

END LEGISLATED POVERTY

N E W S L E T T E R

November, 1992

#58

Over 100,000 B. C. children now on welfare

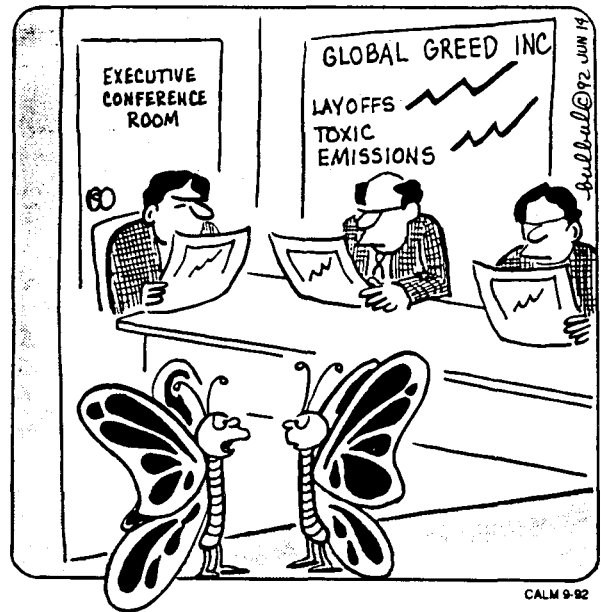
The Ministry of Social Services says that 100,861 children in B. C. were on welfare in August. The total number of people on welfare was 292,921. Since the number has been rising lately, there's a good chance that the total number on welfare in B. C. today is over 300,000!

72,540 of the people on welfare in B. C. are single men. 37,268 are single women. 6,780 are couples. 11,721 are two parent families. 45,253 are one parent families.

This is the highest number of people on welfare ever! It means that about 300,000 people in B. C. are barely surviving on income that is about half the poverty line.

So don't feel like being poor is your own fault! When 300,000 people in our province are welfare, the economy and our government are at fault, not you.

We need politicians who will End Legislated Poverty!



THESE SPECIMENS ARE CALLED
HOMO-SAPIEN GREED-ISORUS...
A HABITAT DESTROYING SUB-SPECIES

Multinational drug dealing

By Sandy Cameron

Have you noticed? Prescription drug costs in Canada are going up faster and faster. The reason is simple. The Mulroney government in Ottawa has given in to the demands of the brand name, foreign owned drug corporations. These huge companies don't want competition from smaller Canadian companies that sell cheaper, no-name drugs.

In 1987 Mulroney passed Bill C-22. This gave the brand name companies patents for 7 to 10 years. This meant that they had a monopoly on drugs for that length of time. Now Mulroney wants to pass Bill C-91. This would give the brand name multinational drug companies a monopoly on new drugs for 20 years.

There are three big problems with this bill.

Bill C-91 will put up to 2300 Canadians out of work. These are the people who work for the no name drug companies.

Bill C-91 will push drug costs up for everyone, including people on low income who have nothing to spare.

Bill C-91 will push up the costs of health care to provinces. The no name drug industry saves Canadians about \$500 million a year in medicine costs.

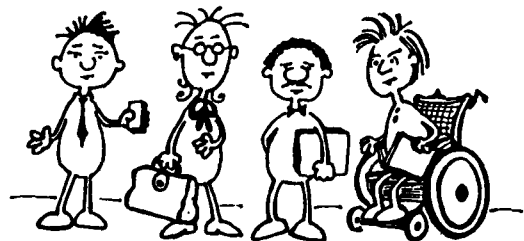
Bill C-91 must be stopped. Write to Brian Mulroney, Parliament Buildings, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6. Write to Elizabeth Cull, Minister of Health, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B. C. V8V 1X4. Tell them you want Bill C-91 stopped.

And when the next federal election comes...well, you can finish this sentence for yourself.

Free economics class

Would you like to sit in on an economics class for free. No tests. No grades. Just learning.

