

# End Legislated Poverty

**"Better Welfare? Let's ORGANIZE!"**

**Saturday, November 20 1999**

**This free workshop is for you if. . .**

**-you** are struggling on welfare and want to work with a group to change BC Benefits

**-you** work with a group or agency that works with people struggling on welfare and want to be part of changing things

**-you** belong to a union, Church or a community group that works towards social justice and want to make positive changes to welfare and poverty issues.

This day long workshop is part of ELP's campaign to change BC Benefits. You will get a copy of the new ELPKIT, with lobbying and organizing information. We'll reimburse your busfare and childcare expenses and provide lunch. Call the ELP office at 879-1209 to register.

*\*On November 20th vote for the candidate who has the interest of people living in poverty.*



# **The ELPKIT**

Organise for a Better Welfare System

**Congratulations!**

**By opening up this kit, you are joining with other anti-poverty organisations across BC in a campaign to change BC Benefits!**



**You can use the information in this kit to:**

- Educate & organise with other low-income people and anti-poverty groups.
- Show who benefits from making the welfare system the way it is.
- Lobby politicians to make changes to BC Benefits.
- Make the key issue of the February, 2000, NDP Party leadership race improving BC Benefits.

**You can copy and distribute the ELPKIT as much you want!**

This kit was produced by End Legislated Poverty. Call us collect at (604) 879-1209 or email us at [elp@vcn.bc.ca](mailto:elp@vcn.bc.ca). 211- 456 Broadway, Vancouver, BC, V5Y 1R3.

# What ELP wants...

Join us in demanding that the BC government:

- increase welfare rates for everyone on welfare.
- rescind regulations of BC Benefits that deny welfare to people in need.
- withdraw policies which:
  - force work like Youth Works & Welfare to Work.
  - restrict hardship assistance and crisis grants.
  - make cuts to the allowable asset level.
  - make the appeal process further biased.
  - deny benefits to students.
  - eliminate flat rate earnings exemptions.
  - force single parents to work when their child is 7.
  - force early CPP for seniors.

How to use this kit to organise and lobby .....	3
A guide to Organising .....	5
A guide to lobbying politicians .....	6
Letter to Moe Sihota, .....	9
Resolution for Municipal Councils.....	10
Resolution for Regional Health Boards .....	11
List of federal politicians (BC MP's).....	12
List of provincial politicians (BC MLA's) .....	13
Local contacts for Regional Health Boards .....	14
Media Contact List .....	15
The myths and realities of welfare .....	16
The background of BC Benefits .....	19
Poverty Fact Sheet.....	26

Sources for this Kit: Thank you to Maureen Davis, Rini Templeton, and CALM for the artwork; Unemployment Insurance Bulletin Vol.2, No.1, August 1999; The Long Haul; Campaign Organising in Your Community: A Handbook (Canadian Labour Congress); Your Welfare Rights: A User's Guide to BC Benefits (Legal Services Society); Welfare Changes: Does BC Benefit? (Welfare Hurts One and All); The Growing Gap: A Report on Growing Inequality between the rich and poor in Canada (Centre for Social Justice); BC Benefits: Renewing Our Social Safety Net (Province of British Columbia); Social Planning and Research Council; the Monitor; Revenue Canada 1995 Report; Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation; Vancouver Sun; and, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

# Using this kit to organise and lobby

## Work with an anti-poverty group

If you have an anti-poverty group in your area contact them to work together. If you can't find a group, call ELP (604) 879-1209 collect and we'll help you. We can also work with you to develop strategies and lobbying skills.



## Find out how poverty affects people in your area

Some ways to find out how poverty affects people in your area are: talking with low-income people, asking librarians to help with research, and talking to people who work in helping agencies. If you can't find out how poverty affects people in your area, call ELP for contacts and information. Use the information you find when you go to your Health Board, City/Municipal Council, other local politicians, and the media.

## Use the Media

You can write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. If you listen to the radio, call in when you can and air your views. Ask reporters to do stories about poverty. (See the media contact list in this kit.)

## **Lobby your Provincial and Federal Politicians**

Make copies of the **Letter to Moe Sihota** (or write your own letter) and get people to add to it, sign it, and send it to him. Make an appointment to meet with your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and ask for her/his support. Meet with your Member of Parliament (MP) and tell her/him about how the federal government could end poverty. See the **Background Information** and **ELP Poverty Fact Sheet** for arguments. This kit includes lists of the politicians phone numbers.

## **Lobby your Health Board**

Take the **Resolution on welfare rates and health** to your local Regional Health Board and ask them to pass it. This kit includes a list of contacts for all BC's Health Boards. Use the BC Poverty Fact sheet and the Background Information.

## **Lobby your City or Municipal Council**

Take the **Resolution on BC Benefits** to your City or Municipal Council and ask them to pass it.

## **Meet with other anti-poverty groups**

November 20: ELP workshop to develop skills for working with the ELPKIT (for lower mainland only)

December: Open House event

January: event to share mid-campaign successes

February: NDP leadership conference and ELP event

If you have money or volunteer time, any contributions to ELP's campaign against BC Benefits are welcome. Call us at ELP.



