

Casseroles

a supplement to The Gateway

*Those who take the meat from the table
Teach Contentment.
Those for whom the taxes are destined
Demand Sacrifice.
Those who eat their fill speak to the hungry
Of wonderful times to come.
Those who lead the country into the abyss
Call the ruling too difficult
For Ordinary Folk.*

--Bertolt Brecht

A conference on poverty in Canada is scheduled for the evenings of March 7th, 8th, and 9th at Dinwoodie Lounge starting at 7:00 p.m. nightly. The actual agenda and slate of guest speakers that will be participating are listed elsewhere. The conference will concentrate on the problems of poverty as it affects workers, farmers, Native people, and the unemployed. For it is they who make up more than 80% of Canada's population, and yet have virtually no access to the media or the political platform.

It is hoped that this conference will familiarize the student with the experiences of the poor, in their actual work setting and as they begin their struggle against corporate oppression and government neglect, ultimately to gain the necessary political power to change their economic condition.

We don't expect that after listening to Ian Adams speak on poverty in Canada or Homer Stevens on the plight of the fishermen in Nova Scotia, that you'll immediately become a champion of the poor (something they can do without anyway), but that at the very least you'll begin to question your glowing picture of Canada - as "The Land of the Free".

The poor are free to choose once every four to five years which political party will have the opportunity to tell them that "if they're poor it's their own damn fault"; and anyway poverty really doesn't exist in Canada, exceptin' of course among them injuns.

Trudeau gives you the finger, and tells you to "eat shit" if you happen to be an unemployed postal truck driver from Montreal

Mayor Campbell of Vancouver owns half the slums in that city. And man, has he made a killing.

Remember those good upstanding citizens here in Meadowlark and Rio Terrace who nearly pissed their pants when they found out that welfare recipients-- maybe even Native people--were going to be moving into those low-income public housing units built in their suburbs. They got a petition up, attesting to protect first their property and second their children from "bad influences", and collected one hell of a lot of names.

The poor are free to work 10 to 12 hours a day on assembly lines guaranteed to drive you bananas--for between \$1.55 per hour (if you're a woman) to \$2.25 per hour (if you're a man). Nearly 45% of all working Canadians are expected to live on that crappy wage.

"Unless workers in this country stop demanding exorbitant wage hikes, we'll never be able to beat inflation". Louis Razminsky--Governor of the Bank of Canada.

What Louis means here by "workers" is the 10 to 15% of skilled Tradesmen in the Trade Union movement whose wages are beginning to approach about 10% of what he earns. (\$75,000 plus a huge expense account.) And when Louie says "we'll" he isn't talking about all Canadians, but instead that 2 to 3% who monopolize the economic and political power of this country, usually, I might add, from Wall Street. It is that "we'll", when faced by financial and economic difficulties, that will cut back on production throwing thousands of workers out on the streets--taking money out of circulation, and concentrating it into other areas of more profitable returns. Thereby shifting the problems they created onto those who are least prepared to withstand periods of recession.

The poor are free to protest as much as they wish, not that it's likely anyone will hear them. Air Waves in Canada are bought with money, a commodity of extreme shortage in a poverty setting. The National Farmers Union can hold a mammoth demonstration anywhere in Canada, and get themselves pre-empted on the late evening news by Stanfield, the underwear king, downing a bowl of gruel at the local soup kitchen with "the boys." It is an election year; isn't it!

The poor are free to spend half their life looking for work. In fact if you happen to be on the dole in Halifax, the welfare department encourages you to get out and freeze your ass and collect ten duly-signed affidavits from employers (weekly) stating that "The above was not able to find work at this establishment". And if you have any pride left, better forget it otherwise you won't be seeing your "starvation" allowance at the end of the month. While back in Ottawa the Prime Minister has given away another million dollars to Statistics Canada to conjure up 40,000 to 50,000 fictitious jobs every month only going to prove that "you're not looking hard enough", baby.

The poor are free to spend the other half of their life in jail. What a farce, you're brought before a judge--a representative from your peer group--who after finding you guilty with or without the aid of a court-appointed attorney, gives you the choice between a hefty fine or a jail sentence. But what he is actually saying is that if it wasn't for the fact that you are poor, you wouldn't be going to jail. WHY? Because in 80 - 90% of cases involving poor people their crime is one against private property

...Sure, I see it in the papers, how good orange juice is for kids. But damnit our kids get colds one on top of the other. They look like little ghosts. Betty never saw a grapefruit. I took her to the store last week and she pointed to a stack of grapefruits. "What's That!" she said. My God, Joe -- the world is supposed to be for all of us.

(From a play by Clifford Odets called, Waiting For Lefty.)

About 75,000 or a little over 5% of Alberta's population is made up of Native people. 50% of Alberta's prison population is made up of native people.

Oh Yeah, the poor are also free to kick-off as soon as possible.

The fisherman is shafted

The worker is shafted

The Indian and the Eskimo is shafted

The farmer is shafted

The unemployed are shafted

Do you know that David Molson spends more money on the upkeep of one of his dogs than the welfare recipient or the Old-age pensioner gets as a monthly allowance for food, clothing, and shelter.

So who's doing the shafting?

You're in Bathurst, New Brunswick, there are 10,000 unemployed -- close to half the working population of the town. Nearly 2000 guys haven't seen their unemployment insurance benefits for three weeks, some as long as five weeks. You and a thousand others go down to the U.I.C. office, and make it known that your families aren't eating and may soon find themselves locked out of their homes. The evening of your demonstration, Bryce MacKasey, Minister of unemployment, announced that due to some unforeseen bureaucratic difficulties 22 U.I.C. cheques destined for Bathurst, New Brunswick have been slightly delayed. This is not called a lie: it is called a credibility gap. Mackasey can thank God he's in Ottawa and that there aren't too many television sets among the poor in Bathurst, New Brunswick.

You're an Indian living on a reservation in Alberta. You've listened very patiently as the government has told you that it is just a matter of time before we get around to solving the problems of education, housing, employment, lack of medical facilities, and lack of pure drinking water and good food. You watch your kids growing up with crooked spines and sick bones. And then you remember that you've been listening to this shit over one hundred years.

You're a student at university. And we're asking you to attend a conference on poverty. But you find that you simply don't have the time--that you're too wrapped up in your studies. And you really don't think poverty has a lot to do with what you're into. I mean, you're among the privileged that are going to make it in this society.

Much like the 5000 qualified engineers in Canada who haven't got a hope in hell of practising their profession.

Or the 200 qualified teachers here in the province, who while driving the school bus or cleaning the building, etc. are wondering maybe if they should have gone into dentistry.

And if you still need convincing take a stroll down to the welfare office: you'll be amazed how many university graduates you can bump into an afternoon.