



Kingston: Our War In Afghanistan:

Who Pays? Who Profits? April 2008

An evening with Linda McQuaig and Cathy Crowe: sponsored by Kingston Social Justice Groups

There are no lovely wars! Cathy Crowe

Movie buffs in the audience tonight will recognize the title of my talk 'There are no lovely wars' as homage to Sir Richard Attenborough's powerful anti-war film "***OH! What A Lovely War.***"

Before I begin I need to describe the corner of Jarvis and Queen Street in Toronto. That is where the Moss Park Armoury sits and beside it is Moss Park. In the Moss Park area are many homeless shelters and services. In late summer 2006 a homeless man in his late 50s, named Paul Crutch was sleeping on a park bench in Moss Park. He was savagely beaten and later died in hospital. A woman who attempted to intervene and stop the men's attack was herself beaten by them. For the last month, the trial of three young army reservists has heard shocking evidence on what happened that night. They were being tried for the second degree murder of Paul Crutch. This morning the trial ended abruptly when two of the reservists pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and the third to accessory after the fact. All three pleaded guilty to assault on the woman.

We have to ask how military culture may have fuelled such hate.

Housing and War

Housing and war have had an interesting history. Our national housing program, owes its origins, in large part, to tremendous efforts by members of the Canadian military and their families. Today, ***spending*** on war in Afghanistan is ***spending*** that should be directed towards a national housing strategy.

You may know the Tommy Douglas story, how we got Medicare, our national health program. You may not know this one – how we got our national housing program.

Returning World War II veterans, facing a housing shortage, fought for their right to housing. In Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver, women's groups joined in. They protested, they held picket signs, they demonstrated, and they actually took over empty buildings like the Hotel Vancouver and the Kildare barracks in Ottawa and

squatted in them. Franklyn Hanratty, the leader of the Ottawa protest said that “scores of Ottawa families are living under intolerable conditions”.

The campaign led to empty military buildings being freed up for housing; it led to a federal agency ‘Wartime Housing Ltd.’ that built 19,000 temporary rental homes over 4 years. It led to the creation of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, now the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which came to be our national housing program. The resulting war-time housing, co-op housing, supportive housing, city ‘public’ housing are evident all across Canada, including Kingston.

CMHC helped to build affordable housing for close to 2 million Canadians until that program was quietly killed.

Today, we are one of the few countries in the world without a national housing program. Canadian NGO’s pointed this out in their 2005 submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Working Group. Canada has:

“no coherent policy of national standards to ensure that the right to adequate housing is enjoyed by all and particularly by poor and disadvantaged groups, such as low-income women.”

The 2007 federal budget was entirely silent on homelessness and a national housing program. So was the 2008 budget.

Ontario Housing Minister Jim Watson ran into federal Finance Minister Jim Flaherty the day after his budget was released. He wrote in the Ottawa Citizen that as the elevator in the downtown Toronto hotel went up with Minister Flaherty in it, he asked him why his budget didn't offer a penny of new money for affordable housing. Minister Flaherty quipped the federal government doesn't have responsibility for social housing - which is a bizarre response.

Canada's federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers met several weeks ago on April 2 for the first time since September of 2005. After the 2005 meeting, the ministers issued a joint communique promising that they were accelerating work on developing a comprehensive Canadian Housing Framework to address the needs of the four million Canadians who are officially classified as being in "core housing need" and the 300,000 or more Canadians who experience homelessness each year.

Despite that promise almost three years ago, no progress has been made. The issue was not even on the agenda of the **informal** meeting of the housing ministers. Provincial housing ministers got no assurances, no commitments on any of the three national programs due to expire.

The three national housing / homelessness programs that are due to expire this year (in annual dollars) are:

1. \$700 million for the affordable housing (a two-year allocation of \$1.4 billion from Bill C-48 that was authorized by Parliament in 2005 and allocated in 2006;
2. \$128 million for the housing repairs through the Residential Rehabilitation and Assistance Program (RRAP); and,
3. \$135 million for homelessness through the National Homelessness Initiative.

Ten years after the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee and the mayors of Canada's largest cities declared homelessness a national disaster nothing of substance has been done.

