

Bulletin #332

January 11, 2022

Homelessness is a Tragedy! Give People Back Their Dignity

The winter holiday period has just passed and typically, people in this country contribute to a number of food drives to help people living in poverty. Some CUPW locals organize their own collection drives and give to local food banks. This is commendable and poor and homeless people require our respect and aid, especially in these times. But it is also central to our commitment to justice and part of our solidarity work, to address the colonial economic systems and societal trauma that keep them there. We must ask ourselves why it is incumbent on the generosity of individuals and work and labour organizations to alleviate the financial hardship of community members. As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Canada's record on poverty is shameful. Governments at all levels need to do much more to get rid of poverty and put an end to homelessness.

In any given year, there are between 150,000 and 300,000 homeless people in Canada (Homeless Hub). Folks are homeless for a number of reasons and they compose a diverse group of people. The pandemic has exacerbated the situation, forcing low-income workers out of work, or making it difficult for some to get access to the CERB. To boot, we are witnessing an increase in the latest predatory phenomenon of "renovictions" which worsens the potential for affordable housing.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a number of factors that accentuate poverty. There are inadequate benefits and sick leave for low income earners, a large number of whom are also the people who work in the care sector; and rents have increased disproportionately, diminishing the access to affordable housing. COVID-19 has made things especially bad for those who are racialized. They are more likely to work in essential services, live in over-crowded housing, and have limited access to healthcare and employment benefits. In Toronto alone, where 50% of residents are racialized, COVID infections among this demographic is at 80%. In the same jurisdiction, where low-income earners comprise 30% of the population, they accounted for 57% of hospitalizations as of February 2021.

Since 1995, Canada has consistently spent less on social services than the average OECD countries (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is comprised of 38 of the wealthiest countries on the globe). Needless to say that this means inadequate support for those who care for others. Outrageous that those working in the care sector should be the poorest workers.

.../2

As unionized workers, CUPW stands in solidarity with workers and their families who are struggling financially, and resists alongside groups that work to help put an end to poverty such as Acorn Canada, or the Ontario Coalition against Poverty, for example.

CUPW calls on the federal government to institute a Universal Basic Income for all, a wealth tax, mandatory sick benefits for all workers, and an affordable housing strategy that includes putting an end to the horrendous practice of “renovictions”, and instituting measures to alleviate homelessness.

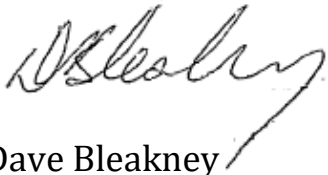
References:

Employment and Social Development Canada. *Understanding Systems: The 2021 Report of the National Advisory Council on Poverty.*

<https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2021-annual/advisory-council-poverty-2021-annual.pdf>

Homeless Hub. <https://www.homelesshub.ca/about-homelessness>

In Solidarity,



Dave Bleakney
2nd National Vice-President

