

Courage My Friends Podcast – Episode 3
Sustainable Food and Zero Hunger: The Future and the Right

[music]

ANNOUNCER: This is a rabble podcast network show.

VOICE: New voices in your head. It's radio...free...

[music transition]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: How do I feed my kids and protect myself from this virus?

STREET VOICE 2: I'm safe here in Canada, but I'm worried about my family back home.

STREET VOICE 3: I'm scared about the future. When this pandemic is over, we still have the climate crisis to deal with.

[music]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell Foundation.

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

HOST, RESH BUDHU: Welcome to episode 3 of the *Courage My Friends* podcast. I'm Resh Budhu, co-producer and host of this special 6-episode series and coordinator of the annual Tommy Douglas Institute at George Brown College.

In today's episode, *Sustainable Food and Zero Hunger: The Future and the Right to Eat*, anti-poverty activist Paul Taylor discusses the present crisis in food access, the situation facing those working to grow, pack and deliver our food and what it means to have food as a right.

Paul Taylor is the Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto (a non-profit that works with those most impacted by poverty and food insecurity to access and advocate for affordable, high-quality fresh and nutritious food). He also teaches at Simon Fraser

University, is a regular political commentator on CTV and has written numerous op-eds on various social issues.

As a life-long anti-poverty activist, Paul is committed to dismantling the systems and organizing principles that cause and uphold poverty, food insecurity and wealth inequality.

In 2020, Paul was named one of Canada's Top 40 under 40, one of Toronto Life's 50 Most Influential Torontonians and voted as Best Activist by the readers of Now Magazine.

Paul Taylor is currently federal NDP candidate for Parkdale-High Park, Toronto.

What should sustainable food and food jobs look like?

Has four decades of food banking and food charity, helped the situation or only distracted us from the real reasons behind food insecurity? And from the real solutions? Can we finally secure the right to eat in a post-pandemic world?

Here is my conversation with Paul Taylor.

RESH: Paul, welcome.

Paul: Resh, thanks so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

RESH: As an anti poverty activist who is now leading Canada's largest food justice organization, a great deal of your work is focused in the area of food insecurity. So first of all, what is food insecurity?

PAUL: I'm so glad you asked that question. Because I think actually, it's something that's not understood really well. And I think the fact that we don't understand it really well leads to all kinds of interventions that actually don't get at the crux of food insecurity.

I guess the first thing I'll say is food insecurity is measured at the household level. So it's really in essence, a family or a household not having enough income to purchase the food that they need. We've had a bunch of interventions. I think the first Food Bank in this country opened in 1981. And we've led with food-based response to an issue of food and security, when really we need to be talking much more about income.

So that's what actually brings me to FoodShare as an anti poverty activist, you know, recognizing that connection, and the need for a larger, national conversation within food-based charities about food insecurity itself, and what are the things we can do to tackle it?

RESH: And what is the work of FoodShare?

PAUL: Right, yeah, so FoodShare. You know, it depends on who you ask. I still don't have an elevator-pitch for FoodShare. Sometimes it feels like our work is pretty vast. But I guess one of the ways I've come to think about our work is we are working alongside communities, across the city of Toronto, that have faced chronic underinvestment - That have been on the brunt, or the receiving end, of systemic racism, sexism, those sorts of issues. And we're working with these communities, like I say, across the city to build community-led food infrastructure.

So we recognize that capitalism is clearly failing us when it comes to providing access to food for all of the inhabitants of our city and of our country. So FoodShare says, we're going to work with the communities that have been disadvantaged the most by our existing system, by helping them create their own resident community-led food infrastructure. And this looks like turning a hydro corridor into an urban farm, where residents of that community, this is in Flemingdon Park, can not only grow food, but they can sell the food that they grow. They can eat the food that they grow. And then also, you know, looking at other underutilized public land and communities, whether it's the Burnhamthorpe Collegiate Institute site that we've converted a field, an-open field at a school without sports teams, into an urban farm and a Market Garden. The other thing that we do is we help communities set up what we call "Good Food Markets". So these are, in essence subsidized produce markets. They look a lot like farmers markets, I suppose; except our sole focus is not on local food. The main focus for us is around access, then cultural relevancy. And so we will have local food as well as international food.

