Homelessness in Canada: Past, Present, Future

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Here we are in 2009, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, following one of the greatest economic booms of our times, at yet another national conference on ... homelessness.

As we began, we need to reflect on how we got here and why this thing we call homelessness is so persistent.

Will we gather again in 2029, the 20th anniversary of this conference? I hope we do gather, and sooner, and often − but for different purposes; for example, to build on the great progress being made; to tackle further nuances of the problem; and to address entirely different social issues.

I will return to this question, why homelessness persists, at the end. It is helpful first to be clear about what we are talking about, and why, and where it came from.

HOMELESSNESS PAST

International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, 1987

Twenty years is not a long time. We are here on the 22nd anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH). In Canada, during 1987, there were local, regional and national conferences on homelessness. There have been many since.

Many Canadians no longer remember the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. The United Nations, in 1981, decided to focus on the fact that so many people in *less developed* countries were unhoused. The focus was not on developed countries. The purpose of the General Assembly in designating 1987 was, according to the resolution, "to focus the attention of the international community on those problems" faced by "homeless people in urban and rural areas of the developing countries."[1] There was no mention of countries like Canada in that 1981 UN resolution.

Six years later, the focus of the International Year shifted to include many of the developed nations of the world, including Canada. The many conferences on homelessness in Canada that year were focused on the growing number of unhoused people *in Canada*, not those in developing countries.

From Rehousing to Dehousing Processes & Public Policies

As we reflect on homelessness in Canada, we need to make an important initial clarification about this word we use so easily: homelessness.

The word *homelessness* was not used in that 1981 UN General Assembly resolution. There was, therefore, no need to engage in a debate over how to define it. The 1981 UN resolution was clear. Many millions of households in developing countries had no housing. They were unhoused. They were homeless. They needed adequate housing.

Before the 1980s, large numbers of people in *developed* countries were, in contrast, not unhoused, not homeless. They had housing, although

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1 "That an international year devoted to the problems of homeless people in urban and rural areas of the developing countries ... to focus the attention of the international community on those problems, Recognizing the grave and generally worsening situation of the homeless in the developing countries..." U.N. General Assembly, Resolution 36/71. International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, 4 December 1981.

for many that housing was in poor condition. There were also some transient single men in many cities who were assisted by organizations like the Salvation Army. These men were referred to at times as homeless, though they generally lived in poor-quality "skid-row" rooming houses and flophouses.

In 1960, for example, in a report titled *Homeless and Transient Men* by a committee of the Social Planning Council of Metro Toronto, the committee defined the "homeless man" as one with few or no ties to a family group and who was thus without the economic or social support a family home normally provides. A clear distinction exists in the report between house and home. The men were "home"-less, not unhoused. *Home* refers to a social, psychological space not just a house as a physical structure. These homeless men were housed. "Homeless men may be considered from the point of view of their residence," according to the report. They lived in poor-quality physical spaces: rooming houses or accommodation provided by charities. According to the report: "They live predominately in cheap rooming houses in the downtown area. In times of emergency they turn to hostels or to welfare agencies, missions or churches for assistance."[2] That was 1960. Canada thus had some homeless individuals, but no problem called "homelessness" at that time.

About two decades later, in 1977, the City of Toronto Planning Board released a *Report on Skid Row*, "an overview of a complex social, physical, economic and geographical phenomenon − Toronto's skid row." This report never uses the word "homelessness" and uses the word "homeless" only a few times. These men − and they were mainly men − were not homeless in the contemporary sense of the word, i.e., unhoused. They were characterized by their "residence in a deteriorated mixed commercial-residential area in older sections of the city," by frequent changes in residence, and by the low rent they paid.[3] That was 1977. Canada still had no "homelessness" problem.

The word "homelessness" came into common use in developed countries in the early and mid-1980s to refer to the problem of *de*housing – the fact that an increasing number of people who were once housed in these wealthy countries were no longer housed. Canada had started to experience dehousing processes.

Until the 1980s in Canada, as in all Western nations, urban planners, public health officials, social workers and related professionals were focused on *re*housing people into better housing and neighbourhoods.

This was because, during the 15 years of the Depression and the Second World War, very little new housing was built and many people were living in poor-quality, aging, and overcrowded housing, often in rundown neighbourhoods. After the War, we Canadians, with our tax money and the governments we elected, revived the housing market, created a functioning mortgage system with government mortgage insurance, built social housing, and subsidized private-sector rental housing.

Adequately housing everyone was the objective. Note two key words here: *adequately* and *everyone*.