Andrew Whittaker is an economics teacher at Langara. If you would like to sit in on his class, just give him a call at 324-5483.



Has the NDP made a difference to people on welfare?

The NDP government has been in power for about a year now. What has the result been for people on welfare? In general, the big changes that people on welfare need haven't been made. Unemployment is still high. Minimum wages are still way too low. And welfare rates are still at only about half the poverty line.

Jobs. Unemployment in B. C. is over 11%. This means that people who want jobs have a hard time finding them. There aren't enough jobs for all who want them. The government hasn't done anything noticeable to create jobs.

Minimum wage. The NDP raised this from \$5 an hour to \$5.50. Moe Sihota, the Minister in charge of minimum wage told NDP that he would like to raise it to 125% of the poverty line within four years. That would be over \$9 an hour. But if he wants to raise it that high, we need another increase of at least 50 cents now!!

Welfare rates. The increase last January was terrible. Single people actually fell behind inflation since their increase was only 4.2%.

On some smaller things, the NDP has been quite good.

Police reports. A Province newspaper article reported that police were upset about people on welfare. The police said that people on welfare were cashing their cheques, reporting the money lost or stolen, and getting welfare to replace the money. There was no real evidence in the article that people on welfare were cheating. The police just implied that they were. What did the Ministry of Social Services do? According to the article, they told the police to stop harrasing their clients. Its good to have the Ministry coming out on our side for a change!!

Forced employment of single parents on welfare. The NDP passed the best law in the country on this issue. Single parents on welfare can chose to stay home and look after their children, or look for work. The option is theirs. This change came after a long struggle by End Legislated Poverty and lots of women on welfare.

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The year in review....(cont)

School food program. The NDP has provided \$11 million for universal school lunch programs throughout the province. This, too, came after a long fight by ELP and many single parents. The program is still not perfect. Many schools that need the program don't have it. The people that run the schools haven't recognized the need and haven't applied for the money.

Earnings exemptions. The amount of money that you can earn and keep was increased from \$50 to \$100 for singles and \$100 to \$200 for families and people with disabilities. This is good for people who can work. But Cecile Guay of Dawson Creek points out: if you can't work, it doesn't help you.

Asset limits: The amount of money you can have in the bank and still apply for welfare was increased quite a bit. Singles can have \$2500, up from as low as \$5 for some people. Families can have \$5000.

Training limit. There used to be a 3 year limit on the number of years that a person could go to College or University and still be

on welfare. That limit was taken off for single parents and people with disabilities. This means that these people now have a better chance of finishing college or university. Unfortunately the limit was not taken off for single people and couples.

Maintenance program. The Family Maintenance Enforcement Program is now optional for women on welfare. It used to be required or you'd could get cut off welfare. This change came because of a long struggle led by the Federated Anti-Poverty Groups of B. C.

Services can be appealed. The Ministry changed welfare regulations on childcare, training, homemaker services so that they can now be appealed. This means that if you ask your worker for childcare, training, or homemaker services, and the worker says "no," you can appeal the decision. Get one of the groups on the back page to help you out.



Continued from the last page)...

Training. The Ministry added \$17 million dollars to its budget for training and adjusted some policies to increase wages. For example, employers in the Employment Plus program now have to pay minimum wage of \$5.50 instead of \$3.50 to workers. The Ministry will top this up to \$9 an hour.

