

Inspiration

a speech by Cathy Crowe
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Thank you Madame Chancellor. Thank you President Patry and the Faculty and students for this honour. I accept it knowing that I am only one of many people in the struggle to end the housing crisis here in Canada.

I am sure you can imagine that, after twenty years working as a Street Nurse, I need to find inspiration to stay hopeful. After all, I am not a carpenter, I am not a roofer, and I'm certainly not the federal finance minister, so I cannot build housing. I am a nurse, a street nurse, une infirmière de la rue. Je crois que le logement est à la base d'une bonne santé.

J'ai vu la destruction totale de notre programme de logement national, ce qui a rendu le Canada un des très peu de pays du monde sans programme de logement. Quand nous avions un programme national nous construisions vingt milles unités d'habitations à loyer modique par année. The cancellation of the national housing program in 1993 is the number one reason that 300,000 men and women and over 20,000 children in this country are homeless. 2 million others are on the edge.

Homelessness has been declared a ***national disaster*** in Canada. The United Nations calls it a ***national emergency***. ***I call it a national disgrace***. Whatever you call it – homeless people are in fact ***Canada's*** internally displaced refugees.

Let me give you a glimpse at what that looks like.

There is the nightly movement of homeless families and children from church basement to church basement in Calgary. The children describe being woken at 5 am to be transported with their parents in a yellow school bus back downtown. Then they are bused to the one school they must all go to. They end up in a different church basement the next night and every day the pattern is repeated.

Il y a les squats et les campements dans chaque ville du Canada - des boites en carton, des sacs de couchages, et des familles entières qui vivent dans des tentes ou des caravanes. Les gens qui sont forcés à mendier sur nos rues sont les mêmes gens qui se font déplacés par la police.

On a besoin de soins palliatifs, tel que le programme ici à Ottawa, pour les sans-abri. Il y a le Monument aux Sans-abri à Toronto qui a plus de cinq cent noms inscrits. Les gens vivent sans-abri pour tellement de temps qu'ils meurent dans des conditions désespérés.

I have toured this disaster across Canada. I often invite political leaders or the media to join me on my walk. What I have seen, and they have seen it too, is the

destruction of our life-saving infrastructure: the shelters, the food programs and the assistance programs like unemployment and disability.

Pour les canadiens pauvres et sans-abri, les résultats de ces négligences ont été la destruction et la mort - la tuberculose, la malnutrition, la mort de froid, la dépression et le suicide.

What can give us hope? What can inspire us to move forward and act with a sense of justice? I have three thoughts, three different kinds of inspiration that help me.

D'abord, il y a les gens qui nous inspirent à la justice et à l'action.

Il y a plusieurs personnes à travers l'histoire qui nous donnent du courage face au désespoir. Pour moi, une de ces personnes est l'infirmière et ancien maire de la ville d'Ottawa Marion Dewar.

Après la guerre du Vietnam, plusieurs pays fermèrent leurs frontières aux réfugiés vietnamiens. Des centaines de milliers durent s'échapper de la guerre à bord de bateaux dangereux et surchargés. Plusieurs de ces "boat people" moururent de faim ou se noyèrent.

Marion Dewar witnessed the media images of abysmal refugee camps, grim boat conditions, and the slammed doors of many countries. She acted. She made the slogan "***Think globally – act locally***" come alive. While Mayor she helped launch Project 4000 – to find sponsors for 4,000 Vietnamese people in Ottawa. She created the spark that 'imagined' Canadians country wide to open their hearts and homes to thousands and thousands of Vietnamese refugees who were fleeing persecution, war and homelessness in their own country. ***That was a moment of justice in Canada's history.***

Marion Dewar a dit que les infirmières et les travailleurs de santé doivent être responsables envers la communauté, et que la communauté a besoin de paix et de justice avant tout. Her words inspire me even more today because as she says, we know in our heart that what we need in our country is public education. What we need is health care. What we need is housing. We do not need more destruction, we need justice and peace.

Along with my family, I am very honoured to have Marion's son Paul Dewar, MP for Ottawa Centre here with us tonight.

Second, there are words and art that inspire us to justice and action

De temps en temps, une oeuvre de musique, de poésie ou de littérature émerge et atteint des millions de personnes et engage leurs coeurs à l'action. Ces joyaux littéraires inspirent parce qu'ils nous rappellent qu'il y a des choses pour lesquelles il faut la peine de se battre.

I recently watched a music video on YouTube - the song 'Dear Mr. President' by the singer **Pink**. This song represents art joining forces to nurture the work of activists, in this case, anti-war and homeless activists. The lyrics from her song are inspiring millions. I took a little liberty with them. **Ecoutez!**

Dear Mr. PRIME MINISTER

Come take a walk with me.

