

END LEGISLATED POVERTY

N E W S L E T T E R

Smallwood and Sihota get your letters!!

In February the ELP newsletter had two form letters about welfare and wages. One letter asked Moe Sihota, the government person in charge of minimum wage, to increase minimum wage to \$8.26 an hour. The other asked Joan Smallwood, the person in charge of welfare, to increase welfare to the poverty line.

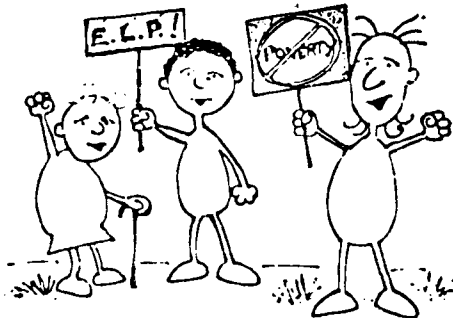
ELP asked people to sign the letters and write down their comments. Lots of people did!! We got over 1000 letters back. On March 24th, a group from ELP went to Victoria to give the letters to Smallwood and Sihota. The group included Stephanie Chaytor, ELP Board member, Linda Marcotte, Pat Chauncey and Wayne MacEachern, ELP staff; Carlie Conway and Eavan O'Connor, 17 year old students on welfare from Spectrum School; and Cindy MacLaren, a parent on welfare.

Sihota said that he wanted to raise minimum wage to 125% of the poverty line. He said he wanted to announce another increase that would be more than 25 cents an hour this year. But he didn't make a firm commitment to do this.

Smallwood didn't say much about raising welfare rates. She said the government would try to figure out programs to help people get off welfare and get jobs.

"It was a good meeting but it shows that we have to keep the pressure up if we're going to get more money for low income people," said Linda afterwards.

Better Incomes for Better Lives



Going fishing?

Dan Larsen is president of the Clearbrook welfare and handicapped person's rights society.

Dan Larsen also likes to fish. But regular fishing licenses cost \$12. That's too expensive for people on welfare or handicapped pension.

So Dan started writing to the Ministry of Fisheries. He wanted disabled people to have a \$1 fishing licence just like seniors have.

Dan won!! The government is going to have a \$1 fishing licence for people with disabilities. That law is not passed yet but it will be soon.

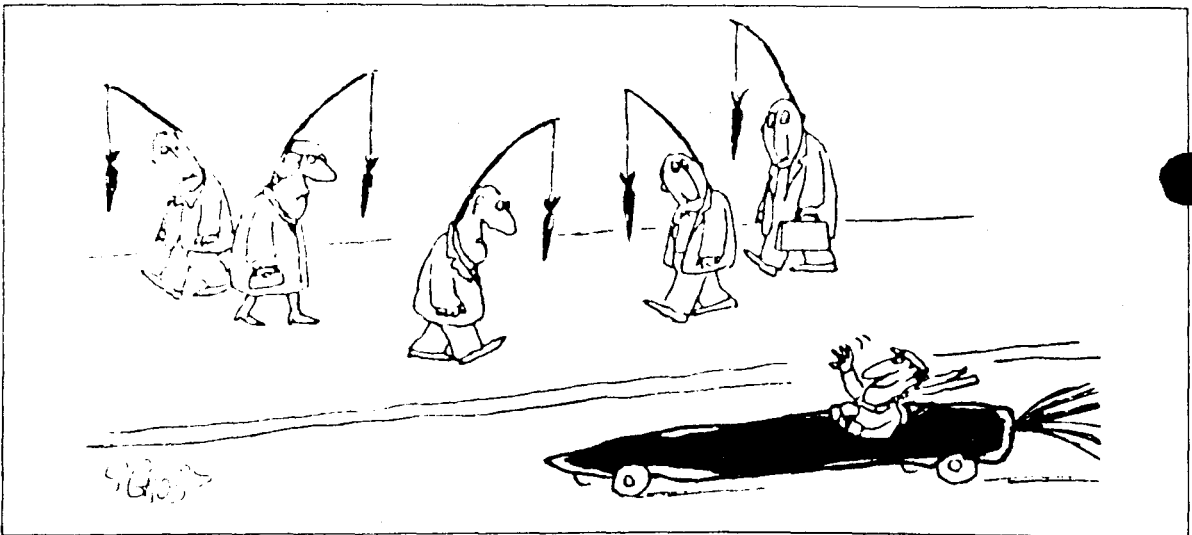
Larsen says he "sat on the bank and fished and dared them to arrest me."

