Against Housing: Homes as a Human Life Requirement

Jeff Noonan[1] and Josephine Watson[2]

ABSTRACT: The paper argues that human beings have a need for homes, not just housing. When this claim is unpacked at the proper level of complexity, it becomes apparent that the dominant mode of struggle for a right to housing is inadequate. Not only does the struggle for the right to housing operate at a level of abstraction removed from the material demands of need-satisfaction, it also fails to specify exactly what a right to housing is a right to. The paper explains the three dimensions of the need for homes (the physical need for shelter, the social need for a space in which one feels at home, and the political need to participate in struggles and movements that lead to the satisfaction of the first two dimensions of the need for homes). The paper concludes with a brief discussion of the practical implications of the political-philosophical claims.

KEYWORDS: Rights; Needs; Homelessness; Social Determinants of Health

Introduction

More than a century ago, in 1844, Friedrich Engels observed that working class housing was, "badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition" (Engels 1969: 106). He traced the privations the working classes suffered directly to the way in which housing markets allowed unscrupulous landlords to prey upon workers' need for space. Since workers had a need for housing but lacked the ability to pay for high quality accommodations, landlords exploited their need by making

---

[1] Jeff Nonnan is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Windsor. Email: jnoonan@uwindsor.ca

[2] Josephine Watson is a clinical nursing Instructor at the University of Windsor. Email: jwatson@uwindsor.ca

profits from renting deplorable hovels. Workers were crammed into "desolate, small, wretched huts, with no comforts whatsoever" (Engels 1969: 290). Workers were *housed*, one might say, but they lacked human *homes*. Later, in 1872, Engels published *The Housing Question,* in which he observed a direct link between poor health and housing among the working classes: "the so-called "poor districts" in which the workers are crowded together are the breeding places of all those epidemics" (Engels 1872: 24). What Engels demonstrated was that the problem of homelessness was not simply a problem of not having a roof over one's head, but also of not having access to *homes.*

Despite the many changes that have occurred since Engels' early observations, the crisis of homelessness still persists, even in the world's wealthiest countries. Estimates put the number of men, women, and children in Canada who experience homelessness at varying intervals and durations each year at 300,000, but we also know that many more Canadians who migrate to urban areas suffer from inadequate housing and shelter. On any given night, 35,000 Canadians will be absolutely homeless (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter 2014; Stock 2016). But as Engels argued, homelessness means more than absolute lack of shelter. Approximately 40% of people renting in Ontario have difficulty affording their space, while over 150,000 households in Ontario are on waiting lists for affordable housing, the average wait time being about 4 years (Monsebraaten 2016; Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario 2016). Yet under the flag of austerity, governments have stopped building public housing and cooperatives and have instead returned to a more or less unregulated real estate market to provide the "incentives" for private landlords to solve the housing crisis. As in Victorian Manchester, so too today: private landlords and developers have not solved the problem of homelessness, but left those who cannot afford to pay for living space out in the cold. When there is no political commitment to affordable housing, people become homeless. As a study conducted by one of the authors in Windsor confirmed, a primary reason for homelessness is lack of income. Forty-eight percent of the participants reported not having

permanent housing due to inability to pay (33% receiving monies from Ontario Works (OW) and 100% receiving monies from Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) (Watson, Crawley, Kane 2016). However, inability to pay market prices does not mean absence of the need for the good of which one is deprived.

The need for homes, as opposed to housing, i.e., a mere roof over one's head is, we will argue, three-dimensional. It involves, first, the physical need for shelter. This physical need is combined with a second, psycho-social need for domestic space under one's own control in which one is not only sheltered but "feels" at home. Finally, in conditions where many people are deprived of homes, a third, political dimension opens up, the need to participate in struggles and movements against the structural forces that generate homelessness, i.e., to help satisfy one's own needs through one's own individual agency in concert with others who together manifest the collective agency needed to solve problems democratically.

