

## **LETTER TO TORONTO STAR: The banality of billionaires, poverty & extreme inequality**

By Grahame Russell, April 7, 2008

In the "Ideas" section of the Sunday Toronto Star (April 6, 2008), under the column "10 Things We Learned This Week", one reads:

"3) One Canadian made Forbes magazine's list of top 100 billionaires: David Thomson and family in 31st spot (\$18.9 billion U.S.). (Forbes.com)"

"4) Nearly 3 billion people live on less than \$2/ day. (globalissues.org)."

Often, in the media, one reads these casual references to unfathomable and grotesque amounts of both wealth accumulation and poverty distribution.

What are some of the "Ideas" represented in this listing of the Thomson family's billions of dollars juxtaposed with billions of people subsisting on less than \$730 / year?

While individualizing and implicitly honoring the Thomson family for their wealth, this list simultaneously invisibilizes and de-individualizes the lives (and usually brutal early deaths) of billions of people and their \$2/day.

A most harmful idea - implicit, not stated in this list - is that there is no link between wealth accumulation at the top of the global development pyramid scheme and the accumulation of poverty, exploitation and dispossession for billions of people at the bottom.

Yet in our complexly intertwined and interdependent global community, if billionaires and millionaires "earn and deserve" their vast and unnecessary amounts of wealth (privilege and power) it stands that the 3 billion earn and deserve their lives of subsistence and early death on \$2/day.

The casually presented figures and numbers are not only horrific and numbing, they are misleading. Billions of people do not "live on" \$2/ day; they subsist in conditions of extreme exploitation and/ or abandonment, before dying young in usually terrible life conditions.

Such a blasé reproduction of mind-numbing figures trivializes the suffering and exploitation of billions of people living in poverty on our planet. It is a disservice to people and organizations clamoring across the world for an honest debate (presenting real "Ideas") about the grotesque inequality and injustice of our global economic order that creates billionaires to be honored in the Forbes list and media, while at the same time creating billions of people subsisting and dying young after invisibilized, nameless lives.

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