



Canada-China Friendship Society®

Ottawa Chapter
PO Box 8461, Post Office Terminal – Ottawa, Ontario K1G 3H9

Founded 1976

December Newsletter

2008 – No. 2 ISSN 1496-6816

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China Trip an Eye-Opener: reflections of Peter Larson, CCFS' First President*

Having visited China about 20 years ago, and having more or less followed developments in China through the Western press, I thought I knew something about the country. But I am still rubbing my eyes, and shaking my head as a result of my recent tour to China with the Federation



Canadian delegates with Madame Li Xiaolin (centre)

of Canada China Friendship Associations, along with representatives from four other Canadian chapters. China's cities are booming. Construction cranes are everywhere. Shops are full - of goods and people. And everyone I talked to – young and old – sounded optimistic about the future.

** Last month, Canada's Federation of Canada China Friendship Associations was invited to send a delegation to China to participate in the Third Friendship Forum hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). Peter Larson and his wife Lorraine Farkas represented the Ottawa chapter, together with Gilliane Lapointe and James Steele. Following an intensive 10-day program organized by CPAFFC, Peter and Lorraine embarked on a tour of their own making aimed at meeting a broad selection of Chinese from various walks of life. The following reports some of their observations and highlights of these encounters.*

The Chinese explain it as the result of the policy of “opening up”, now thirty years old. In fact, in 1978 under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese Communist Party decided that even more urgently than socialism, China needed economic progress. Deng’s strategy for achieving these aims of becoming a modern, industrial nation was called the “socialist market economy.” Whatever you call it, the results speak for themselves. The Chinese economy has increased at a sustained rate of around 10% yearly for nearly 3 decades. Living conditions have improved markedly in all areas of China. According to a recent article in the *Economist*, living standards improved 10% last year overall in China, and 20% in rural areas.

The policy of “opening up” has also encouraged foreign investment from other countries. Billions of dollars have flowed into China in joint ventures and in outright purchases. The resulting investment is overwhelming. China now sports thousands of kilometers of new autoroutes, dozens of new airports, tens of thousands of new offices and apartments. In the two years prior to the Olympics, Beijing alone constructed more than 50 new metro stations.

The Chinese economy has also been privatized to a large extent. Hundreds of former state enterprises have been closed or sold to private investors. Official statistics indicate that the private sector now controls over 60% of the Chinese economy. The sectors which remain under government control are ones judged key to China’s economic success – sectors like banking, transportation, infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications. The Chinese government still plays an important role in other areas of the economy as well – often acting as banker of last resort.

Competitive capitalism in China is most apparent in the retail sector. China’s cities are now crammed with clothing stores, furniture stores, jewelry stores, shoe stores, electronic stores, automobile dealers. And those stores are crammed with shoppers seven days a week. All of China, at least in the seven cities we visited, seems to be on a permanent shopping binge. International brands like Nike, Benetton, BMW, and Pierre Cardin jostle with local high quality Chinese brands. In the fast food and hotel business McDonalds, KFC and Pizza Hut seem to be on every corner, and Hilton and Sheraton have found their way into every corner of the country. China now also has a stock market. Actually, it has three – one in Shanghai, another in Shenzhen and a third, much older – based in Hong Kong. Although it has only been operating for 18 years, the Shanghai Stock Exchange (market capitalisation \$ 3 trillion US) is the fifth largest in the world. Along with the stock market, of course, there are brokers, venture capitalists, banks, insurance companies and a range of other financial institutions commonly associated with capitalism.

China now also has a real estate market. On the main street of Zhangjiajie (a provincial town in Hunan Province) is the sales office of a local developer. Smartly dressed young sales people show prospective buyers just which apartment they can buy, as soft music plays in the background. A penthouse suite on the 23rd floor was selling for about \$120,000 Canadian. Mortgages are readily available and Chinese financial regulators demand a minimum of 20% down payment. Many young Chinese people are saving their money for the day they can leave their parents’ crowded apartment and buy their own home.

Too little free enterprise... or too much?

