

Toronto Anti-Poverty Rally at Queen's Park September 26/07

“It's Time to Act – Together”

“When a few people in a community have no housing due to a fire or some other tragic event, or when hundreds of people become displaced because of some disaster, the community mobilizes. To do otherwise is unthinkable.

When many people are unhoused we have a community-wide crisis. When the numbers are allowed to grow, and when all reasonable analyses point to even more homeless people every day, we have a disaster – a situation requiring emergency relief and prevention measures – in the same way as when a flood or a storm leaves many people homeless. All people must be protected from becoming homeless, from having inadequate food, and from being exposed to life and health-threatening circumstances.”

From the State of Emergency Declaration, TDRC, October, 1998 – nearly nine years ago!

In that State of Emergency Declaration written 9 years ago we declared homelessness a disaster in Toronto and a national disaster. Over 400 organizations across the country signed on to the declaration. Some of you are here today.

Yes, our mobilizing together brought relief. It brought in the SCPI money, it brought in emergency shelters like the armouries, and the shelters in the armouries and old empty hospitals like Princess Margaret and Doctors. It brought in more food relief for drop-ins; it brought in donations for sleeping bags. It brought a housing victory for the Tent City squatters in Toronto. But it still left people homeless.

Yesterday, I finished reading a new health report on people in Toronto. It had these words in it: violence, fatigue, pain, stress, rape, despair, death, depression, tuberculosis, bedbugs, killer heat. In a health report! Well you probably know I'm referring not to a health report on people living in Forest Hill, but the Street Health Report.

Street Health Report.

- ~40% unable to get a shelter bed at least once in past year
- 56% had experienced serious depression in the past year
- One-third had been homeless more than 5 years
- 78% cited economic reasons for why they remain homeless

Remember the words “When many people are unhoused we have a community-wide crisis.”

I often say that THIS is our Katrina. This is our Katrina because like those hurricane victims our political leaders are leaving people languishing in hellish conditions because

they will not deal with the question of right to housing and build the infrastructure.

Shortly after the election the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari is coming to Canada to investigate our conditions.

What will he see and hear?

- that there is no proper shelter in Kingston or Cobourg,
- that there is no designated family shelter in Sault Ste. Marie, in Thunder Bay, or Sarnia,
- that no new affordable housing is being built in northern Ontario
- that we now have palliative care programs set up for homeless people
- and that women suffer greatly, like Heather, age 48 who in the Street Health Report says: "I WILL NOT live on a park bench any more, or in a tent like I was doing. They should have a lot more housing for us. Because it's terrible."

What is terrible, what is criminal really is the lack of heroism, the lack of courage, the lack of political will, the lack of determination, the lack of imagination, the lack of empathy by political parties to put housing and homelessness and hunger and poverty onto their election platforms. And to the media, many of you here today, many of you have covered these issues for years, you know the issue. Where is the coverage of our Katrina during this election?

We, the people affected and the agencies and unions and churches have come together today. We must stay together to speak out, to protest. It is the right thing to do.

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