

Dancing With The BOG: One Step, Two Step, Three Step—Four?

To improve our relationship with the College, the faculty and support staff have made a number of constructive suggestions to management in recent years. We continue to approach employer/employee relations in a professional and collegial way.

What is our goal? To work towards a culture at Fanshawe that is respectful, collaborative, dynamic and...dare we say it...enjoyable?

Support staff and faculty can't change things on our own. Senior administration must be a willing partner. The locals have attempted to resolve employee concerns through the internal processes available, with limited success. Formal and informal conversations and meetings have taken place, and countless emails sent.

Out of frustration, we turned to the Board of Governors in the hope that the Board would make improving employer/employee relations a priority.

Since September the support staff and faculty locals have tried three times to get employee issues on the Board of Governors' agenda, with no success.

Step One: Impromptu, In Person

On September 22, after the strike was over, about 25 employees attended the public Board meeting, and around 12 were let in. One goal for this meeting was to present a petition signed by over 450 employees requesting the reinstatement of five part-time workers fired during the support staff strike. The petition was accepted by Board of Governors' Chair Winther, referred to Howard Rundle, but was not shared with the Board. The employees were not given time at the Board meeting to present their concerns; instead, they were told to follow process to get their issues on the Board agenda. The next morning Rundle claimed he did not know where the petition was. (A detailed account

of this meeting was published in the November 2011 edition of *The Educator*).

Step Two: Meeting with Board Representatives

On November 9, Britta Winther, Crispin Colvin (Vice Chair of the Board), Marg Rae (the previous President of Local 109), and Darryl Bedford (president of Local 110) met. The following items of concern were discussed:

- Violations under Board Policy D-20, Interactions with Staff. This policy states that "the President cannot retaliate against an employee who raises a complaint in good faith, for example, or cannot cause nor permit conditions, procedures or decisions that are unfair or disrespectful to employees."
- Treatment and accommodation of ill or injured workers
- Actions and role of Human Resources
- Employer/employee relations
- Dysfunction at the support staff Union College Committee (UCC)
- Deactivation of Local 109's e-mail account
- Interference with Local 109's officers and release time
- Firing of the part-time support staff during the strike
- Non-unionized workers' concerns not being addressed.

This meeting concluded with an agreement that Britta Winther and Crispin Colvin would consider the information presented by the locals and that another meeting would be scheduled.

Step Three: Another Meeting with Board Representatives

On Thursday November 24, Wil Sorrell (the newly elected President of Local 109)

and Darryl Bedford met with Britta Winther and Crispin Colvin.

In this meeting Winther confirmed that the College is committed to improving labour relations, however she decided that the concerns raised by Locals 109 and 110 were *operational* in nature and not matters for the Board to consider. The Board's position is that the College's internal mechanisms are adequate to resolve the issues.

As a consequence, the Board will not provide the locals with an opportunity to present worker concerns to the Board directly. Nor will the Board of Governors accept the petition signed by over 450 employees. Winther indicated that she would report on the meeting to the Board *in camera*.

Winther did say that she and Colvin will meet with Howard Rundle and Jeff Low, Associate Director of Human Resources to discuss the concerns presented by the locals.

Bedford and Sorrell expressed profound disappointment that the Board would not be able to hear directly from the local presidents, as "worker issues have taken a back seat for too long." They were somewhat heartened that the Chair would be speaking with Rundle and Low. Time will tell if there will be any tangible results.

Step Four: Stay Tuned

Locals 109 and 110 are now considering the next steps to be taken. There are hundreds of employees looking to see whether their issues matter, and of course, five fired workers counting on us. ☹

CHANGE



Ontario's union
Le syndicat de l'Ontario

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Pre-Bargaining Survey: Don't forget to fill it out!

The intention of this survey is to gather feedback regarding potential bargaining demand themes in upcoming negotiations for the 2012 Collective agreement.

We encourage you to participate in this survey as one of the ways you can be involved in the negotiation process. Further opportunity for your involvement will include attendance at your local demand-setting meeting.

www.opseu110.ca/survey

Username: your surname

Password: your postal code with the space



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Happy Holidays!

"Birds in Hats" by Alice Tams @ birdsin-hats.blogspot.com
Buy her items at Etsy.