Although China is a “socialist” country, many of the “high profile” failures of the Chinese economy can be attributed to an **excess** of free enterprise rather than a **lack** of it. – see page 4

Coming Events in 2009

- **January 15, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.** Illustrated talk by **Professor Charles Burton of Brock University on the reforms of Deng Xiaoping**. One of the founding fathers of the New China, Deng Xiaoping is the Chief Architect of China's Opening Up and Reform Policies, the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics that produced China's economic miracle. December 2008 marks the 30th anniversary of the start of the Reform Movement. Professor Burton is a well-known sinologist who has served twice in the Canadian Embassy in Beijing. Library and Archives Canada, Room 156.
- **Friday, January 16, 8:00 p.m. Spring Festival Gala of Chinese Music and Dance, 2009**. National Arts Centre organized by the Canada China Art Association. A visual and musical masterpiece featuring a wide range of spectacular performances by 50 leading artists and entertainers from China. Traditional Chinese instruments will also be showcased individually and with the Ottawa Symphony Orchestra. Tickets from the NAC Box Office or Ticketmaster.
- **Sunday, February 8, 6:00 p.m. CCFS Traditional Chinese New Year Celebration Banquet to usher in the New Year of the Ox at the Mandarin Ogilvie Restaurant**. See page 7 for further details and book early.
- **March 19, 7:30 p.m. Talk by Senior Colonel Cai Ping of the PRC Embassy** on China's defence policies and the various roles played by the Chinese defence forces including China's contributions to international peacekeeping operations and assistance to earthquake victims in Sichuan and elsewhere. Library and Archives Canada, Room 156.

Highlights of the past 8 Months

Nov. 6-16: FCCFA delegation attends Third Friendship Forum as Guests of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries – see cover photo, back row, left to right: Peter Larson, James Steele, Fred Drewe (FCCFA Vice-President & president of Manitoba chapter), Lorraine Farkas, Bob Raeburn (Winnipeg). Front row, left to right: Joan Wicken (Victoria), Gloria MacLeod (Victoria chapter president), Michael Copeland (Toronto chapter), Madame Li Xiaolin (Vice-President, CPAFFC), Ottawa VP Gilliane Lapointe, Morag MacLelland and Donna Lamb (Calgary); photo supplied by M. Copeland. The Forum was held in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province, and included a tour of the spectacular Zhangjiajie ethnic minority region embracing ancient Phoenix City. Thanks to its border of natural mountains and water, this small town has been little affected by the outside world and retains the style of the Ming Dynasty of 400 years ago. The friendly and down-to-earth local people live a simple and peaceful life in the 'Land of the Peach Blossoms'.

Rounding out the ten-day program, the delegation was treated to a welcoming banquet in Beijing, a tour of the Olympic sites, and hospitality offered by the Shanghai People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

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The recent milk scandal, for example, in which in which milk product was tainted with melamine, causing health damage to thousands, arose because of a lack of government regulatory capacity. China's ability to deal with its notorious environmental problems is also weakened by a lack of government regulatory capacity. Too many private companies can and do pollute watercourses and the atmosphere because they can do so with impunity. While China's western critics complain about the heavy hand of government, to many Chinese it appears that private owners have too much leeway and can make fortunes at the expense of others.

The rewards for those who are successful are extremely high. There are now thousands of Chinese "self made men" who have risen from rags to riches. One Canadian colleague of mine was astonished to find out, when visiting a Chinese friend who works in the financial industry in Beijing, that her bonus for last year was 5 million yuan (approximately \$1 million Canadian)!! This is on top of her already significant salary. This new class of Chinese yuppies thinks nothing of buying a \$10,000 Rolex, a \$50,000 BMW or flying to Macao for the weekend to gamble away thousands of yuan....

But China is still a long way behind us...

These emerging characteristics indicate that the major economic difference between China and the west is no longer that we are "capitalist" and they are "communist". The major difference is that China, despite its very rapid economic growth is still very much a "developing country" facing some huge economic and social challenges. Three jump to mind.