# A Guide to Organising

- Get together with people in your anti-Poverty group or find some people you would like to work with.
- Develop short-term and long-term goals. **Short-term** goals are good to have because they are winnable. **Long-term** goals are good to have because they are the context we organise our other work in.
- Ask yourselves these questions:

Will this reduce poverty in BC?

Will this build more allies?

Can we win?

Can we do it?

If we can't win, what other ends will we achieve?

- Decide on what type of campaign you want: community meetings and events, lobbying, press conferences, etc.
- Develop a plan of action. This is a list of things you need to do and a timeline for doing it.
- Prepare an information fact sheet about your issues. Include a description of your organisation, outline your concerns / issues, and finish with specific requests / needs of your community.

## Here are some tips:

- Brainstorm a list of ideas first and then decide which things are practical and do-able.
- Evaluate things as you go. What worked? What could be changed?
- All of your actions are steps to get to your short-term and long-term goals.
- The more of us there are working together, the stronger our groups and campaigns can be. Always encourage new people to join our groups or support us as allies.

# A guide to lobbying politicians

## Why do we lobby?

Lobbying is *one* way to put pressure on the forces against economic justice. It is a good way to find out about the powers that we're up against, how sleazy they are, and where they are coming from. According to one activist: "Most people think that the problem with politicians is that they are well intentioned, but ill informed. The fact is the opposite: Politicians are very well informed and have very bad intentions!" Lobbying is also a way to gain more media coverage for our issues.

## Setting the right expectations:

It is good to set simple goals for lobbying. We cannot expect everything to change through lobbying alone. It is one tool to achieve our goals. The more people you represent the more politicians will be likely to respond to you.

## Getting Ready:

- Prepare an information fact sheet about your issues. Include a description of your organisation, outline your concerns / issues, and finish with specific recommendations from your community. You can include copies of any resolution you want the politician to support.
- Put together a contact list of politicians you would like to meet with on the issue. This can include MPs, MLAs or municipal politicians.

## Preparing for a lobbying meeting:

- Call and set up an appointment with the politician.
- Have a "pre-meeting" with the people who will be going to the lobbying meeting. 3-4 people is a good number to go to a meeting. This can include people involved in your organisation. It is also helpful to bring allies like representatives of unions or other community organisations that support your issues.
- Decide how you want to work with the media. For example do you want to invite the media

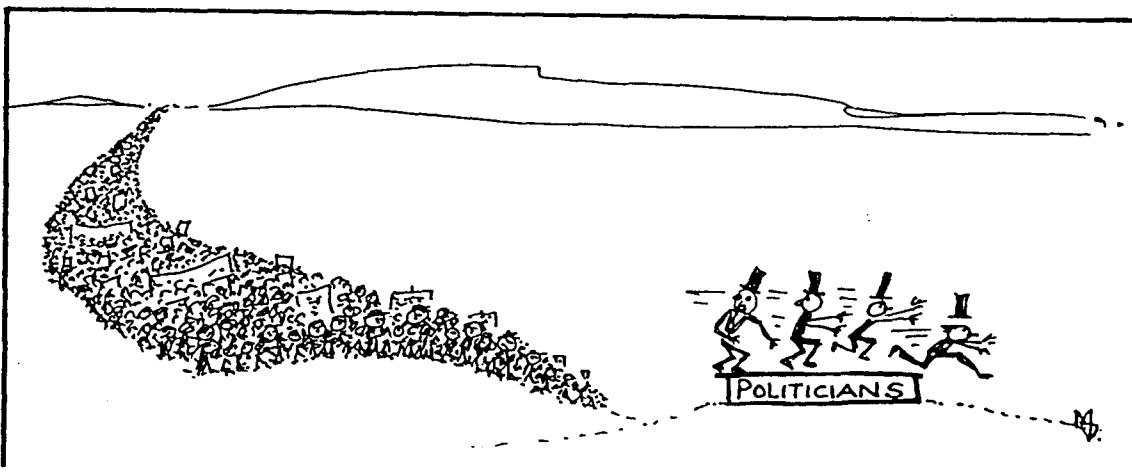


to meet you right after the meeting or will you call the media to tell them the outcome?

- Talk about what issues you want to bring up with the politician. It helps to have a very specific request for the politician, so that he/she knows exactly what type of commitment you are asking for.
- Choose who is going to be the chairperson for the meeting with the government representative and what order you are going to speak.
- Practice what everyone wants to say (everyone should know and agree with what everyone else is going to say).
- Create a list of questions you will ask the politician.
- Practice what you are going to say if the politician says something you don't agree with.
- Set up a time and place you are going to meet up before the meeting.

### At the Lobbying Meeting

- Meet 15 minutes early and go over what issues and order everyone will be talking in. Give each other encouragement.
- Go to meeting and introduce yourselves to the politician.
- Have your chairperson thank the representative for the meeting and introduce the agenda for the meeting.
- Each of you reintroduces yourself and talk about the issues in the order that you have decided on.
- Have your chairperson clearly state what commitment you want from the politician.
- Let the government representative respond.
- Have a discussion about the main points.
- Have your chairperson repeat your concerns and specific requests.





