

PANDEMIC MEANS PANDEMONIUM FOR THE POOR

By

Robin Philpot

"We're all in the same boat," they tell us. Oh yeah. A slave ship captain faced with a wild Atlantic storm might have said the same thing to restless slaves. But if he were an "Honest Abe," he would add that, although everybody is in the same boat, those slaves have to remain shackled down in the hold and, by the way, there are no lifeboats for them.

An exaggeration? No. Just replace shackles and the hold by overcrowded insalubrious housing, poverty and discrimination, the lifeboats by health insurance and housing for the privileged, and the captain by Donald Trump, and the portrait is complete.

Reports are piling up. Be it in Newark, Pittsburgh, Washington, DC, New York City or New Mexico, the poor, very often Black, Hispanic, Native American and other minorities, find themselves without a lifeboat, sick and dying at much higher rates than the rest of the population.

Similar statistics about Covid-19 and the poor are being reported in Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal, although not quite as dramatic. The incremental difference can be explained by Canada's universal public health care. But that incremental difference does not cancel out the glaring social and economic inequalities in both countries.

Covid-19 has shown that social and economic inequalities are now a question of life and death. Never again should they be relegated to that pile of banal political issues that politicians always promise to address but spend decades working to preserve them.

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