Prime Minister Lester Pearson, in a 1965 speech to the Ontario Association of Housing Authorities, for example, noted that the immediate problem is "the necessity for everybody to have a decent dwelling; not to make all homes mansions, but to ensure that none of them will be hovels. It is only a very rare soul that can expand in a hovel. This objective of decent housing simply has to be achieved in our democratic society." He made no mention of homelessness – a Canadian social problem that did not exist in 1965.

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2 Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, *Report on Homeless and Transient Men*, 1960, pages 1, 5, 8.

3 City of Toronto Planning Board, *Report on Skid Row*, 1977, p.2. The report is focussed on the declining numbers of rooming houses and flophouses for this population group.

Though gentrification was not yet a term in common usage, the report describes the process: "Today, because the inner city has become an attractive and desirable residential area for the young and affluent middleclass, extensive renovation of houses has occurred. As a result, the availability of low cost housing in Don Vale and Cabbagetown has decreased. This, along with the establishment of restaurants or specialty stores catering to these new residents, has resulted in a shrinkage of the geographic area of skid row and a decline in the extent of services provided by the private sector for the skid row population." (p.5)

In addition, starting in that post-war period, people who needed to be protected during difficult economic times and supported in ill health and old age received the assistance they needed. Universal health insurance, Unemployment Insurance, Old Age Pensions, and the Canada Assistance Plan were all introduced or improved as national cost-shared programs during those years. We had a federal urban renewal program followed by a Neighbourhood Improvement Program and a federal Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. Canadians in poor-quality housing were, year by year, obtaining new housing, as the suburbs were built and as rental housing, public and private, was being constructed. About 20,000 social housing units were created every year following the 1973 amendments to the *National Housing Act*.

In introducing the 1973 housing legislation, the Minister of Urban Affairs, a federal ministry we no longer have today but which existed during most of the 1970s, clearly asserted that our society has an obligation to see that all people are adequately housed.

> When we talk … about the subject of housing, we are talking about an elemental human need – the need for shelter, for physical and emotional comfort in that shelter. When we talk about people's basic needs – the requirements for survival – society and the government obviously have an obligation to assure that these basic needs of shelter are met.

> I have already acknowledged this obligation in stating that good housing at reasonable cost is a social right of every citizen of this country. … [This] must be our objective, our obligation, and our goal. The legislation which I am proposing to the House today is an expression of the government's policy, part of a broad plan, to try to make this right and this objective a reality.[4]

Would we have the social problem of homelessness today if this 1970s philosophy had continued through the 1980s and 1990s, to the present day? I think not. We need to hear a similar speech by the government in the House of Commons today.

HOMELESSNESS PRESENT

This brings us to the present, and the period that started in the early 1980s.

By the 1980s Canada clearly had a social problem that was and is called *homelessness*.

The proceedings of Canada's 1987 national IYSH conference, for example, included a document endorsed by the conference, called the "Canadian Agenda for Action on Housing and Homelessness through the Year 2000." This agenda included the following explicit summary of the federal government's failure to take action on the growing national affordable housing crisis.

> A significant component of the homelessness problem is that housing has not been a high priority for governments at any level…. [O]nly a small proportion of government resources are directed to improving housing conditions…. In all regions of the country, the demand for housing that is adequate and affordable to low-income persons and the willingness of local organizations ready to build greatly exceed the availability of government funds to carry out effective social housing programs.[5]

This is a key reason why we began to have the widespread social problem we call homelessness in the 1980s. The initial cutbacks in social housing and related programs began in 1984. The government ignored the 1987 Agenda for Action. In 1993 all federal spending on the construction of new social housing was terminated and in 1996 the federal government further removed itself from low-income housing supply by transferring responsibility for most existing federal social housing to the provinces.

Homeless-ness

Researchers rightly refer to homelessness as "an odd-job word, pressed into service to impose

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4 Ron Basford, Minister of State for Urban Affairs, introducing the 1973 NHA amendments, Canada, House of Commons, March 15, 1973, p.2257.

5 *New Partnerships – Building for the Future: Proceedings of the Canadian Conference to Observe the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, September 13-16,* Ottawa: Canadian Association of Housing and Renewal Officials, 1988.

order on a hodgepodge of social dislocation, extreme poverty, seasonal or itinerant work, and unconventional ways of life."[6]

The word *homeless* has been used throughout history. Adding the suffix –less means without: without home. To be homeless, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), is to have "no home or permanent abode." This word is clear and simple. In a recent update to the OED, likely due to the widespread and unfortunate use of the designation "the homeless," the OED added the word *homeless* as a noun with the definition: "homeless people as a class." There is no entry in the OED for *homelessness*.