This needs-based approach to the problem of understanding the legitimacy of struggles for homes contrasts with the dominant rights-based approach. Typically, the struggle for homes has been and still is interpreted as a struggle for the human right to housing. While we do not disagree in any sectarian way with this approach, we will argue that the full implications of the struggle for homes are better understood from the standpoint of the principle that human beings *need* homes, not rights to housing. The needs-based approach better explicates the complexity of the life-value of homes and better illuminates the structural causes of homelessness. By better illuminating the structural causes, the needs-based approach points more clearly to what must be done to solve it: not struggles to secure a legal right in the abstract, but to take back urban space from control by capitalist developers, to make it truly public space in which the home-deprived can participate in the satisfaction of their need for homes. While our argument is not designed to shape short-term government policy or solve the nightly problem of homelessness, we do not think that it is without practical significance. Of course, in making

this distinction between houses and homes, and specifying that the human need for housing is really a need for a home in the sense given above, we recognise that in emergencies the bare physical minimum is better than the alternative. When there is a fire, it is necessary to call the fire department. But social criticism and transformative change go beyond putting out immediate fires. They must also think of fire protection (addressing the systemic causes) and engineering new materials that are fireproof (providing a permanent solution to the problem). That means, in the case of homes, freeing land, building materials, and architectural and construction labour from their subordination to capitalist real estate markets and the appropriation of all urban space by for-profit development.

Our argument will be divided in three sections. In the first, we will briefly distinguish mere housing from homes and argue that the human need for homes is more complex than the mere physical need for shelter. This examination will set the stage for a more detailed explanation of the political differences between needs-based and rights-based struggles to solve social problems, and an argument about why only a needs-based approach can solve the problem of homelessness in its full complexity. In the final section we will draw our analytical and critical arguments together by making some general, although still practically relevant, political conclusions regarding the overall significance of struggles against homelessness for the future of a democratic alternative to capitalism.

Homes, Not Housing

Our political argument turns on the claim that a needs-based approach to the problem of homelessness exposes important shortcomings of rights-based approaches. The first step to substantiating this claim is to explain the politically relevant sense of "need' and the full complexity of the human need for homes. In any use, the idea of need is connected to the idea of necessity. When one says they need something, they are asserting that unless they have access to that thing, they will not

be able to complete some goal or project. However, there are qualitative differences between the sorts of projects human beings can pursue. The qualitative differences are distinguished by the kind of necessity that characterises the project. If I want to watch the baseball game, I need a television or a computer, but there is no necessity to my having to watch the game, in the sense that nothing essential to my life and well-being is lost if I do not watch it. People sometimes speak in hyperbole and say: "if I miss that game, I will die." Since they go on living, it is obvious that they do not literally mean what they say.

However, there are things that we do need in this exigent way. If we are deprived of oxygen, or nutritious food, or water we *will* die. Thus, when we say we need food in order to live, we are not saying that we have a contingent need for an instrumental input into some project we could pursue or not pursue, but rather that our being able to access that good (or another which meets the same requirement) is a matter of absolute necessity (assuming only that we want to continue living). When we use the term "need" in our argument it is in this exigent way. We follow the definition worked out by John McMurtry: "N is a need, if, and only if, and to the extent that, deprivation of n always leads to a reduction of organic capability" (McMurtry 1998: 164). *These* needs, in contrast to what one might call instrumental needs relevant to a given contingent project, are non-optional *life-requirements* because, if they are not satisfied, the person suffers objective harm in the form of loss or reduction of the human life-capacities to think, move, feel, relate to others, and act as a social self-conscious agent. The harm is objective in the sense that it cannot be overcome simply through changing one's self-interpretation. If I *feel* harmed because I missed the ballgame, I can revise my self-interpretation to convince myself that watching baseball is a waste of time, so that I was better off missing it. But if my brain is damaged by oxygen deprivation, I cannot revise my self interpretation to make that brain damage disappear.

McMurtry's definition recognizes degrees and different concrete forms of harm. Not every form of deprivation leads to death or serious

cognitive impairment. Moreover, human beings are *integrally* natural and social, which means that we have a more complex set of needs than other animals, who for the most part require only physical inputs to maintain their health. Human beings have raw physical needs like oxygen, but they also have psycho-social needs, like loving attention; we have basic organic life-requirements like water, but also political needs like being able to participate in the determination of the laws we will be compelled to obey. Elsewhere one of the authors has developed a systematic account of the full range of fundamental human natural and socio-cultural needs, but it would take us too far afield to repeat those arguments here (Noonan 2012: 46-88). Instead, let us content ourselves with the general point that in the case of our physical needs it is our health that is impaired if we fail to meet them. In the case of social, political, and cultural needs, failure to satisfy them impairs the development of our social-self-conscious agency. Since it is obvious that human beings have the potential to become social-self-conscious agents, that is, *subjects* capable of determining their own goals and projects, harm to our social self-conscious agency is a real and objective harm, analogous to the organic harms that result from the deprivation of our physical needs.

