

THE DEATH OF THE HONOURABLE HUGH SEGAL

The passing of the Honourable Hugh Segal on August 9 reminds many of us of the struggle to achieve a Guaranteed Livable Income, for which he advocated throughout his adult life. His 2019 publication, *Bootstraps Need Boots: One Tory's Lonely Fight to End Poverty in Canada*, is both a memoir and a manifesto.

Of course, the fight to end poverty is no partisan struggle, as a close reading of Canadian political history over the past half-century and more clearly shows. In an era of social policy advances, Dr. Joe Willard, Deputy Minister of Welfare in the Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau Governments, wrote a report on social development policy late in the Sixties urging an income maintenance program. This would be an advance on the Canada Assistance Plan established by the Pearson Government.

As the Liberal Party prepared for a policy convention in Ottawa in November 1970, a ginger group at the University of Western Ontario issued a broadside about inequality in Canada and called for action. The London resolution calling for implementation of an income maintenance scheme for Canada did not make it to the convention, but a motion calling for a guaranteed annual income program to be instituted by January 1, 1972, was supported by a vote of 595 to 250, even though Prime Minister Trudeau had told delegates at the opening session that Canada could not afford a guaranteed income plan.

Failure to act on the recommendations of the Carter Commission on Taxation would have fateful consequences. Prior to the Constitutional Conference of First Ministers in Victoria in June 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau offered 50% federal funding to any province establishing a guaranteed income program. Premier Ed Schreyer's Manitoba Government responded by establishing a pilot project based in part in the Dauphin area. Federal funding was ended by spending cuts the Trudeau Government instituted in 1977, and University of Manitoba Professor Evelyn Forget has only recently been able to assess how the people--and the province--benefited from the project while it lasted.

Eighteen years later, the Chrétien Government responded to similar financial pressures by gutting Canadian social assistance programs. Among the most significant cuts was abolition of the Canada Assistance Plan in Paul Martin's 1995 budget, which allowed Ontario Premier Mike Harris to establish the Ontario Works program and thus force unemployed Ontarians to starve ever since—and through several changes of government!

The need for a guaranteed livable income becomes more obvious with every day that passes. Exacerbating the plight of so many people in our communities is the fact that there is far too little social housing and that housing cooperatives have received little encouragement for decades.

(Dr. A. Ernest Epp, known by all as Ernie Epp, served as MP for Thunder Bay-Nipigon 1984-88 and is now Professor Emeritus of History at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario. His email address is: eepp@lakeheadu.ca)