By the early 1980s we needed a new term for a widespread mass phenomenon, a new social problem found in many wealthy, developed nations. The response was to add yet another suffix to further qualify the word *homeless*, to give us that odd-job word, *homeless-ness*.[7] Adding the suffix −ness makes the simple and clear word *homeless* into an abstract concept. As such, it allows users, readers, and listeners to imagine whatever they want. It tosses all sorts of problems into one handy term. We thus have the ongoing problem of defining what homeless-*ness* is and isn't. There is no single correct definition, given the different mix of problems that goes into the hodgepodge of issues, and depending on who is using the term.

We, therefore, need to be careful when we use the words *homeless* and *homelessness*. While it is true that all societies through history tend to have some people who are homeless – without a home – we have not always had the set of social problems we associate with the word *homelessness*.

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6 Kim Hopper and Jim Baumohl (1996) "Redefining the Cursed Word," Chapter 1 of *Homelessness in America*, J. Baumohl, editor, Phoenix: Oryx Press, p. 3

7 A search of the *New York Times* historical database covering 1851 to 2005, for example, finds that the word *homelessness* was used in 4,755 articles, but that 87% of this usage (4,148 articles) was in the 20 years between 1985 and 2005. Before the 1980s, it is rare to find *homelessness* used to designate a social problem. The distinction here is use of *homelessness* to refer to a person or some people who are homeless versus its use in reference to a general societal situation, as a social problem or set of social problems. Source: analysis carried out by author.

Starting in the 1980s it was clear that *homelessness* referred to a poverty that includes being unhoused. It is a poverty that means being without required social supports. And it is poverty so deep that even poor-quality housing is not affordable. Canada has always had many people living in poverty. In the 1980s more and more people were not only poor, but also found themselves unhoused.

In short, we have not used the word *homelessness* for very long. It was rarely used before the 1980s. It is a catch-all term for a host of serious social and economic policy failures – more serious than in the past. Its widespread usage reflects what has happened to Canadian society – the way we organize who gets what, and our failure to have in place systems for meeting basic human needs in a universal, inclusive fashion. We were moving in that direction up to the 1980s.

There is one major exception to this failure to act and the decisions to weaken and terminate a host of social supports. We continued to build and strengthen our universal health care system. We could have and should have done this in the areas of housing, income, and support services. Poverty would likely have been reduced and Canadians would likely have little or need to define a new set of severe interrelated social problems by adding that suffix –ness to the word *homeless*.

Progress since the 1980s?

So here we are in Calgary today. Instead of reviewing and improving upon the progress made in the decades after the Depression and the Second World War and up to the 1980s, we have a very different agenda. Regrettably, it is not very different from the agenda of the 1987 Canadian Conference for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

Postwar progress in building a middle-income inclusive society in which everyone is adequately housed was halted. Instead of rehousing processes and mechanisms, we have had, for at least two decades now, dehousing processes and mechanisms. Before the 1980s, a natural disaster − earthquake, flood or ice storm − did not unhouse many thousands of Canadians and keep them unhoused. We, in fact, are quick to rehouse people

whenever a natural disaster leaves people homeless. But over the past two decades, instead of continuing public policies, including appropriate regulation of the private sector where necessary for the general public good, we did the opposite. We now have a huge social service, health and mental health sector focused on dehoused people. This requires special skills and knowledge.

Over the past two decades we relied on an increasingly deregulated society in which the "genius of market forces" would meet our needs, in which the tax cuts, made possible by program spending cuts that usually benefited poor and average income people, were supposed to "trickle down" to benefit those in need. The competitive economy required, we were told, wage suppression and part-time jobs with no benefits. We may now be entering a new, very different period caused by the global financial crisis, although this remains to be seen.

I used to be able to say that no one in Canada was born homeless. Unfortunately, with so many homeless families in temporary shelters, children are today being born into unhoused families across the country. We now have many Canadians who have first-hand experience of being unhoused. Here is a quote from one such very experienced Canadian veteran of homelessness:

> I don't ever want to go back to being homeless. I'd rather try to do something to prevent that happening, because everybody deserves their own place to call home.

This Canadian veteran of homelessness is a 12-year-old Calgary girl.