When we turn now to homes, the need for them has three inter-related dimensions: a physical need for *shelter,* a psycho-social need for a home as a dwelling space for personal freedom, and a political need to participate in the processes by which homes are obtained and built. We will discuss each element of the complex need for homes in turn. Deprivation of our need for shelter causes a myriad of health problems. We can explicate the complex set of health problems homelessness causes through the social determinants of health. These are the social and economic conditions which shape lives and determine the health of individuals and societies in so far as they regulate the availability, quality, and quantity of social and economic resources that people need as social-organic beings (Mikkonen & Raphael 2010). We use them to help explain the damages that homelessness causes because they have revolutionized

the field of public health by politicising it. They break public health out of an abstract biologistic conception of health and its conditions by revealing, a)   that the incidence of disease is not only a function of pathogens, but overall life-conditions; b) that inequality of access to key social determinants negatively impacts health; and c) health is not simply optimal organic functioning but a holistic capacity to act as a free subject in which physical and mental capacities, social opportunities and biological functions are integrally united.

The social determinants of health model emerged as researchers sought to explain how experiences of daily living conditions in contexts of structural inequality of access to basic life-requirement satisfiers influenced the health of individuals within a population (Mikkonen & Raphael 2010). The term "social determinants of health" was first used by Blane, Brunner, and Wilkinson (1996) who were expanding upon then Canadian Minister of National Health and Welfare Marc Lalonde's, *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians* health field concept (Health and Welfare Canada 1974). Since 1996, the actual social determinants of health have been variously theorized in academic literature and numerous national and international policy documents (Rootman & O'Neill 2012). Access to homes has been identified as an independent variable for poorer health outcomes and is thus a key social determinant of health (Mikkonen & Raphael 2010). Lack of adequate and safe housing and the experience of material and social deprivation contribute to increased stress that affects physical and psychological health. (Galabuzi 2009). Health complications are associated with long periods of stress, especially when individuals feel that their ability to control their situation is threatened and limited. As Lippert and Lee (2015) confirm in their study of coping, stress, and mental health among homeless people, it is the cumulative stress that impacts psychological health most dramatically. Empirical research has established beyond a shadow of a doubt that cumulative stress causes heart disease, diabetes, and chronic illnesses (Marmot & Wilkinson 2006; McEwen 2004; Mikkonen & Raphael 2010).

When we look at homelessness through the lens of the social determinants of health, we can understand the true damage it causes to people's life and well-being. Let us return to Watson's study (which was rooted in the social determinants of health model) in order to substantiate these claims empirically. The broad aspects explored in this study pertaining to housing were: age when first homeless, number of years homeless, reasons for not having permanent housing, educational level, employment history and income. The earlier homelessness began, the more severe the negative impacts on physical, psychological and social development, because children and youth are especially vulnerable to the health consequences of the material and social deprivations involved in homelessness. The people in her study reported the following medical diagnoses: dental problems (33%), cardiac (29%), respiratory (24%), Hepatitis C positive (24%), HIV positive (5%), and foot problems (3%); psychological diagnoses most prevalent were anxiety (57%) and depression (52%). Forty-eight percent of the participants reported both anxiety and depression. While it may be easy to calculate medical and psychological diagnoses through self-report, it is not so easy to calculate the health toll on an individual's overall ability to realize their life-capacities in conditions of social and material deprivation. The study found that all the participants experienced social exclusion, which diminished their ability to access quality social supports (they felt ashamed), increased risky behaviours (especially drug use), and compromised physical and psychological health. Participants described various forms of marginalization, for example being restricted from shelter use due to substance abuse history (Watson, Crawley, Kane 2016).

As important as the physical dimensions of human beings are, we are not just bodies with physical needs, but thinking-feeling agents who interpret and evaluate the physical spaces in which we live and discriminate between places in which we "feel at home" and places in which we feel like strangers. A shelter, let us say, is the material basis out of which homes are built, but homes depend upon feeling at home in the shelter in which one dwells. If you couch-surf at a friend's place you are

sheltered, but if you do not feel at home, the *psycho-social* need for a home has not been met. Hence, there is a difference between being sheltered and having a home. Henri Lefebvre makes the point eloquently: "*Dwelling*, a social and yet poetic act, generating poetry and art work, fades in the face of housing, an economic function. The 'home,' so clearly evoked and celebrated in the work of Gaston Bachelard, likewise vanishes: the magic place of childhood, the home as womb and shell…Confronted with functional housing, constructed according to technological dictates, inhabited by users in homogenous, shattered space, it sinks and fades into the past" (Lefebvre 2014: 766). Just as the unemployed, in order to live fulfilling human lives do not need (as the mantra goes) "jobs" but meaningful, non-alienated labour, so too, the homeless, to satisfy their need in a fully human way, do not need "housing" (i.e., any shelter whatsoever) but homes. That is, they need a private space within social space in which they *feel* at one with the space. Feeling at home enables people to gather themselves, reflect, relax, and renew themselves for the hard business of living.