President's Message *by Darryl Bedford*

The Conversation Begins



At our meeting on November 22nd we welcomed our newly elected bargaining team co-chair Carolyn Gaunt. It was the first step in the bargaining process. Great points were raised and Carolyn will take those back to the team. She remarked that the 24 college academic locals had so many things in common despite the diversity of our colleges. This meeting was just the beginning of an important conversation.

If you think about it, collective bargaining is all about "conversations." Conversations with members. Conversations with the other side. And conversations with the media and the public. Is The Council willing to bargain in good faith? I guess we'll find out soon enough. Engaging the public in a conversation is tough in an era of sound bites and 140-character tweets. We discussed all of that on November 22nd and more.

That wasn't the only event that took place on November 22nd. Fanshawe organized a "President's Breakfast" at the London Convention Centre. I had to smile at the Chair of the Board of Governors Britta Winther's opening remarks, which were to the effect of "Fanshawe is not about buildings, it is about the people in them." You could have fooled us.

Maybe Britta has been reading Local 110's newsletter columns or *The Educator* and is finally coming around to how important worker issues

are? Well, when newly elected Local 109 President Wil Sorrell and I meet with her on November 24th we got the College's answer. You can learn more by reading the article in this issue.

Something funny happened after the President's Breakfast. Local 110 distributed to the participants a Fact Sheet illustrating the increase in students and programs and the decrease in full-time faculty from 1991 to 2010. The key message was: "You can't expect highly educated and experienced individuals to move to London, sign a lease or a mortgage, raise a family, and spend money in the downtown if they don't know whether they will still have a teaching position the next term." It is a tough message but I make no apologies as it is the truth.

The issue of good jobs is too important for us to stay silent!

The media picked up on it. You can read The London Free Press coverage at <http://www.lfpress.com/news/london/2011/11/22/19003011.html>

With a clear and relevant message, those of us who are concerned about the continuing, and growing exploitation of part-time educational workers can influence "the conversation."

Let the conversation begin.

I wish all employees at Fanshawe College a Happy Holiday, and best wishes for the New Year ahead. ☺

In solidarity,

CHANGE

SAFETY FIRST BY JOHN CONLEY



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Here's what's happening in the health and safety world of Fanshawe College.

Crowded Hallways

I perceive a problem with crowded hallways, particularly at the beginning of the term, and mainly due to the new student population. The problem is very crowded hallways in between classes, which may be dangerous for egress during a fire drill or an emergency situation, and access for emergency workers. Backpacks, rolling cases and carts make the problem even worse. Trouble areas include, but not exclusively, the hall outside D1052, the hall in A building by the lounge area, the first floor D E F junction, the passage by the bookstore and the entrance to the lecture theatre in R building. I am suggesting a hallway protocol, based largely on common sense. Students, as well as staff and faculty should:

- Keep to the right of the hallway,

just the way we drive!

- Keep moving. Do not stop in the middle of the hallway.
- Wait in a line to get into classrooms. Do not swarm.
- Be aware of your backpacks, rolling cases and carts.
- Be considerate of crutches, wheelchairs and scooters.
- Make room for emergency workers.
- Leave in an orderly fashion during fire drills and emergency situations.
- Avoid using phones and texting while walking.
- Avoid eating and be careful carrying hot beverages while walking.
- Use common sense and be considerate of others.

Implementation of procedures

How can these common sense policies and practices be implemented?

- Articles in student newspapers
- Articles in the student handbook
- Professors can educate new students on the protocol at the beginning of the semester.

I am currently running a hallway audit and I ask for your input to help identify problem areas. Please call or email me if you have any concerns or information (contact information above).

Smoking

The new smoking policy restricts smoking to 14 designated areas around the College. It is prohibited elsewhere and supported by a system of warnings and fines. It is my perception that this policy is only selectively enforced. Rain and the coming snow will cause

smokers to crowd around entrances, causing a health hazard to non-smokers. If you observe this behaviour, please call 4400 and security officer will be dispatched to the area. They will respond quickly and this will help to 'spread the word' to other abusers about the new policy. It will also create a paper trail so the enforcement can be monitored.