RESH: I come from George Brown College, where we house the Tommy Douglas Institute, and we have a Good Food Market there as well. And it is so meaningful to our students. And post secondary students have become one of those very large populations that are really experiencing food insecurity. So they get a great deal of benefit.

PAUL: It's true. And the other thing I'll just add really quickly is we hear a lot about Farmers Markets in this city. I think at last count, there were 39 Farmers Markets, well, believe it or not, there are close to 50 Good Food Markets right across the city of Toronto. And again, it's such a push-back to the model of, one having to purchase from a large corporation, but also having folks from another community come in and hand out leftovers. That is not good enough. And not an intervention that we really cared to uphold.

RESH: So just to get more of the terminology down, then. When you're talking about empowering communities to grow and distribute food, not just about accessing food, is that what you mean by *food sovereignty* or *food justice*?

PAUL: Yeah, in a lot of ways it is. But I think the other major part of our work is recognizing that there are systemic, oppressive forces that actually impede access to food and create some of the food inequities that we see. So for us, it's just as important,

while we're supporting the building of this food infrastructure, a key pillar for us when it comes to food justice is, doing all that we can to dismantle those oppressive systems, acknowledging the impact that these systems have on who gets to eat and who doesn't in this country, and then working to dismantle those within our organization and outside of the organization.

RESH: So FoodShare. As you've mentioned, you work with those populations most impacted by food insecurity. Could you say a bit more about who they are and what you're hearing and seeing of their experience during this pandemic?

PAUL: That's a big question. I guess the first thing I'll say, maybe And I didn't say this earlier. And I think it's really important to contextualize what's happening with food insecurity in this country. Before the pandemic, there were 4.5 million people that were food insecure across this country. That number has skyrocketed. The last count that I saw, is now 5.5 million people that are food insecure. So that is like the populations of Toronto, Montreal and Winnipeg combined. It is a massive issue, a massive crisis in this country. And you know, what I'm hearing from folks is all kinds of things. That people are really struggling. They're struggling to access the food that they need. They're seeing food costs go up. And that's caused by the pandemic, caused by climate change. And also greedy corporations that are looking to extract as much wealth as they possibly can, who are increasing prices as well. So it is a real struggle for folks.

And when we talk about who's most impacted by food insecurity, or who our systems have made most vulnerable, we just have to look at who's most food insecure. So example, you know 50% of households in Nunavut are food insecure.

One of the things, we were seeing was there was a real lack of research around Black Canadians and food insecurity. Whenever we talk about food insecurity in this country, we often talk about this issue aggregately. So FoodShare actually partnered with a group out of the University of Toronto called PROOF, a public policy research group, to get a better sense of what was happening for Black Canadians around food insecurity. And what we learned completely turned on its head much of what had been the prevailing conversation around food insecurity in this country. The first few things that we learned was awful, but not as surprising. We learned that Black households are three and a half times more likely to be food insecure than White households. We learned that 36% of Black children are food insecure and living in food, insecure households, versus 12% of white children.

But I really have to say, the interesting thing for us here was when we dove into that research a little bit more, it turned everything on its head. What I mean is when we looked at the aggregate data about food insecurity, we recognized that, you know, there are things that are correlated to food insecurity. One of them is household composition. If there's a single parent, that household is more likely to be food insecure. If someone is a renter over a homeowner, they're more likely to be food insecure, those sorts of things. But what this research when we look specifically at what was happening for

