



A Human Future

BONUS ISSUE: The Spring 2011 Thought Sheet revisited, October 2015

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REVISITED



Dr. Ursula M. Franklin, CC, FRSC, is a Canadian academic, pacifist and feminist. She and her family were imprisoned by the Nazis, an experience that informs her commitment to democracy. She received her PhD in experimental physics at the Technical University of Berlin in 1948. She came to Canada in 1949 and began a distinguished scientific career. She was the first woman professor in the University of Toronto's Dept. of Metallurgy and Materials Science. She resides in Toronto and is a grandmother.

Democratic Essentials at Risk: An Interview with Ursula Franklin

In 2011, before the last federal election, we published this very popular interview with Canadian humanitarian and thought leader Dr. Ursula Franklin. Although some allusions reflect that particular time, much remains relevant. Hoping it will contribute to readers' preparation for the upcoming election, we are re-sending it as a bonus issue with some new links and a box on Dr. Franklin's 2014 CBC "Next Chapter" interview. Stephen Clarkson's piece and the link to the Afrobarometer continue to remind us of the privilege we share living in a democracy, whatever its weaknesses (see Gordon Gibson, p.4, and link to Andrew Coyne's *Walrus* article). You can expect our Fall issue of *A Human Future* in a few weeks. – Beth Porter, ed.

Beth Porter: What is your vision of a well-functioning Canadian democracy?

Ursula Franklin: The foundation of a functioning democracy is a social contract between those who rule and those who consent to be ruled—a social contract that is inclusive, fair and caring. That means that those who see themselves as governing us are bound by the same principles as those who consent to be governed. It requires reciprocity and equal respect between all parties. It puts these groups on a level of equality. In a well-functioning democracy the social contract is clear, and the reciprocal obligations are understood by all, in terms of honesty, in terms of making a commitment and staying with it. These things are non-negotiable. All contribute and all have obligations to each other, and somebody cannot run rough shod over others just because technically they can do so. Foreclosing

access to education, as has been the case for some First Nations communities, would be an example. There are standards other than power. That is why it's a *social* contract.

Where we now have a great democratic deficit is that while the ordinary citizen is strictly held to many of her or his obligations (down to the last cent in paying taxes, for instance), the same obligations do not seem to be binding for those who govern us. Equally important to the citizen's obligation is that our MPs—those who won the job of representing the community in the decision making of Parliament—do so reciprocally and honestly, and that the venues for them to do so are protected.

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I have said to those who represent us, “We don’t seem to be able to get certain concerns across to you. And then, it seems some issues can’t be raised in the House. You want to do a decent job... What’s standing in your way of raising these issues?” This is not a matter of good will or lack thereof. In fact, the same structural problem that prevents MPs from doing their part prevents us ordinary citizens from being effective in influencing government. The structural problem is a short-cutting of our democratic system. New communications technologies offer very tempting ways to get around the parliamentary system. A poll that asks a pseudo question of a limited number of people can be used to push through policy. We see this happening. Or press conferences are used to announce proposals that have not been debated or voted upon in the House. At the same time, party discipline prevents MPs from raising some concerns, and parliamentary processes—hearings, committees—are weakened or skirted around.

Canada has almost no foreign policy but rather is part an elaborate network of trade agreements. Nothing seems to matter but the economy. Now that is not the wish of the people, but it is the consequence of the heavy influence of new technologies and commerce, which put decision making into very different perspectives and time frames. So we deal with the demands of trade, rather than with Canada’s relationships to other states. These *relationships* would other-

Ursula Franklin on CBC’s *The Current*

- **Anna Maria Tremonti:** Don’t you think we have enough checks and balances in our democratic system here?
- **Ursula Franklin:** We have them. We don’t use them. And one of the big ones is the opposition, both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary...If people elect a representative who happens to be from a party that is not the party in power, that does not mean they are not trustworthy. We don’t want a country in which people who may oppose this or that are considered not trustworthy. They make a contribution.

CBC Radio One, *The Current*, May 6, 2010.

wise occur on very different moral levels. We need clarity as citizens to recognize these problems.

Are there core Canadian values that we might not want to consider changing? What values should we hold fast to?

If we understand a social contract as a reciprocal relationship, our values and hopes have to be based on reciprocal caring in the simple sense that we treat others in the way we wish to be treated and that equality is inclusive of all people. That to me is the measure of what is important. Living together means being organized so that tasks that nobody can do alone can be done collectively. You cannot create electricity nor can I, but we can together see that hydro works properly to respond to people’s needs.