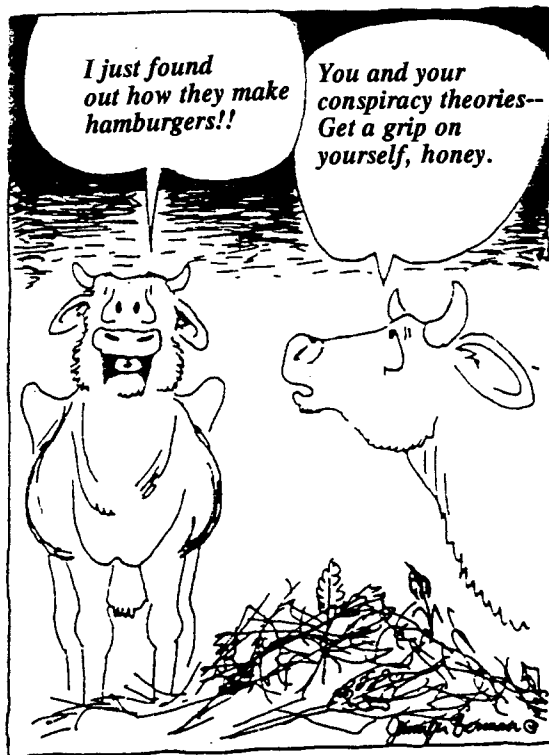
The Ministry has done some good things with the Community Volunteer Program. This program pays volunteers on welfare \$100 a month to work with community groups. The Ministry said people only have to work 10 hours a month, instead of the old 40 hours. There is no longer a limit on the amount of time that you can be on the program.

But, the Ministry said that all the non profit groups that use volunteers have to have a criminal record check on their staff and other volunteers. Many groups feel this is an invasion of their rights and won't do it. As a result, few will be able to use the community volunteer program. However, ELP has complained to the Ministry and there is a chance that this regulation about criminal record checks will be changed.

Funds for advocacy groups.

The Ministry has announced that it will give \$1 million to advocacy and anti-poverty groups.

How has the NDP done in the first years? On the big things, they haven't done nearly enough. On the little things, they have made positive changes.



Changes coming to family benefits

The Tory government is getting ready to abolish family allowances and the child tax credit.

They are buying expensive ads in newspapers to tell people about the wonders of the Child Benefit. The Child Benefit will replace the family allowance and child tax credit.

In the ad the government tries to create the impression that the child benefit will help people surviving in poverty. But it won't help people on welfare. The amount of money that people on welfare will get after the change is exactly the same as they were getting before it.

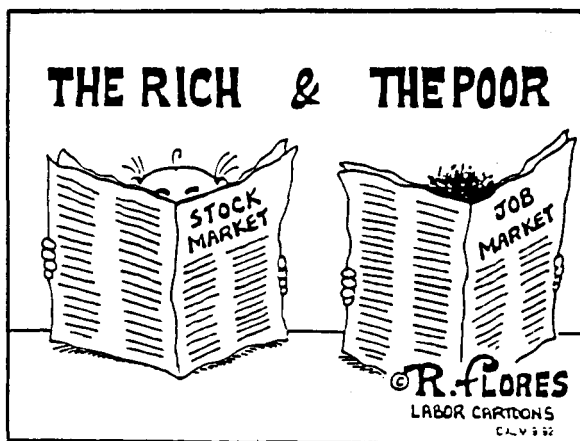
After January a family on welfare with one child will get \$85 a month. With two children, the family will get \$170 per month. But the family won't get any family allowance or child tax credit.

Families that earn between \$3,750 and \$20,921 will get up to \$500 more per year than families on welfare. This is a wage supplement to enable them to work at low wages and still survive.

The Tories don't want to increase minimum wages or pass pay equity laws. With the child benefit, they take money that used to go to the family allowance and child tax credit. They use it to top up wages that employers should be paying.

This is part of a strategy to keep wages low so that corporations in Canada can compete with Mexican companies. The problems are: wages stay low; taxes stay high; social programs get destroyed; and we still have poverty.

Instead low income people need adequate welfare, and adequate wages.



