



Joseph Mairs Memorial

1 PM, January 21, 2007

St Mary's Catholic Church
1135 4th Ave, Ladysmith, BC

Eden Haythornthwaite's Remarks At Joseph Mairs Memorial 2007

My friends my name is Eden Haythornthwaite and I am a founding member of the Community Alliance for Public Education (CAPE) a supporting organisation for this event over the years. I look around this room today and see many people who are members and supporters -people I have worked with for years, people I have come to love and admire in the trenches of community organising

I am a CAPE trustee on the Cowichan school board and this week has been a challenging one. But today I am resting with my friends - there are no power points here, no ministry guidelines will intrude. Today I can speak freely to people who understand. I am not forced to look into the eyes of people who exercise their authority with too much pleasure and very little humanity.

In Cowichan we are enduring a school closure process that is our burden and particularly as one of the schools is almost entirely 1st Nations they too bear the consequences of living under occupation - all this is only necessary because most of my fellow trustees, buoyed by the admonitions of bureaucrats have accepted a regime of funding priorities and principles that are incompatible with justice and civilised standards.

Globally we live in a world that is wealthier then we could have ever imagined and yet want is the dominating feature. In this province despite enjoying the largest tax base in our history we are watching our human needs go unmet.

Our schools close, our public school programs that would care for special needs and learning assistance are slashed, our classes are crowded, our teachers and kids struggle with unreasonable testing regimes because ministry deputies have created guidelines, so called success protocols and funding formulas that do not acknowledge our needs - but do support their will to diminish public education. They insist that there is no money. They tell us that a large school miles from a family's home is the best place to learn. They tell us our hopes are too great and that we must forego even the most modest aspirations. They tell native families that their children will be better off if they are dispersed to schools away from their homes on reserve and the echoes of the former residential schools ring in all our ears.

We know that that the public education system in the US has been degraded and there is a lesson there. As of this year the cost of mounting the war in Iraq ,had it been allocated to public education, would have allowed for the construction of 700 elementary schools in every state in their country. Our decision makers' instincts mirror theirs they build monuments, they fund lavish sporting events, they support colonial adventures creating misery in faraway places and they spend millions developing the data to explain to us how well this is working for ordinary people. So it is clear to thinking people that funding is a matter of priority and austerity is a fraud.

The good news is that my friends at Yount School in Youbou, Cowichan Station School and Koksilah have fought back with great dignity, cleverness and dogged determination. They have at every information session ripped apart their data and their tattered, unwieldy assertions. They have even managed to do this with humour and wit. I do not know if we will win I am ashamed to say I fear we won't. But if we don't it will only be because the decision flies in the face of all verity, justice and rational thinking .

However in the past few years I have come to understand that human advancements have always been the consequence of many lost battles. Just like Joseph Mairs who died twenty years before the firm establishment of union recognition for his fellows in this place his death was a defeat in the moment but part of an enduring progression that has bound us together in this hall today.

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c/o Alastair Haythornthwaite

6134 Lakeview Drive Duncan BC V9L 2G4

email: josephmairs@shaw.ca

phone: 250 748 3274