Black Canadians, we found that household composition was irrelevant. It didn't matter if it was a single parent or dual parent household, prevalence remained high. Immigration status didn't matter. It didn't matter if someone was born in Canada or born abroad, or how long they had been here, for a Black person. Also, we saw that, when it comes to homeownership, the percentage of Black homeowners - 14.3%, that are food insecure - is just about equal to the percentage of White renters - 14.5%, that are food insecure. So there's more that I could go on about this research, but I won't do that. But ultimately, what this research showed us is that if we truly want to tackle an issue of food insecurity for communities that have been made vulnerable, we need to analyze what's happening for those communities through disaggregated data. And what we learned through doing that is that anti-Black racism is one of the drivers of food insecurity in this country. So we're not going to solve that with a community garden. We're not going to solve that with a beautiful box of produce. We've also got to be making sure that we're doing everything we can to tackle anti-Black racism in all of its forms.

RESH: Just to go more into that. So you've talked about aggregate data. If you were to give a case study of how anti-Black racism intersects with food insecurity, and all of those elements of systemic racism, what is happening? How would you explain that?

PAUL: Okay, I'll give you another example here. The first thing before I share this example, because I'm going to talk about social assistance, I feel like it's really important to know, to dispel, I think a prevailing myth, you know that, the bulk of people that are food insecure on social assistance. And that's actually not correct. If you're on social assistance, you're more likely to be food insecure, but the 65% of Canadians that are food insecure, actually derive their income from paid employment.

RESH: We've really been seeing that even before the pandemic, that food banks, right across Canada were reporting more and more of those using their services, at least one member of the family or the group was actually an income earner.

PAUL: Exactly. And yet, our default response is, let's see what peanut butter and jelly we have in our, or cranberry sauce, or what corporate waste can be donated and redistributed to low-income people, low-income workers, and treating people like compost bins - But a real reluctance to deal with the underlying issues and, you know, low wages, and that sort of thing.

But just coming back to the way in which anti-Black racism manifests in our systems and how it creates some of these inequities. When we were doing this research, we were startled to find that there was a variance between the amount of money that Black Canadians receive on social assistance versus the amount of money that White Canadians receive. White folks receive more money on social assistance, and we didn't understand at first what was going on. I had thought that, you know, welfare, - you punch in some numbers and out comes an entitlement. But we what we then realized was that of course, social assistance calculations also include disability income. So

what that's telling us is that White folks are more likely to be approved for disability than Black folks. And when White folks are approved for disability income support, they're approved for more money. So again, this is just one of the ways that our systems are rigged against Black folks. And that lead to increased prevalence of food and security.

Seniors is another one. We thought food insecurity, as I said at the beginning, was an issue of income. And, you know, many of us in this space have been advocating for basic income, which makes a lot of sense, because we actually have a basic income in this country for seniors. As soon as someone hits retirement age, and they can draw upon their retirement savings or the Old Age Security or the Guaranteed Income Supplement, we actually see what happens for food insecurity. When someone hits retirement age, their risk of food insecurity decreases pretty significantly. So we have been saying, we don't need another pilot. What we need is a basic income.

But this research has showed us actually that for Black Canadians, it didn't matter that they hit retirement age. The prevalence remained high for food insecurity. So again, you know, systemic factors. While that person, previous to becoming a senior, whether it was low wage income, all those kinds of factors that don't allow for the type of retirement income that can help offset food insecurity in seniors.

RESH: So it really is sort of a perfect storm of circumstances that's leading people into food insecurity. It's about people not having enough money to buy the food they need. So it's an issue of income and income support.

PAUL: Exactly. And we feel a moral imperative, I get it, I get it. We know that we have hungry neighbours. We know that people are struggling with access to food and we want to do something. I think the problem is what's been constructed as our default is food banking. And I know we can't stop food banking tomorrow. But I think all of those folks that are volunteering to sort out tins; those are allies or potential allies, in advancing and advocating for the type of systemic change that's going to have a greater impact than, giving out corporate waste.

RESH: We're going to get back to that because I think it's very interesting, your take on food banks.

As with everything about this pandemic, the harshest impacts seem reserved for those already marginalized. And as you said, we have seen just an incredibly steep rise in people accessing food banks. From the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, they were reporting a 25% increase last year, and that was at the start of the pandemic. What demands are you facing at FoodShare?