- **The first** is that China's vast countryside is still extremely poor. According to the *Economist*, China's GDP per person is only about \$2000 US per person. In rural areas, the number could be less than half that. (The same source estimates Canadian GDP per person at \$39,000.) Much of agriculture is still characterised by small plots using farm animals or human labour. China needs to find ways to dramatically improve the standard of living of the 800 or so million people who still live in the countryside.

- **The second** dramatic difference is that unbridled "free market" economic development has brought about a dramatic increase in disparities between the rich and poor. In today's Beijing and Shanghai, BMW's now sidle along bicycles and even a few rickshaws. In the developed capitalist economies, progressive taxation tends to redistribute wealth from the richest to the poorest sectors of the society.

- **The third** significant difference between China and any other country in the world (except, perhaps, India) is that the rising demands of its massive population are running up against the physical limits of the country. Only a generation ago, the material aspirations of Chinese were summed up as "a watch, a radio, and a bicycle". That objective has been long since attained, and the new generation of Chinese want things that are much closer to what we want – a car, an apartment, a television and a fridge, and perhaps a 2 week vacation.

Take automobiles as an example. At the present time, there are only 4 private vehicles in China for every 100 of population. (Compare this to North America, where there is approximately 1 vehicle per person.) Yet China's highways and expressways are already near the saturation point in many cities, and this despite a huge investment in public transportation. And China's auto sector is booming because of huge pent-up demand. Will it be physically possible for China to come any where near the North American level of auto use?

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Cont'd from page 3. **Remarks by Lolan Merklinger at a reception hosted by the Chinese Embassy following a 4-member panel discussion on the theme “Re-inventing the Canada-China Relationship”.** *The discussion held in the Senate Chamber of Carleton University was organized by the National Capital Branch of the Canadian International Council and dedicated to the memory of Dr. Norman Bethune. Former Chinese Ambassador to Canada Mei Ping was one of the panelists.*

Our Ottawa chapter and our Federation are looking to 2009 as a special year of activity with China. We will see the 30th anniversary of the opening and reform policies of the new China, and China will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of the 1949 Revolution. As Tom Grimmer has written in *The Globe and Mail*, the event marking that watershed moment – arguably as big a moment as the Communist revolution itself – was the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. It concluded in December of 1978, 30 years ago this month. Few grasped that the cardboard speeches of that plenum would change not only China but the world.

2009 will also pay tribute to the remarkable accomplishments and legacy of Dr. Norman Bethune. To honour the memory of this extraordinary Montrealer (Montreal is where Bethune trained and practiced thoracic surgery) the City of Montreal and several local institutions – Concordia University and the McCord Museum of Canadian History among others – have joined together to offer a series of commemorative events from autumn 2008 to autumn 2009. Montreal’s tribute to Bethune was launched on October 14 with the unveiling of the newly-restored statue of Bethune in downtown Montreal, located in Place Norman Bethune, in a ceremony presided over by Montreal’s mayor, Gerard Tremblay, and former governor-general Adrienne Clarkson. The statue is located at the intersection of Guy Street and Blvd. Maisonneuve.



*Ambassador Lan Lijun and Lolan Merklinger speaking at a CIC event
Honouring Dr. Norman Bethune, Oct. 29, 2008*

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What about the censorship, human rights abuses and political control?

China remains a “one party state”, something that no Canadian would like to see in this country. Even Chinese authorities agree that there is less political freedom in China than in Canada, the rule of law is less well developed and human rights abuses are more widespread. However, I was surprised to see how little this seemed to concern any of the Chinese I spoke to. Most of the students I met, for example, were more bothered by the control their parents exerted over their lives than by state control. After centuries of poverty and social disruption, most Chinese seem to think that things are finally getting better. Not surprisingly, they don’t really feel very sympathetic to anybody (or any group) which threatens to disrupt that progress. In fact, a recent poll undertaken by the Pew Research Centre in Washington, DC revealed that 81% of Chinese approve of the leadership of the Communist Party and feel that the country is heading in the right direction.