If our values are anchored in the reciprocity of



Gordon Gibson—On Democratic Reform—Part I

...Much of what government does is good. But alas, much of what government does is also stupid or wasteful or improperly gives the advantage to one group over others to buy votes... [But] it could be worse—one need only look south of the border.... So we must get past the cynicism, and ask, “How can we make it better?” That should be a central issue of this election—democratic reform.

Condensed from “Democratic reform should be this election’s central issue,” an op-ed in the *Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2011, p. A21. A further portion of this article may be found lower down in this issue of *A Human Future*.



caring, cultural differences become very secondary considerations. Is it really important whether someone wears a turban? I would think it isn't. But it is important that they don't only care for people who dress like them or speak like them or have the same skin colour. One is far more interested not only in what people do but in how they do it, in conduct. In a civil society, a sense of proportion can steer us away from getting overly excited or overly negligent about differences that may be differences in conduct but may also only be differences in externality.

As citizens, we want to be proud of Canada, but we recognize that apathy and cynicism is sapping energy from our democracy. How can the vision for our democracy be reignited?

The wish to let somebody else do it, to have no responsibility for the community, can be strong, and this is where the danger of fascism arises. Leaving our responsibilities to some strong person who wants to have power can be pretty tempting when the world is so ugly.

Where do we go off the rails? I think when our daily conduct does not reflect reciprocity and caring. For instance, when there is praise for people who take advantage of others. Implicit standards of behaviour are then formed in people and they don't shake off these standards when they get into Parliament. When the daily conduct of those who hold power is nitpick-

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ing and uncaring, when helpfulness is not rewarded, and when competition is constantly touted—that somebody is better than somebody else—what do you expect? People know that if they do nasty things nicely, they are more successful. But civil society does not mean being “civil” in the sense of seeming

Ursula Franklin Speaks

Shelagh Rogers interviewed Dr. Franklin about her new book, *Ursula Franklin Speaks* (“The Next Chapter,” CBC Radio One, November 10, 2014)

Excerpts from this interview: ... I grew up [in Germany in the 1930s] with parents who tried to instill in me that things can be wrong, and not only wrong but wrong on purpose, and that is propaganda... When you see that in an authoritarian regime people seem not to matter... when you see it for the second time, that people are beginning to be classified as mattering or not mattering... whether they are aboriginal women being murdered, or little kids, or creatures... you'd better look—and do something!

Each citizen has a toolbox that has both practical skills that allow you to [work in a particular way] and also citizenship skills that allow you to understand the issues... Our role is to use our toolbox as well as we can for advancing the common good.... [This] requires citizens who are willing and a structure that allows them to do it. ...Unfortunately, the government is not usually ready to accept citizens [input]... The most important thing should be to find ways collectively to bring the best of citizens' insights to decisions before the decisions are made.

nice. It means honesty and openness much more than political correctness and good PR.

I think that for young people, apathy and cynicism could be combatted if they could experience a little success in influencing how things are done. For this to happen, listening and acting is required on the part of those who hold elected responsibility. You can see how young people are drawn to things that give them community or virtual community, so Facebook and Twitter. They are desperate to be valued as human beings. When they see that their country has no way to recognize their contribution and that they can't change the mind of their elders, why would they not be cynical?

The way we can reignite the vision is through our

own practice, but also through holding those who govern us to standards of fairness, honesty and openness—not trying to micro manage *what* they do but being exceedingly clear about *how* they do it. And then their conduct has to be the best of what the community

can expect and not the lowest common denominator. We have to affirm that from community to community, from country to country, all people matter. When you have honest people who do that, the vision will ignite with power. ■

Stephen Clarkson—Taking their Now-Restored Political Capacities Very Seriously

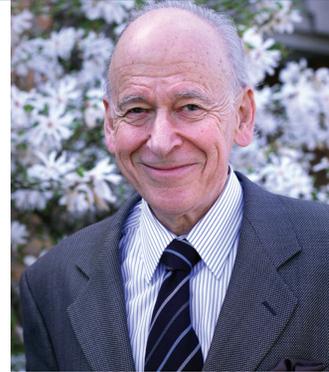
2011: I am currently teaching an intense workshop in San Juan, a small provincial city near Mendoza in the Argentinian wine country. The university was moved out into the suburbs in the 1970s by the military to remove the possibility of faculty and student participation in the city's political life when they could have threatened the dictatorship's control. The campus has a memorial to those who "disappeared" following the coup d'état.