### Lobbying tips:

- Politicians are just people. They will respond to your friendliness.
- You are the experts on your community. Talk about what you know: stories of your experiences are important and convincing.
- Make notes of what the politician says and what some of your arguments can be for the discussion period.
- The chairperson needs to keep track of time so everything gets done in the time you have.
- After the meeting, spend some time talking about how things went. Make sure to tell each other the goods things that they said and did. Also discuss what your next step will be.
- Don't give up! The more of us who are working together, the stronger our campaign will be!

### Your next steps can include:

- Talk to the media at a press conference or issue a press release about the meeting.
- Write a letter to the government official to restate your request and thank him/her for the meeting.
- Make sure the politician follows through on his / her commitment.



Moe Sihota,  
Minister of Social Development Economic Security  
Fax: (250) 356-9830

Dear Mr. Sihota,

I am writing to you as a citizen of BC who is deeply concerned about poverty in this province. I urge you, as the Minister responsible for welfare, to change the parts of BC Benefits that hurt people the most. Unemployed people need welfare. There are not enough jobs for everyone who needs one and many jobs are part time and pay low wages. Single parents need decent welfare rates. Good childcare is hard to find and expensive. Lots of kids need parents to be home for them, even if they are older than 7 years old. Disabled people need welfare if they are unable to work or can't find a job. All these people need to have welfare rates that are high enough to live on and be healthy. They need a welfare system that treats people with dignity and respect. If people are able to work outside the home, they need a welfare system that facilitates finding a job and/or getting training and education.

Shame on your government: the present welfare rates for single people are the same as they were in 1980 under the Socreds.

I urge you to raise the welfare rates and stop denying welfare to people in need. The parts of BC Benefits I am referring specifically to are:

- the 46\$ cut single people, reducing their monthly cheque to \$500.
- that people cannot be on welfare and go to school but must take out a student loan.
- the early intervention program and the all the changes to the "management culture" in the welfare offices that are purposely designed to keep people from applying for welfare.
- change in the earnings exemption that reduced what people can keep from \$100/\$200 to 25%.
- cuts to hardship and crisis grants.
- forced training and employment.
- forced early CCP applications.
- changes to the appeal process.
- forced signing of privacy-violating consent forms.

You stated on Oct.10, 1999 at the federated anti-poverty groups of BC meeting in Naramata that the Ministry "will not save money off the backs of poor people and that people are always to be treated with dignity and respect."

Talking to poor people and anti-poverty groups at Naramata, you said you needed their help to offset the corporate agenda. BC Benefits is the corporate agenda. Use your considerable power to educate the public about the need for a good welfare system. Publicly, make the links between welfare's part in the big business cheap labour strategy and wages of ordinary people. Be an ally of women and publicly make the links between a good welfare system and the ability of woman, and their children to leave abusers. Publicly make the link between how welfare treats children, women the unemployed, disabled people, youth and older people and the value of those people in society.

Please write back and deal honestly and thoughtfully with my points.

Yours truly,

## Resolution on BC Benefits and City/Municipal Councils

Whereas poverty hurts a growing number of people in our community; and

Whereas BC Benefits has:

- reduced income for single people on welfare by \$46 a month to \$500 a month (37% of the poverty line) and for couples by \$82;
- ended the \$200 a month flat rate earnings exemption for families;
- ended the \$100 a month flat rate earning exemption for singles;
- forced seniors to apply for CPP when they're 60 (cutting CPP income by 30% when they become 60, thus ending the only hope many seniors have to escape poverty);
- cut people in university and college off welfare;
- reduced income by \$96 a month for an estimated (by Robin Loxton of the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities) 10,000 people with disabilities that don't meet the government's stringent definition of handicapped;
- added new regulations that deny welfare to people in need (for example people with outstanding warrants, or childless people who need hardship assistance because they are waiting for a UI cheque or for other reasons; and

Whereas there are not enough jobs to support all who need them; and

Whereas low welfare rates plus lack of decent paying jobs contribute to inadequate housing, less access to education, and ill health.

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council strongly urge the provincial government to increase welfare rates for everyone on welfare at least to the poverty line and to rescind regulations of BC Benefits that deny welfare to people in need; and

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council use its zoning powers to support re-zoning applications for affordable housing and shelters, designate and preserve land and existing affordable / rental units, and encourage developers to provide resources for social housing; and

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council guarantee people's right to ask for money if they need it; and

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council provide accessible transportation for low-income people through discounted rates on public transportation; and

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council and Parks Board provide free recreational passes for low-income people and create more useable park space for low-income communities; and

Therefore be it resolved that \_\_\_\_\_ Municipal / City Council and School Board end student fees for low-income students and add more teachers and support staff to allow low-income children adequate and comparable access to education.

## **Resolution on welfare rates (BC Benefits) and health**

**Whereas** poverty is the biggest indicator of poor health; and

**Whereas** the BC Benefits program has:

- reduced income for single people on welfare by \$46 a month to \$500 a month (37% of poverty line) and for couples by \$82;
- ended the \$200 a month flat rate earnings exemption for families;
- ended the \$100 a month flat rate earnings exemption for singles;
- forced seniors to apply for CCP when they're (this cuts CPP income by 30% when they become 64, thus ending the only hope many seniors have to escape poverty);
- cut people in university and college off welfare;
- reduced income by \$96 a month for an estimated (by Robin Loxton of the BC Coalition of People with disabilities) 10,000 people with disabilities that don't meet the government's stringent definition of handicapped;
- added new regulations that deny welfare to people in need (for example people with outstanding warrants, or childless people who need hardship assistance because they are waiting for a UI cheque or for other reasons; and

**Whereas** there are not enough jobs to support all who need them; and

**Whereas** \$500 a month is all that over 86,000 BC citizens (single people on welfare) have to pay for shelter, food, job search, clothes, medicine,

personal care, and participation as citizens in the life of the community; and

**Whereas** the Social Planning and Research Council of BC, after studying BC welfare rates, reports that "Current income assistance rates in BC are too low to sustain the well being of anyone requiring income support."

