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Minimum wage should be a living wage

May 9 '06
P. A. G.

BY LESLIE LYNN KENNEDY

• TELEGRAM FORUM •

Minimum wage may very well have been what young people made at part-time jobs to finance their social and educational lives, but today it's often what families are trying to feed, clothe and educate themselves and their children on.

Minimum wage is a hot topic these days, and I want to add my voice to support those who want to raise it (regardless of age).

It's good that it has increased, since it costs a lot more to go to a movie these days than it did 20-odd years ago, when I was beating around Prince of Wales Collegiate and Memorial University, but my middle-class blinders prevented me from seeing, until recently, how much more serious the situation is than that. Do you?

Minimum wage may very well have been what young people made at part-time jobs to finance their social and educational lives, but today it's often what families are trying to feed, clothe and educate themselves and their children on. With our technological world spinning ever faster, the skills and education being demanded of workers is getting almost ridiculous. One consequence of this, apparently, is that the gap between the very rich and the very poor is widening and the space in between is disappearing. Our traditional middle class will either have to ratchet it up a notch (hello, therapy and antidepressants ... if you have a really good health plan) or join the working poor and learn what it really means to have financial problems (Little Justin may have to pawn that Ipod and Jessica had better hope the local second-hand clothes store has prom dresses in her size).

Canada is a wealthy nation and it makes no sense to me why we do not provide our fellow citizens with at

least a living wage. When I say "living," I only mean that. There should not be a single person in this nation who cannot get a job that provides the opportunity for safety, decent shelter, food and clothes, as well as quality day care, health care, pension and social support for other issues that are part of "living," such as sick children, sick parents, burst hot-water boilers, and family time like Christmas concerts, homework and picking up a kindergarten at lunch — not because you have to, but because you want to and you can.

Many challenges

We have lived in a fortunate age where hard work meant reward, but already there are signs that perhaps it's no longer enough.

Young people face tough issues. What if their parents made too much

money to get them a student loan but not enough to pay the tuition for the training they need? What if they had the grades for admission but not for scholarships? What if they manage to get post-secondary education but are crippled by debt or can't afford the clothes, hairstyle or dental work they need to create the right image to get a job (Yes, good dental work is a signal of the kind of cultural capital that makes a difference to employers).

What if no one in their family ever went beyond high school and always managed to get by? What if their parents never knew the importance of reading to their child or had to work so hard themselves that they did not have time to help with homework? What if a single parent needed them to either help financially or work at home? What if they wanted to fish with their parents but the quota got cut?

Plato once said individual equality is the condition, not the goal, of a just social order. Maybe if government and business thought on *that* for awhile, the amount of money required for a living wage wouldn't be an issue. Either that, or let them live on minimum wage for a couple of months (in a low-rent apartment, with no credit cards and no car, and no health insurance to cover their prescriptions).

I bet that would be an eye-opener.

I bet individual equality feels different on minimum wage.

Maybe we voters should take a turn at it, too.

Leslie Lynn Kennedy
writes from St. John's.

Where's the welcome mat?

The welcome to Alberta is definitely cool towards Newfoundlanders and a recent article in your paper ("Welcome in Alberta is cool," April 30) only reinforced my own experience.

I lived in Alberta for six years and I encountered overt hostility towards Newfoundlanders from Albertans. I have been called a "goofy Newfie," and told that Newfoundland is a fiscal burden on Albertan taxpayers. I was asked if Newfoundland had electricity and doctors. I felt unwanted among Albertans so when I finally returned to

musicians like Great Big Sea, listen to Rhodes Scholars like Rex Murphy on CBC, benefit economically from our doctors, nurses, engineers, tradespeople, teachers and yes, those guys who work the oil patch. Newfoundland's own Brad Gushue brought home the first gold medal in curling to both Alberta and the rest of Canada. Colourful politicians like Brian Tobin kept Canada united during the 1995 Quebec referendum.

Albertans who dislike Newfoundlanders should also remember that New-

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Editorial page editor: Joe Walsh,
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