

The year that will please nobody

By Bill Kilpatrick

It's that time again when we editorial writers pen our final editorials for the year, and this seems like an important one to say the least. As we head into 2025, I must say that I am not optimistic about the year that lies ahead, given the year that just ended. It's not easy to pick a topic at such a momentous time in history. Do I write a recap piece about what happened over the last year? Or something else? I think the last year could be summed up in three words, Trump, war, and inflation. Yet, so many other words and issues come to mind such as such as hypocrisy, climate change, record profits, along with homelessness, misery, and drug addiction and on and on. I heard it said many times while I was a municipal councillor that, 'If everything is a priority, then nothing is a priority.' It's often overwhelming for me, and many others I would imagine, when we consider the myriad of problems facing the planet these days. In fact, it can be paralyzing. Which problem needs the most urgent attention? What can I do about it? How can I actually make a difference in my community, in my province, in my country, or in the world when everything seems in crisis? These are questions that we as humans all must face at some point. What is my purpose on this planet? What is worth living for and what is worth dying for? How can I be the best person that I can be without causing harm to others in the process? And therein lies the rub of everything we do, or subsequently do not do: for every action or inaction there is an equal and opposite reaction. I may think that I'm doing good by spreading false information that I believe is true, or conversely, I may think I'm doing good by spreading facts that I know to be true, and both can have negative or positive consequences depending on whose ears they fall on and how that person deals with and interprets that information. It also depends on how we define positive or negative. Life is not black and white, positive or negative, good or bad, and nothing is ever guaranteed, no matter what we do and that is life in a nutshell. Life is never guaranteed, all we can do is live it the best we can, but what is that 'best' way? Since the fall of communism in the 1990s we have lived in a unipolar world that has been dominated by the United States and their neo-liberal economic policies. That system has rules, and those rules often dictate how we will behave or at least limit our options. Our best lives, therefore, are limited to the rules of the system and the best life that it will allow us to have. While there is an underlying belief that we all have freedom of choice and anyone can live their best life in this system, we now know that this is in fact not true, and while there are minor exceptions, the vast majority of us are being prohibited from reaching that best life, a life that is highly dependent on our level of income. One thing that I think will define 2025 is the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots which will only equal one thing: more conflict. Billionaires and the wealthy in our system are afforded the right to live the best life they want, in fact many of them are even above the law, while the rest of us have to live with the consequences of their actions and inactions. The French economist Thomas Piketty, author of *Capital in the Twenty First Century* pointed out that, 'indeed, if capital ownership were equally distributed and each worker received an equal share of profits in addition to his or her wages, virtually no one would be interested in the division of earning between profits and wages. If the labour-capital split gives rise to so many conflicts, it is due first and foremost to the extreme concentration of the ownership of capital.' And there can be no doubt that we live in a time of extreme wealth and extreme poverty. The people who helped plan the post Second World War economy knew that extreme wealth would breed misery, and that misery would breed extremism and division, but those currently in power would like us to believe that the welfare state was bad and that concentrated wealth is something normal and natural. It is not. As historian Tony Judt points out, 'Far from dividing the social classes against each other, the European welfare state bound them closer together than ever before, with a common interest in its preservation and defense.' Our enemies are those who destroyed this system and will not allow its return. Our current world of misery, extremism, and division is the result the dismantling of the economic plans that were put in place after the Second World War, plans that were meant to prevent a return to boom-bust cycles and the concentration of wealth. In its place is a system that allows the greediest to run wild with no rules. And when things go bad, as they inevitably do when there are no limits, we, the taxpayers, will bail them out. This has already happened multiple times and it's only a matter of time before it happens again. So, as we move into 2025 and history, it seems, is once again repeating itself, I will leave you with some wise words, that also serve as a warning, by the historian Tony Judt, from his award-winning book *Postwar: A history of Europe since 1945*, where he says: 'The economics of planning drew directly upon the lessons of the 1930s - a successful strategy for post-war recovery must preclude any return to economic stagnation, depression, protectionism and above all unemployment. The same considerations lay behind the creation of the modern European welfare state. In the conventional wisdom of the 1940s, the political polarization of the last interwar decade were born directly of economic depression and its social costs. Both fascism and communism thrived on social despair, on the huge gulf separating rich and poor. If the democracies were to recover, the 'condition of the people' question must be

addressed. In the words of Thomas Carlyle a hundred years earlier, 'If something be not done, something will do itself one day, and in a fashion that will please nobody.'? I fear the next year will be the year that pleases nobody, nobody but the super wealthy that is.