Court Victory for Anti-Poverty Activist but Coalition raises questions

Contributed by HCAP

On Wednesday, September 12, 2007, members and supporters of the Halifax Coalition Against Poverty (HCAP) watched in dumbfounded silence as the story of the Crown's main witness broke down under cross-examination. John MacDonald, a caseworker for the Department of Community Services, had allegedly been assaulted by anti-poverty activist Cole Webber during a demonstration in October, 2006. But while Mr. MacDonald initially claimed to have been pushed by Webber, he eventually admitted that he was not actually "absolutely sure" he had been. After a brief recess, the Crown decided not to pursue the case any further and Webber was acquitted.

"Webber's trial raises a number of troubling questions," says HCAP member Susan LeFort. "Why, for example, given the weak and incomplete testimony of John MacDonald, did the Crown prosecute the case in the first place? Why, after deposing 17 witnesses, did the Crown base its case on one person's unreliable testimony? How can the Crown and the Halifax Regional Police justify the expense of a full-day trial when the assault charge was clearly without foundation?"

The Coalition Against Poverty has other related concerns. "There is no money to provide those on welfare – the majority of whom are children and people with disabilities – with an adequate living, but there is enough to prosecute those who fight to change that," the group contends. In addition, says LeFort, "It seems obvious that Cole was deliberately targeted. The conditions placed on him for release after his arrest impeded his ability to do advocacy work on behalf of HCAP for eleven months. Is it unreasonable to assume that this was the real motivation behind the assault charge to begin with?"

A Private "Isness"

by Hal Hatfield

I've been taken of late by the overwhelming generosity of good-hearted strangers who give me change when I ask. An act of kindness like this is the beginning of an ongoing positive energy in the matrix of cause and effect in which we find ourselves. When someone gives me a toonie my happiness and gratitude are passed on to the next person I meet. If I am able to, I give him something in the original act of kindness which multiplies itself and continues to grow.

When I purchased an electronic keyboard last year I was a little reluctant at first to play tunes on it with the rhythm accompaniment engaged. This feature on my keyboard had me thinking that in the chain of cause and effect which it seemed to symbolize, if I surrendered to or followed this rhythm I was somehow forfeiting my window on eternity. It was as if in surrendering my feeling to the rhythm of the keyboard, I no longer had a purchase on eternity--an eternity greater than the physical universe of cause and effect. Dancing in the matrix I felt like a clown being led and controlled by a senseless, cold physical universe where every action has an equal and opposite reaction. I didn't like the thought of relinquishing my grasp on a spiritual state greater than a world of cause and effect in which I was an integral part no greater than a grain of sand on a beach--a grain of sand which had no soul in relationship with other souls who lived beyond death.

I've overcome this fear and now play tunes without hesitation although the electronic rhythm still poses something of a problem in that I cannot integrate it with my playing and must follow a predetermined rhythm rather than creating my own with variations of tempo.

For the most part I no longer fear losing my soul to the physical world. Indeed the physical world may be imbued by spirit anyway and this brings me to the title I have selected for this bit of writing. "A Private 'Isness'" is a state of mind I frequently enjoy. I first experienced this when writing years ago thinking that I was incorporating the souls of other artists in my own soul and providing a channel for their energy. At that time when feeling particularly naked in mind--a state which was mostly schizophrenic delusion (I was diagnosed with schizophrenia in my teens). I would by willful and conscious thought regard myself as alone when not sensing the presence the God. This was not difficult and I would focus on some inanimate feature of the beach upon which I sat--a rock or a piece of driftwood, for instance. It was comforting to look at this inanimate object. The sense of being alone with a private mind knowing that no one knew my thoughts was wonderful after the discomfort of having thought that my mind was nakedly exposed to others. I'd imagine a kind of mystical community where souls were entwined and spiralling in communal growth of peace and sharing to their source of destiny which was God.