It’s tempting to put that down to “brainwashing”. But a simpler explanation is that the Chinese are happy because for 30 years in a row, life has been getting better. According to the UNDP, China’s ranking on the “Human Development Index” (which in addition to GDP per capita also factors in health and longevity) has risen 50% over the last three decades. They feel that this improvement in living standards has come about because the Chinese government has led the country with a very strong hand. When roads need to be built, or rivers dammed, or an Olympic site constructed, it has plowed straight ahead. This has not been without opposition. According to figures from the Ministry of Public Security, 87,000 “mass incidents” were reported in 2005, including a deadly clash between police and villagers over the seizure of land for a power plant.

For the same reason, censorship does not seem to be a major concern for most people. Although western reporters have focused on China’s “pervasive” censorship, the Chinese young people I talked to in my recent trip seem to be very well versed in what is going on in the west (and certainly much better versed than their Canadian counterparts would be about developments in China). At the main bookstore in Nanjing, Barak Obama’s autobiography in Chinese was prominently displayed, for example. Chinese youth are avid users of the internet. Several “blew off” my questions about censorship indicating that it was a “snap” to get around. Although I am not particularly internet savvy, at several internet cafés in different cities in China, I had no trouble accessing the *Globe and Mail*, the *New York Times*, the BBC and any other newspaper I could think of. Nor did I have any difficulty in finding articles in *Wikipedia* which were quite critical of Mao Zedong. I did see some evidence of censorship, however. When I googled “Falun Gong” in China, all I got were articles critical of that movement. When I do the same thing in Canada, most of the articles I find support Falun Gong and criticise the Chinese government.

It is now surprisingly easy to travel around China – and millions of Chinese do. We were able to travel freely by taxi, subway, bus, train and airplane. On a couple of occasions we were offered a lift in a private car by friendly locals. But in general, nobody appeared to care in the least where we were going, who we were talking to or what we were doing. At our hotels we did have to produce a passport, but then we have to do that in Europe as well.

“We know there are problems – we want someone to keep them under control

The Chinese are worried that any one of their many problems could boil over and disrupt the

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phenomenal growth of the last 30 years. These include anger over a growing gap between rich and poor, an inadequate social security system including very small retirement pensions, rising crime and divorce rates, clashes between security forces and farmers whose fields and villages have been swallowed by development, and ethnic tensions particularly in Tibet and Xinjiang. They seem to feel that in a country of 1.3 billion people, a “heavy hand” is sometimes the only way forward, and they are not particularly worried if some individual rights get trampled in the process.

Some examples: 1) they want the government to deal with the population problem. 76% of Chinese people approve of the one child policy - Pew Research; 2) they want the government to do something about the environment. In Beijing, for example, the city has banned 2 cycle motorcycles as an environmental measure. It has also restricted the number of days anyone can use his or her car in the city. Some car owners have complained loudly about their rights, but the majority seems to be fully behind the measure; 3) they want their government to deal firmly with corruption and do not seem in the least upset when a few greedy party bosses are executed for extensive graft; 4) they also want their government to protect China’s sovereignty and borders and that means finding a way to deal with unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang.

As a result of these pressures, in 2006 China's Communist Party formally endorsed a new political doctrine laid out by President Hu Jintao that focused on the creation of a "harmonious society", signaling a shift in the party's focus from promoting all-out economic growth to solving worsening social tensions. According to the *Washington Post*, the four-day plenary session was “the first in 25 years to focus on social issues rather than on economic or political development.”



Dr. Larson talks to an English class at Qufu Normal University

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What should Canada do?

Canadians should take a careful and pragmatic look at our approach to China today. A good place to start would be to recognize that the Chinese leadership faces huge challenges and adopt a positive, helpful approach that focuses on what we can do together. It is in our interest to help China grow and find solutions to its environmental, economic and social challenges. A growing Chinese economy, particularly the elimination of poverty in the rural areas, will help stabilize the Chinese population, and solidify an economic market for our goods and services.

On the other hand, if the current government of China is not able to solve its huge problems, the potential for political and social unrest is immense. Famine and huge internal migration is possible. China's potential as an economic partner could be diminished for a generation. We also face the possibility of vast waves of immigrants, both legal and illegal, flooding into neighbouring countries, including Canada.