(Widening the Gap.1997 p. 1);

**And whereas** low welfare rates plus lack of decent paying jobs contribute to feelings of hopelessness and isolation that increase sickness and drug use.

**Therefore be it resolved** that the \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Health Board, in order to help reduce the impact of poverty on the health of BC's poorest citizens, strongly urge the provincial government to increase welfare rates for everyone on welfare and to rescind regulations of BC Benefits that deny welfare to people in need; and

**Therefore be it resolved** that the \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Health Board design an action plan to bring the inadequacy of welfare rates and their impact on health to the public's and government attention.

## Regional Health Board Contacts

Capital Health Region  
 Jac Kreut  
 Chair  
 2101 Richmond Ave  
 Victoria BC V8R 4R7  
 Ph 250-370-8699  
 Fax: 250-370-8750

Central Vancouver  
 Island Health Region  
 Else Strand, Chair  
 610- 495 Dunsmuir  
 Nanaimo, BC  
 V9R 6B9  
 Ph 250-755-3010  
 Fax 250-755-7353

Fraser Valley Health  
 Region  
 George Peary, Chair  
 34194 Marshall Road  
 Abbotsford, BC  
 V2S 5E4  
 Ph 604-556-5060  
 Fax 604-556-5077

North Okanagan  
 Health Region  
 Elsie Gerdes, Chair  
 Box 388  
 Armstrong, BC  
 VOE 1B0  
 Ph 250-546-2917  
 Fax: 250-546-6593

North Shore Health  
 Region  
 Len Kelsey, Chair  
 231 East 15th Street  
 North Vancouver, BC  
 V7L 2L7  
 Ph: 604-984-3841  
 Fax 604-984-5788

Northern Interior  
 Regional Health  
 Board  
 Lorraine Grant  
 2000 15th Avenue  
 Prince George, BC  
 V2M 1S2  
 Ph 250-565-2649  
 Fax 250-565-2640

Okanagan  
 Similkameen Health  
 Region  
 Murli Pendharkar  
 2180 Ethel Street  
 Kelowna, BC  
 V1Y 3A1  
 Ph 250-862-4200  
 Fax 250-862-4201

Simon Fraser Health  
 Region  
 Dennis Cocke, Chair  
 260 Sherbrooke  
 Street

New Westminster,  
 BC  
 V3L 3M2  
 Ph 604-520-7684  
 Fax 604-520-4827

South Fraser Health  
 Region  
 Betty Cameron, Chair  
 300-10233 153rd St  
 Surrey, BC  
 V3R 0Z7  
 Ph 604-587-4623  
 Fax 604-587-4666

Thompson Health  
 Region  
 Berthe Hall, Chair  
 311 Columbia Street  
 Kamloops BC  
 V2C 2T1  
 Ph 250-314-2784  
 Fax: 250-314-2765

Vancouver /  
 Richmond Health  
 Board  
 David Levi, Chair  
 Room 2052 - 2nd  
 Floor  
 655 West 12th Ave  
 Vancouver BC  
 V5Z 4R4  
 Ph 604-775-1866  
 Fax: 604-775-2813

## MEDIA LIST

Media that reaches the entire province and Vancouver media are listed below. Unfortunately, space does not allow us to list all the local radio, TV and newspapers in the whole province, but if your local media bashes poor people, phone and/or write to them and tell them to stop.

### Media that reaches the whole province:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone</b>	<b>Fax</b>
<b>Newspapers</b>		
The Vancouver Sun	605-2180	605-2323
The Province	605-2222	605-2720
Globe & Mail	685-0308	684-7956
National Post	683-8254	683-1729
<b>Radio</b>		
CBC Radio News	662-6900	662-6913
<b>Television</b>		
CBC TV News	662-6000	662-6878
BCTV News	420-2288	421-9466
Vancouver TV	609-5800	609-5894
Global TV	876-1344	874-5206
<b>Vancouver Media:</b>		
West/East Ender	682-0686	682-3158
Vancouver Echo	437-7030	439-3367
The Courier	738-1411	731-1474
CKNW Radio	331-2711	331-2722

## The Myths and Realities of Welfare

Canada is considered to be an open & just society that looks after all its citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender & age. But is this really true? The following myths and realities show this to be untrue:

### Myth #1

Child poverty is a number one item that needs to be addressed.



### Myth #2

We need to be concerned about welfare & EI fraud.

### Reality:

The issue is poverty in general. HELLO!! Children come attached to families / caregivers. This myth places the blame on parents for their 'children's poverty'. This argument has been used to justify child apprehensions, particularly in the Aboriginal community. It has also been designed to force parents into the low wage work force.



