



A charity with plenty



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On his side are wealthy trust-fund progenies, powerful U.S. business leaders, billion-dollar American foundations, a web of environmental groups and prominent Vancouver political players. The region under focus for "systemic" change is Western Canada. The funding is frequently foreign. And Canadians may not know it yet, but the program is already well underway.

In a promotional video, praising the institute's work, one attendee notes, "I think we're starting to see ourselves as parts of a whole, rather than as separate pieces." And that co-ordination, co-operation and collective power is precisely the point of the Social Change Institute. And not just the institute: It's the point of all the efforts Mr. Solomon has brilliantly co-ordinated into a breathtakingly enterprising strategy.

Mr. Solomon is the vice chair of Tides Canada, and a director and former chairman of Tides' American board. And he is a major reason Tides has been pumping money into environmental and social activist groups that have been fighting fish farms in British Columbia, the oil sands in Alberta, logging in the Boreal forest, and dozens of other anti-industrial campaigns. Most any prominent green group you might think of has probably been on Tides' list of recipients. Tides also provides charitable assistance to The Tyee, its website shows, an NDP-friendly online magazine. Tides has hired government lobbyists. Former officials and affiliates of Tides, meanwhile, have influence at the highest level of Vancouver's city government, including its eco-chic mayor Gregor Robertson, who has made it his explicit goal to turn Vancouver into the "greenest city in the world." Some of the biggest donors to his campaign, and that of his Vision Vancouver party, are also connected to Tides.

"The Tides Foundation has some very long, strong tentacles into all sorts of businesses that all support Vision Vancouver, not as a political party, but as a movement, and this is extremely troubling," says Alex Tsakumis, a former political analyst for the newspaper *24 Hours* and former director of Vancouver's municipal Non-Partisan Association opposition party, who blogs on political affairs. "And [Joel] Solomon is the green father, if you will, behind this social engineering movement."

At an SCI gathering, a representative of ForestEthics, a bumptious American antagonist of Canadian forestry and oil industries, announces "we need to gain power." A visitor from the Dogwood Initiative, which pursues a roughly similar agenda, proclaims "we have an incredibly ambitious agenda we have to achieve, unprecedented in the history of humanity." The head of Environmental Defence talks of "advancing things that can be implemented right away, that are tailor-made to be implemented by a receptive government."

Carol Newell, heiress to the U.S. Rubbermaid fortune

If corraling the kind of money that can bring corporate-scale power and disciplining the social change lobby is the goal, an organization such as Tides is certainly a good place to start. Tides was designed by its American founder, Drummond Pike, in 1976, to be a vehicle through which large donors could give immense sums of cash, which Tides would then redirect to non-profit recipients. There would be no public connection between the originator of the funds — much of the more than US\$700 million Tides has given away in the U.S. and Canada since 2000 has come from esteemed American foundations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and others, controlling billions of dollars between them — and the recipients who eventually got the cash.

Under the direction of the American Tides Center, the organizing branch of Tides, those recipients eventually included, besides hospitals, schools, religious groups and museums, a catalogue of left-wing causes, everything from anti-war groups and anti-gun groups to pro-choice efforts, gay-marriage advocates and numerous environmental causes, ranging from the mainstream, such as Ducks Unlimited, to more hard-core anti-industry groups like Corporate Ethics International, an organization that this year launched the "ReThink Alberta" boycott against the province's tourism industry to protest the oil sands.

Yvonne Krause, an independent Vancouver researcher who has investigated Tides, discovered through the organization's U.S. tax returns that its Canadian and American arms have together helped more than 30 organizations campaigning against Alberta's oil sands, with roughly \$6 million in funding. Tides has launched a campaign to stigmatize the oil sands, with \$4.3 million specifically earmarked for what Tides calls its "Tar Sands Campaign." Tides refers to its role of separating donors from recipients as "donor advised giving." The website for the Centre for Consumer Freedom, a U.S. market-minded advocacy group, calls it "less like a philanthropy than a money-laundering enterprise ... taking money from other foundations and spending as the donor requires."

