



## We have seen the enemy

**The quest for equality and justice is a constant in history, a permanent fact of life.**

BY JIM CAMPBELL

One of the benefits of getting older is that a lot of history ends up happening in your lifetime. I remember the thirties when homeless men camped in “the bush” near our house in Ottawa, the patriotism and determination of people in the Second World War, the first jets, zippers, Velcro, television, computers, scotch tape and penicillin – most of the regular stuff of our lives today. Yes, and there was the “the Bomb,” the assassination of President Kennedy, the moon landing and the end of the Berlin Wall. Lots of changes.

It has been a fascinating time to be alive and to realize that the unexpected lies in wait at every turning of the road of life. What will be next? Who knows? Changes and innovations follow each other with such rapidity, many declare that the only constant these days is change itself.

Illustration by Gerald Heydens

They are wrong. There is one thing that has not changed in history for generations: the struggle between those who have privilege, wealth and power, and those who don't.

The Magna Carta and the great revolutions, such as the French and Russian revolutions, arose out of the struggle to have the power and wealth of societies shared. History records the confrontations between the barons and the kings, the merchants and the aristocracy, the landless and the landlords, and the workers and the factory owners.

The struggle never ends because the minute the ‘have-nots’ become the ‘haves,’ and enjoy power, wealth and prestige, they immediately close ranks to protect their newly won position.

The very people who fought for justice

## PEN POINT

and who sang songs about equality, fraternity and solidarity, find it expedient to stand against anyone who wants them to share. They use their new-found status to pass laws, to set standards and promote customs designed to make their victory permanent. They undertake defensive positions, not only against the class or faction they displaced or forced to make room for them

at the top, but against those, who also – like they did – try to struggle from below to secure a place in the sun.

You can find evidence of these strategies in every age and nation protecting the craft guilds and unions, the aristocracy, the merchants and the honoured professions. So here is something that never changes: the “haves” prefer the status quo, they like to hold on to what they have acquired.

It is the permanent undercurrent of life, the struggle behind the items that fill our newspapers and political agendas, and the issues behind government budgets and tax laws and subsidies. While the poor nations demand a share in the world's prosperity and justly complain that the rules set by the wealthy are unfair, the gap between the wealthy industrialized countries and the nations of the third world grows bigger.

The division in every society between the powerful politicians, the corporate elite, the top 10 per cent in society, and those who barely get by, widens year by year. And so the struggle between the haves and the have-nots – the quest for equality and justice – is a constant in histo-



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ry, a permanent fact of life. It is always there; only the players change from time to time.

Thus the struggle for human rights, justice and equality is a permanent one. The victories won by our ancestors and our fathers and mothers over oppression and inequality were not won once-and-for-all. They were only brief skirmishes in the never-ending conflict.

Liberty, justice, democracy and sharing the wealth are always under attack; there are forces working to wear them away. It is because power, wealth, prestige and fame produce bitter fruit – no one ever has never enough.

What can we do? I suppose the answer depends upon which side of the struggle one finds oneself. But what if the position most of us find ourselves in is that we are on both sides of the struggle?

We see the need for the people above us who have so much to change, to open up, and to share. But we feel we need to protect our place in the scheme of things, the position we have earned and the rewards that have come to us. Which probably means that Pogo, the cartoon figure of a generation ago, was right when he said: “We have seen the enemy and he is us.” 🍁

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### DID YOU HEAR...?

- In addition to slowing down a thousandth of a second per century, the Earth also speeds and slows on a daily, even hourly, basis. That means, just like it seems, some days are actually longer than others.
- The border between the U.S. and Canada is 5,500 miles long.
- The average size of a farm in Ontario is 206 acres. In Saskatchewan, it is 1,152 acres