In social contexts in which a significant number of people are deprived of homes as both shelter and as dwelling space, a third dimension of need opens up: the political need to be engaged in movements to overcome (or at least mitigate) the structural causes of deprivation. Human beings have political needs to participate in the determination of the forces and laws that structure their own lives because they have the capacity to become subjects, self-determining social self-conscious agents. If we were nothing but the objects of natural and social laws and forces, there would be no need to participate in the determination of those forces and laws, because we would lack all capacity to shape them. We keep our cat safe and secure, but we do not consult her about the household budget, because she lacks the capacity to participate in a meaningful discussion of alternative priorities. But human beings do have the capacity to participate in political discussions, and if we are deprived of the opportunity to satisfy the need to help shape those forces that shape our lives, we are harmed in our social self-

conscious agency. This harm takes the form of alienation, exploitation, and oppression. This point is relevant to the problem of homelessness because it means that merely providing housing for the homeless (shelters, public housing) without involving them in the satisfaction of their needs might solve the problem of shelter, but leaves unaddressed the deeper dimension of oppression, because it leaves the need-deprived in the status of mere objects of benevolent social policy and not (as the non-need deprived think of themselves) self-determining agents who satisfy their needs through their own individual and cooperative efforts. In order to understand this point more fully, we must shift to examine the political differences between a rights and needs-based approach to solving social problems.

The Political Implications of Needs-based Struggle

As with most other major social problems, the dominant approach to the solution of the problem of homelessness is to remind governments that housing has been recognized as a human right and to demand that they make good their rhetorical commitment to human rights in general by allocating funds to build affordable housing. In the case of housing, Article 25(1) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* asserts that housing is a human right, as does *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966/1976). In 2007, Miloon Kothari, United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Right to Adequate Housing reprimanded Canada for its homelessness crisis and for not fulfilling its obligations to the covenant.

In February 2016, Canada was again criticized by the UN agency responsible for monitoring enforcement of *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966/1967) for its lack of progress in solving the problem. The report criticised Canada for the "absence of a national housing strategy; inadequate housing subsidy within the social assistance benefit; shortage of social housing units; increased evictions related to rental arrears; increased numbers of homeless and lack of homelessness prevention; shortage of emergency

shelters; laws that penalize people for being homeless; lack of adequate housing for people with psycho-social and intellectual disabilities; and the poor housing conditions of Canada's indigenous peoples" (Monsebraaten 2016). We of course concur with this criticism of decades of government inattention to the growing problem of homelessness, and do not disagree, in any dogmatic way, with the appeal to the right as a tactic of shaming governments into resuming their responsibilities for public investment in affordable housing. However, we want to argue that if access to housing is a right, it is a right because human beings have the sort of complex need for homes discussed in the previous section. If we accept that a) people have this complex need for homes and b) that it is *systematically* ignored by the normal operation of real estate markets and government policy, then c) it follows that homelessness is a structural problem of the normal operations of the socio-economic system, which prioritises profitable investment over need satisfaction. Since, as we will now argue, rights are also a normal part of this same system, they cannot, on their own, solve the problem of the unmet complex need for homes. Thus, in order to understand the limits of a rights-based solution to the problem of homelessness, we must understand the role rights have historically played in capitalism, and in order to understand the role they have played in capitalism, we must think of capitalist society not only as a functional economic system, a mode of producing and distributing commodities, but also as a value-system which legitimates its way of producing and distributing commodities *as good* for those who live within it.