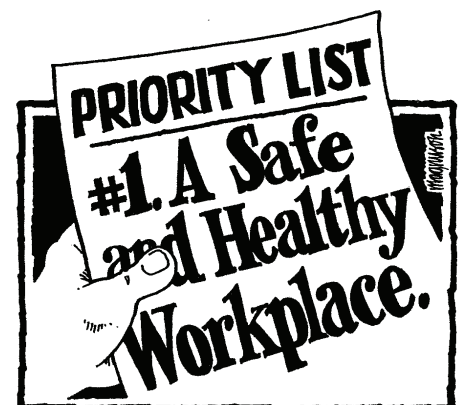
Snow and Ice

It will be getting slippery very soon. Please watch your step as you enter the college and call 4400 if you find an area that needs salt or snow removal. Also be aware of slip, trip and fall hazards inside the doorways as well, due to melting snow and water.

If you have any health and safety concerns, the official protocol is to approach your supervisor. If you are uncomfortable in doing this, I, Lianne Wong, or any Union Steward can take this forward to the supervisor for you. If there is no adequate resolution, or if the problem is College wide, it can be brought to the JHSC (Joint Health and Safety Committee).

I am interested in any and all health and safety concerns you have about your workplace, and would be glad to offer advice and assistance. ☎

~Prof. JC



Pension Plan Update

About the CAAT Plan

The CAAT Plan is the 30th largest pension fund in Canada.

Unlike the situation facing other unions and their pension plans, the CAAT Plan is excluded from collective bargaining under the *Colleges Collective Bargaining Act*. Instead, the CAAT Pension Plan is governed an independent Board of Trustees with representatives from OPSEU Academic and Support Staff, OCASA (Administrative Staff), and Colleges Ontario. The employer and employee trustees jointly make decisions for the benefit of all plan members.

Updates: New Publications Online

The CAAT Pension Plan website (<http://www.caatpension.on.ca>) has a new look. There are new Plan publications, including updates to the Pensioner Handbook, Member Handbook and some of the pamphlets. Plus, there are a new series of booklets about "Making Choices".

On May 31 the CAAT Plan held its first "webinar" on the topic of plan

funding. You can play it back by surfing to the www.caatpension.on.ca site.

2010 Returns

The CAAT Plan fund continues to grow with another year of double-digit returns. The CAAT Plan's net rate of return in 2010 was 12.6%, bringing net assets to \$5.45 billion at year end, up from \$4.85 billion at the end of 2009. All of the Plan's asset classes performed well during the year.

In its most recent filing with regulators for January 1, 2011, the CAAT Pension Plan showed that it is adequately funded with a modest going-concern surplus.

Part Time, Partial Load, and Sessional Faculty can participate too!

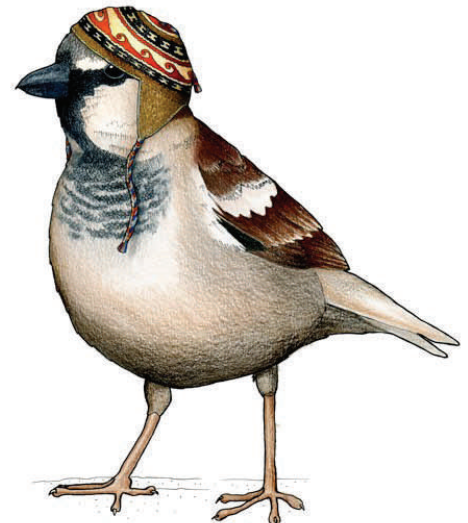
A common misconception is that you must be a member of the union to contribute to the CAAT Pension Plan. Not so. If you work part time, partial load, or sessional, the CAAT Plan refers to you as an "Other Than Regular Full-Time" (OTRFT) employee. An OTRFT employee is technically defined by the Plan as someone with a fixed contract

end date.

Before joining the Plan, OTRFT members must complete a waiting period of 24 months of "continuous" employment. Generally, if you consistently worked part-time, partial load, or sessional hours during the 24-month period in question you are considered to have completed continuous employment. It need not be a completely "continuous" period of work as vacation periods can be included in the 24 months. Once you have completed the waiting period, the College should notify you that you are eligible to enrol in the Plan. If you think you are eligible for the pension plan but haven't received an application, feel free to contact us in D2018 or by email. ☪



Have a Restful
Break!



"Birds in Hats" by Alice Tams @ birdsindhats.blogspot.com Buy her items at Etsy.



Chief Steward's Report *by Fred Varkaris*

Requesting and Booking Vacation Time

As we head toward the end of 2011, I would like to extend warm holiday greetings to everyone and wish all of you a happy new year.