In Heaven, a state like this would have some merit, perhaps, but on earth a sense of individuality and privacy is very desirable to me now because self revelation is difficult. The difficulty lies in the fact that we all have sinful thoughts which we often try to hide. Also there is a basic need for privacy when structuring and composing conscious thoughts. In 'Private "Isness"'--God and His Son--the Greatest Lover Who ever was and Who ever will be--are the ones to Whom I feel comfortable in exposing myself. The rest is 'Private "Isness"'.

The Real Criminals - Explained

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have done something to deserve abandonment and or abuse. It is actually very common for dysfunctional families to gang up on either the youngest child, a mentally challenged, emotionally disturbed, or any member of the family - it's called scapegoating' I believe, or 'blaming the victim'. It's easier to 'blame the victim' than admit that your family were mean, uncaring, and irresponsible. In fact it is more common than any sibling/relative *coming to the aid* of a person who is a victim of abuse/neglect! We like to put on our rose tinted glasses and pretend we are wonderful crusaders of truth and justice - it just isn't so.

It's an alien world I am describing. The ones who have suffered abuse/neglect will understand though, I know that. If this were a normal article, I suppose one would add some helpful''solutions' to the denouement. So here is some advice. When you see a mother grab the ear of a 9-year-old boy in public and twist it till it causes extreme pain merely because he made some tiny mistake - Speak up and demand that she stop it - it is child abuse! When you see a mentally challenged person on the street, don't be snotty and rude to them. When you read about the scary, dangerous, violent 'street kids'' and''bums' on the street - take it with a grain of salt. Any misdeed a less fortunate person does on the street is blown out of context usually and the media generalize them. *Example*: It could be that around *one* '*street person'* assaults a '*normal person'* every 5 years in a particular city but this assault reaches the papers. But on the other hand *ten* '*street people'* might be assaulted by '*normal people'* in a five year period — such as middle class yuppie larvae who stream out of night clubs when drunken, malevolent and malicious & pick on someone vulnerable, who else? - A 'street person'! *Will it be 'newsworthy? - NO!* But the media will publish the assault of the yuppie kid or 'normal persons' by a 'bum who is '*provoked'*. ***But it is not 'newsworthy' if a 'bum' or 'street person' is assaulted by a 'good person'. Believe it - It is true*!**

Another thing: You are more likely to be raped in a college dorm or at a funky party in a middle class neighbourhood than by any '*street people'* - you are more likely to be murdered by a family member or *'loved one'* in your comfortable home than a''*street person'*. You are more likely to be beaten up at an upscale nightclub than by a''*street person'*. Some good some bad - Just like politicians, lawyers, journalists, and anyone else. But there are far more''bad''normal people' than 'bad''street people'.

Laws against poor encourage violence

According to several studies in the United States it is the homeless and desperate youth who have suffered assaults and been victims of crime - perpetrated by non-homeless individuals in the general public. When poor people are assaulted on the street they almost never report it. But the media blows it up big when a poor person is provoked or attacks someone of the general public.

In The U.S. during the years (1999-2003) advocates and homeless shelter workers have seen an alarming rise in reports of homeless men, women, and even children killed, beaten, and harassed. Since 1999 National Coalition for the Homeless has been compiling records of abuse against the homeless in America. In 2003, nine homeless people died as a result of beatings by non-homeless individuals. Dozens were assaulted on the street. These numbers are probably far higher, however, because most homeless people do not report abuse. There has not been a similar study in Canada.

Groups like National Coalition for the Homeless in the States have been successful in challenging unjust laws and in spreading the word: "Instead of the compassionate responses that communities have used to save lives in the past two decades, the common response to homelessness is to criminalize the victims through laws and ordinances that make illegal life-sustaining activities that people experiencing homelessness are forced to do in public," said Donald Whitehead, Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless, who is himself formerly homeless.

As it becomes increasingly difficult to afford housing, this country is turning to jails instead of creating affordable housing. These individuals and families are arrested for committing such illegal acts as sitting or standing on sidewalks and napping in parks. Whitehead stated, "At the national level, we see a relationship between municipalities' efforts to make homelessness a crime and the increases in hate crimes and violent acts directed at homeless people in those cities."

So who are the real criminals? It's you and I.

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