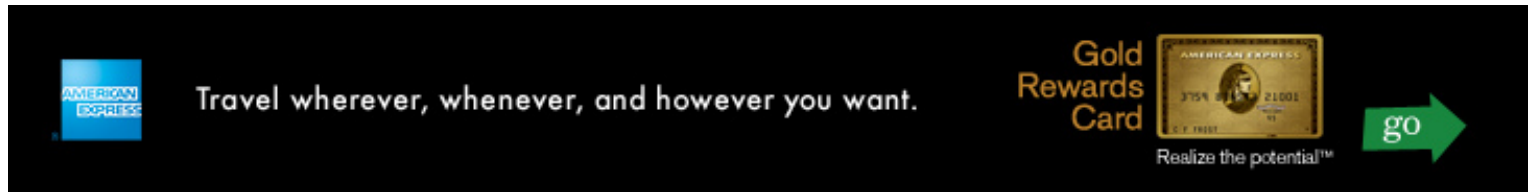


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# Economic inequality breeds social ills: author

**British researcher takes message to Parliament Hill**

*Last Updated: Thursday, December 9, 2010 | 4:17 PM ET* [Comments25](#)[Recommend22](#)

The Canadian Press

Canada's growing economic inequality will inevitably lead to social problems, poorer health and a shorter lifespan, says acclaimed British author Richard Wilkinson.

Wilkinson, in his first speaking engagement in Canada, told an audience of economists and civil servants in Ottawa that wealthy countries with wide gaps between rich and poor are rife with social ills. These can

include high rates of teenage pregnancy, crime, imprisonment and mental illness.



*An anti-poverty march in Vancouver protesting spending on the 2010 Winter Olympics in a city with a large homeless population. A prominent British author is warning that the gap between rich and poor in Canada is widening. (Darryl Dyck/Associated Press)* And Canada, traditionally in the middle of the pack in terms of economic inequality, seems to be heading in the wrong direction.

"As Canadian income differences increase, I think they'll have more of these problems," he said in an interview.

Wilkinson has researched social and health policy for decades but has become a sudden celebrity with his book *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*.

He and co-author Kate Pickett show how in developed countries, inequality is linked to poor health, obesity, teenage pregnancy, crime, mental illness, child mortality, life expectancy, drugs and homicide rates.

They argue that inequality doesn't just hurt the downtrodden.

'It's the differences between us that count.'

Rather, it harms an entire society because it's the gap between rich and poor that is destructive, not just the presence of poverty.

— *Richard Wilkinson*

"Average income levels are no longer the issue," Wilkinson said. "It's the differences between us that count."

In countries with large equality gaps "something goes wrong with the quality of social relations," he said. "What we're looking at is a general social dysfunction because of inequality."

## **Nations with more equality have fewer social problems**

Conversely, social problems in more equal societies such as Sweden and Japan are far less severe, he says.



*Cyclists and pedestrians on a street in Stockholm.*

*British author Richard Wilkinson points out that nations such as Sweden, which have more economic equality, have fewer social problems. Equality benefits the poor the most, he and Pickett found, but it benefits every social class to some extent.*

"The differences are bigger at the bottom, but even at the top, there are

some benefits," he told the audience.

*The Spirit Level* has gone viral, seizing the attention of the British Labour Party and even, briefly, of Conservative British Prime Minister David Cameron.

The study has also ignited a heated international debate about the researchers' methodology, the validity of their conclusions and what the appropriate public policy response should be.

The authors advocate policies that make advanced countries more equal, including higher taxes and pay limits for the rich.

## **Corporate culture is key**

But Wilkinson also says corporate culture is key. Companies that embrace employee ownership or have flat internal structures produce healthier work environments and foster more comfortable communities. Such corporations have also shown higher productivity and strong ethics.