PAUL: Well, I think we're a little bit different, in that we're not really an emergency food provider, we're building infrastructure in communities. So I guess, the demands that we're seeing are a little bit different, actually. You know, we are partnering with groups and grassroots groups across the city, which we've partnered with throughout the pandemic. And what's been exciting is that there's been a different type of analysis that

these organizations are bringing, right? We're all responding to a crisis, you know, in the same way that food banks first did in the early 80s. But the analysis here is one that's very different. And it's critical of capitalism. It's critical of wealth inequality in ways that didn't exist - I don't think when we made that big shift previous to the opening of the first food bank, and our reliance on food as our default response, you know, we actually used to respond with income. It was much more based on the European model. And for me, the scariest part is that none of that conversation of shifting from income-based interventions and responses to food-based responses was ever part of the public discourse; was never debated in Parliament. But it marked a pretty significant shift. So what I get excited about now, is the analysis that's coming with a response from grassroots groups that are engaged in this type of solidarity work. We're saying, "No, we might be doing this. But we also need to hold our governments accountable for the harm and the violence that they've inflicted on our communities, communities that are disproportionately Black and Brown". And we see it right through the food system.

I've been saying this from the beginning of a pandemic, if you just look at who's on transit, who has been forced to the frontlines of the economy in the middle of this pandemic. And it's, Black and Brown folks that are cleaning, sanitizing our offices and workplaces. It's Black and Brown folks predominantly working in grocery stores, providing care, working in food plants. Its migrant workers, migrant agricultural workers. These are all the folks that have been exposed to the greatest risk. And of course, that's why we're seeing that, you know, it's racialized folks that are contracting COVID at disproportionate rates.

RESH: That's a very good point. Right from the beginning of this pandemic, we've been seeing serious issues right along the conveyor food belt, for lack of a better term, right? So not only among those needing access to food, but as you were just saying, also those who are involved in different facets of food production. Could you speak a bit more to what is facing those people, as you say, migrant workers and farms, food plants, grocery stores, food delivery, just to name a few?

PAUL: Before I go there, if I may, I just want to really highlight how racist our food system is. And it's been that way pretty much from the get-go. So this is not anything new. Because when we think about Turtle Island, and the foundations for the modern industrial food system - The foundations are stolen bodies through the transatlantic slave trade. Farming on stolen land, Indigenous land. So this is the very foundation of the modern industrial food system. So we're just seeing that continue to play out.

In Canada, through things like the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, again, we have the imported bodies of Black and Brown migrant workers who are shackled to a single employer pretty much from the moment that they arrive. Like really. It's outrageous! Who else do we shackle to a single employer? Who else do we allow to be treated like this? You know, these workers that are essential to our food system, which means they are what makes it possible for us all to eat the delicious local food that we love; they have to request permission to leave the farms that they work on. They can be

sent to their home country, if they raise labor or human rights concerns. Heck, they could be sent back if they get sick. Or simply if the employer doesn't like their smile or they don't feel like they nod enough. This is absolutely absurd! And we let it continue. And in this moment of a deadly global pandemic, you know, these essential food system workers, that don't receive hazard pay, they aren't always provided with an adequate supply of PPE and are routinely forced to live in close quarters; making it almost impossible to practice physical distancing. We know what the outcome of that is.

I think about also other low wage food system workers, and I go back to again, I always try and, you know, go back to the origins of this stuff. And I think, the Industrial Revolution really created the need for cheap food. So that employers could pay low wages. So food is cheap in this country, because we don't pay the environmental costs associated with our food. And it's also made cheap on the backs of low wage workers. All of this in service of capitalism, Certainly not workers. Not eaters. Nor the planet.

RESH: We call those the negative market externalities, right when the cost to the climate and the cost to workers are not actually reflected on the sticker price of the food, but it's externalized onto them.

