

Arduous times turn ever-increasing need into fear

by JAMES MATTHEWS

Every 15 minutes, a person sees through the dream.

Okay, I made that up. But it sounds as if it could be a thing. The case could be made that I'm a little too gracious with the timeframe, actually. Fifteen minutes likely seems generous to many people, given the current circumstances. But I'm trying to be at least somewhat optimistic. Hopeful optimism is about the only thing that doesn't cost anything. Is disappointment a price?

These are days people give up on ambitions tended over years through education, practice, and daydreams. Those hopes are lately abandoned for any job that will send the wolves howling in another direction, away from the door. Those people are lucky enough to be able to get any job. For the rest, the need turns into fear.

It costs more just to live these days. And the wherewithal to meet that bar set by utility companies and corporations is outmatched and outpaced by need. To wit: Just recently I read that the crowd at Rogers is going to introduce a fee for subscribers who pay their bill with a credit card. Their justification is that the fee is needed to cover costs levied on Rogers by the credit card companies.

And too bad for you if you live in an area where you can't readily go to an outlet to pay the bill. There's always online banking, I suppose. It seems providing as many means as possible to ensure customers' convenience is trumped by the directive to maximize profit for shareholders.

Talk about the majority serving the few. But that's how we've allowed the world to turn. The quality of service provided by Rogers, and indeed all internet service providers, especially, doesn't indicate a desire or drive by the company to do anything but serve the shareholders. If you don't think so, ask somebody living in Mono, waiting for high-speed residential internet.

I don't mean to pile on Rogers. They have the bloated contracts given to athletes to service. And poor service at high cost isn't the monopoly of telecommunications companies. It's getting to be a blight across the board for most consumers.

To those of us who still read: The next time you read about the obscene quarterly profits achieved by Canada's major banks, wonder where the NSF fees go that are paid by more of us as monthly budgets are blown by rising costs at checkout counters. A fabricated charge, that is. What is a bank out when you're account is without sufficient funds? It feels like it is little more than the daily vig on a gambling debt as set by Vito Black Eyes and enforced by goons.

Can anybody explain how the price of petrol can increase as quickly as it does? The gasoline and diesel in the below-ground tanks at any gas station were refined and processed months ago at the price it was then. That should govern the value now, the commodity's cost. Years ago, when the Loonie achieved parity with the U.S. dollar, we were told Canadian prices would continue to be higher than south of the border because items in the marketplace were manufactured at a higher cost. Industry had to recoup the costs of production and distribution.

Here's something else for anybody who isn't convinced there's a thumb on the scales: The lowest living hourly wage rate in Ontario is between \$21.50 and \$27.20 depending on where you're living. That's according to last year's numbers by the Ontario Living Wage Network. The province's general minimum hourly wage rose to a whopping \$17.95 at the beginning of October.

That extra 30 cents doesn't really go far to assuage the fear sowed by ever-increasing need.