



## Sign of the Times: Through the Lens of the Pandemic

### Economic Inequality Canada and UK

Economic inequality is not only a global scandal, but it is also a social and ecological malignancy. Billionaires increase their wealth daily while 50% of the world's population live on less than \$5.50 a day, which makes hunger one of the world's greatest outrages.<sup>i</sup> The UN reports that today more than 820 million people go to bed hungry - 135 million of whom suffer acute hunger due to violent conflicts, climate change, and economic downturns. Covid-19 is expected to double that number.<sup>ii</sup> Food banks in Canada and the UK have seen the faces of hunger and starvation for many years, but never in the numbers brought about by the onslaught of the pandemic.

Covid-19 has brought to public view and shame chronic economic injustices in Canada and the UK. In a particular way, these injustices are evident in how we care for our aged members of society, and how we honor the labour of service workers. Nowhere is this more evident than in the effect of constant cuts to our public Health Care systems. These cuts have resulted for years now in low pay for personal care workers, staff cutbacks, and fewer resources required for the care of the general population in our long-term care and government sponsored nursing homes. Premium care goes to those who can afford private services. The thousands of Covid-19 deaths of our aged in care homes, and the deaths of their front-line under-paid workers, are testimony to the critical need and opportunity we now have to reform unjust economic policies and laws for low wage health care workers.<sup>iii</sup>

Chronic economic disparities in Canada and the UK are clearly visible also, when you examine the wages of those who collect our rubbish, clean our offices, serve our food, transport our goods, clean our houses, pack our online orders, stock our grocery stores, grow our vegetables, or make our clothing. Invariably, these services are provided by visible minorities, mainly women, who toil for low wages, and who often work in unhealthy or unsafe working conditions.<sup>iv</sup>

In September 2015, as *Laudato Si* was being widely read, famed Canadian environmental activist, David Suzuki, wrote a short and profound opinion piece titled, "It's Time to Talk About a New Vision for the Canadian Economy." In this article, Suzuki noted that developed countries with the greatest inequalities have higher rates of disease, mental illness, drug use, and a host of other social problems. Suzuki proposed that reducing income gaps makes all of us healthier. In addition, Suzuki highlighted the suggestion of the American journalist Charles Bowden, who contended that wealth disparity and ecological devastation are rooted in our social and political demand for short-term economic gain. Bowden suggests that a better economic vision would support the right of all Canadians to live in a healthy environment with access to clean water and healthy food. Within such a vision, businesses would be required to pay for environmental damage they inflict, capital would be more widely distributed, and ideas, such as employee shareholder programs with ethically invested stocks, would be the norm. This alternative economy would connect people to family, friends and communities, while focusing on social capital investments over gross domestic product gains, and distributing wealth through taxes, social programs, and minimum guaranteed incomes.<sup>v</sup>

Let us join voices like those of David Suzuki, and Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* who call us to a new vision of reality. Let us act together before it is too late to bring economic justice to birth in this age of global inequities.

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/5-shocking-facts-about-extreme-global-inequality-and-how-even-it>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/35449/?gclid=CjwKCAjw5Ij2BRBdEiwA0Frc9S6GGjyWZUL9bwxHoF4KyzszVZijJsTpOK-WeYeXGiKclD367VVsiRoCKK4QAvD\\_BwE](https://www.oxfam.ca/publication/35449/?gclid=CjwKCAjw5Ij2BRBdEiwA0Frc9S6GGjyWZUL9bwxHoF4KyzszVZijJsTpOK-WeYeXGiKclD367VVsiRoCKK4QAvD_BwE)

<sup>iv</sup> <https://careers.workopolis.com/advice/the-ten-highest-and-ten-lowest-paying-jobs-in-canada/>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/ethnicitypaygapsingreatbritain/2018>

<sup>v</sup> <https://david Suzuki.org/story/its-time-to-talk-about-a-new-vision-for-the-economy>