PAUL: Exactly. And we need to have a bigger conversation about paying the actual costs of food, and also making sure we're paying livable wages. And that brings me to the last group again. You know, you jump on to one of these delivery app platforms, and you get your food delivered. Look at who's delivering your food! - Again, the racism that underlies so much of our food system.

Gig economy workers have become an important part of the food system. And what's happened is they've absolutely removed actually the classification of worker right out of the equation. These delivery apps can remove... when they do that, they're ultimately removing any sort of worker protections out of the equation as well. And again, all in pursuit of increased profits. One of the things I began to realize is, it's these people who are winning in the economy, who decide who our politicians are. And it's our politicians who decide who wins in the economy. And until we can disrupt this vicious cycle, we will never have the type of system, the type of justice that so many of us know as possible.

RESH: Absolutely. And vicious cycle is a very apt term, I mean, if only looking at just the issue of food insecurity, because it seems that many of those people who are in those, jobs that you were just describing, are also of course, experiencing food insecurity. So they're working in food, but they're not benefiting from what should be the fruits of their labor, (just to extend the metaphor). I just got a message that, sadly, another migrant worker has died in Haldimand-Norfolk, from COVID. So again, just really amplifying your point about what's happening with migrant workers that some have said are almost, or similar to indentured workers.

PAUL: It's heartbreaking actually. I remember points in this pandemic, when the Premier of Ontario, the messaging that he was sharing with migrant agricultural workers was, "you can still go to work, providing you don't have symptoms". This is just cruel! it's

absolutely cruel! And these are our governments, our elected officials, that we vote for, in the hopes of, fulfilling the social contract, and advancing equity. But yet we consistently see this type of neglect.

RESH: One of the remarkable things about COVID-19 is its ability to reveal all of these harsh truths about the systems that existed before this pandemic. And that have worked to make this pandemic so much worse. And you've spoken of how your lived experience and your work experience as an anti poverty activist grew out of a need to challenge these systems that create and perpetuate poverty and food insecurity. So could you speak a bit more about this? You've spoken about colonization? That history of capitalism? Could you speak a bit more about what are those systems that potentially led us into the scale of the disaster that we're experiencing now?

PAUL: Yeah, so I would say, you know, I think I've highlighted White supremacy, but also classism. I was 13 years old, I will never forget this. I was 13 years old. You know, I was raised by a single mom. Powerful Black woman, you know, doing all that she could to support our family. And when I was 13, the province elected Mike Harris and one of the first things he did was cut welfare by 22%. And for me as a child, you know, that was the first time I saw my mother cry. And it was earth shattering for me to try and understand what was happening and why someone would make a decision to make it harder for my family to eat. Why someone would make a decision that would ultimately lead to us not having electricity, heat or hot water for large portions of my childhood. So there is a class war. You know, we have politicians that don't care about poor people. He also introduced tax cuts at the same time. So you know, this is, it's just horrific. Families like mine across the province struggled. I'm sure some didn't even make it, you know.

I think we've really got to be challenging these underlying systems, White supremacy, classism, capitalism, all of these organizing principles - ableism, racism certainly - that have so much of an impact on who has food in this country to eat and who doesn't. And yet, we continue to focus on food as a response. And that's why I really liked your question from the get-go around what is food insecurity. It actually has very little to do with food. And we also have more than enough food to feed everyone in this country. So these food redistribution schemes that seem to be all the rage these days - like, let's move some three legged carrots from here or some leftover food from here to there. That's great, you know, it's great to some extent. It's going to have an impact on climate change. And that's an existential threat that we need to address. But we also need to address poverty and food insecurity. And food banks don't do it. These food redistribution schemes don't do it either. It's challenging these principles, these organizing principles that are at the root of inequities in food, in healthcare, in education, just about everything. That's how we're going to have a more just society.

RESH: And again, to that very good point that you just brought up. This is not a poor country. Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. And yet we have this food crisis that has plagued us from long before the pandemic.