*Galen Weston is one of Canada's richest Canadians. A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that Canada's rich are getting richer faster. (Chris Young/Canadian Press)"We need to change the way business is done," Wilkinson said in an interview, criticizing the "bonus culture" that heavily rewards those at the top, contributing to society-wide inequality.*

His first visit to Canada is timely. In the last few weeks, a raft of studies has shown that the super-rich in Canada — mainly corporate leaders — have entrenched their position while the middle class has stagnated and the poor have struggled to deal with the recession.

Food bank use is up to all-time highs. The ability for newcomers to Canada to make a decent living is deteriorating. And single, young men have become the new post-recession face of destitution in urban Canada.

Wilkinson held court with a wide variety of Parliamentarians and their staff Thursday morning and was to meet with deputy ministers. He is travelling across Canada on a speaking tour.

But few who listened to Wilkinson's message felt there was any chance of his ideas gaining traction with the federal Conservative government.

Rather, the federal response to recent recommendations on how to deal with poverty and inequality has been to point to provincial responsibility in many areas of social policy.

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**[Eliezer](#) wrote:** Posted 2010/12/09

at 10:01 PM ET" ...Wilkinson and co-author Kate Pickett show how in developed countries, inequality is linked to poor health, obesity, teenage pregnancy, crime, mental illness, child mortality, life expectancy, drugs and homicide rates..."

Actually, their "reasoning" is up-side-down." Most if not all of the social psychosis described by the authors, is predicated upon a British born model of Economic Collectivism, which is an expression of the economic theories of British born Thomas Malthus. Through the Corporate Interface, the people have been reduced to serfs on the land, & a disenfranchised people have intuited this for decades. The opiates of the masses designed to mesmerise & degrade the population, have been only partially successful. Remember, these authors hail from the home of British born Thomas Malthus, darling of the LAND"LORD" & EUGENICS class. These authors have likely been tasked, to "instruct" members of our Canadian Parliament in "correct" economic principles. The most important question is, how can a cause provide the cure?

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**[Grand Puba](#) wrote:** Posted 2010/12/09

at 9:34 PM ETAbsolutely !!

Right On !!

And start with Canada Pension.

If it is Government Funded it should be the same for everyone. If a store clerk gets \$850.00 a month at 65.... The Prime Minister should get the same.

Right across the board, Politicians, Public Service Workers, Labourers, Waitresses.... they should ALL retire on an EQUAL SALARY.

Anyone who wants more just has to invest their OWN wages in RRSPs or whatever. The retirement packages for Civil Servants & Politicians are outrageous. Especially with the job security they already have.

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**Mr Panic wrote:** Posted 2010/12/09

at 9:29 PM ET Went to an inner-city school full of immigrants from around the world. There were some students, mostly from Eastern Europe and East Asia who studied diligently, did volunteer work, and stayed out of trouble. They went on to university, finished grad school, and so on. The rest complain how society let them down, discriminated against them, and generally makes it difficult for them to make a decent living.

It's always the fault of someone else. Put that in a rap song with a good beat and maybe I'll listen to it.

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- [4](#)

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**Eliezer wrote:** Posted 2010/12/09

at 9:18 PM ET Economic inequality does not breed "social ills," rather, inequality to the access of the means of creating & producing wealth, is basic to all "social ills." The Corporatization & increasing MONOPOLIZATION of the public domain & the means of creating wealth, which has captured a disproportionate control of natural resources, plus an extraction of wealth through labor & the benefits of nature's bounty, to CORPORATE ENTITIES & Their LAND "LORDS," is at the root of the problem. This is why Canadians MUST reacquaint themselves with the economic philosophy of American born Henry George, & his best selling treatise PROGRESS & POVERTY, first published in 1879 - an inquiry into the cause of an emergent poverty alongside an apparent progress. The exact same issues addressed by George are recurring in today's economic terrain.

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**Woofers wrote:** Posted 2010/12/09

at 9:14 PM ET CBC:

> Canada's growing economic inequality will inevitably  
> lead to social problems, poorer health and a shorter  
> lifespan

...for the have-nots. Of course the haves will feel the pinch when the have-nots come for their blood.. and their money, their houses, their electronics...

Woof!



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