

CCPA Connections

EDITORIAL - ED FINN

It all boils down to unfair distribution

When Mahatma Gandhi, more than 70 years ago, remarked that “the world holds enough to satisfy everyone’s need, but not everyone’s greed,” he was pithily identifying the main cause of the world’s social and economic problems. And he was also pointing to their obvious solutions.

Poverty, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, polluted air and water, preventable disease, and most of the other ills that beset us have one root cause: the inequitable distribution of the planet’s wealth and resources.

People who have enough money – no matter where they may live – are not poor, do not go hungry, do not lack shelter or a good education, and have access to quality health care. Famines don’t break out in posh residential districts. Business executives don’t line up at food banks or sleep on park benches. The rich can afford to stay healthy and live longer than the poor

These simple facts are clear. They underscore the equally obvious fact that most human misery and injustice can be prevented by a fair allocation of the world’s wealth.

Unfortunately, the prevailing economic system – laissez-faire capitalism – promotes, defends, and even extols a brutally unequal distribution of wealth. Its three ideological principles are greed, competition, and individualism, all of which militate against social and economic justice. So we have a system in which the top executives of Microsoft control more wealth than all the people in the world’s 50 poorest countries. We have 450 billionaires with more wealth than the poorest two-and-a-half billion people. And the proponents of this grossly inequitable system see nothing wrong with it. They would presumably not object if eventually 600 billionaires accumulated more wealth than 90% of the rest of humankind. That’s what a “free market” is all about, they would tell us.

They even have the gall to argue that, because the enrichment of a privileged few drains money needed to maintain Canada’s social security system, it should be dismantled. Instead of raising taxes on the rich, they say, let’s keep cutting those taxes – even if it means also cutting health care, education, unemployment insurance benefits, and other social programs. And the political leaders they control are quick to do their bidding.

The upshot is that the function of redistributing wealth is now mainly taking the form of charity. Thousands of charitable organizations beg the corporations and the high-income groups to share some of their wealth with the needy. Appeals for charitable donations clog the mails, the airwaves, and the telephone lines. Motorists driving on city streets encounter schoolchildren at busy intersections selling chocolate bars to help save school programs threatened by government cutbacks. All of the causes championed by charities are worthwhile. All of the hungry and destitute they help are deserving. But the growing dependence on handouts from corporations and the affluent elite has two serious flaws: it perpetuates – perhaps even institutionalizes – a system built on avarice and inequity; and it ensures that the problems of poverty and hunger will persist and even get worse because the proceeds of charity alone will never be enough to eliminate them.

The CCPA, thanks to your financial and moral support, is taking a leading role in the struggle for social justice. Our research projects bolster the efforts of activists with hard facts and figures and powerful arguments. It’s important, however, as we fight these battles, always to keep in mind both the nature of the underlying problem and the solution. The problem is an unfair distribution of wealth, and the solution – however it may be achieved – is a fair distribution of wealth. Any proposals or discussions that ignore this simple truth waste our time, squander our resources, and undermine our collective efforts to create a better world.