PAUL: We're in the wealthiest country in the world. So when I think about the fact that there are now 5.5 million people that are food insecure, I see that as a policy failure - significant policy failure that no government should be proud of. But when I also think about the fact that there are 45 or so billionaires in this country, I also see that as a policy failure that no government should be a proud of. Because in essence, these are often folks and corporations that have extracted the most wealth from low-income people. They've taken their wealth, and they hide it through offshore tax havens, through tax loopholes, and the lack of a wealth tax in this country. And that's the money that we should be recouping to be able to support creating the type of society where everyone, in one of the richest countries in the world, has food to eat, has a place to sleep, has access to the medicine that they need. Like, it's ludicrous to me that these policy failures, we've allowed them to just balloon and exist the way they have for as long as they have.

RESH: And as you brought up those years in the 90s, the so-called Common Sense Revolution in Ontario, under the Harris government - We saw those cuts to social welfare. We saw the welfare diet shopping list. I remember that! It was Kraft Dinner, and canned tuna and canned peas. And you can feed a family of four on \$90 a month or something like that.

PAUL: Yes, David Tsubouchi. That's exactly what it was. He was a Minister of Social Services at the time in the Mike Harris government. I wanted to figure out what was happening as a child. And I learned so much about these characters, and ultimately their war on the poor. But yeah, David Tsubouchi said; Oh, yeah, of course, people can eat on the welfare diet. What they need to be doing is they can have pasta without sauce. They can have bread without butter. Re-use tea bags. They can go to local grocery stores and see if they have any dented tins or things like that.

And actually, I feel remiss to not have mentioned this yet. Not only are we one of the richest countries in the world, but Canada also ratified the Right to Food, as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So it means that it was introduced in 1966, ratified in 1976. It means that Canadians have a right to food and, you know, General Comment 12 spells out that the Federal Government is the duty bearer and Canadians are the rights holders. So it's the responsibility of the Federal Government, not to hand out free food or support the handing out of free food, but actually the responsibility of the Federal Government to create the conditions to allow people to access the food that they need to feed their families, feed their communities now and into the future - Again 5.5 million people that are food insecure. And this isn't seen as a national disaster or a huge policy failure by our governments and something that they're prioritizing. It's really disappointing. It's really sad. Tragic.

RESH: Absolutely. And since those times of the 90s, what we've seen is that inflation has risen 56%. But social assistance has only risen by 41%. So again, its cuts to social welfare. So you've talked about capitalism. This is very much the recipe of neoliberalism, which is prioritizing profit over people through privatization, deregulation,

and of course, cuts to social welfare. And over the four decades, four or five decades of neoliberal growth, that's where we saw the growth and the explosion of food banks right across the country. So let's talk about food banks. So FoodShare is not a food bank. Food banks were originally developed as short-term contingency charitable measure to deal with hunger emergencies. And rather than disappearing, they became permanent fixtures. So have we been caught in a 40-year food emergency?

PAUL: We have, indeed, and we've been caught in a 40-year lack of attention to the issues that cause food insecurity. You know, and this is not popular to say and people always get upset with me every time I say something along these lines; but I again, feel remiss not to. You know, when we just look at the time, the rise of neoliberalism, we've got Thatcher, Reagan and Mulroney in power. We've got the opening of the first Food Bank, led by Gerard Kennedy, a former liberal MP, you know, this is not surprising to me. And what food banks have done, in essence; one, they distract us from the root causes. They distract us from income-based interventions. They support the distrust of the poor. We can't give them money, but we can give them food. And we see how that plays out on the individual level. But even more significantly, when we looked at the issue of corporate food waste - so for example, you know, some company that produces soup. Let's say they will go nameless, but maybe they produce soup, and they mislabel a bunch of their products. So what they used to have to do would be they would have to pay to dispose of that soup and all of the costs associated with the disposal. Instead, what we've seen since 1981 is these large food corporations are often on boards of food banks; they're often making donations to allow for the purchase of infrastructure for food banks, especially vehicles that allows the food bank staff or volunteers to go and pick up the mislabeled product, the food waste, the things that that corporation would have had to pay to have disposed of before. Now they have volunteers or staff picking up this food waste and doing the work of trying to distribute it some way, somehow. These corporations are saving money. And while they're saving money, they're getting a halo from the food banks; who are giving them awards and putting them on their walls - Partner of the Year, and all of this. I think we have got to - I would love and this is so radical, but I think what we need is a roadmap to close food banks.

