

## The sobering ghost of Christmas present



By Nate Smelle

IF THERE IS one time of year when Canadians feel the crunch from the rising cost of living it is the holiday season. Not only is there the seasonal pressure to purchase as much as you can for as many of your loved ones as possible, there is also an expectation to feast and fill one's fridge and freezer with festive foods and drinks to share with those whom we gather to celebrate. The limited daylight and falling temperatures also add weight to the holiday price tag by driving up the cost of hydro and heat. One must also not forget the Christmas miracle at the pumps ? at least for the big oil executive class ? that magically boosts the price of gas each year just in time for everyone to travel and visit loved ones. As we all know, feeling the pinch on our personal resources during the holiday season is nothing new. It is fair to say that as long as people have been celebrating the holidays, there have been working class people struggling to make ends meet, keep the lights on, put food on the table, and so on; while at the same time keeping up with the above mentioned expectations to spend and consume. For some reason though, this year seems different. Maybe it's the influence of ?shrinkflation? sneakily driving up the cost of the holidays as we pay more for less. Perhaps it's the fact that our wages always seem to fall far short of what experts define as a ?living wage.? Certainly the wars in Ukraine and Gaza are also compelling the cost of fossil fuels to climb higher than usual at this time of year; which in turn raises the costs associated with the transportation of goods and services. Of course the damages caused by the recent record-breaking wildfire season, along with our repeated failure to take meaningful action on the climate crisis has translated into spending far more than we should have to on disaster recovery, infrastructure repairs, and home insurance premiums. In addition, disruptions to the supply chain as a result of such climate-related catastrophes have also inflated our grocery bills. With so much unnecessary drama in the world today it has never been clearer that the war we are waging on the planet, like those being fought by opposing forces around the globe, is essentially a war against ourselves and our potential for a sustainable and prosperous future. Many of those profiting the most from the current state of economic inequity will tell us that in order for everyone to prosper and succeed within our economic system, we first need to make the cost of doing business less for the big businesses which employ the most people. Anyone who buys into this philosophy ? also known as trickle down economics ? tends to maintain that the less ?burden? we place on the rich through corporate taxes and so-called ?red tape? the more opportunities they will create for everybody to succeed. However, considering this has basically been the modus operandi of our economic system since former U.S. president Ronald Reagan, along with ex-U.K. prime minister Margaret Thatcher, and former Canadian prime minister Brian Mulroney hijacked the global economy, by unleashing a wave of privatization that is still obliterating public services in the name of ?fiscal responsibility? to this day, by now we know better. Our politicians know this as well. I believe that is why our current MPP in Hastings?Lennox and Addington Ric Bresee has refused to answer any questions about his government's plans to privatize our public health care system for almost a year now. Is he not proud of the Ford government's ?Buck-a-beer? health care strategy? Their plan to privatize public health care was never a secret ? unlike

the premier's failed attempt to pave over the Greenbelt ? and Ontarians still decided to hand him a majority and enable him to do pretty much anything his developer friends and corporate handlers tell him to do. Nevertheless, this is not the time to dwell in the negativity of our current situation in Ontario. It is almost Christmas and we are once again getting ready to head into a new year full of possibilities. Who knows what the future will hold! Perhaps 2024 will be the year when we finally get real about the inequity and injustice we willfully ignore in the name of profits that will never trickle down into our wallets. Only then will we realize that we the people ultimately have the power to turn this ship around and start heading in more sustainable and prosperous direction. For now though, it is a time to make merry and spread peace, joy, and love. As we are aware, each of these all-important items on our holiday agendas are only achievable for everyone when we are blessed with a functioning economic system; one that respects the undeniable truth of our interconnectedness with all life on Earth, including each other. This is why it is critical that we take a good hard look at our economy while the crunch is on this holiday season, so that we might see where it is failing and where it is succeeding. In doing so, we may better understand what we can build on and what needs to change. With this knowledge, and the wisdom to apply it, our potential to build a better society, one that gives priority to the health and well-being of people and the planet over the short-term profits of a few already obscenely wealthy individuals, is virtually limitless.