

NATIVE POVERTY IN BC IS SEVERE

A poem by Rolf Auer

For BC's First Nations Peoples

July 6, 2011

“In 1995 there were
‘only’ 357 billionaires.
Their net worth was \$760 billion,
more wealth than
the bottom 45 percent
of humanity.
That is, 357 people in the world
owned more combined wealth
than 2.7 billion other people.”¹

According to a 2010 article,
there were over
1,000 billionaires.²
Their net worth
was \$3 trillion.³
Their monetary value
was equivalent to the net worth
of *more* than the poorest
3.5 billion human beings
(out of 7 billion)
on the planet.⁴

“In 1998, the United Nations
calculated that US\$40 billion,
spent carefully, could provide
clean water, sanitation,
and other basic needs
for the poorest on earth.”⁵

A Tobin Tax—
that is, an extremely miniscule
tax on global financial transactions—
could easily provide
this amount and more.
“Conservative estimates show the tax
could yield from \$150-\$300 billion annually.
[In 2000,] The [United Nations] estimates
that the cost of wiping out

the worst forms of poverty
and environmental destruction *globally*
would be around \$225 billion per year.” (italics, brackets mine)⁶

The Canadian government supports the tax.⁷

“In Canada, as in many countries,
being [Native] often means being poor,
or even very poor.” (brackets mine)⁸

In 2005, of the 3.8 percent of the population
identified as Native, 21.7 percent had incomes
below Statistics Canada low-income cut-off poverty line
after tax, compared to 11.1 percent for non-Natives.⁹

“Living and health conditions also remained
well below those of the majority. If one
defines a dwelling where there is more
than one person per room
as crowded, for example,
11.4 percent of [Natives] ... lived in such
housing conditions in 2005, compared to
2.9 percent for [non-Natives].” (brackets mine)¹⁰

“Eighty-eight percent of [Natives]
live in substandard housing
as against 11 percent [of Canada].” (brackets mine)¹¹

A very large number of Native homes have health-damaging mould.¹²

“BC has one of the highest percentages
of [Native] in core housing need at 29 percent,
compared to 14 percent [for Canada].” (brackets mine)¹³

“In 1960, [Natives] could not vote...
faced major constraints preventing them
from owning land, a business
or even a house.” (brackets mine)¹⁴

Treaties allow land claims by Natives
to be made, as long as they’re not communal.
If a land claim allows Natives to own land,
they can then own equity—
whereas before they had none—

allowing them access to banking privileges,
such as loans.

First Nations land claims in Eastern Canada
seem to be relatively successful
compared to those in Western Canada.
For example, in 1975, the Cree and the Inuits
of the James Bay area negotiated a spectacular
land claims arrangement in Northern Quebec.
By comparison, Western Canada land claims have been failures.
In Alberta, the Lubicon have been constantly mistreated.
In BC, the Nisga'a Treaty has
received mixed reactions from
both Natives and non-Natives.¹⁵
The Haida have been harmed
by destructive corporate forest practises.^{¶16}

“Most of British Columbia (BC)
is unceded Indian land
traditionally under the jurisdiction
of distinct nations.”¹⁷

“...[Native] freedom is heavily restricted ...
for example, their land, education and economic
enterprises are controlled by the [federal government]
administration [through the Indian Act].” (brackets mine)¹⁸

The effect of the Indian Act's
social services and benefits
are more like instruments
of assimilation than as rights.¹⁹

In 2010, Assembly of First Nations national chief
Shawn Atleo said he'd like to see Natives
get out “from under” the Indian Act and
strike a new deal with the government on land claims,
resource sharing and education. He said
the Indian Act has led to high rates of suicide,
poverty and health problems.²⁰

BC's sordid history of its residential schools
has been a great cause of poverty to Natives.
“...on and off reserve, [Native] people
face epidemic-sized problems
rooted in the residential school experience
of abuse, humiliation, separation from parents

and loss of culture and language. ...
Mothers and grandmothers often carry
the heaviest burden. They are more likely
to live in poverty and experience violence
than any other men or women in Canada.” (brackets mine)²¹

“...[in 2010, Natives] were found to live 17 years
less than average for non-Natives. ...
Aboriginal children are believed to be
the poorest in the country.” [brackets mine]²²

In 2010, Canada was one of the few
countries to *refuse to sign* the
United Nations Declaration
on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
Signing the UNDRIP would have caused to be
adopted minimal standards of human rights
of Indigenous Peoples, which would have
supported strong First Nations governments,
economies, families and communities,
and ultimately benefitted all Canadians.²³

So, why does the Canadian government support
the Tobin Tax for solving worldwide poverty,
but not the UNDRIP to solve poverty
for Canadian Natives?

Could it be possible that the Canadian government
has a lingering hangover of a racist and colonial
attitude towards its First Nations peoples?

Footnotes:

¹ *The Myth of the Good Corporate Citizen*, Murray Dobbin, 2nd edition, 2003, p.123

² “The New World Order,” *The Globe and Mail*, March 10, 2010

³ *Forbes*, 2010

⁴ Shannon Daub, BC Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

⁵ *A Short History of Progress*, Ronald Wright, 2004, p.128

⁶ “Time for Tobin!”; <http://www.newint.org/features/2000/01/01/tobintax/>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ “Aboriginal Peoples and Poverty in Canada,” Alain Noël, Florence Larocque, August 20, 2009, pdf, p.5

⁹ *ibid.*, p.5

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.6

¹¹ <http://www.faqs.org/minorities/North-America/Indians-and-Metis-of-Canada.html>

¹² CBC Radio 1, *The Current*, July 6, 2011

¹³ http://www.fns.bc.ca/pdf/ACTFPovertyFactSheet_02_2010.pdf

¹⁴ op. cit., fn. 8, pp.13-14

¹⁵ <http://www.fnbc.info/node/1511>

¹⁶ op. cit., fn. 8, pp.4-5

¹⁷ http://www.firstnations.eu/indian_land.htm

¹⁸ op. cit., fn. 11, p.1

¹⁹ op. cit., fn. 8, p.14

²⁰ http://www.okanaganlakebc.com/community/personal/all/bc_native_land_claims.htm

²¹ "Actions speak much louder than words," *Vancouver Sun*, June 14, 2008

²² op. cit., fn. 13, p.1

²³ http://www.fns.bc.ca/pdf/ACTF_mediarelasereUNDRIP02222010.pdf