RESH: That's one of your bold ideas. That's part of your platform. Right?

PAUL: It is, indeed. I think what we need to do is - like I said, these folks who are working in food banks, they're not awful people. These are folks who are responding to, like I said, that moral imperative. But how powerful would it be if we started to organize along low-income people, alongside the volunteers and staff at food banks, and said to governments that; We're giving you your notice. We are giving you one year. Otherwise, we are going to go on strike. And we will not sort tins. We will not collect corporate refuse. We want to see income-based interventions. We want to see livable wages, and we want to see legislation that truly supports workers and those unable to work.

RESH: You said that, “Everyone has a right to food, not a right to charity, not a right to handouts, not a right to someone else's leftovers, but the right to food”.. So, again, we often hear, not just in food, but in terms of other types of assistance as well, that you know, charity. Charity is great. And as you said, it comes from a good place. But rather than alleviating these issues: poverty, food insecurity, it could actually help perpetuate them. What is the difference between food charity and food as a right?

PAUL: Food as a right means that we're, governments again, will have that responsibility, are looking at the tools available to them to ensure that everyone has access to food. This is a public policy issue. So for example, when I have conversations with people who are food insecure, again, food is just how it shows up for them. But often, it's because they can't access affordable housing. They're paying more than 30% of their income on housing. They are working in jobs that don't pay enough, they don't pay livable wages. They can't afford, or they're paying a lot for the medicine that they need to control an illness that they might have. So advancing food as a right is going to involve looking at policies outside of food. It's going to involve looking at income security. It's going to involve building affordable housing.

You know, we used to do this sort of thing. And again, we kind of see the trajectory of neoliberalism. We're talking about the early 80s, you know. In the 90s, the Conservative government, got us out of building affordable housing. And then the Liberals in the budget after that, ensured that we were completely out of, and CMHC, was completely out of building affordable housing. We need to get back to building affordable housing, building co-ops, building social housing, building affordable rental.

Why we don't have a pharmacare program in this country is outrageous. You know, Tommy Douglas, of course, had this vision, this brilliant vision for access to healthcare. And I think his vision included moving towards the next step, which was introducing pharmacare and more robust coverage around other supports that people need. But we stopped. So I've heard from - and this again boggles me - I've heard from nurses, you know that somebody could be in hospital, they get released from hospital and they get a prescription. The prescription is for some penicillin that costs less than \$20. They can't afford to fill that prescription. So they end up back in hospital, more sick, and it costs about \$1200 a day to care for them in the hospital. So there's also this underlying distrust of the poor, I think. - This class war that I spoke about, that prevents us from providing the supports, the actual supports that people need.

I just want to add one thing, while I may, about health care. I also think there's an opportunity for us as a country, one of the richest countries in the world again, to think really boldly about what health care is. We actually don't have a health care system in this country. We have, you know, a semi functioning sick care system. When people get sick, we try and help them. And I think this connects to capitalism; making sure that workers are ready to go back to work. But truly a health care system wouldn't be divorced from things that I've talked about. - Shouldn't be divorced from access to fresh

food. Wouldn't be divorced from a safe, affordable homes. These are the sorts of things that are actually going to advance the right to food, more so than food charity.

RESH: And is this what you mean by joined-up policy?