Filmmaker Laura Sky and Street Nurse Cathy Crowe are currently chronicling the plight of homeless families with children in their documentary project called *Home Safe*. *Home Safe* is a four-part film series in what will be the keystone of a national community development initiative on family homelessness. The first of the four films, *Home Safe Calgary*, is being shown at this conference.[8]

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8 *Home Safe Calgary* is directed by award-winning film-maker Laura Sky. Street nurse, advocate and author Cathy Crowe is the executive producer. *Home Safe Calgary* will

What should we do?

In our sessions at this conference we need to reflect on whether we are making progress on this hodgepodge of conditions we call *homelessness*. Someday someone will review all the programs and proceedings of Canada's conferences on homelessness. They will assess and attempt to explain the extent to which progress is being made or whether the same issues and topics are continually being discussed and whether the same conclusions are being drawn and the same recommendations are being made.

I fear such a review will conclude that to some degree, we are simply spinning our wheels.

If this is the case, and I believe it is, why? Why are we spinning our wheels? We need to approach the issue in a better, more carefully defined manner.

We need to recognize that action must take places at three levels: the level of individuals and families; the community level, with initiatives at the local and municipal level; and the macro (federal and provincial) level, where the resources − for the most part, our tax dollars − are located. The failure to act appropriately at all three levels means that partial efforts have little chance of success – if success mean having fewer homeless people and a dramatically smaller need for expensive services for homeless people.

We are here because major supports for people who find themselves in difficult situations were withdrawn to save money and to decrease the size and role of government, and to allegedly make the economy more competitive. But this was and is a one-sided bargain. The costs and the benefits go to different social strata.

Our federal finance department issues an annual report called *Fiscal Reference Tables*. How's

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tour across the country for community screenings and work-shops. It is available for use by colleges and universities, community groups and activists, teachers and school boards and is part of a tool kit of materials to help plan local strategies for action and change. For more information contact Sky Works at (416) 536 6581; info@skyworksfoundation.org; skyworksfoundation.org To order DVDs contact V-Tape at (416) 351 1317; wan-dav@vtape.org; www.vtape.org.

that for an exciting title? But the document is more informative than the budget and the speeches and claims of our political leaders. We get a 30- and 40-year summaries of trends. These indicate how much capacity we have as Canadians to address serious social problems.

One example is the trend in federal programs that provide support for (direct transfers to) individuals and families. This spending equalled about 5% of the GDP through the 1970s and 1980s, reaching 6% in 1993. Last year it was 3.8% of GDP.

The trend is the same with federal transfers to other levels of government. It averaged about 4% of GDP in the 1970s and 1980s. It is now about 3% of GDP.[9]

The federal surpluses of the past decade − note that Canada is the only OECD country to have such surpluses − the ability to pay down some of the debt, the huge federal tax cuts to higher-income individuals and corporations, and the recent cut in the GST, all came from federal budget cuts, some of which left the most vulnerable without the ability to achieve a minimum standard of living, including adequate, secure housing.

In view of these trends, which need to be reversed, I see three areas of action that we must focus on.

1. Housing

The first is housing. We need to recognize the central importance of adequate, affordable housing and help achieve more action at the federal and provincial levels on the affordable housing agenda.

We need to separate out the one common feature shared by all homeless people from all the other complex social situations associated with the word *homelessness*. The best summary of the core of the problem came from long-time U.S. housing researcher and activist Cushing Dolbeare about 10 years ago. It is a statement I quote often. She wrote:

The one thing all homeless people have in common is a lack of housing. Whatever other problems they face, adequate, stable, affordable housing is a prerequisite to solving them. Homelessness may not be *only* a housing problem, but it is *always* a housing problem; housing is necessary, although sometimes not sufficient, to solve the problem of homelessness.[10]

Some people have denied this claim, saying that homelessness is *not* a housing problem. Housing is an expensive problem to address. It is simpler and cheaper to blame people for their personal failures. We all have our personal failures. But only for some does it mean finding themselves and their families unhoused.

Is it right that we have two kinds of health and mental health care: one for the housed population and another for the unhoused population? Is it right when we have all the evidence we need about the health impacts, including premature death, of being unhoused for any extended period of time?

Is it right that we work to create more and better emergency shelters rather than assisting unhoused people to settle into adequate, stable and affordable housing?

Is it right to give priority to the homeownership sector and to ignore the rental and social housing sectors? Is it right that Canada does not have a tenure-neutral housing system, meaning that owners and renters are treated very differently in terms of subsidies and helpful regulations?

