

It's time to change the social inequity of poverty

By Dely Farrace

Gas prices have plummeted, and unyielding complaints about it are underway.

According to economists, the level to which gas prices are falling is devastating as it will yield substantially less tax revenues for the most dependent provinces, Ontario being one of them.

There is a concern that social programs will be cut. Why? A few years ago, when gas prices skyrocketed, where did the extra revenue go? Social programs did not gain as a result, nor do they consequently need to suffer now. It is the responsibility of government to maintain the necessities of life for those who are struggling to meet their own and their families' needs.

We say that children should never go hungry, especially in such an affluent land. That's why there are school breakfast programs.

Children need good nutrition and rest for proper brain development, as well as proper physical development and mental health.

We believe we live in an ideal society, one that protects and defends its rights and freedoms. Canada is one of the most prosperous countries in which to live and raise happy, healthy children. Why, then, are 29 per cent of our children living in poverty? Something is essentially wrong.

Some say that capitalism can exist only with its companion, poverty. In our society, we believe we are tempering the unrestrained damaging effects of capitalism with social programs, and that is true. But we must continue to keep up this trend in order to make our society whole and people-centred. For if not for people, what is the purpose of civilization? For if not for our people, what is the purpose of our existence? Is it to perpetuate extreme wealth for the top 0.1 per cent of the population? Are we not more civilized than that? Or do we rely on a premise that maintains people are poor who deserve to be poor, who somehow choose their path, or who simply become unfortunate?

What happens if we are permanently paralyzed in an accident, or have profoundly disabled children, or lose everything through fire or theft or an 'act of God', or lose our livelihood, our life partner, whatever it is that sustains us? Then what? Some may recover, and others will not.

Within a societal structure which now requires two working parents for a family to remain within the earning bracket of the middle class, what happens when one parent abandons the family, or simply leaves the marriage, denying that they have abandoned the children? Over time, the reality of abandonment emerges because in every practical sense, the newly engendered arrangement is not sustainable.

Children and their mothers, although shameful to admit, are left in desperate situations in our affluent land. The judicial system supports this, and other social programs follow suit. Twenty nine percent of children in Canada are living in poverty.

That's one out of four kids.

These children may be fed through social assistance, but opportunities to transcend poverty are left in the dust. Access to technology is the greatest opportunity that, if not afforded, will predestine anyone to perpetual poverty.

Canada constitutes one of the most capable societies because it has enormous resources, it is one of the most literate, demonstrates great potential and is continually growing economically. It is unsupportable to have more than 20 per cent of our people living below the poverty line. After all, since we live in a post industrial society, the largest economic foundation in our society is consumerism. All people need to be active consumers. How does it benefit capitalism to have poverty in our midst? If all people were guaranteed the minimum of a living wage, they would consume more, and it would positively impact our economy.

With an increase in Canada's GDP of 115 per cent since 1981 and a mere 15 per cent of it going to middle class families, it really is time for a fundamental change. Canada requires a revolutionary approach to wealth both in its making and its distribution if we are to have any hope of a stable and prosperous future for us all.