The Chinese have ditched their ideological approach to public policy in favour of a pragmatic one. I can't help but wonder whether in our response, we can do likewise?

- Peter Larson, CCFS-Ottawa



*China has made a significant investment in infrastructure,
including this high speed train.
It currently runs at 200 kms. per hour but
next year will go faster than the French TGV (300 kms. per hour).*

This well-researched and thoughtful article and accompanying photographs were contributed by Peter Larson, Founding President, CCFS Ottawa, following a 2½ week tour that he and his wife, Lorraine Farkas, made last month to China. Thank you Peter.

Highlights of the past 8 months – continued from pages 3 and 5

Bethune's place as a Chinese revolutionary hero in modern Chinese history was enshrined in December 1939 when Chairman Mao wrote his famous eulogy, "In memory of Norman Bethune", a few months after Bethune's death from blood poisoning contracted while operating on Chinese soldiers in a remote area of Hebei during the early phase of the anti-Japanese war. In a relatively short essay, Mao dealt with the problems of internationalism and patriotism. This essay was singled out for decades as one of the "three constantly-read articles" by which Maoist ideology was inculcated in China.

Recognition for Bethune in Canada was less wide-spread. When Bethune left for China, he had been a member of the Progressive Workers' Party, not a very popular group in Canada at the time. However, Parks Canada's acquiring the house where Bethune was born in the city of Gravenhurst has over the years transformed Bethune Memorial House into a popular destination for Chinese and Canadian visitors. Indeed Parks Canada is planning an expansion of the existing sizeable visitors' centre.

The 2008-2009 tributes to Norman Bethune will span three countries, Canada, China and Spain, and three cities in particular, Montreal, Shanghai and Malaga. The commemoration will focus on three themes that sum up his legacy. *i) Norman Bethune: Montrealer and Internationalist* will examine his commitment from an international perspective. Bethune had supported the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War before he set out for China, and one can view the exhibition of photos "Bethune in Spain" recently launched at the McCord Museum of Canadian History in Montreal. *ii) Norman Bethune: Trail of Solidarity*: There will be a symposium and photo exhibition on this theme at Concordia University. *iii) Bethune and the Arts*: Rare photographs of Bethune taken by his friend Sha Fei, the official photographer of Mao Zedong's army, at the Royal Victoria Hospital.

At a time when every country in the world is trying to do business with China, Norman Bethune's reputation gives Canada a fantastic edge – a brand which Canadians should cherish. We hope that Bethune's humanism can serve as a model for the future. In an increasingly globalized world, states and governments are important, but people-to-people relations are essential to ensure the security of our common humanity.

- conclusion of remarks by Lolan Merklinger

Other past events

May 29, 2008. Professor Gary Evans spoke on the subject "From There to Here, China's Optic in NFB Films". Since 1939, the National Film Board has made dozens of films about China. Those films reflect both Canadian and Chinese ideas about the monumental changes that China has experienced over the years. Evans showed clips from select films of those years, which were fascinating and led a discussion about their significance at home and abroad.

September 11, 2008. Dr. Xiaobei Chen, Assist. Professor, Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, Carleton University, spoke on "Adoption of Chinese Children from Christian Missionary Philanthropy: (1880 – 1950s) to Intercountry Adoptions (1990s to present). Since the early 1950s, intercountry adoptions from poorer countries such

as China to the West have increased significantly and acquired unprecedented volume and visibility. Most of the adoptions from China have brought girls from marginalized social and economic backgrounds into familial relations with privileged professional, middle-class white people. While Dr. Chen touched on some sensitive issues, this did not affect the quality of her presentation. The presentation was preceded by remarks from this year's Harry Elton Memorial Award winners, Jaan Altosaar and Alison Miller, and Beijing Olympic athlete Andrew Mortimer (a grandson of Harry Elton) about their impressions of China.

September 8 - 11, 2008, the chapter hosted a two-day visit by Director Mr. Qing Boming and Ms. Ye Zi, Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. The CCFS President Lolan Merklinger, Secretary James Steele, and Federation executive Michael Copeland accompanied the delegation for meetings with Senator Mac Harb, with the Canadian Museum Association, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and a visit with Tsin Van. A dinner was held with chapter members and Chinese Embassy officials. The delegation also visited Toronto, Gravenhurst, Montreal, Calgary and Victoria.

