

Gap growing between region's rich and poor

BY LISA QUEEN
STAFF WRITER

York Region's rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, and the middle class is bottoming out, according to the latest Census results.

That was the news presented Friday to the region's first-ever forum on hunger.

Between 1991 and 1996, York Region

households with annual incomes of less than \$10,000 grew by 64.5 per cent, to 7,005 from 4,285. Families with incomes between \$10,000 and \$20,000 increased by 50.2 per cent, to 12,800 from 8,520.

That means the total growth in low-income households earning less than \$20,000 grew by 114.7 per cent.

On the other hand, the middle class

appears to be disappearing. The number of families earning between \$20,000 and \$40,000 fell by 38.6 per cent, from 22,620 to 13,890.

Officials say parents of 4,000 children often don't know where their next meal is coming from.

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But regional social services commissioner Joann Simmons said government cutbacks have resulted in the institutionalization of stop-gap measures, such as soup kitchens, to help feed the hungry.

"Where is the accountability and responsibility of our universal institutions and government, how far does that responsibility extend?" she asked at Friday's forum.

Despite the overall wealth of the region, at any one time more than one per cent of the population, or 65,000 residents, are going hungry.

"There's this vision, people feel York Region is a wealthy region. It is, but it is not immune to the (hunger) issue. It has its share of poverty," Simmons told the crowd of 100 officials, including social workers, politicians and food bank volunteers.

The activists identified a number of barriers to "food security" in York Region, including a lack of affordable housing and daycare, and a lack of an integrated transit network.

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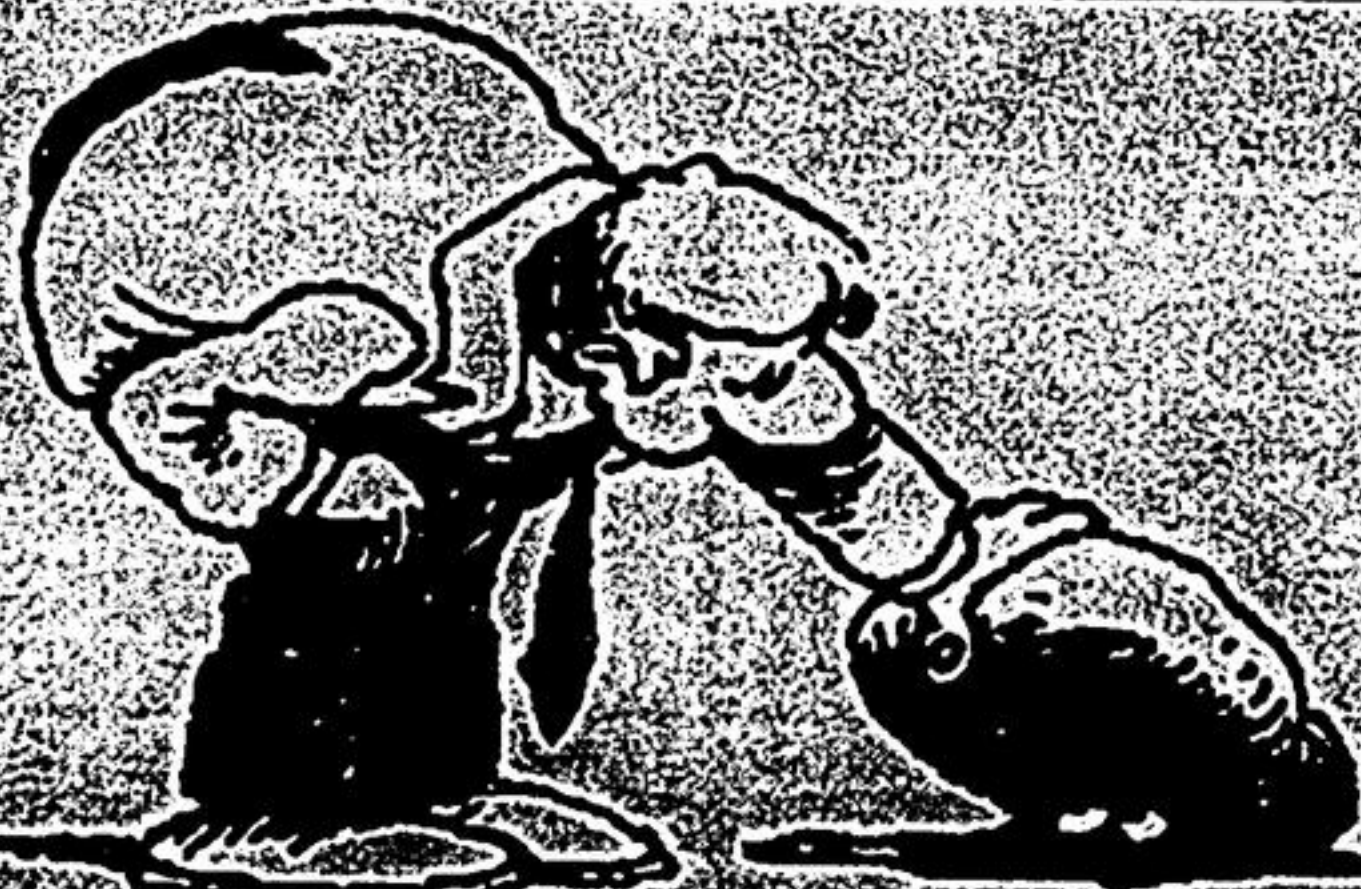


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