You can get an application for the special fishing licence at eight Fish and Wildlife offices in B. C. If you live in the Lower Mainland, call the Surrey office at 584-8822.

In order to get this \$1 licence you have to be on GAIN for handicapped people. Or, your doctor has to fill out part of the application form or write a letter.

The applications will be accepted now. But the fishing licence won't be sent to you until the law is officially passed.

The \$1 license is only good for fishing in fresh water. It is not for ocean fish.



What the BC budget did for poor people

On March 26th, the BC Budget was announced. This is a speech that is given in the Legislature in Victoria. The speech says what the government plans to do in the coming year. It says how much it plans to spend and how much it plans to tax.

What did the budget do for poor people?

The government says that it will let people on welfare keep more of the money they earn. Single people will be able to keep \$100 instead of \$50. Families will be able to keep \$200 instead of \$100.

The welfare budget increased by 19% but this doesn't mean that people will get 19% increases. The government is expecting a lot more people to have to go on welfare. That's what the 19% is for, not increases.

More people will have to go on welfare because of the Tory government in Ottawa cutting back on Unemployment Insurance and because unemployment is high. Free trade is one cause of this.

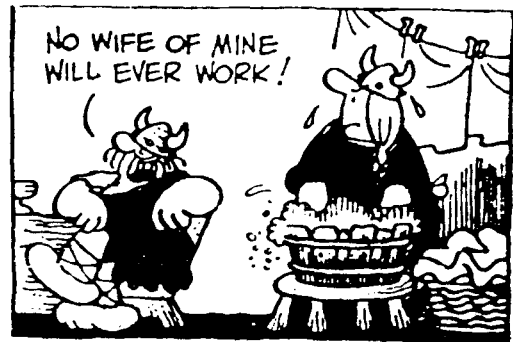
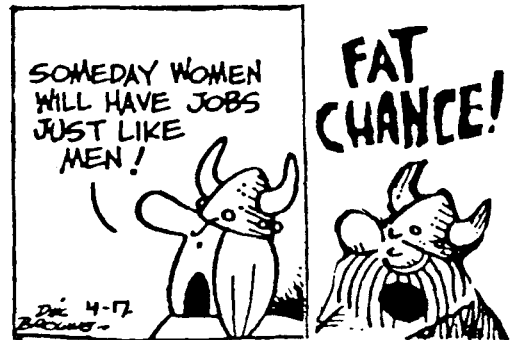
The budget didn't say anything about increasing minimum wage. It didn't say anything about rent control or building affordable housing. It didn't say anything about improving bus service.

The budget didn't announce any big programs to create jobs. They said that spending on things like a new ferry and

spending by BC Hydro will keep 16,000 jobs alive.

The government added about \$400 million in taxes, mostly to corporations and richer people.

Still, there was no increase announced for the poorest British Columbians. This shows we have to keep organizing and working to get the changes that poor people need.



Advocates want changes to welfare

People who stick up for people on welfare want changes to the welfare system.

The Front Line Advocates Workers (FLAW's) are a group of people who are advocates for low income people. These people met with Joan Smallwood on March 13th. Smallwood is the B. C. government person in charge of welfare. This is what the advocates told Smallwood:

Pam Fleming from End Legislated Poverty: FLAWs want welfare rates increased to the poverty line and minimum wage to \$8.26 an hour. We want money for a poor people's conference on the constitution. If property rights and economic union clauses go through, government won't have real power to do anything about poverty.

Karen Spears (Downtown Eastside Women's Centre): FLAWs want the distinction between shelter and support payments abolished.

Colleen Smith (UBC Law Students Legal Advice Program): FLAWs want the distinction of employable and unemployable abolished.

Irene Schmidt (Carnegie Centre): FLAWs want an end to forced employment for all people on welfare. Looking for jobs and training should not be a condition of getting welfare.

Tracy Moore (BC Coalition of People with Disabilities): FLAWs want women on welfare to be able to get proper counselling when they have been abused. They shouldn't have to appeal to get this.

Stephanie Chaytor (First United Church): Single Parents on welfare should not be forced to register for the Family Maintenance Enforcement Program.

Colleen Smith: FLAWs want to stop to lum sum deductions of maintenance payments and criminal injuries.

Rain Daniels (Crabtree Corner, YWCA): People on welfare need bus passes.

David Mossop (Community Legal Assistance Society): FLAWs want a stop to judicial reviews. (This is where a person on welfare wins a Tribunal and then the government takes it to court to stop the win).

Jonene Bicket (Independent Advocate): FLAWs want a list of advocates in every office so people on welfare can get information if they are not getting their rights.

