictures!

Janet Crawford baked her Aunt Mary's molasses and ginger cookies. The Fellowship house was full of delicious

smells coming from the kitchen. We enjoyed delicious warm cookies fresh out of the oven.

The children, Steph, and some parents made a paper chain and papier maché stars to decorate the Holiday Tree.

After the cookie decorating was finished the children washed their hands from the sticky frosting and proceeded to the Sanctuary to decorate the tree. Janet had brought some lights and put them on the tree, and the red and gold balls and other decorations were hung on the tree to shine and sparkle in the greenery. Nick Barnes placed the wreath of lights at the top of the tree.

We then proceeded to the kitchen to have a lunch of sandwiches, veggies, hummous, cup cakes and drinks. After our little lunch we went back into the Sanctuary and listened to the children's story read by me about a little girl named Sofie whose parents own a Bakery. They needed Sofie's help during the busy Christmas season. She had helped in the back of the store before but this was her debut working in the front of the store with the customers. Sofie did a good job and enjoyed being part of the family team.

Then everyone went home with a bag of their own personally decorated cookies.

Special thanks to Steph for helping make the event fun for all and especially helping Zachary get more frosting and sprinkles on his cookies than on everything else. Also, thank you Steph for being ready to help in every way.

Thanks to Janet Crawford for taking some pictures so that we shall have some photos to remember this time together.

I especially want to thank all the children and parents for coming out.

Here are the list of those present:

Christine Zhang and mom
Emily O'Donnell-Daigle and Mom
Sarah O'Donnell-Daigle
Naomi Elder-Gomes and friend's mom and grandmother
Sunaa Hansen (friend of Naomi E-G)
Naomi Frooman and mom
Tamara Frooman
Zachary Frooman
Celeste (friend of Frooman children)
Emily (friend of Frooman children)
Nick Barnes and mom
Nafla Anderson baker of gingerbread men, bells, and tree cookies
Janet Crawford baker of Aunt Mary's ("bad" cookies mainly made of sugar and butter and molasses) Delicious!

Steph Yorke children's program Chief Helper Extrordinaire

Haifa Miller (kid at heart)

Thank you all for all your help.

Haifa Miller,
Religious Education Committee Chair



An Evening of Dance

Between fifteen and twenty hardy Unitarians braved the elements to enjoy community in the form of music and dance on the 27'th of December. A grand time was had by all and at two points during the evening, Haifa's daughter Katherine and her partner, Lilian, gave those who were interested the quick beginners introduction to "Cha-cha" and "Tango". Katherine and Lilian impressed this writer with the skill and precision of their dancing but even those of us with "two left feet" enjoyed a bit of jive or just shuffling our feet to the music while attempting to look like we knew what we were doing.

All agreed we should do it again soon.



ERG 2008

In early November, I had the pleasure of attending the Eastern Regional Gathering in Kingston, Ontario. I had a relaxing drive up the day before and a full day in Kingston both in a beautiful period of extended "Indian summer" weather.

The ingathering service Friday evening and the Sunday morning service were both held in the Odd Fellows hall which is immediately adjacent to the Kingston Fellowship. The Fellowship was taken over by the youth for the weekend while the adults were left to wonder at the thrones which lined the hall and other accoutrements of the organization. It gave us a chance to gain some insight into this service organization which had a wide base in the Kingston area at one time.

The main conference on Saturday was held in a nature preserve a few kilometers north of Kingston and while there was heavy rain to start the morning, by eleven the sun was shining and we had a wonderful nature walk. Our guides helped us "call in" chickadees which amazed us by landing on outstretched hands to pluck the seeds we were holding. It was something that had to be experienced.

I attended the "Go-4-Ward" session in the morning. Because the CUC has experienced the same financial envi-

ronment as everyone else over the last year, our investments have not done very well and the CUC is in a deficit situation. The break out group that I joined discussed options specific to meetings that might be examined to reduce costs. Does it make sense, for example, to have both and ACM and Regional Gatherings every year or might it make sense to alternate the ACM with RNGs. Might it make sense (as suggested by a Halifax participant) to have a Maritime gathering instead of the Eastern Gathering.

