

Introduction

Taxes for the Common Good

Taxes are not simply about money or fees collected by governments. Taxes are equally about public programs and services, reducing poverty and the harmful effects of inequality, and protecting the environment. Taxes are about building the kind of Canada we want.

Different governments have promoted lower taxes as the solution to all ills. In the face of falling revenues, these same governments now say that our most basic programs are unsustainable, that further tax cuts are needed, and that there is public ‘fat’ to cut and greedy public servants to rein in.

As a result of a relentless assault on the value of public programs over the past 30 years, taxation has come to be viewed as a burden rather than a tool for promoting the common good. It seems that few are asking what is the real cost of tax cuts or who pays the price.

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Taxes and Public Justice

A public justice approach supports a progressive distribution of taxes, and transparent and accountable decisions from governments on taxation and spending.

Citizens have an obligation to participate in public life in a way that enables justice, including the promotion of social structures and associations that contribute to the common good. One of the primary ways in which we can do this is through the contribution of our income and wealth through taxes. Taxes pay for the democratic institutions of government, as well as funding the transfers, programs, and services governments provide.

Taxes therefore help to create a democratic, just, and equitable society. Taxes also foster a common good that benefits everyone. We recognize that we are not solely responsible for the wealth that we generate, nor does it belong to us alone. We share a portion of the income that we have received as an expression of our gratitude and a contribution towards the sustainability of our community and collective care for creation.

Recognizing the good that taxes can do is not to suggest that we be naive about their misuse. Taxes should not be used to line the pockets of any kind of political elite or merely benefit the wealthy. Taxes should not burden the poor. The use of our common purse must be transparent and there must be open and honest debate about its use. This requires accountability; active citizenship includes ensuring that government is doing the work it should be doing.

Taxes build our roads and bridges, pay for our police and firefighters, offer support for raising children, provide income security for the elderly, and help to ensure our environment is clean and safe. Taxes pay for the programs, services, and infrastructure that make up our common wealth as a society. Paying taxes is therefore a contribution to the common good.