(this report is a shorter version of the article in the March FLAWline)

Smallwood's response to FLAWs

Here are some of the things that Smallwood told the FLAWs:

Welfare rates and wages: Some issues are going to take longer than others

Constitution: We are looking at ways of more directly giving a voice to people issues.

Shelter and support: I will make a commitment to follow through and deal with those policy issues.

Employable and unemployable: Employment and training issues are on the Ministry's agenda.

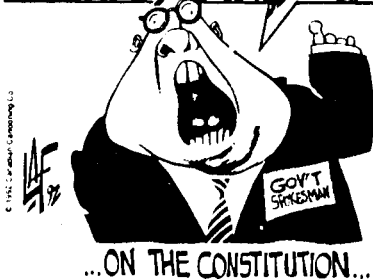
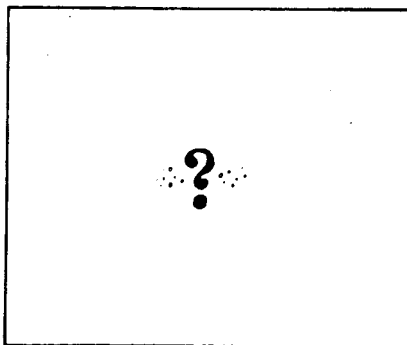
Abuse: I need more information.

Family Maintenance Enforcement Program: A package will come to the legislature on this.

Bus passes: We are looking at options to deal with the broader transit policy.

Smallwood said she wanted to continue meeting with FLAWs. She said that the income assistance caseload is increasing by about 5000 people per month. The government inherited a mess from the Socreds. \$246 million meant for social services has been taken from BC by the Tory government.

(this report is a shorter version of the article in the March FLAWline)



Security deposits: What are your rights?

Do you rent a suite to live in? Here are some rules about security deposits that might help you out.

A security deposit is the extra money the landlord asks for before you move in. It is money over and above the monthly rental. Sometimes a security deposit is called a damage deposit.

Your security deposit can't be more than half a month's rent. The landlord can't ask for more money than the security deposit for things like keys, pets, furniture, or parking. When you add all the deposits together, they can't add up to more than half a month's rent.

The landlord can ask you for a deposit to "hold" the place for you before you move in. When you move in, this becomes part of your security deposit.

The only time the landlord can ask you for a security deposit is when you first agree to rent the suite. If the landlord asks you for a security deposit after you have moved in, you don't have to pay it.

If the landlord has charged you more than half a month's rent for your security deposit, you can take the extra amount that you paid off your rent cheque. If you do this, you should write a letter to your landlord explaining why you're not paying the full rent. Be sure to keep a copy of the letter.

When you move in:

On the day you move in, check over your new home. Make a list, room by room, of what is in good shape and what needs to be repaired. Also check to see if anything is damaged.

Have a friend go through with you as a witness. If you have a camera, take pictures.

Write down things like: broken windows, stains or burns on the rugs, holes in the walls, water damage in the bathroom.

When you finish your checklist, make a copy. You and your witness should sign both copies. Be sure to put the date on it.

Keep your copy in a safe place and give the other copy to your landlord. When you move out, this checklist will prove that you didn't cause any of the damage that was there when you moved in.

Next issue, we'll have more information about security deposits. In the meantime, if you need help with a landlord-tenant problem, call the Tenants Rights Coalition at 255-0546. They can help you get your rights.



Get help with welfare from these groups

Downtown Eastside Residents' Association

9 E. Hastings St. Phone 682-0931. Open Monday through Friday.

First United Church

320 E. Hastings. Come Monday through Friday, 9 to 11 am.

Vancouver and District Public Housing Tenants' Association

246 E. Broadway. Phone 872-8648. Open 9 to 4 Monday through Friday.

B. C. Coalition of People with Disabilities

456 W. Broadway. Phone 872-1278. Open 9 to 5. Monday through Friday.

Downtown Eastside Womens' Centre

For women only. Open 11 am to 5 pm on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Open 12 noon to 5 pm on Wednesday. Drop in or call 681-8480.

Little Mountain Tenants' Association

125 E. 37th. Phone 324-0555. Open 10 to 3 Monday through Friday.



For help with landlord tenant problems:

Call the Tenants' Rights Coalition Hotline: 255-0546.

For help with serious criminal problems or urgent family problems related to the law:

Go to the Legal Services Society, 191 Alexander St. Open 9 to 3:30 on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Open 12:30 to 3:30 on Wednesday. Legal Services may be able to help with child custody and restraining orders.