In the afternoon, I attended (for my own interest) a session presented by a representative of Dying with Dignity who detailed to us the sorts of messes that can result if one does not make explicit provision for decision making in the event that one becomes unable or incompetent to make decisions. Recent changes in Ontario legislation were explained and to the extent that he could, the presenter explained how legislation varies across the country since this tends to be the purview of the provinces.

The dinner was well catered and we had a wonderful sing a long to wrap up the evening.

In fellowship
Tony Fitzgerald



Unicamp is only a few hours drive from most of the city-centers of Southern Ontario yet it is a timeless escape from the realities of urban life. Campers have come from across eastern North America to enjoy Unicamp's serene 50 acre site near Honeywood, Ontario. Some have even traveled from as far away as New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan, Germany, Holland, South America and other corners of the globe. Unicamp has been a special place for Unitarians and their children to enjoy for 39 glorious summers, and we're about to have one of our best seasons yet!

Unitarian congregations are institutional members of Unicamp upon paying their annual dues, and are thus stakeholders of this precious gem north of Shelburne. Unicamp is located within the UNESCO Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve with a five-acre clear, cool, spring-fed pond; two sandy beaches; pine and broad leaf forests; meadows drifted with wildflowers; aged orchards and reedy marshlands; deep mossy crevices with caves; pure icy streams;

shade-dappled ferns and open, sunny spaces. There are vantage points with panoramic views of sun and moon rises. There are creatures in the pond: frogs, fish, turtles and waterfowl, with muskrats in the marshes. The woods harbour raccoons, chipmunks, squirrels, porcupine and even deer, wild turkey, quail and red fox on occasion. The fields and the forests are abundant with edible plants like wild ginger and carrots; morel, puffball and shaggy-mane mushrooms; wild apples, grapes, raspberries and more. Songbirds, woodpeckers, hawks, herons and giant dragonflies follow their quests. Bats come from the caves to play games in the darkening sky while children gleefully chase fireflies at the outer reaches of a bonfire encircled by drummers, singers, dancers and laughter.

Unicamp Day is the first Sunday after Groundhog Day, this year it's February 8, 2009. It's a day that gives Unicampers a wonderful opportunity to organize a special Celebration of Unicamp Service at your congregation with readings, poems and memories, and even Unicamp songs and dances. What does Unicamp mean to you? Why is it so special to your family? Tell the world and especially your congregation!

On February 10th 2009 Unicamp will turn 40 years old, although we feel a lot younger! For as long as Unitarians have owned this land and probably much longer, the acres at Unicamp have been free of farming pesticides, chemicals and other corrosives. We compost, reuse, recycle and conserve. We have a population that attempts to rest gently on the earth. We are pursuing a "Green Sanctuary" designation from the CUC. But it's not what we do that makes Unicamp such a mystical place of restorative healing energy and youthful vibrancy. It's what you feel: the connections made in sharing the spiritual experience of lush peace in nature. It's the people; the like-minded people who don't think you're an odd-ball if you are atheist and into alternative medicine, or pagan, or a on a spiritual quest but holding down a conventional job in a big city. Come for the community - the free-range children giggling in the raspberry patch; the exuberant staff and their captivating songs and stories; the Sunday afternoon deck discussions that range from philosophy to ecology to activism and vegetable gardening. Come enjoy Unicamp with us during this special celebratory 40th anniversary summer. Be a part of this unique UU retreat for your summer vacation in 2009. Our special 40th Anniversary Celebration will be on the 2009 Civic Holiday weekend. We hope to see all of you then or even sooner!

From When We Were Young

Saturday, February 11, Still cold

I've just had the plumber here fixing the leak in the cold water valve in the cellar and I am feeling quite relieved.

He thought the set-up rather ingenious, and it is. He says the steel cylinder holding the cold water reserve would have been made right in the cellar, and it will last for 2000 years. Many of the things Pup got were to last a lifetime—but how long is a lifetime?

