Defining Poverty

Description

Poverty is generally defined as being in material want of something. Not having enough to eat or money to buy essentials is the general understanding of poverty. But I would also say that poverty is also having an attitude of feeling powerless, helplessness, or even non-gratitude. It is psychological and is how you define yourself.

My in-laws are living examples of people who took full advantage of what Canada offers them. They are immigrants who worked very hard and created wealth through their industry which appears to be lost of many native-born Canadians. Technically they have always been â??poorâ?• as far as annual earnings are concerned, yet the life they lead is as far away from poverty as can be. Their example tells me that that poverty is not a state of physical or financial want, but a psychological one. These are people who donâ??t think of themselves as poor and in terms of how they live, they are not. They have more than enough money because they are content to live within their means.

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Yet there is nothing simply psychological about the poverty experienced by Canadaâ??s aboriginal people. I can only conclude that what they have experienced collectively is a poverty due to systemic discrimination, learned helplessness, welfare mentality, isolation, familial dissolution, and a culture of victimization. Looking at their situation, there is no doubt that what they are experiencing is psychological, but the roots behind it are due to social and political forces. In their situation poverty is a political issue, not a personal one.

So I would say that Poverty has two manifestations:

1) Personal Poverty is about the individual psychology behind being poor. It is all about personal expectations and financial competency. It is how a person defines himself/herself when it comes to wealth or lack of same.

2) Systemic Poverty is about how government programs and social pressures (internal and external) impact on people. It is not about how much money you keep, but how a system, government, or collective defines what poverty is and how to fix it. Using the aboriginal people as an example, the Canadian government has consistently undermined that groupâ??s ability to be self-sufficient through its paternalistic, welfare policies.

A individual can experience both kinds of poverty, one of them, or none of them, which would provide us with a broader spectrum and hopefully more insightful way of understanding what poverty is. Perhaps with better understanding, comes the possibility to deal with the problem.

Category

1. Spirit Speculations

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