



IS BEING POOR A CRIME?

ALL EVENTS AT BRUNSWICK STREET UNITED CHURCH

SPONSORED BY:

SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY, THE LAW COMMISSION OF CANADA,
THE COMMUNITY ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS

Key Note Speakers:

7:00-9:00 pm, Monday, November 8

J. Grant Wanzel (Dean, Faculty of Architecture & Planning, Dalhousie University and
President, Creighton-Gerrish Development Association)

The Criminalization of Poverty...and the Impoverishment of Everything Else

Buildings are both the embodiment and reflection of culture. As life has been globalized it's become more polarized, with privilege enjoyed by the few who can afford it. As the private realm has expanded, the public realm has eroded. Once privatized, public space is subject to the norms of private property. Behaviours tolerated in the civic realm may now be interpreted as exhibiting criminal intent. Gated communities, shopping malls, summer-side-walk-cafes come to mind. Such discriminations are aided and abetted by architectural design. One suspects these impoverishments of the public realm as mean-spirited, intolerant and paranoid.

Grant's teaching, research, writing and practice has always focused on housing, including matters of policy, history, theory, development and design. He balances his responsibilities as a full-time academic with his commitments as a housing activist, community organizer, architect-planner, and developer of non-profit housing. He is president of the Creighton/Gerrish Development Association.

Joe Hermer (Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Centre for Criminology,
University of Toronto)

Idle and Disorderly: The Regulation of Poverty As Crime

This talk will explore how poverty has increasingly become regulated and administered as a problem of crime and disorder. Two areas will be discussed: 1) the erosion of ideals of generosity and entitlement in the ways we politically organize our responsibilities to strangers and 2) the range of ways in which poor people have been re-located into a realm of disorder that is subject to intense policing and moral scrutiny.

Joe is an assistant professor of sociology and criminology at the University of Toronto and holds a doctorate in Socio-Legal studies from the University of Oxford. His research and activism addresses how poverty is being governed as an object of disorder and crime. He is currently working on projects for the Law Commission of Canada (on the regulation of 'welfare fraud') and the Homelessness Directorate of the Government of Canada on the relation between homelessness and the criminal justice system.

Steve Bittle (Law Commission of Canada)

Closing Remarks

A Colloquium & Public Meeting on Criminalizing Poverty

Tuesday, November 9

Panel #1: MAKING & DENYING HOME

10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Chair & Comment: Joe Hermer

Bruk Melles (Community Researcher)

Who Stole the Soul? The Case of the Gottingen Street Neighbourhood, 1950-2000.

Neighbourhood change is inevitable; however when this change is triggered by circumstances that cause continual negative impacts, the reasons for neighbourhood decline should be examined. A once vibrant and diverse street, Gottingen Street today exhibits classic signs of inner city decline. A historical look at the Gottingen neighbourhood attempts to answer the question: Is there a relationship between policy, investments and neighbourhood decline in the area over the fifty year period, 1950-2000? What lessons can be learned?

Bruk's interests lie in the intersection between community development, planning, housing and health issues. With a background in urban and rural planning, sociology and anthropology, today's presentation is based on her thesis research while at Dalhousie University's School of Planning. She has recently joined the Halifax Peninsula Community Health Board.

Jeff Karabanow (Assistant Professor, Maritime School of Social Work)

Phillip Clement (Co-ordinator, National Homelessness Initiative Research Study on Street Youth)

Understanding Homeless Youth in Canada

Jeff and Phillip will be reporting on research from the National Homelessness Initiative Research Study. This project is funded by the Homeless Secretariat to study strategies used to get off the streets. It is a national study involving people in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Vancouver and Calgary. They will report preliminary findings of interviews with 150 youth and service providers.

Jeff is assistant professor at the School of Social Work and cross-appointed with International Development Studies and the School of Health and Human Performance at Dalhousie University. He has worked and researched with street youth in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Guatemala, India and Thailand. Phil has a Bachelor of Commerce and a Masters degree from Dalhousie in Environmental Studies. He is currently the research co-ordinator for the National Homelessness Initiative funded project "Getting off the Street: Exploring strategies used by Canadian youth to exit street life and promising street youth services."

Prashan Ranasinghe (Ph.D. student, Centre for Criminology, University of Toronto)

The Regulation of Homelessness through Zoning Law: Toronto's Homeless Shelter By-law

Toronto's homeless shelter by-law had its genesis in the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force (1999), which called for immediate solutions to the 'crisis' of homelessness. The Report urged the circumvention of existing zoning policy to facilitate the building of more shelters across the city. Prashan will narrate the 'fall-out' that took place over the proposed shelter by-law, examining how competing values, expressed through "compassion," "community values," and procedural guidelines conflicted with the desired goal. He concludes by noting how the compassionate response to homelessness is itself regulated by these disparate values, and how these values impede more compassionate responses to homelessness.