When Pup and Mum moved in here in 1915 shortly after they were married, there were birch trees behind the house, and along the dam. I wonder if he planted them? In all the pictures we see birch trees and a wire fence—what was it there for, I don't know. Later, Pup planted Rock Maples which grew taller than the house, and elms. Many years later, those beautiful elms got Dutch Elm disease and died. Now, the maples are dying of centre rot. It's so sad, and a little scary when the wind is strong. Pup planted a Barberry hedge along the side of the lawn and he kept it trimmed beautifully. He loved to garden and trim trees, but that hedge was forever being backed into or run over by cars, so eventually he had it taken out.

Pup didn't confine his landscaping to his own yard. He trimmed little trees along the "dump" across the road from the mill, in front of the office, and right up to the house, and beyond. As a kid, I used to think that we had a great big yard and wondered how it became so much smaller as I grew up. Except, that is, when I have to garden. Then it seems far too big again. I'm sure when the children, the grandchildren, and now the great grandchildren mow the lawn, they think it's far too big, too.

Sunday, February 12, Beautiful day

How could I ever remember sleeping in that little, white, iron bed in Mum and Pup's bedroom, yet I can. We all slept in it as babies. It had sides that came up so we couldn't get out. I wonder where it went? I also have recollections of lamps. We kids never handled them, but I can remember going to bed by lamplight.

Memory is a strange thing. When I was two and Edwin was three, he was climbing up a ladder set up against the house. Pup saw him and called for him to come down because it wasn't safe. I am reputed to have said, "Edwin can go up there nicely, if he wants to." What a sweet kid I was, but I'm sure Edwin could have gone up there nicely. He threw a ball faster than anyone else. We were all afraid when he threw to us because if we didn't try to catch it, he called us "stupid," and often, we were. When we walked the railing at the side of the road coming home from school, he continued right up, and over, the peak of the bridge, over the falls. I couldn't watch!

Monday, February 13, Sunny day—Going to town

Whenever we were going to town on a school day, Mum wouldn't tell us before we ate our lunch or dinner. This was because we'd be so excited we couldn't eat, and would be starving by the time we reached town. Usually, one of us could ask a friend to go, too. After all, some kids didn't get to town as often as we, and for us it was a really big occasion. We only went once a month or less, when somebody really needed something. Usually we went on a Saturday,

as did everyone else. That was Market Day. People would come to market at City Hall early in the morning with their produce. Us kids weren't too interested in this stuff. We liked to get into the stores.

I remember Edgecombs' where Creighans' most recently was. When you bought something, the cashier would make up a bill, take your money, and put both in a tube-like thing. The tube was then placed on a wire over the cashier's head and it would fly off to some remote place. In a few minutes, it was back. The sales lady took out your change, the receipt, and your business was finished. To me, this was sheer magic. The apparatus had a buzzing sound as it came and went. I liked just to go in to see this happening before my very eyes. I thought some machine made the change.

Another big thrill was to hear the 12 o'clock whistle, like a big fog horn. I think it would blow twelve times. There is much, much more I want to write about our trips to town, and our reactions. But that will have to wait for another day. Now I'm off to town!



Message from Linda

Editor's note: Linda is sending out her correspondence as PDF files from which it is difficult to extract clean text for typesetting. I am including more pertinent items but if anyone would like the entire letter in electronic form, drop me a request.

Peace, Joy, Goodwill

I'm not sure why I still love the holiday season as much as I do. While I've certainly expanded my understanding of the season and identify quite strongly with the human need to light candles and sing songs when faced with long nights and grey days, it still doesn't really explain my deep affection for the celebrations. Increasingly, I identify with the ancient people who looked with some dismay at the lengthening nights and who decided that some magic was in order. But, that ancient impulse still doesn't completely explain my enthusiasm! In part, I think, my strong affection for Christmas is because of the ideals that it, and other mid-winter holidays, espouse. I find myself at this time of year, unlike any other, likely to tear up at a card in the mail, or a song on the radio, or watching a small child cozy up to the shopping mall Santa. My tender heart is in part, I believe, the result of our collective longing (and tragic inability) to live the ideals. We long, to manifest the best we are capable of, and we fall short. Yet, every year, I dare hope again.