Few if any societies have ever reproduced themselves solely on the basis of coercion, force, and overt political violence. Human societies, even the most oppressive, typically appeal to sets of norms that determine for a given socio-cultural system what is good and what is bad, and identify their social system with the unique conditions that allow that good to flourish (McMurtry 1998: 15). The threat of force against opponents is thus *legitimated* by appeal to the good that opponents threaten to ruin by their oppositional activity. If a majority can be

convinced of the legitimacy of the value system, they will comply with its demands, making the need for overt violence unnecessary, and also creating citizens who will protect the integrity of the system against opponents, even in cases where, objectively speaking, the opponents make demands which are in the interests of the citizens. Liberal-democratic capitalist societies are unique in the history of social organization for building in self-correcting mechanisms in the form of means of legitimate protest and social change. Rights have, since the eighteenth century, been essential to this self-correcting mechanism. The rights of citizens establish that which citizens may legitimately demand of their governments, and the formal procedures of democratic politics are the accepted means for pursuing these protests. In one sense, the legitimacy of protest and opposition represents a great historical victory over alien and oppressive political and social power. It comes, however, with built in limitations.

Marx was the first to understand the systematic limitations of citizenship rights as the political means to achieve the social conditions for human freedom. In *On the Jewish Question*, he demonstrated that the condition of granting citizenship rights was their separation from the "private" economic sphere. In the political realm people are considered equal citizens, but this equal citizenship did not entail material equality in the sphere of production (Marx 1977: 153). On the contrary, in the sphere of production other laws prevail: the laws of self-interest, pursuit of individual advantage, and the distribution of income and advantage according to market forces (Marx 1986: 43). While the development of social rights in the twentieth century ameliorated to some extent (in the wealthiest capitalist countries) the gross deprivations of the Industrial Revolution and Victorian capitalism, they do not contest the dynamics of the capitalist system as a whole, its prioritization of private profit of comprehensive and universal need satisfaction, or legitimate the mobilization of oppressed and exploited and alienated themselves to transform the structures that cause systematic need-deprivation in the first place (Wood 2002: 130-1). As evidence, consider that explosion of

inequality in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, which did not require the formal revocation of any citizenship rights, but used political tactics to weaken the power of workers to resist and protect their interests by intensifying competition between them for jobs and investment.

Where market forces are allowed more or less free play, the prices for a given commodity can rise beyond the ability of a large number of people to pay for it, with the result that, in cases where the commodity is a life-requirement, people are harmed because they are deprived of that which they need. When this structure of deprivation obtains, the deprived have three general alternatives. On the one hand, people can be left to suffer the consequences of their deprivation, as the homeless typically are today. On the other hand, governments can use public policy to meet the need, *as they define it and to the extent that they feel it is necessary to present themselves as champions of people's rights and to maintain social stability.* This alternative is clearly better than the first. Still, it is distinct from the third, which occurs where the need-deprived mobilize themselves, define the extent of their needs and what they regard as adequate means of satisfying them, and demand access to the resources that would be required to satisfy them. The various direct action struggles that the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty has organized over the years to combat homelessness in Toronto (especially the occupation of empty buildings) is a small but significant example of the sort of movement we have in mind. Let us now contrast the implications of rights and needs-based approaches to the problem of homelessness.

The first point to note is that the right (to housing, in this case) is asserted as a counter-claim against the logic of production for profit, but it does not contest the legitimacy of the value system whose normal outcomes – society-wide deprivation – it tries to correct. Just as in the case of the constitutions of liberal-democratic states, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also recognises the right to private property, without distinguishing personal property for use from universally required life-resources. Where the latter: land, water,

minerals, productive apparatuses, and labour power are allowed to become private property, the products of their combination determined by considerations of profitability, and the acquisition of those products determined by ability to pay, there will always be crises of need-deprivation, as the history of capitalism attests.

The problem is that the appeal to the right to the need-satisfying good is met by a counter-appeal to the right to dispose of private property as the owner sees fit. The right of the home-deprived to public housing is met by the counter-right of those with capital to dispose of it as they see fit in projects that return profit to themselves. Where moral obligation is understood in the language of rights, duty extends only so far as other people's rights over us. Where private property is a legal and accepted institution, individual rights to the goods that will satisfy their needs do not extend to other people's personal property. If I am hungry and you have a sandwich, I have no right to half. The structure of moral obligation becomes a problem when private property extends to the control of basic natural resources and vast pools of social wealth, such that one group's holdings prevent other groups from satisfying their needs. Those groups will have no legally actionable right against those who have (legitimately, within the rules of the game) acquired that property, and thus will not be able to satisfy their needs *just by acting on their rights* because their right does not override the opposed rights of private property.

