

The Climate Change Movement in Atlantic Canada

Outcomes of a Retreat at the Thinkers Lodge, Pugwash, Nova Scotia on the 60th Anniversary of the Inaugural Pugwash Conference on Nuclear Disarmament, Co-Recipient of the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize

By **Christine Heming and Robert Cervelli**
Centre for Local Prosperity

The Statement

We know there are no more chances. It is not going away, and today is the time to get it right in dealing with the climate crisis. Our world will live with it for the rest of our history, just as we have lived with the 20th century legacy of nuclear war. Our shared duty now, as one people, is to protect and repair our Earth, even as we prepare ourselves for its future unknowns.

Armed with this conviction, 60 years post the inaugural Pugwash Thinkers Retreat on nuclear disarmament, 24 global and regional thinkers, representing all aspects of community life, gathered for two and a half days of intense, intentional and focused conversation on Global Warming, the greatest threat facing humankind. Believing local action the best path, the retreat's mission was to move conversation to 'doing' by generating a roadmap to develop community-based action plans, with drawdown potential, that will enable us to face and manage life in a very different world.

The diversity of participants — scientists, economists, municipal councillors, planners, artists, community activists, First Nations and Eastern wisdom representatives, Project Drawdown Director and others—powered a cross pollination of thoughts and ideas, fostering charged and difficult conversations. Without shying away from the hard reality of a changed and changing world, the group identified and articulated Global Warming's cascading impacts on small, rural and coastal communities.

A Potent Legacy

Entering the Thinkers Lodge, one steps back in time. The hearts and minds of those renowned thinkers - scientists from both sides of the Iron Curtain - who assembled there in 1957 can still be felt. The Medal room, in which we held our gathering, displays the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize awarded jointly to the Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs and Joseph Rotblat, its spiritual leader. Rotblat was the only nuclear scientist to leave the Manhattan Project, the US government's secret program to build the first atomic bomb, on moral grounds. The Medal Room also displays the Lenin Peace Prize, a letter from Albert Einstein and numerous other items conveying the potency of the place and its history.

The 1957 conference was a response to the 1955 Russell-Einstein Manifesto that marked the beginning of the campaign for nuclear disarmament by prominent members of the scientific community. The Manifesto called for scientists to assemble "to appraise the perils that have arisen as a result of the development of weapons of mass destruction;" to assemble "not as members of this or that nation, continent, or creed, but as human beings." It concludes with: "We appeal, as human beings, to human beings. Remember your humanity, and forget the rest. If you can do so, the way lies open to a new Paradise; if you cannot, there lies before you the risk of universal death."

The Manifesto was signed by eleven prominent thinkers, among them Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell, Linus Pauling and Joseph Rotblat. It was here, on the shoulders of these courageous leaders, that we held our retreat on Climate Change and the Human Prospect.

An Opportunity

The retreat came about when John Eaton, great grandson of Cyrus Eaton who with his wife Anne hosted the first Pugwash Conference in 1957, contacted Robert Cervelli, Executive Director of the Centre for Local Prosperity. John offered the Thinkers Lodge as the place to host a conference on another urgent threat to humankind, global warming. It was an offer the Centre could not refuse.

Time was short and there was much to be done: How to create the right circumstances that would honour the history and vision of the Thinkers Lodge. As the planning process proceeded, the first expedition to the Lodge took place. It was an emotional journey for the Centre, and it became clear that we would need to open our hearts and go deep to find a way forward. The conference became a closed retreat, an opportunity for those invited to speak freely, human being to human being, with a focus on solutions that were real and doable.

The Four Threads

The retreat was a blend of science, art, and the wisdom traditions. A prominent climate scientist in attendance warned that because of lag time, the next 10 years will see further global warming even if green house gas (GHG) emissions were to completely stop. This was sobering.

We began with four threads: (1) the science and solutions of

Project Drawdown - a comprehensive plan to mitigate and reverse global warming by pulling down carbon from the air and reducing concentrations; (2) Nova Scotia's Municipal Climate Change Action Plans outlining the impacts to our coastal communities and potential adaptive strategies; (3) the wisdom traditions as ways to change the cultural narratives in our communities; and (4) the role of local governments in laying the ground for prosperous and resilient local economies.

The first day was edgy; we were getting to know one another and the task seemed ominous if not impossible. We covered a lot of ground but we needed cohesion. On the second morning we were invited to pause and reflect - how were we feeling and where did we want to go next? We broke into groups of four; the energy began to shift. Through this sharing, new threads began to emerge - a way forward. We did not cover all the critical issues, but we had a number of good starting points. From there further conversations focused on barriers, incentives and opportunities: projects that are already making a difference and others that could be implemented at scale. We wanted to be bold and outrageous, and envisioned Nova Scotia and our region as a leader in reducing GHG emissions while creating a more humane and equal society. We embraced the admonition of Elder Albert Marshall, Eskasoni First Nation: "We must take personal responsibility. We must bring balance and harmony to this earth."

As an outcome, we expect to provide actionable steps for both community residents, businesses and municipal governments which include: (1) education and awareness of the impact of climate change in local communities and across the region; (2) how to have important conversations that can propel the ability for change to happen; (3) easy first steps for municipal polices and programs as investments, not costs; (4) new dynamic models for energy, forestry and agriculture that create more jobs and economic value while living in harmony with the earth, and (5) how to create healthy investment ecosystems for these changes.

The Next Step

Our next step is to share our vision and action plan with others, and to help start a Climate Change Movement in Atlantic Canada. We are preparing a roadmap and video documentary. The vision is positive: We do have the data, technology and platforms we need to engage and create positive change. But this transformation rests on local communities stepping-up, building awareness, reflecting deeply on their shared values and listening to one another. Community residents need to think and talk about what's important for their future. The tools are there and the new vision is being articulated. It is up to all of us to take personal responsibility.

As human beings, we need to reflect individually and collectively on our choices and decisions. Are we helping to heal the earth, protect all its life forms, and create a better world for all humanity? If we are not creating a better world for future generations, a more enlightened world, what are we creating? Like the threat of nuclear war, the situation is serious, and the outcomes rest with all of us. Let's "remember our humanity and forget the rest."

For more details and to sign up to receive the full outcomes of the retreat, see: www.centreforlocalprosperity.ca



Robert Cervelli, co-organizer of the Local Prosperity "Thinker's Retreat" in Pugwash chats with Rebecca Moore, Pictou Landing 1st Nation, who was a drummer in the Peace Hall on Sunday, October 1st. (Rees Photo)



The sound of a harp playing in the background was a welcome addition to the meet and greet prior to Friday's dinner at the Thinker's retreat in Pugwash on September 29th. (Rees Photo)

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