I love that at Christmas we join with the wide-eyed child and let ourselves dream of magic and of flying reindeer. I love that at Christmas we let ourselves dream of peace, joy, and goodwill to all. I love that at Christmas we pull

down the yellowed recipe books and take the time to cook, from scratch, recipes that our Grandparents enjoyed. I love that we put aside our coy ideas and join in singing beautiful songs, and don't worry (too much) about the theological nature of their lyrics. I love that we set our tables and decorate our homes, cultivating the art of hospitality, inviting people to share with us. It seems to me our mid-winter celebrations are a declaration of what is possible. We remind ourselves that the dark and short days are not forever, and in doing so we remind ourselves that the dark days, of sorrow and selfishness, need not last forever either.

I don't know if the lion and the lamb will ever lie down together. I don't know if the day will come when the whole world will "send back the song, which now the angels sing." But I do know I'm not prepared to give up the possibility. And so, I find myself, loving, once again, the prospect of the holidays. I know I'll be disappointed – the meal won't be perfect, the reindeer won't fly and the world we dream of won't happen. Yet, there will have been magic, because we will have hoped. And perhaps, in the spiral of "ever circling years" lies the possibility for the world we dream of.

*In faith and with
affection.*
Linda

Listening to Critics Without Letting them Set the Agenda

There is a tension in congregational life (truth be told there are many), between the need to listen to critics and the corresponding need to move forward in a way respects the existing plans and goals. If we let this tension get out of balance we can miss the opportunity to hear valuable insights from those who see the situation differently than the majority or we can find ourselves stalled and off course, waylaid by the inclination, of a few who don't share the common vision and goal. The ability to listen to critics without letting them set the whole congregational agenda is the goal, and is the subject of an article in the Fall 2007 magazine, "Congregations" I've often thought we struggle with this tension more than many other traditions. Our values of 'inherent worth and dignity', 'free and responsible search for truth and meaning' and 'the use of the democratic process' seem to demand that we not brush aside dissenting or critical voices, and that we honour them. Yet to give them too great a place in our congregational discourse is also a departure from our values. Spending too much time considering criticism is to let it define the reality of the congregation, and will result in frustration among those who don't share that reality. The article offers ideas on how to listen to criticism, without letting it set the agenda, and encourages readers to remember that "good leaders try to listen to criticism and learn from what is helpful", while striving to 'let your vision, strategy, and theology set the agenda'. A clear focus on those things will

help leaders as they consider how to "evaluate the viability of the criticism."

Upcoming Dates

April 19 - May 4, 2009 *A Unitarian Odyssey to Mystic Turkey* The Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation is hosting this trip; an exploration of many of the sites of historical and spiritual significance. For more information visit: www.nuuc.ca

February 6-8, 2009 *Creating Balance in Our Lives* A Mid-winter Retreat: Join UUs in a beautiful setting in Bolton, Ontario, as they work, learn and play together: <http://donheights.ca/mwr>

May 15-18, 2009 *Annual Conference and Meeting* Thunder Bay, Ontario. **Answering the Call: Répondre à L'Appel** <http://cuc.ca/conference/2009>



Fair Vote Canada Editorial

Editor's note: I was asked to include this by a member of the congregation and, after several readings, have convinced myself that the article is fair content. It is not asking you to vote in a particular way, but to get involved in the political process. It has been said that Stephen Harper is a great politician: he worked for two years and united the right, in four days he united the left and, in a day and a half, got a new leader for the Liberal party. If he could shake Canadians out of our political lethargy... that would be a legacy of which to be proud.

The sound of one democratic hand clapping Coalition government, yes, but it's not the one we deserve

Larry Gordon
Executive Director, Fair Vote Canada

After 141 years is Canada finally, albeit accidentally, on the path to modern representative democracy? Don't pop the champagne cork yet. We still have a way to go, but the law of unintended consequences may be at work in Ottawa.

The drama began on November 28 when Jack and Gilles went up the Hill. They joined Stephane Dion to announce the historic Liberal – NDP coalition agreement, along with support from the Bloc. The three-party partnership is now poised to give Canadians an experience rarer than a Leafs' Stanley Cup victory parade: true majority rule.

