

I grew up in the post war era when prosperity was just beginning to take off but the memories of depression were still fresh in the minds of many people. I remember hearing stories of how my grandparents regularly provided food for transients who came to the door of their general store, most of them having arrived on the railcars that stopped at the edge of town. My grandfather worked for the railroad so it was said that he directed many of them to his home and business. I guess poverty has always existed in our country even through all the boom years but I have never been so aware of it as I am now. Despite the manipulation of statistics by various government agencies, more people are hungry in this country and in this province than we have seen for a long time. Food banks are multiplying, each one reporting that there is not enough in contributions to meet the need. It is reported that 700,000 people in Canada rely on food banks to feed themselves and their families. This figure covers adults only. One in four of these are women and one in ten is male. As I have noted many times in this column, BC has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada at 18.8% compared to a 15% Canadian average.

There is a persistent myth that the poor are on social assistance and given a little initiative they could change their situation. The fact is that the majority of the poor in Canada and in British Columbia are working. Sometimes there are two people in the home working but more than 50% are single parents in a desperate struggle to make ends meet. Having a job is not the answer for these people. They often have two or three part time jobs in an effort to be employed full-time. There are many part time jobs under 20 hours a week because less hours means no benefits. The loss of benefits adds those costs to family household expenses.

One of the biggest factors that creates poverty among workers is the low minimum wage. When I look at the hourly rate and then I look at the cost of food, clothing, housing, utilities, and transportation I cannot get my mind around how anyone could manage this on \$8.00 per hour. That is the rate in BC, which by the way is the lowest in Canada. The highest is Ontario, paying \$10.25 per hour and Nunavut at \$11.00 but let's face it, in Nunavut a tomato costs \$5.00.

Poverty has a trickle down effect on all our systems. It impacts health, affects education, can break families apart, can lead to psychological impact such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem to name but a few. These things don't always happen but there is enough of a pattern to note them.

Poverty is a community issue. I am reminded of a quote from one of Hemmingway's books "When a clod of earth falls into the sea my country is diminished". Think about it.

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