Mr. Solomon's office voicemail instructs callers that he can only be reached by email, but Mr. Solomon did not respond to five e-mails sent over the course of two weeks requesting an interview. Nor did Tides Canada representa-



The 30-acre Hollyhock Centre is a remote lodge on Cortes Island, 150 kilometres north of Vancouver, up the Georgia Strait. The New Age retreat is known for its holistic healing circles and Shaman drum-making workshops.

tives respond to calls seeking comment. Mr. Solomon is, according to friends, rather media shy. But in the few public interviews he recounts how he was raised in a staunchly Democratic family of Chattanooga Jews. His father, Jay, a wealthy suburban mail developer, was a key Jimmy Carter organizer in Tennessee and Mr. Carter appointed him to head the federal General Services Administration in 1977, the department that manages federally-owned buildings,

Tides with Ms. Newell's own \$60 million Endswell Foundation, as well as Hollyhock, a web of affiliated consulting groups and charities, and a firm called Renewal Partners, headed by Mr. Solomon, whose stated goal is "to invest in a collection of organizations using the powerful tools of business and philanthropy in support of long-term societal solutions." (Renewal gives money away, but also invests seed capital in eco-friendly companies producing, for ex-

ample, organic foods and reusable menstrual pads). And they all connect, too, to Vision Vancouver, the city's ruling municipal party.

"I concluded that I should use the power and privilege I had as a white north American male from an affluent family: to use those tools — the power of business and finance and politics — towards the common good," Mr. Solomon said, retelling his voyage of self discovery to a Tides Foundation conference in San Francisco two years ago. "And if I did that, however many days I got to live, I'd be doing what I'd feel good about on my deathbed." After becoming a Canadian citizen he received a recuperative kidney transplant here. Astonishingly, the "best match" and donor was Hollyhock co-founder Shivon Robinson.

It was at the San Francisco meeting that Mr. Solomon laid out his strategy to launch "systemic social change focused in one region" that could, once established, be a model exported to other regions. If the world could not be changed in Vancouver, "one of the wealthiest and most blessed places

on the planet ... we have a real problem on our hands," he told the audience. There was a "massive amount of sleeping and distracted capital" that he aimed to track down and mobilize toward his cause. He also said, to wide applause, that "we have to break out of the cycle that tells us that holding on and building infinite wealth is a responsible and moral position in the world."

Little wonder the *Vancouver Magazine* article labeled Mr. Solomon a "revolutionary." In fact, in an interview this spring with the liberal U.S. website, *Huffington Post*, Mr. Solomon went further, explaining that he and Ms. Newell had concocted a 500-year vision for the planet, incremented into sequential 50-year strategies. The first strategy, the project begun in the '90s, would connect businesses, non-profits and public administration "because we wanted to apply a whole-system approach to change," he said. "And concentrating our efforts in one place allowed us to amplify the relatively small amount of money we had to invest." The five-century vision would work to improve all "that had gone wrong" in the 500 years since Columbus discovered the New World, he explained.

Along the way, Mr. Solomon has been moving around impressive sums of cash, a good portion of it passing at some point through the hands of Tides, the organization's tax returns show. Since 2000, U.S. foundations have given at least \$57 million to Tides Canada. While the bulk of it has found its way, stripped of the identity of its original donors, to non-profits and charities, a good deal has also ended up paying the businesses and people that surround Mr. Solomon and Tides.

For instance, while Ms. Newell's foundation, Endswell, run by Mr. Solomon, has sent 90% of its grant money directly to Tides, suggesting it's a fairly non-complicated operation, it has, in the last six years, its own U.S. tax filings show, spent an average of nearly \$2 million yearly on administration costs such as consulting fees, and salaries, including, from 2006 to 2008, more than \$140,000 a year to Mr. Solomon.

There are, in fact, five Renewal Partners employees who are also paid from the Endswell payroll; four of them collect six-figures yearly for their work that includes donating nearly every last dollar of the Rubbermaid fortune to Tides. Ms. Krause found also that Endswell has reported spending \$1.4 million in "consulting fees" to companies listed as Interdependent Investments Ltd, IIL, and "Interdependent Inc." The officers of Interdependent Investments are Joel Solomon and Martha Burton, a fellow Tennessean and senior executive at both Renewal and Endswell. Ms. Burton also did not respond to repeated voicemails and emails over several days requesting an interview.

Consulting fees seem to be something Tides spends a lot of money on.

Between 2000 and 2008, the Canadian and U.S. offices spent \$142 million on just consulting (the equivalent rate of about \$16 million a year). The consultants hired by Tides Canada happen to include the Endswell Foundation itself, which Tides paid

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though he was let go after two years; insiders told *People* magazine he may have been too open with the press.

After being diagnosed in his early adulthood with a potentially fatal genetic kidney disease, Joel Solomon became something of a wayfarer, traveling up the West Coast and eventually landing in, and falling in love with, coastal B.C., where, in 1993, he connected with Carol Newell, heiress to the U.S. Rubbermaid fortune, now living in British Columbia, with her own tens of millions of dollars and West Coast way of thinking.

They created what *Vancouver Magazine* described in a profile as an "Escher-like organization" (referring to the famously convoluted, confounding sketches of M.C. Escher) that tied together a newly established Canadian branch plant of



\$118,000 to in 2003 and \$102,000 to in 2005, as well as