PAUL: Absolutely. We need a framework that's focused on advancing our collective human rights; whether it's our right to food, the right to housing. And I think folks get really excited about, you know, one or two policies and talk about policy windows and that sort of thing. I can't analyze those things without recognizing patriarchy, racism, classism, you know. So when there's a policy window that opens up, who's creating that policy window? I think we need to take some of our power back as everyday folk and community, and we create our policy windows and we create our priorities and insist that our politicians advance them. And we need to make sure that our human rights are protected. And I think we need a framework that does that. That looks at a whole bunch of things instead of one specific policy. That is a collection of joined-up policy that advances our human rights.

RESH: I just want to go back to this idea of people coming together, this idea of empowerment, you've said that, "if anything good is to come out of a pandemic, it must be our collective will to move towards a more just society". FoodShare emphasizes this point, in that the organization is not about working for, or on behalf, of marginalized populations, but working with them. So why is this approach, the solidarity approach, so important?

PAUL: Because we need to build people power. Those with the most power in society, the most access to power resources and money have really done a disservice to workers. Have done a disservice to those that aren't able to work. And I think what we need to be doing to be able to push back is we need to be building solidarity. We need to be making sure that we're showing up for one another, and we're thinking about care in a way that is completely counter to the ways that governments have thought about care. And we need to make sure that we get everyday people elected, so we can challenge this idea of, what I said earlier you know, politicians deciding who wins in the economy and those that win in the economy deciding who our politicians are. That's not serving us. And we can't participate in those kinds of conversations. We can't be in those types of spaces until all of us are fed - So until all of us have the things that we need. And our governments aren't going to provide that. They haven't provided that. So this kind of solidarity of working with each other, sharing our resources, understanding, you know, what's happening in our communities, and developing a shared analysis is the first step in really seizing the power that we have, which is people power.

RESH: To sum up: So where the journey is as important as the goal, we're talking about a solidarity approach to advocate for policies that will guarantee food security as a social right for everyone. Is that a good summation?

PAUL: Absolutely. Beautiful.

RESH: Okay..Thanks. Last question, so in order to achieve food security, and sustainability, from coast to coast to coast, in a way that's also good for the rest of the planet, and for the planet itself, what critical steps do we need to start taking now, to make hunger history?

PAUL: We need to elect people who are going to recognize the urgency of this issue, the scale and the urgency of this issue. And recognize that, you know, we're at a really pivotal time. And this may sound strange; but what I think is really important about this time is I hear more and more people speaking to me as if they feel that hunger and poverty are inevitable. And I think as soon as we believe that these things are inevitable, that homelessness is inevitable, we've lost. So I think we need to make sure that we're electing folks, leaders in our communities, everyday folks in our communities, who actually recognize that something better was possible, who actually recognize that we deserve a refund on what we've been sold from previous governments. And I love the way you asked this question, because I would be remiss also not to say that I think when we center human rights, we need to do that both domestically and internationally. When we're building solidarity, we need to be doing that both domestically and internationally. Our foreign policy shouldn't be divorced from our domestic policy. We need to be thinking about our global responsibilities, and using much more of a lens of internationalism, when it comes to collectively dealing with the issues before us, be it anti-Indigeneity, climate change, poverty, food insecurity, continued colonization and imperialism. We can't solve these issues by only focusing within our borders. So I think we need to be building an international solidarity movement that is positioned to, and prepared to, reframe the way power exists in society and make sure that we are caring for each other in the way that we all know is possible.

RESH: Wonderful. Thank you so much, Paul. It's been a pleasure.

PAUL: Oh, thank you so much for having me, Resh. I really enjoyed our conversation. I could talk about these sorts of things all day long.

RESH: Take care, Paul, thank you so much.

PAUL: Thank you. You take care of as well.

RESH: That was Paul Taylor, anti-poverty activist, federal NDP candidate and Executive Director of FoodShare Toronto.

Please join us for our next episode, *From Epidemic to Pandemic: Rethinking Health*. With host John Caffery and guests Keith McCrady, executive director of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations and Zoe Dodd, activist and harm reduction worker with the University Health Network

I'm Resh Budhu, host of today's episode of the *Courage My Friends* podcast. Thanks for listening.

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