

Inside the National NDP Convention, by invite



by Peter McGuigab,
Editorial Contributor

Halifax hosted the national New Democratic Party's general meeting on August 14th. I had been invited as a supporter and also attended the public session as a contributor to Street Feat. The phone message from Jack

Layton said to use the Duke Street ticket office to the World Trade Centre.

This turned out to be the VIP entrance. I hardly was going to claim such status. Leonard Preyra, who was standing there suggested there was another entrance just down the hill. The only one I found was a black metal staircase so I walked around the corner to the main entrance on Argyle, opposite city hall, following the crowd of volunteers so eventually found the meeting in the very cool main arena, a place that would have been more familiar in such a cavernous building, had it only been mentioned.

Megan Leslie, the outstanding local MP, led off the proceedings at 7:30pm. First, was a memorail list of the dead. There was scattered applause, the loudest was for Lucille Broadbent and Rosemary Brown. Then, there was a pictorial on the life of former national leader Alexa McDonough. Leslie then introduced her as "my personal hero". Alexa is now president of Mount Saint Vincent University. She had been surprised at the material they found showing her life from a baby 65 years ago to national leader. Alexa went on about the lonely times as the only woman in the local legislature in 1981 to the party's breakthrough in 1998. She mentioned the 250th anniversary of Representative Government in Nova Scotia and how it had taken 223 of those years to get a woman, not to mention a socialist, into the local legislature. She also said the party wasn't

about electing women, but about getting women and men who supported the philosophy.

She mentioned how the party had elected an immigrant, Leonard Preyra, a political scientist at Saint Mary's University and about the selection of Irvine Carvery, a Metro Housing manager and former resident of Africville, to the school board chair after the racist, divisive board was scrapped. Alexa went on through three finallys, before she finally succeed in leaving.

She was followed to more loud applause by South End representative, Leonard Preyra, who told of the surprise he got when he elected in normally Liberal South End Halifax, a area which had never been held for more than one term by the party. One voter told him, "I will vote for you this time, if you screw up, you'll never get my vote again." He apparently voted for Leonard a second time, when he was reelected, despite the Conservatives pulling out all the stops. Other voters had shown a bit of racism to the foreign born, accent-less intellectual when he was first elected, saying he only got in due to the student vote, but the election was set by the previous government after the main university session was over and most of the students were away. It didn't do them that much good. Leonard also linked the NDP with the election



During the NDP National convention, one of the most visited places was the vendors' area. At our request, Street Feat vendors were allowed to setup shop and sell our paper to delegates from far and wide. We thank those in authority for the allowance, and Halifax MP Megan Leslie for putting in touch with them. JC Canales-Leyton Photo

of Barrack Obama, first black president of the United States. Watching those waiting in the wings, the smiling, laughing and enthusiastic Preyra finished quickly.

By now, an hour and a half had passed, so I left, not having met many I knew. I missed Denise Patterson-Rafuse, the Minister of Community Affairs, who I'd written about the problems in the senior's manors and their administration, but I did talk to Joe McSweeney, the retired Vice Principal of Saint Patrick's High School, who was an usher.

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of the World as We Know It, Thank God

and talks focused on the theme of finding hope and wisdom in apocalypse. There is a common perception in our time that the world is getting worse economically, environmentally, socially. Sheila Watt Cloutier discussed the challenges facing indigenous people in Canada's north, most particularly those caused by climate change. With rising temperatures the ice, that is so important to life and culture of the north, is melting; their world is literally ending.

"What is crucial is manifesting God's justice in the world."

-Sharon Ruiz Duremdes, participant

Sharon Ruiz Duremdes, an activist from the Philipines discussed what apocalypse means to people there. Though the word itself is meaningless to them, with 11 million people there projected to lose their jobs this year, the idea is understood. She challenged the audience to move from thought to action, stating "What is crucial is

manifesting God's justice in the world."

The second day followed up on the theme of the previous day by focusing on resistance and discipleship. Ched Meyers, a theologian and activist from the US, discussed the real meaning of apocalypse, as an unmasking or unveiling. He talked about these difficult days

as opportunities to see through the "world that has been pulled over [our] eyes", to see that the way things have always been done is not working and to see the possibility that exists for great change that can heal ourselves and our world. Denise Couture, an activist from Quebec, followed this up by discussing the need to struggle for change, to resist that which is unjust, and to accompany our resistance with love.

On the third day of the conference, speakers discussed how churches and their members can be motivated and inspired by the bible to work for justice. Silvia Keesmaat talked about our connection to the earth, based on the biblical story of the creation of humanity from earth, and our need for the earth to provide for our needs. She invited the audience to motivate others to work for justice by "creat[ing] such a vision of the kingdom, that people want

to be a part of it." She was followed by Omega Bula, who pointed out that God's promise in the bible was that all will have life and have it abundantly, but this is not supported or allowed by the systems in which we live. She encouraged churches to become a movement to change these systems, and pointed out that "it isn't that we don't know what matters, we know...but we

don't always choose what matters."

As well as these inspiring speakers, the KAIROS conference offered workshops, discussions and worship with people from around the county and the world. It was a wonderful opportunity for networking and relationship building and Street Feat was grateful to be a part of it.



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