### Reality:

White-collar tax fraud is a huge issue we should be more concerned about. The government also endorses corporate fraud. There are 307 companies with 5 million dollars or more outstanding in deferred taxes. Whereas only .07% of welfare cases were convicted of fraud in 1997. Who are the real criminals? Welfare or EI fraud is another excuse of the government to justify making it more difficult for those in need to obtain.

**Myth # 3**

People subsisting on welfare or EI are freeloaders.

**Reality:**

This doesn't look at who the actual 'freeloaders' are. For example, **81,469** corporations with **combined profits of 17 billion dollars** paid not one cent of income tax. Meanwhile taxes on the **rest of the citizens** made up **59%** of federal revenue in 1994. The top 10 CEO's in Canada made more the 10 million dollars each in 1997. They also had a 56% increase in compensation. Just because people are on EI or welfare does not mean they are not working. Many people, especially single mothers, do huge amounts of unpaid work at home & volunteer work.

**Myth #4**

One should be satisfied to be living in one of the richest countries in the world.

**Reality:**

While Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, over 270,000 BCers survive on \$500 month welfare checks. This is 63% of the Canadian government's poverty line. Employment is increasingly part time or short term work only. Even working full time on minimum wage leaves a person below the poverty line. Even unionized employees have had their wages frozen during the 1990's.

**Myth #5**

Immigrants & refugees drain the welfare system & steal jobs.

**Reality:**

There are not enough jobs. Many refugees and immigrants are forced to work for minimum wage jobs that no one else will take. Immigrants are allowed into Canada based on labour demands & having the skills to fill those positions.



**Myth # 6**

People seeking refuge in Canada for economic reasons should not qualify for refugee status.

**Reality:**

Refugees leave their homelands because of political issues of persecution and violence. Escaping poverty is also a valid reason for seeking refuge. This is particularly true as the corporate agenda of industrialised countries, such as Canada, impoverish people in poorer countries.

**Myth #7**

Canada has generous social programs offered to all citizens.

**Reality:**

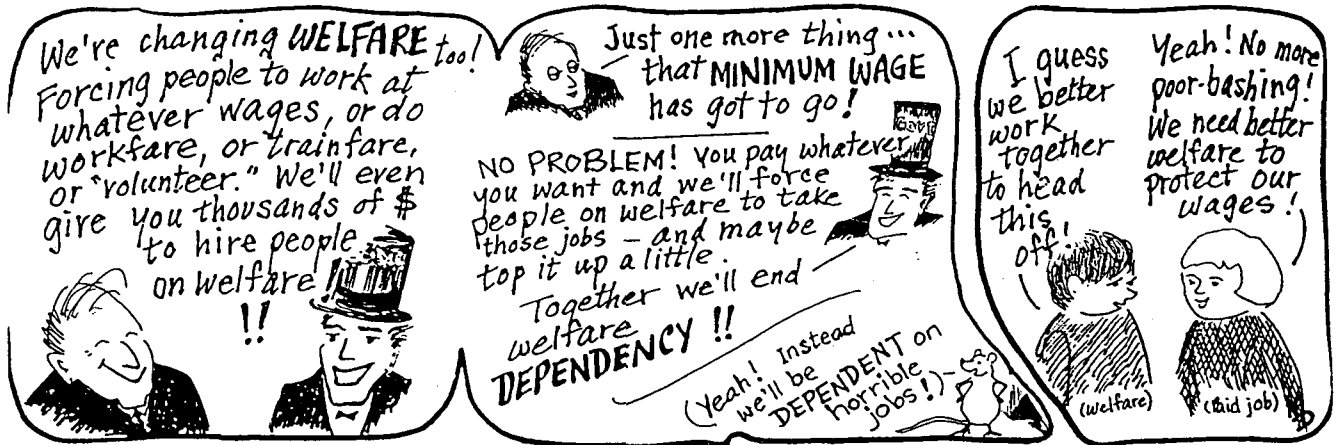
Welfare rates/ EI eligibility and/or shelter amounts have decreased since 1995 in almost every province. Many people in need are not even eligible to receive welfare.

**Myth #8**

"Get a haircut & get a real job." You can 'make it' if you just work hard.