Though many will agree with what I am saying, the huge imbalance in the allocation of resources continues. We have limited resources for the prevention of dehousing and for quick rehousing. Most resources and professional attention are focused on supporting people in their homelessness. This is the situation in which we are stuck today.

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9 Canada, Department of Finance, *Fiscal Reference Tables*, September 2008, Table 8.

10 Cushing N. Dolbeare, 1996, "Housing Policy: A General Consideration," in *Homelessness in America*, 1996, p, 34.

2. The Cause and the Solution: Housing, Income, Support Services

The second thing we need to do is to recognize that homelessness is not a complex problem. Yes, I did say that it is *not* a complex problem.

After all these years of research and policy analysis and documenting the lived experience of those affected and those who provide support services, we know what the causes of the problem are. That means we know what the solutions are.

When individuals or families run into serious difficulty in one or more of the three key areas that support a decent standard of living, they may find themselves unhoused and potentially on a downward spiral. The three areas are: housing, income, and support services. Starting in the 1980s, more and more individuals and families could not afford housing, or could not find jobs or income support at a living wage, or could not obtain appropriate addiction or mental health support.

An adequate standard of living means that a good society not only ensures that good-quality health care is available to everyone, but also access to adequate housing, employment at a living wage, and essential support services must also be available for everyone, not just those who can afford them.

3. Take legal action: A Court Challenge; Homelessness is a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

A third area of action is one wealthy people and corporations use frequently to get what they want and to obtain redress where their rights have been violated. There are many modes of seeking change in democratic societies. One is through the court system.

Everyone has the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing. These are among the fundamental human rights in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, a human rights treaty that Canada ratified in 1976.

But what do these social and economic rights mean if our government ignores them? Are they even enforceable under our Charter of Rights and Freedoms? We will soon find out.

A Charter challenge is being launched. I will read four sentences from an early draft of the pleading that is currently being written and revised. This conveys the urgency and serious nature of the human rights violation that homelessness represents.

> As the facts of the present case make clear, adequate housing is a fundamental prerequisite to the security of the person. The lack of adequate housing creates hopelessness, vulnerability to violence, loss of self-esteem, social isolation, ill health and early death. The lack of adequate housing prevented the applicants from making "basic choices going to the core of what it means to enjoy individual dignity and independence." The challenged government measures – both government action and government failures to act – reflect disregard for "the well-being of the living person" and disrespect "for the intrinsic value of human life and ... the inherent dignity of every human being." By making it impossible to maintain a level of existence compatible with human life at a socially acceptable standard of physical and mental health, security, dignity, human decency and self-respect, the Respondents [the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario] violated the Applicants' right to life, liberty and security of the person.[11]

The court will be asked to declare that our government's failure to take reasonable measures to respond to the crisis of homelessness violates the right to security of the person and to equality for disadvantaged groups under sections 7 and 15 of the Charter. The remedy being sought is that the government should be given a reasonable period, perhaps six months, to design and implement a strategic response to homelessness. Such a response must include, at a minimum, a national and

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11   Godbout v. Longueil (City), [1997] 3 S.C.R. 844 at para. 66, per LaForest J; *Victoria* v. *Adams*, [2008] B.C.J. No. 1935 at para. 143; , *Rodriguez* v. *B.C. (A.G.)*, [1993] 3 S.C.R. 519 at 585, *per* Sopinka J. see also, M. Jackman, Protection of Welfare rights Under the Charter, 20:2 Ottawa L. Rev. 257.

provincial housing strategy, with consultation with affected groups, a timetable, a reporting and monitoring regime, outcome measurements, and a complaints mechanism.

Interestingly, this year, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, after a review of Canada's human rights record, asked Canada to agree to do the same thing. Under the review process, Canada is required to consider recommendations made by members of the Human Rights Council on how it can better comply with its international human rights obligations. Not surprisingly, the Council expressed concern that one of the richest countries in the world has allowed poverty and homelessness to reach epidemic proportions. They have recommended that Canada adopt a Poverty Elimination Strategy that integrates social and economic rights, such as the right to adequate housing, ensuring that those denied access to adequate housing can go to the courts or to a human rights tribunal to enforce their rights. Members of the Council also recommended an enhanced program to address homelessness and poverty that would focus on the needs of Aboriginal communities, single mothers, women with disabilities, parents forced to relinquish children because of homelessness, and other vulnerable groups. These are precisely the groups that are bringing forward the Charter challenge.