October 16, 2008. Screening of the film, "Hello, Xiaoping", a made-for-TV documentary co-produced by China Central Television. Deng Xiaoping, one of the founding fathers of the New China, is the Chief Architect of China's Opening Up and Reform Policies, the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics that produced China's economic miracle. As noted by the film's Directors, "Deng passed through a forest of guns and hails of bullets during the war years and rode through the vicissitudes of life. In the face of difficulties, he was always sensible and optimistic and marched forward decisively and courageously.." The people address such an important leader with "Hello", a simple and plain greeting to express their sincerest and deepest gratitude. This film was very well received by our members and their guests.

November 26, 2008. Annual General Meeting with guest speaker, Dr. Scott Simon, Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Ottawa University, speaking on the subject, "Ethnic Minorities in Greater China". The PRC officially recognizes the existence of 56 ethnic groups in China, including the majority Han Chinese and other groups. The most numerous are the Zhuang at 16 million, the Manchu at 10 million, the Hui at 9 million, the Miao at 8 million, followed by the Uyghur and the Yi at about 7 million each. The AGM elected a new slate of officers including three new members for the Executive Committee, Lorraine Farkas, Jordan Birenbaum and Andrée Chenard, who were in turn assigned responsibilities at a subsequent meeting of the Committee. The Committee also established a sub-committee to assist in the management of preparations for the Chinese New Year Banquet on February 8, 2008, to be chaired by Lorraine Farkas.

Farewell to Ambassador Lu Shumin: Ambassador Lu and his gracious wife Madame Gao Shuqin left Ottawa on May 10 after their three-year tenure in the nation's capital, and have since been installed as Commissioner to Macao with vice-ministerial rank under the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

Welcome to New Chinese ambassador: His Excellency Lan Lijun assumed his post as the new Ambassador of the PRC to Canada arriving in Ottawa in early June with his wife Madame Gu Langlin. Prior to that he was China's Ambassador to Indonesia. Mr. Lan was born in Jiangsu Province, China, graduated from Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, did postgraduate

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(cont'd from previous page) studies at Queen's and McGill Universities (1974 to 1976), and obtained a Masters degree in Public Administration in 1999 from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Mr. Lan Lijun and Madame Gu have one daughter.

Welcome to new Members. A warm welcome is extended to the following new members: Mr. Ercel Baker and Dr. Xiaobei CHEN; Mr. Yves Max BLED; Mr. Bin CHEN; Mr. André CHENARD; Mr. Paul Davidson, Brenda Davidson and Lien; Ms. Carole Foster; Ms. Cindy JIANG; Ms. Beryl Phillips; Mr. Richard Piper; Ms. Cindy SEZUK and Mr. Jo Brody; Mr. Paul TIE; Ms. Rosalie Vézina; Mr. Bing WONG; Ms. Maggie ZENG; Mr. Xiaojian ZHOU; and Dr. Ti-Mao LI who has rejoined – making a grand total of 20 new members! Mrs. Jean Small was made an Honorary Lifetime Member.

2009 Executive Committee Members

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For Membership information, see our website: www.fccfa.ca/Ottawa.

Webmaster: Steve Hagopian

Editor's Note: I regret that this Newsletter was not published between March and December 2008 due to my illness. Anyone interested in taking over this position should please let us know. A strong piece was required as an anchor to launch a new issue, and that was provided recently by Peter Larson, founding President of the Society, following a 2½ week intensive program that he and his wife, Lorraine Farkas, experienced last month in China, from which they were able to make some astute observations combined with careful and thoughtful analysis of published material. We thought you would appreciate the result.

President's message: The executive committee wishes to acknowledge the contribution made by Ken Merklinger for shouldering the task of newsletter editor for the past three-and-a-half years. He gave his time unstintingly to the planning and production of thirteen newsletters for CCFS-Ottawa. A big thank you Ken for your much appreciated contribution to CCFS-Ottawa!