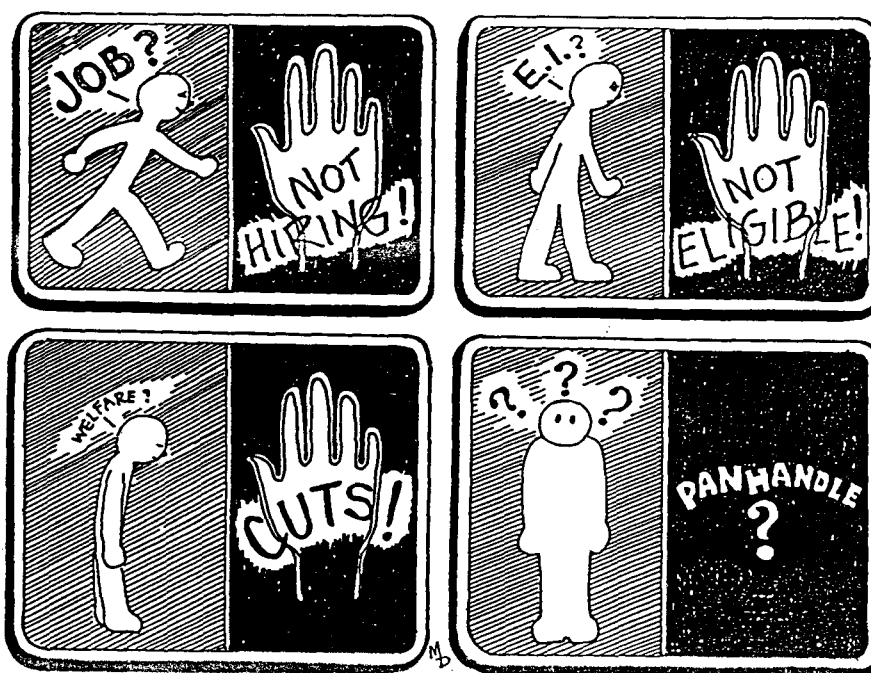
**Reality:**

There are not enough jobs go around. The official unemployment rate is 8.5% in BC in 1999 with over 20% for youth. Even if a person works at a full time, minimum wage job he/she is still below the poverty line. Taxation rates mean that poor people pay a much larger percentage of their income in GST than middle class or rich Canadians.

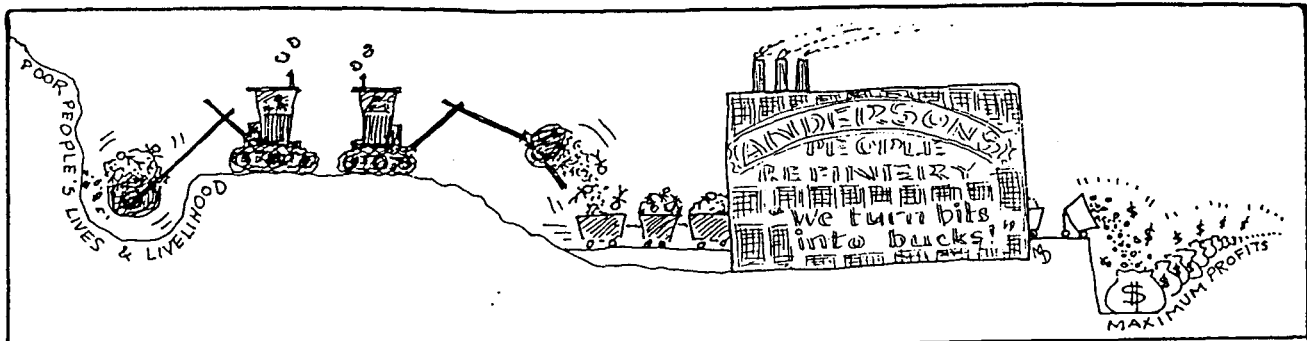


## The Background of BC Benefits

The drive to make more and more money motivates companies, governments, and international organisations to push their costs down. Who pays the price while they profit? Poor working and unemployed people. Welfare is becoming harder to get and welfare rates are decreasing. Unemployment rates are high especially for youth and the only jobs that are available are short-term or part-time without adequate pay or benefits. The gap between rich and poor is only getting bigger. Three families own more than what 15 million Canadians combined possess.



One of the biggest costs for companies is labour. Every penny they pay to workers cuts their own mega-profits. To cut their costs, big business has developed a cheap labour agenda. This is enforced by international groupings such as APEC (Asia Pacific free trade group), the WTO (enforcer of international free trade), and the OECD (rich country club). This cheap labour agenda means that companies threaten or do move to underdeveloped countries where they pay workers, who have no alternatives, below-poverty-level wages. This cheap labour agenda means that unemployment insurance is being cut back so that people will be forced to take low-waged jobs.



*Mining the welfare system for profit*

This cheap labour agenda means wages, particularly minimum wages, are kept low. Already in 1996, 25% of the workforce in Canada was working poor. This cheap labour agenda also ensures that people are not paid for the work that they are doing like volunteering, childcare, and house keeping. This cheap labour agenda forces workers from underdeveloped countries to work as cheap labour in their home country or leave their homes in search of employment. This cheap labour agenda has ended the entitlement to welfare for people in need in Canada. And, this cheap labour agenda maintains high levels of unemployment so that there are always extra workers desperate enough to work for low wages or as scab workers.

According to the OECD, the benefit of their "active labour force" policies is "wage moderation". In other words, wages are pushed down and the people who rely on them get poorer. People on welfare are forced to compete for what few jobs there are with other low-wage workers. With all of us competing for few jobs, with no real alternatives, we are forced to settle for less and less. Welfare and wages go down while corporate profits rapidly increase.

### **Canadian Government:**

Keeping in line with the demands of the corporate agenda, the Canadian Federal government made some major changes to the social assistance program. In April 1996, the federal government ended CAP, the Canada Assistance Program. CAP provided provincial governments with 50% of the funds for social assistance and social programs.

The Canadian Government replaced CAP with the CHST, the Canadian Health and Social Transfer program. The CHST cut funds for social assistance. It made changes that ended the requirement that people in need

have assistance to cover basic necessities. It allowed provincial governments to force people to work for welfare and ended the requirement that there be appeal procedures when people are denied assistance.