Similar to voters in most advanced nations, Canadians seldom give majority support to any single party, doing so only four times since World War One and only once in the last half-century. But thanks to our antiquated first-past-the-post voting system, Canadians are generally ruled by phony majority governments. Typically, a party will get 40 to 45 percent of the votes, but win 50 to 60 percent of the seats, which gives them 100 per of the power

to set the Parliamentary agenda.

At the recent Liberal-NDP-Bloc press conference announcing their parliamentary partnership, the three party leaders correctly claimed to represent the majority of voters, thus having a more legitimate right to govern than Stephen Harper.

The emotional reaction across the country by both supporters and opponents of the coalition would baffle people in most democracies. Several parties collectively representing the majority of voters, announcing they would govern on a platform of their common policies? That's called business-as-usual in modern democracies. But the coalition we got is not the coalition we deserved.

If voters had used a fair and proportional voting system in the recent election and cast votes the same way, a different coalition would have emerged because the seats held by each party would have reflected their portion of the popular vote. The following scenario is based on a projection showing a fair allocation of seats. We would most likely have had a true majority coalition with three parties, rather than the current two-party minority coalition propped up by the Bloc. The coalition would have been more politically cohesive, with stronger representation from all regions.

The three people sitting at the front of the room at the recent coalition press conference would have been the Liberal leader representing an 81-member Liberal caucus, the NDP leader representing a 57-member NDP caucus and the Green Party leader representing a 23-member caucus. Assuming a proportionate assignment of portfolios, the resulting coalition cabinet might have been 13 Liberals, 8 NDP and 4 Greens. The regional composition of the coalition would have been dramatically different. The coalition would have boasted about 43 MPs in the west, rather than just 21, and in Quebec 30 MPs rather than 14.

What about Mr. Duceppe? He would have been sitting on the opposition benches with just 28 Bloc MPs, rather than the 49 he has today that give him the power to pull the plug on a federal government. A fair voting system would also have provided a more stable and effective government. The expiry date on the current coalition is three years at best and more likely less than two years. Because first-past-the-post voting allows a relatively small shift in support to produce a windfall of seats for one party or another, the current system subverts stable and effective government.

With fair and proportional voting systems, parties get the seats they deserve, no more or no less. Their fortunes rise or fall depending on their ability to form stable and effective partnerships with other parties. Elections tend to come every three or four years and government policies

more closely reflect majority view because government actually represents the majority.

Today the parties' spin-meisters are working hard to divide voters into warring camps and pit entire regions against one another. When careers in Ottawa are on the line, country be damned.

Will Canadians turn on one another rather than the real culprits? Or are we finally fed up with this madness and the old-guard party leaders who defend an electoral system that serves their own interests but not those of the voters?

Now is the time, more than ever, for Liberal, Conservative, NDP and Green voters to stand together – call it a people's coalition – to demand equal and effective votes for all and legitimate majority rule for Canada. Grassroots Canadians should unleash a storm of protest until all federal party leaders agree to convene an historic national citizens' assembly on electoral reform – an independent body of several hundred voters, outside of any party's control – to study and then propose the best fair and proportional voting system for Canada.

If we form that people's coalition, we just might be able to put Canada on the path to real representative democracy. If we fail to do so, then political turmoil, bitter regional animosities, and failed governments will likely become the norm and the future of Canada itself will be at stake.

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26 Maryland Blvd.
Toronto, ON M4C 5C9
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office@fairvote.ca
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CUC Executive Director

The Canadian Unitarian Council is seeking applicants for the position of Executive Director.

The job description can be found at
http://www.cuc.ca/whos_who/EDPositionDescription.pdf

Applicants, please submit a letter of application and current resumé to the Executive Director Selection Committee at careers@cuc.ca by January 31, 2009.

The CUC invites applications from all qualified individuals. The CUC is committed to employment equity and diversity in the workplace.

Thank you!

Kalvin Drake
Vice President, Board of Trustees
Canadian Unitarian Council

This space wants your material!