Prashan is a Ph.D. student at the Centre of Criminology, University of Toronto. His research interests revolve around the ordering of public space. His doctoral research examines the re-fashioning of vagrancy-type law as an urban planning tool deployed to order urban sites, and how these laws are used to create "desirable" public spaces and uses of public space.

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Tuesday, November 9

LUNCH 12:00 – 1:00 P.M.

Panel #2: DENYING HOME: THE COMMUNITY IMPACT 1:00-3:00 pm

Chair & Comment: Angela Bishop

Paul O'Hara (Social Worker, North End Community Health Association)

Poverty and Exclusion:

Is Current Social Policy Criminally Responsible for Who Gets Housed in Jails?

Paul will speak about how social policy excludes marginalized groups and identify how policy affects the grass roots. He will also explore social determinants of health and give examples of how social policy contributes to who is poor and susceptible to criminal activity and how communities attempt to advocate for change.

Paul has a Masters degree from the Maritime School of Social Work (MSSW) and has worked for the North End Community Health Centre since 1981 with focus on the social determinants of health. His interests focus on anti-poverty and housing/homelessness issues. He has taught at MSSW since 1991 with a focus on social justice and anti-oppressive social work practice. He is recognized at the Federal, Provincial and Local level for his community contributions through work and volunteer involvement.

Wayne MacNaughton (Community Activist)

Being Homeless in a Post-9/11 World

Wayne will speak to his personal experience of homelessness and how it has changed in a world of increasing security concerns and decreasing availability of affordable housing. He will explore how perceived “problems” on one of Halifax’s main thoroughfares, Spring Garden Road, have been addressed through solutions that emphasize enforcement, thus creating adversaries. He will describe how these "problems" might be addressed through solutions that emphasize compassion and thus build community.

Wayne has lived and worked in several Eastern Canadian cities. In 1996 he developed a visual impairment that made it difficult to access employment. Combined with a decreasing availability of affordable housing, this caused him to enter a cycle of homelessness that lasted about six years. Now living in non-profit housing in Halifax, he advocates for affordable housing and better programs to help the homeless improve their lives. He is a board member of Metro Non-Profit Housing Association and a First-Voice Member of the Community Action on Homelessness (CAH) Steering Committee and Research Committee. He also serves on the Advisory Committee for the Halifax Regional Municipality’s Portrait of the Street and Shelters. As chair of the CAH Action Group he helped organize National Housing Day 2003 in Halifax.

Maureen MacDonald (MLA, Halifax Needham)

Poor bashing, trashing and lashing: the politics of pandering

Maureen will speak on how the political discourse of poverty is shaped and finds itself on the policy agenda at all three levels of government and about the policy impact of this political process for constituents.

Maureen is the New Democratic Critic for Health and African Nova Scotian Affairs, and a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources. In addition to her MLA duties she works through numerous

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social justice organizations, such as Bryony House, Adsum House, and Chrysalis House. She has practiced as a social worker and community legal worker, and taught Social Work at Dalhousie University and community health at the North End Community Health Centre. She holds an MSW from the Maritime School of Social Work and a PhD from the University of Warwick.

Jeanne Fay (Community Legal Worker and Part Time Faculty, Maritime School of Social Work)

Social Assistance as Penal Code

Jeanne will speak on the evolution of social assistance acts in Nova Scotia with a focus on how they have ended up today. This will include addressing how the latest incarnation of the Nova Scotia legislation actually took several steps backwards. She will discuss how the legislation affects the community people with whom she works, showing the community impact, and how the social assistance act is being applied as a penal code.

Jeanne has been a community organizer and welfare rights activist since 1969. She has been a Community Legal Worker at Dalhousie Legal Aid Service in Halifax since 1985, advocating on behalf of women on social assistance and battered women, persons with disabilities and residents of subsidized housing. She also teaches poverty law, and designs and delivers advocacy information, training sessions, and anti-racist presentations for law students and the community. Jeanne has been teaching community practice and social policy on a part-time basis at the MSSW since 1999.

COFFEE & NIBBLES 3:00 P.M.

Tuesday, November 9, 7:00 pm

PUBLIC MEETING

moderator: Costas Halavrezos (CBC Radio 1) entertainment: Shining Lights Choir

“First Voices” Panel & Responders Panel, including:

Cliff Falkenham, Halifax Regional Police

Bob Howse, Editor-in-Chief, *Chronicle Herald*

Stephanie Hunter, Feminists for Just & Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP)

Claire McNeil, Dalhousie Legal Aid

Barbara Nehiley, Senior Policy Analyst for Planning & Development Services, HRM

Bernard F. Smith, Spring Garden Road Area Business Association

The Town Hall will stimulate dialogue on how government policies are changing in ways that over regulate people with severely limited economic resources. We hope to address recent trends toward criminalization in urban policy, cut-backs in publicly-funded services, shrinking public and publicly-supported spaces, and the erosion of community members' commitment to each other. The Town Hall will bring together community, academic and political representatives and will help contribute to solutions that minimize the use of criminal law or intense statutory regulations as ways of dealing with poverty and homelessness in our city.

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