

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IS CANCER A LIFESTYLE ISSUE?

Reading the article “The SPP Makes You Sick” in your spring 2008 issue quite bowled me over. According to the author, the World Health Organization says 80 per cent of cancers are environmentally based, and 20 per cent are genetic, and that cancer is “not a lifestyle issue.”

I copy below a statement that I took from the World Health Organization website:

- 40% of cancer can be prevented (by a healthy diet, physical activity and not using tobacco).
- Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of cancer in the world. Tobacco use causes cancer of the lung, throat, mouth, pancreas, bladder, stomach, liver, kidney and other types; environmental tobacco smoke (passive smoking) causes lung cancer.
- One-fifth of cancers worldwide are due to chronic infections.

I speak as a physician epidemiologist who has been involved in cancer research for almost three decades.

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Editor's Note: The Spring 2008 article dealt with the issue of the social determinants of health. The author, Robert Chernomas, who is a Council board member and a Professor of Economics at the University of Manitoba, responds that while mainstream physicians often believe that smoking, eating carcinogenic food, etc., are all lifestyle issues, progressive public health researchers have shown they are rooted in class, race and gender. Scientific studies have shown, for example, that richer white men have drastically reduced their smoking while working-class women increased their smoking. Is this a lifestyle, or class and gender social issue? In the U.S., poor people live with more pollution and they get more cancer. According to researchers, the social determinants of health show people make decisions, but not under conditions of their own making.

MADE IN CANADA?

Recently our local paper published an article about product labelling. We were disturbed and angered to read that our fruit, vegetables and meat could have come from anywhere, and as long as 51 per cent of the production costs, including labour, transportation and packaging were incurred in Canada,

the products could still have a “made in Canada” label. Not only is this misleading, it is not true! Consumers who wish to buy Canadian and prefer to “think globally but buy locally,” are being deceived by this marketing practice.

The article listed even more alarming and distressing information about “agricultural imports.” Much of our food is being imported at a cost of millions of dollars. Our farmers and other food producers are being hurt and put out of business. The prices we have to pay must cover the transportation costs and handling. All along the way there are companies that make a profit.

This also shows a small part of a larger and disturbing problem, which is the weakness of free trade and the global economy. It is public knowledge that in the clothing industry, raw goods from the developed world are shipped to other countries, especially developing countries, and then imported back to Canada and the United States. These costs are added to the retail price of clothes. Again, numerous “middlemen” profit, producers lose, factory workers are underpaid and consumers pay a high price. It is a sad fact that none of this takes into account the human rights issues of taking advantage of the poor and the environmental damage of the extensive transportation risks involved.

We appreciate the advocacy work that the Council of Canadians does. We are grateful for your efforts to hold our government accountable on many fronts.

Margaret Jasinski, Sandra Mackenzie, Bruce Brillinger
London, Ontario

SEND US YOUR LETTERS!

If you have something to say about an article you have read in *Canadian Perspectives* or an issue you think would interest our readers, please write to us. We reserve the right to edit your letter for clarity and length. Letters must include your full name, address and phone number.

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