If, as a full-time faculty member, you intend to take holidays other than during the week of December 26th to 30th, you should complete a vacation request form, available in your school.

Article 15.01 A of the Collective Agreement states (emphasis added):

A full-time employee who has completed one full academic year's service with the College shall be entitled to a vacation of two months as scheduled by the College. A full-time employee may request and, with the approval of the College, may have a vacation that is scheduled in periods other than a contiguous two-month block. A full-time employee who has completed less than one full academic year's service with the College shall be entitled to a two month vacation period and shall be paid the remainder of the employee's prorated annual salary. The request of the employee shall be in writing and a copy provided to the Union Local President.

Where the employee requests a vacation in other than a contiguous two month block, the employee shall be entitled to forty-three (43) weekdays of vacation not including

any holidays as set out in Article 16.

Faculty members must fill out a vacation request form if they plan to take vacation outside the usual two contiguous months of scheduled vacation. Any vacation time taken will result in the two months being reduced accordingly.

You may want to request vacation time for some of the interterm days during the year. For example, if you teach a 15-week term these days include December 19th to 23rd, 2011, February 27th to Mar 2nd, 2012 (Reading Week), as well as some others. You do not have to include any of the following holidays in your request (Article 16.01 A):

Family Day	Victoria Day
Civic Holiday	Thanksgiving Day
Good Friday	Canada Day
Labour Day	

The use of the vacation request form is relatively new and was created to address concerns raised by both the management and union members of WMG (Workload Monitoring Group).

Although Article 11.01 G1 provides full-time faculty members with the ability to perform some of our assigned tasks off-campus, the College may have need to contact any one of us and has the right to request our presence on-campus within a reasonable amount of time. Failure to be available within a reasonable amount of time may result in disciplinary actions. If you plan on being unavailable during non-vacation times,

it is advisable that you complete the vacation request form to avoid any possibility of this happening.

As scheduling during contact weeks becomes more convoluted, it has become difficult to schedule meetings at times when all faculty members are available. This has resulted in increasingly more meetings being scheduled during non-teaching weeks. If any of these meetings are scheduled during an assigned or an approved requested vacation time, you are not obligated to attend. Similarly, if you are not able to attend due to health reasons, communicate your regrets and take the time as sick leave.

If you are unavailable to be on-campus for health reasons or because you are on vacation, clearly communicate with the College to avoid any misunderstandings. As always, if you have any further questions about this or any other aspects of the Collective Agreement, please contact me.

I sincerely wish you and your families all the best during this holiday season. ☺

Fred Varkaris
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Workload Monitoring Group
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Board of Governors' Report by Kay Wigle

The Balancing Act: A Governor's Struggle



There are many ways one could describe what it is like as the faculty representative on the Board of Governors (BOG) at Fanshawe College—being caught between a rock and a hard place, a balancing act, walking a tight-rope—and they all fit.

Challenging yes; frustrating—at times; surreal, for sure.

In September, members of Local 109 and 110 attempted to draw to the BOG's attention their concerns by presenting a petition that carried a total of 467 signatures protesting the termination of five employees during the September 2011 support staff strike. I was aware of the petition as an employee but as a Board member, I was not made aware of the content. The employees asked at the meeting if they could be included on the agenda, but they were denied.

The petition was in support of re-hiring the five fired workers who lost their jobs because they supported their fellow workers by not crossing the picket line. Many members of both locals were present at the September BOG meeting wearing "Change" buttons. Board members were aware by the presence of the employees and heightened security that there was a concern, but neither union president was given permission to speak at that meeting.

This is the balancing act: the BOG does not deal with operational issues and this was perceived as an operations issue. However, the BOG only has one employee and that is the president (Policy C-01):

"The Board directs the work of one employee, the President, who is

accountable to the Board of Governors. The Board wishes to ensure that it establishes policies concerning its relationship with the President, its expectations of the President, the President's authority, the President's rights, the President's expectations of the Board, and the President's compensation and terms and conditions of employment."

Therefore, the president is ultimately responsible for the college, its employee relations, and decisions made by the college, such as the firing of the five workers.

Can the BOG intervene? As a faculty member in 2006, I was in the opposite position. I was one of the protesters requesting the BOG hear our issue. In that case, the protesters were allowed to address the members of the Board even though they were not on the agenda.