Right is met by right in this contradictory way because the "rights-ground of social morality" has co-evolved with the capitalist mode of production (Noonan 2006: xvi-xvii). A ground of social morality is the basis of legitimate claims on social wealth and natural resources. In capitalism, rights (legally actionable entitlements) serve as the basis of legitimate claims on social resources. However, these rights come in two forms: the right of exclusionary private property in life-resources represented by money, and the right of universal life-requirement satisfaction of those systemically deprived of needed goods. The problem, from a practical perspective, is that if there is to be public provision

legitimated by appeal to people's needs, there must be funds for public provision, which can only be acquired through taxation. Those with surplus wealth will resist paying higher taxes and legitimate their resistance by appeal to their right to private property. Moreover, if there are economic forces (such as those unleashed by globalization) that create pressure to reduce marginal tax rates on the rich, then funds for public investment can dry up, without there being any formal violation of anyone's rights under the rights-ground of social morality, since it does not specify which of the two countervailing sets of rights are to win in any conflict, but rules out extra-legal struggle to resolve them.

In these sorts of cases, democratic progress depends upon the mobilization of social forces against exclusionary rights to private property. In these cases, a different social morality is brought into play, the social morality of need-satisfaction. Where the structure of rights blocks access to needed resources, it becomes a means of legitimating objective harm. Since it allows the harms of need-deprivation to proceed unchecked, its own legitimacy comes into question. Its legitimacy is challenged by social movements which do not appeal to authorities or experts to satisfy their rights for them, but draw on their own social power to secure access to and control over the resources that they need to satisfy their own rights. This form of organizing is consistent with the master democratic norm of self-determination, and is, in fact, the only way that needs can be satisfied in an empowering, as opposed to paternalistic, way.

To put this crucial point another way, only a needs-based social morality exposes the real problem with the capitalist value system: it subordinates the life-value of goods and services to their money-value. The basic life-value of any good is the contribution that it makes to the satisfaction of non-optional needs (McMurtry 1998: 164). When life-value is subordinated to money-value, people can be deprived of that which they need and the economy still judged good, because the basis of judgement is not the satisfaction of people's life-requirements, but return on investment to the owners of capital. Such is the case with housing

markets as currently constituted. Hundreds of thousands of people cannot afford homes, but if house prices are rising, the markets are judged good by those who profit from them. Occasionally (as with the Vancouver foreign buyers tax) governments will intervene to cool markets in order to prevent the emergence of bubbles and the deeper social problems they can cause, but this sort of regulation is distinct from a structural solution to the homelessness crisis.

Putting the problem in terms of life-requirement deprivation also highlights a second limitation of the rights-based approach. The Universal Declaration asserts that housing is a right, but it does not further define the conditions that count as satisfying that right. All rights-statements tend to be programmatic and abstract. A discussion of human life-requirements, by contrast, cannot be carried out without reflection on the nature of the life that has the requirements. In other words, it is never enough to assert that "x is a life-requirement," one must always unpack the life-value of x in relation to human life to explain just what it is that x contributes to life which, if absent, would cause harm. We tried to provide this complex unpacking in the case of the need for homes in Section One. If we content ourselves with the assertion that 'housing is a right,' it remains an open question what is required to satisfy the right. Does any sort of 'roof over one's head' constitute satisfaction of the right? Are the rights of social assistance recipients housed in motels while they await public housing violated? There is no straightforward answer to these questions if we focus only on the right to housing, because it does not explain why it is that human beings need housing, beyond the obvious that we require shelter. When the need-deprived mobilise to explain just what they need, and demand the resources to satisfy that need through their own labour and intelligence, this problem disappears because they tell everyone exactly what they require to satisfy their need.

The Struggle Against Homelessness: General Implications

The orthodox neo-liberal solution to the housing crisis through market-incentives to developers not only has not solved the problem, it ignores completely the voices of the homeless. Although it does not concern people who are completely without homes, but rather working class people living in public housing and vulnerable to market forces, the example of the on-going re-development of Regent Park in Toronto illustrates this point clearly. The left-liberal press has trumpeted the re-development of Regent Park, Canada's first social public housing development, as a great success. Starting in 2002 the Toronto Community Housing Corporation [TCHC] committed to the revitalization of several social and public housing locations and Regent Park became the most celebrated experiment. The introduction of condominiums to turn what had been a low-income, ethnically diverse working class community into a mixed income neighborhood was sold as serving the interest of the original residents, even though they were never fully consulted on the plans, much less involved in their realization.