The Government of Canada must inform the United Nations by June of this year whether it accepts these recommendations or not. Surely in the face of this economic crisis, we should expect our government to take up the challenge of the UN recommendations, and together with the provinces, territories, civil society and indigenous organizations, entrench and implement the right to adequate housing as a human right in Canada.

This Charter challenge will be accompanied by a national community educational and advocacy campaign. You will be hearing more about this shortly.

HOMLESSNESS FUTURE

Sadly, the future of homelessness in Canada, that set of interrelated severe social problems, looks very bright. It does not have to. There are three possible future scenarios.[12]

> **1) Homelessness becomes routine**
> Homelessness can become a routine, normal part of our social and political landscape.

> **2) Homelessness is no longer a problem**
> Homelessness can cease to be a problem, as we make progress in changing and compensating for the homeless making processes that are at work.

> **3) Homelessness worsens**
> Homelessness, as well as other manifestations of poverty, could become much worse as our support systems are further weakened and our public priorities remain elsewhere.

The seeds of each scenario exist in the present.

Homeless Makers and Homeless-Making Processes

The question I raised at the opening remains. Why does homelessness persist? What I refer to as "homelessness present" is about 25 years old.

Who is in favour of homelessness? Who lobbies for homelessness? Which economists tell us homelessness is good for the economy? If no one is doing these things, why does homelessness persist?

Homelessness does not occur in a social or political vacuum. The events that make people homeless are initiated and controlled by other people. The primary purpose of these activities of others is not to make people homeless

> but, rather, to achieve socially condoned aims such as making a living, becoming rich, obtaining a more desirable home, increasing the efficiency at the workplace, promoting the growth of cultural institutions, giving cities a competitive advantage, or helping local or federal governments to balance their budgets or limit their debts. Homelessness occurs as a side effect.

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12 See: Ralph S Hambrick Jr. and Gary T. Johnson, "The future of homelessness," *Society*, Sept./Oct., 1998.

This statement is from an insightful 1992 article called "Homeless-Making Processes and Homeless Makers."[13] Homelessness is the "natural" outcome of the way we have organized our housing system, and the way we allocate or fail to allocate income and support services when they are desperately needed.

Though no one favours homelessness, many contribute to it by doing what societal norms and government laws and regulations allow.

For a long time sociologists and social policy experts have recognized the especially difficult nature of some social problems – which is why some persist. Here is one explanation:

> a social problem is an enterprise in finding ways of getting something done or prevented, while not interfering with the rights, interests, and activities of all those who are involved in the failure to do, or the persistence in doing, what is the subject of the problem.[14]

This is not a new observation. It comes from a 1925 article on the nature of social problems. This refers to what we might call the tyranny of the status quo. A significant majority, or at least an influential minority, are doing fine and benefit from the changes that were made in the 1980s to the present.

So keeping things the same and tinkering at the edges, acting *only* at the local community level and individual level of the problem, without addressing the larger dynamics that are producing the problem in the first place, means, obviously, that the problem will persist.

By tossing a broad set of socially undesirable outcomes under the rubric of homelessness, society can recognize and condemn the undesirable social outcome we call homelessness. No one I know of is in *favour* of homelessness. But simply condemning the problem while at the same time not doing anything to change the social dynamics that produce the undesirable outcomes, means that things will stay the same or worsen. In addition, the social dynamics creating the problem remain unnamed, subsumed under the rubric of the abstract term *homelessness*. The homeless-makers carry on their work and the homeless-making processes continue.

It is up to us which of the three potential future scenarios for homelessness will play out. The second, in which homelessness disappears, is still possible. We have the knowledge and the resources.

In closing, we are fortunate to have this opportunity to come together over these three days, to network and share what we know and to learn from one another.

The broad, messy mix of serious social problems we call *homelessness* will not go away by itself. We have an advantage, in that we are perhaps on the cusp of a new era in social and economic policy, due to the global financial crisis. It is a time to think more broadly than we have in the past.

We need to focus on the bigger picture – we need to take action on the three causes, and thus the three solutions, to homelessness: adequate housing, adequate income, and adequate support services to meet the basic human needs that define an adequate standard of living for all.

I hope these remarks are helpful as we embark on this three-day journey. I am convinced this is not a difficult problem so long as we frame it properly and work at all three levels.

Growing Home — Housing and Homelessness in Canada

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13   Rene I. Jahiel, "Homeless-Makers and Homeless Making Processes," Chapter 18 in *Homeless: A Prevention-Oriented Approach*, R.I. Jahiel, editor, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, p.269.

14   L.K. Frank, "Social Problems, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 30(4), 1925:468.