So why would BOG members not want to use their discretion to invite the protesters to speak this time? Wouldn't one of the expectations of the president be a positive working environment? The BOG did review the Employee survey, which did not rate the college environment favourably. The September protest was a further indication of the internal problems.

The issues that are important to members of Local 109 and 110 will never be discussed at the BOG. I am referring to major issues, like continual delays in scheduling of arbitrations and workplace bullying. I am also referring to the increase in full-time students (up 20%), decrease of full-time faculty (down 28%), and the

expectation that programs continually increase their Contribution to Overhead. These latter issues have a direct impact on students through increased class sizes and decreased services. The Student Success Centre and its counselors cannot keep up with the demands of the increased number of students. All these are critical issues that affect the morale of the employees at Fanshawe College, but the BOG will never know about them, or refuses to hear them.

I have to ask myself, is there really any value in having an internal governor? Can I possibly make a difference? I can raise issues as long as they fit with the "governance" model utilized by the BOG, but the agenda items do not afford an opportunity to deal with many issues that will impact employees.

As we embark on the season of giving, my hope for Christmas is the five fired employees get a gift of employment back and not the lump of coal given to them in the form of a pink slip.

For all Fanshawe employees, managers, and members of local 109 and 110, I hope you have a *Safe and Happy Holiday Season*.

If you would like to discuss any issues, please contact me at 519-452-4175 or email kwigle@fanshawec.ca ☺

HUMOUR

If I Had Two Million Dollars

It was announced to the Board of Governors that Fanshawe received \$3.4 million more in government grants than originally forecast in the 2011-12 budget. \$1.4 million was put to eliminating any possibility of a deficit this year. \$2 million was used for a "Strategic Initiative Fund" to be spent by fiscal year end March 31, 2012. What will it be spent on? Nobody knows. The documents aren't specific. It is just but one line on a single page financial update provided to the Board.

We thought we would sing about it. With all apologies to the *Barenaked Ladies*:

If I had two million dollars
 (If I had two million dollars)
 I'd put it in the budget
 (I would put it in the budget)
 If I had two million dollars
 (If I had two million dollars)
 I'd teach the Board about the budget
 (Maybe a nice course about the over-head!)
 And if I had two million dollars
 (If I had two million dollars)
 Well, I'd buy you a classroom
 (A nice spot at Ox-bury Mall!)
 If I had two million dollars
 I'd buy resp-e-ct...



If I had two million dollars
 I'd build parking spots downtown
 If I had two million dollars
 Tell me SEM, can enrolment really go down?
 If I had two million dollars
 Maybe we could keep food service at Z open
 You know, we could just go over there and hang out

And use the computer lab we're not supposed to
There would already be thirty-three other faculty sent out
We could talk about GPS skylights and things

Voice 1: They have GPS skylights at Z but they don't
have a shuttle bus.

Voice 2: Well, can you blame 'em?

Voice 1: Uh, yeah...



If I had two million dollars
We wouldn't have to walk to Z building
If I had two million dollars
No, we'd take a limousine 'cause walking sucks
If I had two million dollars
We wouldn't have to eat Kraft Dinner...

Voice 1: But we would eat Kraft Dinner

Voice 2: Of course we would, the food service is closed

Voice 1: And buy really expensive ketchups with it

Voice 2: That's right, all the fanciest ket... *SEMWorks ketchups!*
Mmmmmm, Mmmoney, Hmmm

If I had two million dollars
(If I had two million dollars)
Well, I'd buy you some Datatel
(But not real Datatel, that's cruel)



If I had two million dollars
I'd buy your respe-e-ect...

If they had two million dollars, If they had two million dollars
If they had two million dollars, If they had two million dollars
If they had two million dollars...
It'd go to capital!



The Value of Nothing by Raj Patel

Review/Précis by Jennifer Boswell

Raj Patel, author of *The Value of Nothing: Why Everything Costs So Much More Than We Think* is a distinguished scholar who attended Oxford, the London School of Economics, and Cornell, earning degrees in philosophy, politics, economics and development sociology. Currently a visiting professor at Berkeley, he has been called the “rock star of social justice writing,” a moniker which perhaps undervalues and demeans the importance of Patel’s work.

The rock star label suits in one sense, however, because in person Patel is handsome and young, and easily commands attention with passion and wit. Patel has called himself a “mutt of globalization,” as he has a Kenyan mother, a Fijian father, was born in London, England and has lived in several European and African countries, before pausing—for now—in San Francisco.