In her critique, August *does* allow the voices of those who were displaced during the redevelopment of Regent Park to speak, and they were not supportive of the project. When they were asked, residents reported only minimal consultation from housing authorities. Moreover, they expressed the fear that if they spoke out against the redevelopment they could lose access to the housing that they needed. August described a sense of powerlessness among tenants of Regent Park to resist what they could see were not benevolent forces of social improvement but rather the market power of gentrification bent on displacing them to make room for higher money-value developments. As she explains, "residents were given the option of moving directly into brand-new off units, rather than (old) temporary locations units. Tenants who did this, however, gave up their right to return to a replacement unit in the redeveloped RP" (August 2014: 1327). Conveniently for the re-developers, the physical displacement of the original residents changed the cultural value of the neighborhood. From being perceived as a dangerous slum, it now appeared as yet another hip new urban space, a

change which encourages further displacement of the original residents as more and more wealthier people feel safe enough to move to what would formerly have been a no-go area for them.

The fact that residents were encouraged to leave leads Stefan Kipfer and Jason Petrunia to interpret the redevelopment of Regent Park and analogous projects elsewhere as a move to "re-colonize" public space by and for market forces that drives the "re-vitalization agenda." They argue that "property, class, and race are first articulated by strategies of recommodifcation: privatising land ownership and socializing the risk of private investment in redevelopment efforts. The Chair of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) praised the project...and declares Regent Park 'open for business.' Public land is to be leased or sold to developers…Two prime city blocks, which now constitute prime obstacles to the gentrification of the east downtown district, are being reconnected to real estate markets with the prime objective of maximizing land rent. In the words of housing company Chief Executive Derek Balantyne, Regent Park is 'prime real estate that will draw higher-income people' " (Kipfer and Petrunia 2009: 122). When the individual and collective agency of the exploited and oppressed is ignored, and their "needs" defined for them by the agents of market forces, they become mere instruments of those forces: useful to the extent that they can be exploited, and obstacles to be removed when they cannot.

The significance of this example for the struggle against homelessness is as follows. Human beings are not automobiles who simply need to be sheltered from the elements, they are integral bio-social beings who need a space in which they feel at home, which is under their control, and which they have played an active role in procuring. For the homeless, this need takes the form not only of the need for homes, but the political need to participate in the struggle to provide homes for themselves. Hence, there can be no complete solution to the problem of homelessness that does not engage the individual and collective agency of the homeless themselves. While Canada certainly needs a national housing strategy and massive re-investment in public housing, this

strategy and re-investment cannot repeat the approach of the post-war era, which focussed exclusively on the social need to house people, and not the complex need that human beings have for homes. Satisfying that need takes more than low-cost apartment buildings, it requires that the home-deprived themselves participate in the satisfaction of their human needs for homes.

One very small scale example of the type of participation we have in mind started in Toronto a decade ago under the leadership of the Parkdale Area Recreation Group. It was able to acquire and empty building with the assistance of the Ministry of Housing. Homeless Parkdale residents, many of them psychiatric survivors, then helped renovate the space as well as draw up a constitution defining the rules by which residents would abide (Noonan 2006: 245-6). By helping to create the space they would inhabit and collectively determining the rules of living there, empty physical space became a home: a psychic space felt to be free and safe and regulated not by the impersonal forces of the market but to self-conscious values of the people who lived there. As the PARC example show, homes need not be walls that separate people from each other. The walls of a home are not so much exclusionary in a pernicious sense as material conditions of free self-determination of one's living environment.

The PARC example is very small, to be sure, and cannot be a universal model for the satisfaction of the need for homes. If the underlying forces driving homelessness in Canada's major cities today are the skyrocketing real estate values that make investment in condominium construction preferable to low-cost rental accommodation, and if these forces are driving what Kipfer and Petrunia called above the re-colonization of public space by private developers, the systematic solution must involve protecting and extending public space. Struggles for the "right to the city" must become struggles to reclaim urban spaces from the forces of privatization and their constructive use to satisfy the complex need for homes that we have defined (Harvey 2012: 24). The immediate form that struggle takes is a struggle for

expanded and democratized public services. Implicit in such demands is, as Carlo Fanelli recently argued, the system-changing demand for "non-commodified labour and services…housing, public transit, community centres, and other social services" (Fanelli 2016: 79). If that claim is true, then it follows that the demand for democratized public services is, at least implicitly, a struggle against the domination of human life by market forces, and therefore the domination of human beings by other human beings who control the resources from which private wealth is produced and amassed. This struggle, to be *ultimately* successful, must not only influence government policy and increase public spending, it must begin to re-appropriate universally required resources and democratise public institutions so that both serve the fundamental purpose of need-satisfaction, for the sake of enabling all people to realise their life-capacities in projects that are both individually meaningful and socially valuable for other people. That struggle – to create a society in which social wealth was used to satisfy needs and work was the non-alienated expression of our intellectual and creative capacities – was once called the struggle for socialism. Whatever one wants to call it today, the mass deprivation of so basic a human need as the need for homes shows that Canada very much needs a renewed such struggle today.