So this is the tragedy today and we should be enraged about, and I've seen it from Vancouver to Newfoundland:

- a deteriorating housing stock that leaves people to live in water damaged, poorly heated, mouldy and bed bug infested units;
- worsening poverty that equates to evictions, hunger, deprivation, depression;
- forced nightly migration of homeless people like the families with children who move from church basement to church basement in Calgary because there is no family shelter and no affordable housing program
- disease outbreaks such as tuberculosis;
- seniors, living and ultimately dying in a shelter;
- palliative care units set up in shelters;
- homeless deaths, freezing deaths, hate crimes and murders

How we treat our own people is a pretty important thing to look at.

Who do we care about? What are we spending our federal budget on?

It's not being spend on home care, pharmacare, a new national child care program, education or to help reduce tuition, to help provinces raise welfare rates, to improve and expand employment insurance, on increases to old age pensions, not on better income security for injured workers, not on making sure we meet Kyoto standards, and certainly not on affordable housing.

This fiscal year a whopping \$18 billion will go towards the military. That is 8.5 % of our budget. We are spending \$100 million a month in Afghanistan, the majority of that not in peace-keeping or NGOs but on war. Spending that could be directed towards a national housing strategy.

We don't intend to take money from Peter to pay Paul. I am not asking that we take money from health care or from roads and transit. We need those things. We do not need to dedicate money to a US/NATO military coalition that is fighting a counter-insurgency war in Afghanistan.

What does our government care about at home and in Afghanistan?

They say they care about women.

If the Conservative government cared so much about women would they have dismantled so much of Canada's funding for women's programs? Would they leave homeless families and children in church basements, forced to move nightly for shelter?

If I saw money going to women I'd be far less skeptical about this government's efforts to help women in Afghanistan.

How does the Karzai government, that we're supporting, treat women?

Ask Malalai Joya. She is the young, Afghan Member of Parliament who was illegally ejected for criticizing the warlords that surrounded her. Then it got worse. She had four assassination attempts on her life. Her home was blown up and she was assaulted and threatened even inside the parliament chamber. The Karzai government took away her security protection. Joya, who now runs a clinic in Farah province, whose patients are mostly women and children, reports that the warlords, who we help, control much of Afghanistan: "kidnap girls and women and rape them regularly."

The government continues to perpetrate severe human rights violations against women including: systemic rape, imprisonment for trying to escape forced and child marriages and offering no protection to the 87% who face violence at home. (as reported by Amnesty, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, WOMANKIND Worldwide)

What does the Karzai government do to individuals including journalists who consider women's rights issues or who utter feminist ideas? They jailed 23 year old Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh and he is sentenced to be-heading.

The Canadian government says we are there to reconstruct and to achieve peace.

Violence just keeps increasing, year after year since this war began.

Our military brags that it has fired 4.7 million bullets plus about 14,000 artillery and tank shells in less than 20 months. Even mainstream media is now reporting that violence has increased every year since 2001 – the Canadian role is aggressive, quite distinct from peacekeeping.

In an Oxfam report earlier this year it was reported that Canadian and allied forces have killed about as many civilians as the insurgents.

3 million Afghans are displaced, made homeless by bombing and shelling – many forced into refugee camps, thousands killed. According to the Afghan Post thousands froze to death this past winter, many who lost limbs to frostbite.

Our government says we are providing aid.

Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Canada is spending 10 times more on war than aid, despite the fact that poverty fuels the insurgency.

In Afghanistan 7.5 million people living on the verge of starvation – men, women and children. Where is the aid?

We are actually destroying their infrastructure. Retired Major-General Lewis Mackenzie explained the use of battle tanks in Afghanistan: rather than risking soldiers when “clearing that house of the enemy, even though they would win, it’s sort of nice to be able to stand back and turn to the tanker and say ‘Take that house out.’” (Globe and Mail, Sept. 11, 2006)

Instead, we should invest resources in peaceful, neutral aid – indeed, reparations – investing in Afghan community-led reconstruction/development.

The Harper government purports to care about drug issues here at home.

Are they funding a national harm reduction strategy? No. Instead, they take the side of the Karzai government which is intricately linked to the drug trade, producing 90% of the world’s heroin.

How much longer will we engage in this war? Two more years? Or 12? Or 20?

We must always have questions when we send our youth to war. We should have debate.

People ask “What would happen if we leave Afghanistan?”

I ask “What will happen if we stay?”

When will we get money for housing and aid in Canada and Afghanistan?

Check with delivery