Even more interestingly, to his dismay and consternation, he has been pronounced the second coming of Buddha, the Maitreya, by followers of a religious group named Share International.

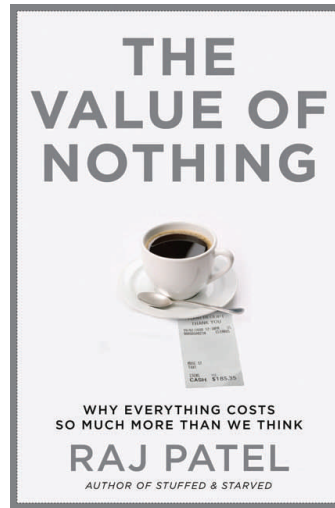
How much more interesting a 39-year-old could one hope to meet?

Patel’s goals in this book at first seem quite plain: he tackles the financial collapse of 2008 by pointing out the failures of the free market system that dominates the Global North. A startling revelation by Alan Greenspan, 19-year Chairman of the US Federal Reserve and free market economic guru is the starting point for the first chapter, “The Flaw.”

Testifying before U.S. Congress about the crisis, Greenspan’s statements reveal a chastened and bewildered man, who admits under questioning that his former ideology—“My judgement is that free, competitive markets are by far the unrivalled way to organize economies. We have tried regulation, none meaningfully worked”—was flawed.

His admission is not about a ‘correction,’ or an improbable “black swan” problem that arises from the confluence of unlikely events: his admission was that free market ideology itself was, appallingly, wrong:

Greenspan: *I found a flaw in the*



model that I perceived is the critical functioning structure that defines how the world works, so to speak.

Rep. Waxman: *In other words, you found that your view of the world, your ideology, was not right, it was not working.*

Greenspan: *Precisely. That is precisely the reason I was shocked, because I had been going for 40 years or more with very considerable evidence that it was working exceptionally well.*

The importance of this admission, and similar ones by other highly visible economists and advisors has since been buried in the hindsight and rationalizations of commentary since 2008, including claims that the risk in the financial markets was incorrectly priced, traders were rewarded for pushing risk into the future, and the old ‘we were working with bad data’ argument. All these subsequent rationalizations and explanations cover up the reality that all that was believed about free markets was proven wrong.

The first part of *The Value of Nothing* deals with some history of economic theory leading up to free market ideology, and its flawed fundamentals and assumptions. New ways of thinking about the ways we value the world, and the interactions between society and markets are the focus of the second part of Patel’s book.

Patel makes a series of compelling arguments about the failings of free market ide-

ology, taking the reader from John Stuart Mill to Karl Polanyi’s *The Great Transformation* to the Chicago School of Economics’ Eugene Fama, originator of the “markets are smart” Efficient Market Hypothesis (1960s), to Gary Becker’s (1970s) *Homo economicus*. This theoretical construct has human beings always acting rationally to maximize results for themselves, an idea that is demonstrably false, in many ways. Corporations, which are legal persons, more closely follow the behaviours of *Homo economicus*, and their influence in our governments has a great deal to do with free market fundamentalism.

A series of engaging discussions about the flaws of free market ideology follow the short history lesson: the price of things does not reflect their true value; if it did, water would be worth a great deal, as it’s vital to life itself, and diamonds would be worth little. Another correction is that markets depend on society; society does not depend on markets, as is commonly assumed.

The divisions between government and the market are utterly false, according to Patel. The recent financial crisis would have resulted in complete economic collapse had the public not been there to prop up the system. So, “too big to fail” means “so big that it can depend on society to pick it up when it topples,” completely destroying the oft-heard free-market mantra to keep government out.

Patel relays Polanyi’s idea that free market supporters would have us believe that markets are the doctor, and society the patient: not true, as we have seen with recent extraordinary failures. Patel carefully outlines how markets have been shaped over the last few hundred years, and how they in turn have trapped people within a certain culture and politics that make it hard to see that uncontrolled markets are not the correct way to value the world—and are actually destroying it. This book often turns accepted thinking on its head, making it truly interesting to read.

