

## GAP

I was concerned this week when I read about the rise in low pay throughout the UK, particularly among the growing numbers of self-employed.

Eurostat figures comparing wealth and the cost of living throughout the European Union also show that there are sections of our country which are poorer than regions of Bulgaria and Romania, the two poorest countries in the EU.

And those same Eurostat figures also inform us that London is the richest place in the whole of Europe.

One thing I've noticed in this Referendum year is how much discussion is going on. We're thinking deeply about the relative wealth of the UK, as well as other issues like fairness and equality.

These statistics suggest that whilst we may live in one of the world's wealthiest countries, our wealth is very unevenly distributed.

Income inequality has become a big issue for us. Since the mid 1970s, the gap between rich and poor has risen faster in the UK than any other developed nation.

In Richard Wilkinson's and Kate Pickett's insightful book, *The Spirit Level*, it's pointed out that what matters most is not how rich or poor we are, but rather the *gap* between the richest and the poorest.

Where there is greater inequality there are greater problems - in areas of health, education, crime and almost every indicator of well-being. This inevitably affects all citizens, not just the poor. So, the negative effects of inequality pervade the whole fabric of society.

If we're hoping for a happier and healthier society, then this is an issue we can't avoid. The words of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus emphasize the imperative to care for the poorest and most vulnerable. According to the Bible, the ultimate test of a nation is how it cares for its weakest and poorest members.

So maybe in this year of big discussions and big decisions, we should rise to that ultimate test - and in caring for the vulnerable and poor - we can all live in a more equal, and therefore better country.

Let us together 'mind the gap'.

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