

Every month since February 1987 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation has produced one-hour TV programs on issues related to peace, social justice, economics, the environment, and nonviolence.

The Olympia FOR's program airs several times every week for the entire month on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), channel 22 for Thurston County's cable TV subscribers. You can see TCTV's schedule at www.tctv.net.

You can also watch the program described below (and more than 90 of our previous interview programs and special programs at the Olympia FOR's website, www.olympiafor.org. Simply click the TV programs link to reach www.olympiafor.org/tv_programs.htm, scroll down, and click the program you want to watch.

Many of our website's TV program listings also include a .pdf document describing the program.

JULY 2013

“SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE CAN HELP EASE THE CLIMATE CRISIS”

by GLEN ANDERSON, PRODUCER AND HOST OF THIS TV SERIES

The science is settled. The climate crisis is real. And human behavior – especially burning fossil fuels – has caused it.

The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's July 2013 TV program goes past the obvious causes to examine some causes that are not usually recognized. And these unrecognized sources of the problem are also unrecognized solutions!

Our TV program explores how the very real imbalances of social and economic power – actual social and economic injustices – are part of the problem. And we explore how correcting the imbalances of social and economic power can help relieve the climate crisis.

Our guest, **Gar Lipow**, is a researcher and writer with wide-ranging knowledge across very diverse subject matter. He is highly skilled at “connecting the dots” across issues to identify problems and propose solutions. He has written several books, including *Solving the Climate Crisis Through Social Change* and *Cooling a Fevered Planet*.

When a house or apartment is not well insulated, heat leaks out and wastes energy. When we burn fuel to heat and re-heat the house or apartment, we waste fuel and put more carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere. This disrupts our climate. Many apartment buildings are poorly insulated. But Gar explains why the tenant and the apartment owner have different realities that reduce their incentives to improve insulation.

The poorly insulated apartment is an example of what Gar and others have called “atomization.” This phenomenon of dividing people rather than see the entire picture makes the climate crisis worse. The climate crisis is a side effect of “atomization” and social and economic inequality. Therefore, Gar points out, the climate crisis is much bigger than just an environmental issue, so if we want to make progress on the climate we must call attention to the “atomization,” bring people together to “connect the dots” and see the big picture, and show how solving the climate crisis must be interrelated with working for social and economic justice.

Social costs are imposed on some people, but social benefits accrue to other people. Gar's book, *Solving the Climate Crisis Through Social Change*, offers many more examples beyond apartment insulation, and explains them very clearly. Gar offered other examples and reasons why social and economic injustice make the climate crisis worse.

Likewise, his book explains the synergy of making progress on the climate crisis in the process of improving social and economic justice. The problems are interconnected, but so also are the solutions!

People assume that markets efficiently allocate resources, but Gar explains why markets can be **in**-efficient and wasteful. Our political and economic systems allow businesses to "externalize" costs – to avoid paying for their carbon pollution, for example – so, for example, unless we can force businesses to actually pay for the carbon pollution they cause, the market allows them to escape responsibility.

Gar "connects the dots" further when he calls for public investment as a very practical way to address the climate crisis – and to simultaneously make our society more fair.

Where could we find money for this public investment? Politicians and news media keep telling us that we can't afford anything anymore – we can't afford schools, parks, or anything that serves the public interest. He says where could we find the money for this public investment.

He also explains why public investment would increase our economy's "Gross Domestic Product" (GDP) and promote prosperity.

"Cap-and-trade" and "carbon-trading" schemes that have been proposed have serious pitfalls.

A tax on selling or burning carbon can be a much better solution, and it is supported across the political spectrum, including by people who support "market-based" solutions, because a carbon tax would send clearer economic signals throughout our economy. Gar agrees that a carbon tax could be useful, but he explains why we should not overstate that, and he offers advice about how to tax carbon effectively.

In the U.S. we typically think of economic consumption at the individual level: I buy and consume this product for my own use. Gar proposes that we use the term "social consumption" to mean something different – devoting more of our economy to providing goods and services for use by society as a whole (*e.g.*, schools, public transportation, clean energy). Protecting the climate will require less individual consumption and more social consumption.

Some of the things we need to do for the climate are in the realm of public policy, social justice, economic justice, taxation, and so forth. Gar discusses those during our TV conversation, and much more thoroughly in his hardbound book, *Solving the Climate Crisis Through Social Change*.

In addition, there is another whole realm of technological solutions that some people are promoting. While some bold technological solutions might be quackery, many are actually realistic and practical. In any case, Gar maintains that much of the technology already exists for real solutions, but that we need to muster the political will to proceed.

It is clear that "politics-as-usual" cannot solve the underlying problems of atomization and inequality. Both Gar and I call for a vigorous grassroots movement for the climate that is interconnected with other grassroots movements for social and economic justice, improved democracy, and so forth.

In 2012 the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation launched a bold campaign called “Confronting the Climate Crisis” to work on the problems and solutions in a variety of ways. Both Gar and I have been part of this from the beginning. The Olympia FOR’s “Confronting the Climate Crisis” meets every month, and working committees also meet and carry out a variety of activities.

We invite people to contact our climate group by e-mailing climate@olympiafor.org or by phoning (360) 352-6327.

We offer a lot of information at the Olympia FOR’s website, www.olympiafor.org. Our website’s Climate Crisis page is at www.olympiafor.org/Climate_Crisis.html. This climate page offers a lot of relevant information and referrals and links to other organizations and sources of information.

Half a year ago I read the hardbound book, *Solving the Climate Crisis Through Social Change*. Then I read the shorter paperback version that uses graphics to convey a similar message. These are very interesting with wide-ranging information and insights. I found them very enjoyable to read. I appreciate Gar’s thorough research and his very clear writing style.

When people want to act to solve the climate crisis, some people simply change light bulbs but fail to move beyond that. Actually, we need to do much, much more. Many of these bold steps would be vastly more useful in protecting our climate. And, as Gar’s research and writing shows, many of the solutions to the climate crisis would be very good for us in additional ways.

Conservation is important, but not enough. We also need **technological** and **political** and **economic** changes.

In 1941, when Japan attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor, the U.S. mobilized our whole economy and our whole society. We stopped producing civilian vehicles altogether and converted factories to produce weapons for war. We severely rationed scarce commodities. We mobilized millions of people to work in jobs that were different from what they had done before.

The climate crisis is so severe and so urgent that I believe we need a mobilization that is equally immediate and equally far-ranging. We need to overhaul much of our economy.

Gar Lipow has documented a number of social and economic injustices that we usually fail to recognize as interconnected with the climate crisis. We need to solve those social and economic problems for their own sake, and also to ease the climate crisis. We could ease the climate crisis in ways that would help our whole nation to be more fair in social and economic ways.

Gar’s book says, “the flaws that create the climate crisis are institutional, social, and political.” The solutions are interconnected as well!