### BC government:

In 1996 the BC NDP government swore "to fiercely negotiate" with the federal government to maintain the rights outlined in CAP. But BC government changes to the welfare system since 1995 have continued destructive global and federal policies. Formerly welfare policy in BC had the stated goal of "relieving the effects of poverty". Now, the stated purpose of BC Benefits is to promote "labour market attachment". Changes to welfare do three main things: they take from the poor to give to the poor, they poor-bash by blaming poor people for poverty, and they fulfil the cheap labour agenda. Some of the changes in BC Benefits are:

#### Cuts to welfare rates

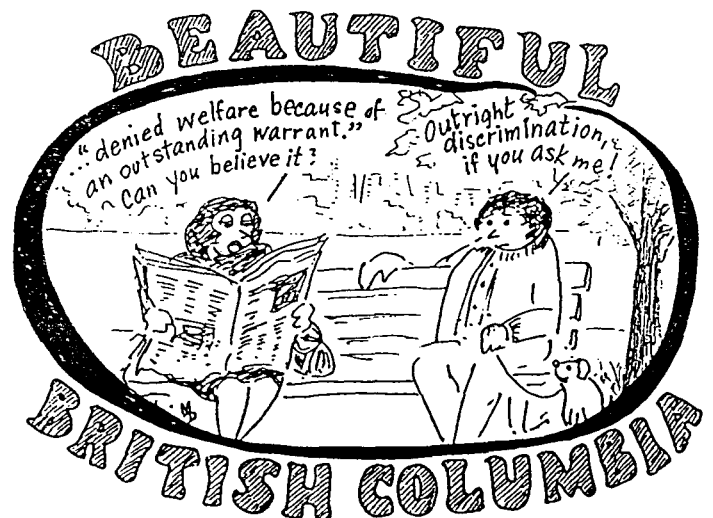
Welfare has been cut by \$46 to only \$500 per month for singles employables. \$86 has been cut for childless couples. This is 64% under the Canadian government's poverty line. This is an almost 20% cut to living allowances at the same time as the cost of living is rising. Rent for an average bachelor suite in Victoria takes 93% of a single person's cheque each month.

#### "Unemployable category"

This category for people who were medically "unemployable" was cut. The new category of Disability Level I is harder to qualify for and you get less benefits than in the previous "unemployable category". People who manage to qualify for Disability Level II, and have high, long-term costs, only receive only \$771 per month.

#### Outstanding warrants

People who are wanted for indictable offences or wanted on immigration warrants cannot get welfare. Someone with an outstanding warrant has not been found guilty or innocent. By denying this person benefits, the welfare system, not the justice system, is assigning guilt.



### Earnings exemptions

Recipients can now only keep 25% of earnings for 1 year out of 3. The flat rate exemption that was allowed in the past was ended. A person on welfare also working at a part time, minimum wage job is working for \$1.75 per hour.

### Parents

Parents are now forced to seek work or training when their child reaches the age of 7. Until 1995, a parent's work looking after their child until age 19 was recognised. A parent taking a minimum wage job and receiving the BC Family Bonus will be \$9,000 below the poverty line as a result of added costs for childcare and work related items. For parents who are on welfare, the \$103 Family Bonus will be deducted from their cheque.

### Hardship and Crisis Grants

Hardship grants are for people who do not qualify for regular welfare. They have been cut by 32%. If a Financial Aid Worker decides a person has refused work they may not qualify and if they have quit or been fired they will not qualify for hardship grants. If someone's income is over the welfare rate, they do not qualify. For example, if a person's pay-check is over the welfare rate and is stolen they can't get a hardship grant. If a person gets a hardship grant, they sometimes have to pay it back when they get a job or come into some money, including EI.

Crisis grants are for people receiving welfare who encounter times of crisis. These grants are issued at the discretion of an FAW. You need to have checked out all other sources, including "community resources" like food banks, before you can even qualify. It's no wonder that the Food Bank in Victoria has seen a 50% rise in the number of people using the service since 1996. Also, if you ask for a crisis grant more than 6 times in one year the ministry will administer you (manage your money), a frustrating, time consuming and insulting process.



### Workfare

All youth between 19 and 25 must fulfil full-time job search, training and work experience requirements and must take any job the ministry deems suitable or get cut off. Full time job searches cost at least \$4 per day, while welfare is \$6 a day. After seven months, youth **must** take a job preparation course. After ten months, youth **must** participate in employability training or subsidised jobs in order to collect assistance. Often there is no work waiting for youth at the end of the Youth Works program. Youth Works is just a corporate strategy for getting subsidised workers and blaming the unemployed.

### CPP

When a person on welfare turns 60 they are now forced to apply for early CPP at age 60. Their CPP benefits are deducted from their welfare. They are also penalised by CPP for applying before age 65. This means they will face a 30% reduction in CPP benefits for the entire time they receive CPP. For many seniors, full CPP coverage is the only thing that keeps them above the poverty line.