Backed by extensive research and knowledge, witty and with comic timing, Patel is relentless in his attack on free market think-

(Continued on page 11)

ing. He is especially scathing when it comes to market-based solutions to climate change: cap and trade initiatives are simply turning a common good, the atmosphere, into a commodity that “you can foul for a fee.” Patel sputters that getting the free market to solve climate change is like asking

*“There are two novels that can transform a bookish fourteen-year-old’s life: *The Lord of the Rings* and *Atlas Shrugged*. One is a childish daydream that can lead to an emotionally stunted, socially crippled adulthood in which large chunks of the day are spent inventing ways to make real life more like a fantasy novel. The other is a book about orcs” (172).*

an iceberg to fix the Titanic. Preposterous! cries Patel, and a sad illustration of how blind we have become to alternate ways of valuing the world.

Part Two of the book offers examples of the countermovements that, according to Karl Polanyi, inevitably arise in reaction to the harms that economic systems inflict. These countermovements are not nostalgic wishes for a return to the past, but using new tools, economic and other, such movements attempt to mitigate some of the damage: “Today’s countermovements will tweet and blog, using the latest ideas and technology, as well as old-fashioned direct action, to fight for a different and sustainable world.”

Environmental movements, and the recent Occupy actions are examples of countermovements resulting from the damage caused by free markets. Patel notes that there are many countermovements around the world, but they are not widely reported on and many of the people leading them are poor.

Many of these movements are “reinventing the commons”, so to speak. The idea of the commons is important to this book as a whole: Patel writes about the enclosures of the common land in Britain in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the turning of commons into commodities which was the

goal, and result. Fisheries are a particularly good example of how free markets profit from what was previously a common resource but because of their need for continual expansion and rapaciousness, inevitably cause its destruction.

Modern movements are working to reclaim and redistribute some goods such as land, water, seed, food resources and shelter according to need, sustainability, and the grassroots democratic will of the people. These movements are not communistic, but they’re not purely capitalist either. Patel points to movements that attempt to create markets that are not coldly profit driven, but ones that serve more responsibly the society in which they operate. For this to happen, the movements themselves need to set the terms of value for things their people need to survive, and not let outside markets do so.

Patel has long been associated with La Via Campesina, an international peasant movement formed in 1993. This movement has over 150 million members around the world, and one of its original organizers is now president of Bolivia, Evo Morales. La Via Campesina uses a “meticulously democratic process” that is the result of being told by too many so-called experts what is best for them. They are fighting for what they call food sovereignty.

The actions of unrestricted markets in seeds has been especially repugnant, and detrimental to the Global South. Corporations have taken the knowledge of generations of farmers (knowledge held in common) that traditional seeds represent and patented the genetic codes within, creating ‘intellectual property’. One countermovement, the Deccan Development Society in India, a village level association of poor women, have in their quest for food sovereignty created community gene banks that hold traditional seeds that can be borrowed for free.

People in another movement in Durban, South Africa sought the right to settle on some public land. The Abahlali baseMjondolo shackdweller movement also rejected outside help; its members declared they were “professors of their own suffering” and insisted on their right to shelter. At first beaten, abused, and treated as sub-human by the police, they are now being defended

by them. Home foreclosures in Philadelphia are being fought by an organization called ACORN—the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. They recruit “home defenders” to stay with families under threat of eviction, and peacefully resist.

After several countermovement examples, we get to the truly radical kernel of the book: people must fight for change. Patel acknowledges that challenges to the status quo “inevitably lead to charges of criminality.” One need only remember the avalanche of negative comments directed at the Occupy movement. Raj Patel knows that those who challenge the “fragile consensus” around how markets operate in society will not be tolerated, at first. His book argues for the necessity, morality and inevitability of direct action against free market economic ideology and its harms.

Markets have been around for much of human history, and Patel does not seek to eliminate them. But he argues that we must pierce the modern myths that free markets are the cure to all societal ills and recognize that they are dependent on society, and should be accountable to society. Markets don’t exist in a vacuum, any more than society does, so markets should not be allowed to act as if they do.

The title *The Value of Nothing* refers to Oscar Wilde’s quote that “Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.” Patel’s book is a rousing and convincing attempt to remedy this dire situation. Raj Patel argues passionately and convincingly for the need to invent and operate within newer market forms, ones that are already being brought to life in poor areas of the world—including, perhaps, some right outside our own doors. ☪



Raj Patel

Happy Holidays!

from

Fred, Kathryn, Darryl, Kathleen,
Jennifer, Sandra and Lynne



...and

All the best to you and
your families in the New Year!

