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## Opinion: Don't fall for the Quebec government's line on spending cuts



CATHY INOUE, SPECIAL TO MONTREAL GAZETTE

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Reading the newspaper, you might be convinced that we are living in a province teetering on bankruptcy and can't afford our social programs. That is certainly the line that we are being expected to swallow by the Quebec government, with its incessant calls to reduce spending in all ministries. We are being told that cuts, affecting the poorest and lower middle class, will solve our problems, without any recognition of the control the government has on its revenue stream.

Recently it was leaked to the media that the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity, François Blais, was considering cutting the welfare cheques of people living with more than one roommate, a choice many have to make when living on a monthly income of only \$610. However, we have not heard any rumours yet about Finance Minister Carlos Leitão planning to restore the tax on capital for financial institutions, something that could bring in about \$600 million a year.

When the government explores ways to increase its revenue, it turns to user fees and consumption tax hikes — regressive measures that again punish those with the lowest incomes, while leaving untouched such gifts to the wealthy as the tax deductions for capital gains. Abolishing this tax deduction would be estimated to increase government revenue by \$739 million a year, more than triple the \$220 million the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity is being asked to trim from its budget.

We have been making these choices for a long time now and the impact is undeniable. Just 10 years ago, the poorest among us were living at their wits' end, making only 60 per cent of what they needed to survive. Today they make less than 49 per cent of subsistence income.



Wealth inequality is even more worrisome, as Statistics Canada data show that the top 10 per cent of Quebecers own 43.4 per cent of the province’s wealth, while the bottom half of the population owns only 7 per cent of the wealth. In other words, most of the population owns little or nothing, with no nest egg to cushion them from misfortune and the major gaps in the social safety net that is supposed to prevent them from falling into destitution.

These people come into Project Genesis all the time — minimum-wage workers, the precariously employed, the over or under qualified. They fall sick, or have an accident, can’t work or can’t find work, and suddenly can’t pay the rent. They ask us what benefits they are entitled to. And we are obliged to say that there is almost nothing for them, that welfare requires them to liquidate their bank accounts and then will give them a benefit that is so low they are likely to still be unable to pay the rent. As for social housing, there’s not enough of it to go around and new units are few — thanks once more to austerity.

How to explain this situation to the person faced with going to the food bank for the first time?

Rather than continuing this merry-go-round of cuts to services to finance tax cuts leading to further cuts to services, it might actually be time for an honest conversation on the type of society we want to have.

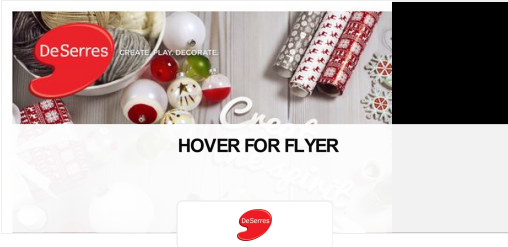
Do we want to continue to witness a worsening situation for most households, the bottom and middle included, or do we want instead to strengthen our social safety net and actually get at the root cause of our budget situation?

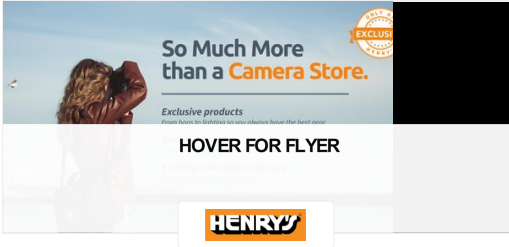
*Cathy Inouye is a community organizer with Project Genesis.*


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**Johnny Garone** · McGill University

Can't believe you're actually getting paid to comment on public finances. If there is anything current situation in Europe has taught us, it is that Socialism doesn't work !!

Reply · Like · 3 · October 27 at 2:50pm



**Anne Dunn** · ★ Top Commenter · Rodborough Technology College

I object to your idea of "cutting tax Breaks for the rich" Actually I am wondering who on earth you are to suggest that our "Social programs " in Quebec are a God given right ! I suppose you know that Businesses are paying through the nose for the "privilege of running a business here ? Also the a single person in Quebec hands over half of his salary to the Quebec government ! And how long has this been going on ?? I'm sick of it ! If I was on welfare ( I'm retired) and out of work , I would be on the next Greyhound bus out of this hell hole ! Welfare is NOT a career choice, neither is homelessness ! To imagine that Quebec is 'Suddenly' going to put up subsidised housing is ludicrous ! Quebec can't even fix its roads or infrastructure ! WE are at this moment living in the poorest, most run down province in Canada ! And YOU are looking for someone to "Cough up some cash"? .....?

Reply · Like · 2 · October 27 at 12:31pm



**Gary Mccollom** · ★ Top Commenter

We might just beat you here in Ontario Anne, what a horrid mess these two provinces are in, thats what you get though when special interest groups and public sector unions are calling the shots.

Reply · Like · 3 · October 28 at 4:59am



**Anne Dunn** · ★ Top Commenter · Rodborough Technology College

I have a son who was born here in Quebec. He is now in Australia. He has lived in Ontario, Calgary , and Japan. He has two kids, and has never been out of work- ever ! People need to be prepared to go where the jobs are ! they also need to keep educating themselves, try new things , be versatile ! A job for life ? not anymore ! get moving !

Reply · Like · 2 · October 29 at 6:17am



**Anne Dunn** · ★ Top Commenter · Rodborough Technology College

Their is no money . Have you seen Quebec's 'Debt Clock '? that is no "figment " of someone's "Imagination" ! If I were you , I would tell the truth ! and the truth is , People would be better off away from Quebec ! Perhaps the "government " would help with moving expenses for everyone . I hear the mayor of Calgary is in town ! recruiting ! "Go for it "!

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**Andrea Lauren** · Sydney, Australia

An important and necessary call to action! We have learned that a more equal society is a more just and healthy one for the majority (Professor Richard Wilkinson, among others, has done the math - <http://bit.ly/1sBzAJ>). I have spoken with many Quebec residents who would give anything to be working and financially independent from the state (I've never met anyone who would actually choose to "live" off \$610/month!) but who must temporarily rely on social assistance to (barely) meet their basic needs. Recent and potentially future cuts discussed in this article would truly be kicking our fellow humans when they're already very much down.

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**Anne Dunn** · ★ Top Commenter · Rodborough Technology College

I too know people who are on welfare. Its a terrible state to be in, and one that doesn't look good for the future either. People need to make some hard choices. Choices that people have made of many , many years. You go where the jobs are ! Nothing new in that ! You can't change what is , and poverty can only increase here in Quebec. Even people who work in Quebec are struggling. Absolutely, people must leave.

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**Zawisch von Falkenstein** · ★ Top Commenter · University of South Bohemia (Jihočeská Univerzita)

Québec has highest taxes in North America on about everything. If high taxes were such a panacea, we would be already living in a paradise.

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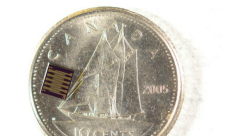
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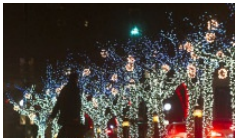
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