References

August, M. (2014). Challenging the rhetoric of stigmatization: the benefits concentrated Poverty in Toronto's Regent Park, *Environmental and Planning A,* 46,1317-1333

August, M. (2016). "Its all about power and you have none". The marginalization of tenant to resistance to mixed-income social housing redevelopment in Toronto, Canada. *Cities* (2016), 1-8. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2012.12.00

CSDH (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health. Final Report of the*

Commission on Social Determinants of Health. Geneva, World
   Health Organization.
   http://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/csdh_final
   report_2008.pdf

Engels, F. (1872). *The Housing Question.*
   https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_
   The_Housing_Question.pdf

Engels, F. (1969). *The Condition of the Working Class in England.* St.
   Albans: Panther.

Fanelli, C. (2016). *Megacity Malaise: Neoliberalism, Public Services, and
   Labour in Toronto.* Halifax: Fernwood.

Harvey, D. (2012). Rebel Cities. London: Verso.

Kipfer, S., and Petrunia, J. (2009). Recolonization and Public Housing:
   A Toronto Case Study. *Studies in Political Economy,* 83, 111- 140.

Kothari, M. (2007). United Nations Special Rapporteur for the right to
   adequate housing.
   http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/housing/un_to_canada__take
   _action_on_housing__homelessness_/

Lalonde, M. (1974). *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians: A
   Working Document.* http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hcs-
   sss/com/fed/lalonde_e.html

Lefebvre, H. (2014). *The Critique of Everyday Life.* London: Verso.

Lippert, A.M., & Lee, B.A. (2015). Stress, Coping and Mental Health
   Differences Among Homeless People. *Sociological Inquiry 85*(3),
   343-374 DOI: 10.1111/soin.12080

Marmot, M., & Wilkinson, R. (2006). *Social Determinants of Health* (2nd
   ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marx, K. (1977) *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Collected Works,
   Volume 3 1843-1844.* New York: International Publishers.

Marx, K. (1986). *Capital, Volume 1.* Moscow: Progress Publishers.

McMurtry, J. (1998). *Unequal Freedoms.* Toronto: Garamond.

McMurtry, J. (25, February 2015). Breaking Out of the Invisible Prison. *The Bullet*, No. 1085, http://www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/1085.php

McEwen, B.S. (2004). Protection and damage from acute and chronic stress. *Annals New York Academy of Sciences,* 1032, 1-7. DOI: 10.1196/annals.1314.001

Mikkonen, J., & Raphael, D. (2010). *Social determinants of health: The Canadian facts.* www.thecanadianfacts.org.

Monsebratten, Laurie. (2016, March 7th). UN Raises Concern Over Canada's Persistent Housing Crisis." *Toronto Star.* https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/03/07/un-raises-concern-over-canadas-persistent-housing-crisis.html.

Noonan, J. (2006). *Democratic Society and Human needs.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Noonan, J. (2012). *Materialist Ethics and Life-Value.* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP). (2016). *Out in the Cold: The Crisis in Toronto's Shelter Systems.* http://ocap.ca/files/outinthecold2.pdf

Rootman, I., Dupere, S., Pedersaon, A., & O'Neill, M. (2012). *Health promotion in Canada: Critical perspectives on practice.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc.

Rowe, D.J., & Dunn, J.R. (2016). Tenure-mix in Toronto: resident attitudes and experience in the Regent Park community. *Housing Studies, 30*(8), 1257-1280 Doi: 10.1080/02673037.2015.1013091

Stock, M. (2016). *Ending homelessness? A critical examination of housing first in Canada and Winnipeg.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba

UN General Assembly. (10, December 1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights.* 217A(111), http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712chtml

UN General Assembly. (16, December 1966) *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations,* http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36c.html

Watson, J., Crawley, J., & Kane, D. (2016). Social exclusion, health and hidden homelessness. *Public Health* (2016). doi.org/10-2016/j.puhe.2016.05.017

World Health Organization, Canadian Public Health Association, & Health and Welfare Canada. (1986). *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.* Ottawa, ON: Health and Welfare Canada

Wood, E.M. (2002). *The Origins of Capitalism: A Longer View.* London: Verso.