Talk to a person

(Thanks for this story to the Telecommunications' Workers Union/CALM)

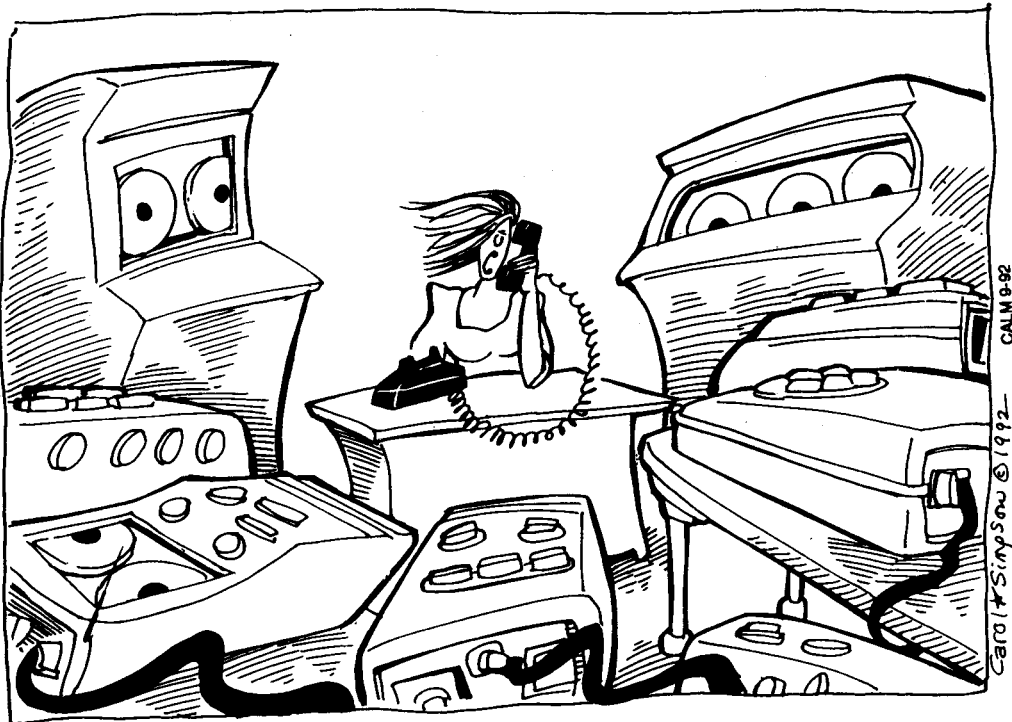
Tired of calling the phone company, only to listen to a robotic voice telling you which buttons to push?

Most people are, say the members of the Telecommunications Workers. The union recently started a "Human Touch"

campaign to let the public know they can talk to an operator.

You can bypass the robot system and continue to place calls with an operator. All you have to do is dial "0" as soon as you hear the automated voice.

You can talk to a real person when calling directory assistance, too. You can ask the operator to stay on the line to give you the phone number.



"I'M SORRY, MADAM, BUT ALL OUR RECORDED MESSAGES ARE BUSY. YOU'LL HAVE TO SPEAK TO A HUMAN BEING."

Get help with legal problems 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

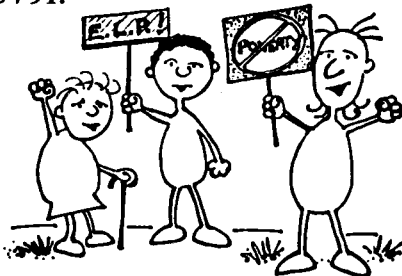
#105 E. 37th. Phone 321-6120. Open 9 to 4 Monday through Friday.

B. C. Coalition of People with Disabilities

#204 456 W. Broadway. Phone 872-1278. Open 9 to 5 Monday through Friday. Toll free number for people who are outside the Lower Mainland: 1-800-663-1278.

Law Students Legal Advice Program

For help with a wide variety of legal problems. Locations throughout the Lower Mainland. Call 822-5791.



For help with landlord and tenant problems:

Call the **Tenant's Rights Coalition** Hotline: 255-0546. If you are outside the Lower Mainland, call 1-800-665-1185 between 9 am and 1 pm Monday through Friday.

For help with welfare, 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.

If you are outside the Lower Mainland, for the advocate nearest you, call ELP at 879-1209.