These people do not take their democracy lightly. Today there are elections in the university, and yesterday the halls were plastered with election posters since not just professors but also students elect representatives who actually run the university and determine its policies.

This is not to say they live in a scholarly nirvana. The

extreme right-wing government of President Menem created a private sector in post-secondary education that has in turn caused a societal split with the middle class sending their offspring to private colleges and leaving the lower-middle class to use the public universities whose quality has fallen drastically.

I infer from all this that, having been deprived of their democratic rights, Argentinians take their now-restored political capacities very seriously indeed even if they have to struggle with poor infrastructure and discouraging pedagogical challenges.



- Stephen Clarkson, CM, FRSC, is one of Canada's preeminent political scientists, a professor of political economy at the University of Toronto who works on regional political economy in the western hemisphere.

Gordon Gibson—On Democratic Reform—Part II

...Without good information there can't be good accountability [and] the shiny tinsel carries the debate. The trouble is, the reforms that would make our political system work better involve a transfer of power. Some would move power from the Prime Minister's Office to Parliament. Some would move power from governments to voters. Unlikely. An iron rule of politics says that no one voluntarily gives up power.... But some great people have voluntarily done so in the past and, more rarely, some great citizens' movements have forced change. We can hope.

The bottom line is this: The gatekeeper to reform is the prime minister of the day. That's the person who can make change—or stop it. If you believe that reforming a dysfunctional system is more important than any of the other issues in play, then the thing to do is look at Stephen Harper and Michael Ignatieff and ask: Which one is the more credible reformer.

Maybe neither, but one thing is certain—if we don't ask, nay demand, things will go on as before and perhaps get worse.

Extracted from "Democratic reform should be this election's central issue," in the *Globe and Mail*, April 13, 2011, p. A21.

- Gordon Gibson has been a significant contributor to informed public discourse for decades. He is a recipient of the Order of British Columbia.

For Your Information

Books

- Ursula M. Franklin: *Ursula Franklin Speaks: Thoughts and Afterthoughts*, (a collection of her speeches) co-edited by Sarah Jane Freeman, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014.
- *The Ursula Franklin Reader: Pacifism as a Map*, Ursula Franklin, (Between the Lines Press, 2006).
- *The Real World of Technology, Ursula Franklin, the 1989 CBC Massey Lectures*, (House of Anansi Press).
- *Dialogue on Democracy*, (Penguin, 2006). A collection of the first six Lafontaine Baldwin lectures.
- Mark Kingwell: *The World We Want: Restoring Citizenship in a Fractured Age*, (Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
- Andrew Coyne, "[Minority Rule by Any Other Name](#)," *The Walrus*, October 2015
- Craig and Mark Kielburger: "With Election Coming, Canadians Need to Ask Big Questions"
- [Afrobarometer](#) (survey of the extent of democracy in African countries)
- [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#)
- [The Voices Coalition](#)
- [Citizens for Public Justice](#)
- "[Canada's Image Lies in Tatters](#)," (2009 *Guardian* article after Copenhagen, on Canada's approach to the environment)

Links

- [Ursula Franklin on CBC Radio One "Ideas" in 2012](#), introduction to a dialogue on "War, Peace and Public Health"
- [Shelagh Rogers' interview with Dr. Franklin on "The Next Chapter"](#), CBC Radio One, November 10, 2014: (38 min.)
- [Hon. Justice Murray Sinclair on the Importance of the CBC to people in Northern Canada and the threat posed by its diminished funding](#)
- [Miriam Mahaffy, "Understanding the need for climate change mitigation in Canada."](#) (In December 2015, representatives of our new or re-elected government will join other nations in Paris for the Climate Change Summit.)
- [The Churchill Society for the Advancement of Parliamentary Democracy](#)
- [Anna Maria Tremonti's interview with Kevin Page on "The Current," CBC Radio One, September 29, 2015, on his new book: *Unaccountable: Truth and Lies on Parliament Hill*](#)
- [Stephen Tapp, "What Kevin Page gets Wrong..." *MacLean's*, September 28, 2015](#)

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The L'Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 147 communities of L'Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L'Arche, people with intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

A Human Future is offered as a contribution to the Canadian conversation about values and the fostering of a society where everyone belongs and can make a contribution.