Let's pretend that we're just two people and

You're not better than me.

I'd like to ask you some questions, if we can speak honestly.

How do you sleep while the rest of us cry?

How do you dream when a mother has no chance to say goodbye?

How do you walk with your head held high?

Can you even look me in the eye?

And tell me why?

Cher Monsieur le Premier Ministre

As-tu déjà rencontré un enfant, une femme ou un homme sans-abri?

Ne sont-ils pas l'humanité?

Comment peux-tu dire

Qu'une réduction de la TPS achèvera la pauvreté?

Nous ne sommes ni idiots, ni aveugles.

Tu n'as pas d'argent pour l'habitation mais cinquante milliards pour l'armée!

Comment dors-tu quand nous autres pleurons?

Comment rêves-tu quand une mère ne peut pas dire au revoir?

Comment peux-tu marcher la tête haute?

Peux-tu même me regarder dans l'oeil?

Let me tell you 'bout hard work.

Minimum wage, plants closing every day.

Let me tell you 'bout hard work.

Rebuilding your house after the bombs took them away

Let me tell you about hard work

Building a bed out of a cardboard box.

Laisse-moi te parler du travail dur

Travail dur, travail dur

T'en sais rien du travail dur.

How do you sleep at night?
How do you walk with your head held high?
Dear Mr. Prime Minister,
You'd never take a walk with me. **Would you?**

Finally, there are the political wins that happen because of a people's movement.

The slogans, the buttons, the chants inspire and tell the story of those wins.

Il y a des phrases qui agissent comme un mantra ou un symbole qui capturent l'essence d'une lutte et nous inspirent à être actifs dans un mouvement de justice sociale. A lot of these phrases are on political buttons so I poked around in my button collection to give you some examples.

Before I do, did you know that the first widespread use of a logo for a political cause was in the 18th century? It was a medallion, designed by the pottery entrepreneur Josiah Wedgwood. It depicted a kneeling slave, in chains, encircled by the words **"Am I Not a Man and a Brother?"** Women wore the medallion as a bracelet or in their hair. Today the equivalent is a button worn on lapels and knapsacks.

Think of this one from my collection. An all black button with these white words on it: **'WHY kill people to show that killing people is wrong?'** It tells the story of the winning campaign to fight the federal government's plan to bring back the death penalty.

Ou celui-ci: **"Speak Out! South Africa will hear us!"** Ce slogan inspira les canadiens à rejoindre la lutte internationale contre l'apartheid. Ou encore **"Ban the Klan"**. Ce slogan nous rappela qu'il était essentiel d'empêcher le Ku Klux Klan de s'installer au Canada ! Or how about this slogan: **'NO GRAPES.'** The California grape boycott in support of the United Farmworkers had a real influence on the use of agricultural pesticides and it expanded the right for farm workers to organize in a union. And this slogan: **'Will that be cash or OHIP?'** That inspired the win against extra-billing by physicians. There are many other inspirational slogans like: **'Abortion is a Woman's Choice,'** that symbolized the win for de-criminalization. **'A Date with Equality,'** that symbolized pay equity wins across the country. **'Stop the Secret Trials,'** which our Supreme Court agreed with in 2007.

In 2003, the hundreds of thousands of people across Canada who took to the streets and chanted **'Stop the War!'** were clearly an 'inspiration' to Prime Minister Chrétien to not bring Canada into the war in Iraq.

Aujourd'hui, les nouveaux slogans qu'on commence à entendre à travers le pays sont **"Drop fees not bombs"**, **"Health care not warfare"**, **"Childcare not warfare"**, and my favourite **"Housing not war"**.

How about **"Let them Stay!"** referring to the US Iraq war resisters in Canada. **This week the House of Commons voted 137-110 to 'let them stay'** if they refuse to engage in an illegal war'.

Ces slogans m'ont inspirés à continuer la lutte. J'espère qu'ils vous inspireront aussi.

Graduates - the work that you and I do is about life; it is about healing and caring. As a street nurse, I ask you to remember the words and actions of Marion Dewar. I also ask you to hear the words of a very young female politician who inspires. Malalai Joya is the suspended member of the Afghan parliament. She risks her life for speaking out in her country. She has to change housing every night for safety. She is homeless.

On a recent visit to Canada, she expressed shock at the extent of the homelessness and poverty she saw. She said **"I don't know how the (Canadian) government cannot look at them. Instead they say 'we want to help Afghan people.'"** She noted – neither group is being helped.

Our government is making more homelessness in Canada. They are also making more homelessness in Afghanistan.

We should be so ashamed **and then** I hope we will find the moral resolve to prove that we, and this country, are inspired to be about life, healing and caring and to act.

Thank you!

Merci beaucoup!