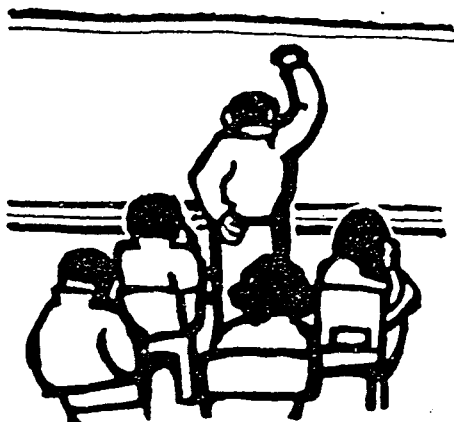
### Health

A person who is considered employable will not be covered for glasses, unless they have a child or are on DB I. A person can only get dental coverage if they are on DB I or DB II. People who are considered employable will not get any dental coverage except in emergency situations and in this case they will only receive "relief from pain".



### Failure to look for work

People on welfare who do not look for work or withdraw voluntarily from work (either quit or are fired) will not be able to get welfare immediately. This pushes people to stay in low wage or exploitative jobs as they have no other alternatives.



### **Appeal Process**

Changes to the appeal process have introduced a new level of appeal (the review board). The Review Board allows the Ministry to challenge tribunal decisions, many of which they were losing. With this new level of bureaucracy, decisions are taking a lot longer. Training requirements for tribunal members mean a more closed process with fewer people winning their appeals. The time limit to appeal has been reduced to 20 days. As well, if an appeal is turned down, a person is forced to repay the contested amount received during the appeal process.

### **Early Intervention Program (EIP)**

Before a person can qualify for welfare they must take part in the EIP including a BC Benefits Orientation and a Job Search Orientation. This program is based on the assumption that people want to defraud the system. The government hopes to increase the "natural diversion" rate by making it harder, longer, and more intimidating process to get welfare.

### **5 week months**

For most of the year, income assistance payments come four weeks after the previous check. While this amount is difficult to stretch over four weeks, it is even harder to make do with the several months of the year when there is a five-week wait. This causes increased hardship and hunger.

### **Other changes include:**

- inadequate services and office closures
- decreased amount of allowable personal assets
- an increase in focus on fraud investigation
- denial of benefits to students
- forced signing of consent forms which violate people's privacy

- forced repayment by sponsor families for immigrants who have received welfare
- forced "assignment of maintenance" which limits the amount of family maintenance a parent can receive to \$100 per month



### Why we need a decent welfare system:

People have an unequivocal human right to shelter and income when in need. Having a decent welfare system, with no forced work or training:

- helps make workers' wages truly living-wages.
- makes it possible for women (and children) to leave abusive family situations.
- allows immigrants and refugees to leave situations of economic and political violence.
- is one of the human right for Aboriginal communities because of the impact of colonialism.
- provides people with disabilities an adequate financial support to ensure access to transportation, health and medical needs, and independence.
- means Youth and children can live with safety, security, good health, and education because they are our future.
- ensures that all people can receive preventative health care such as adequate food, heating, and clothing.



# Poverty Fact Sheet

## Welfare in B.C.:

There were 276,564 people on Income Assistance (IA) as of Jan. 1999.

This includes 95,389 children

21,103 people between the ages of 19-24

32,103 people with disabilities

42,678 single parents

The caseload has declined by 22.5% since Dec. 1995 because BC's IA program, BC Benefits, has made more people ineligible for welfare. It brought in a new "management culture" which deters people in need from seeking welfare. ELP believes more people are living in more dire poverty because of the cuts.

The proportion of basic BC Benefits cases on welfare for three months or less is 46%. BC has 6.88% of the population on income assistance (May 1999). Past Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security ((MSDES) statistics show that 64% of first time benefit receivers have at least a high school diploma.

Single families on IA have an average of 1.7 children which according to the 1996 census is less than the average BC family who has 1.8 children at home.

There were about 270,000 welfare cases last year. In 1997 MSDES opened 14,864 files for investigation. Of these about 1/4 were unfounded or failed to have sufficient evidence. There were only 197 convictions. 6,679 repayment agreements were signed.

The maximum welfare rate for a single employable person is \$500 per month. According to Stats Canada the low income cut-off (Poverty Line) for a single person in a city of 500,000 is \$16,565. (1998 figures) A person on welfare lives on an income at 36% of the poverty line.

In 1980 a single person on welfare received \$191/month for living costs. Despite these costs increasing at least 106% since then, in 1999 those costs must be covered with a reduced amount of \$175.

A Social Planning and Research Council report states that a single adults monthly food costs alone are \$194.50 for ages 25 to 49 (1996). A single BC resident receives only \$175/month for food, clothes, job hunting expense, transportation, and other necessities.

The maximum shelter allowance a single employable person gets is \$325. In 1998 an average bachelor apartment in Metro Vancouver cost \$607 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp).

### **Unemployment:**

Official Unemployment rates in May 1999 were: Vancouver - 7.8%; BC (178,000); Canada - 8.1% (1,288,000). This is only part of the poverty problem. Changes to employment insurance (EI) have resulted in only 27% -46% of unemployed people getting benefits. This is down from more than 80% who received benefits before the Federal Government cuts. In BC only 49% of unemployed workers were eligible for EI benefits in 1997, down from 77% eligible in 1992. Part-time work increased in 1995 when only 47% of BCer's had full time, non-seasonal work. (Vancouver Sun,1998) The number of people working at part time only jobs still remains high.

### **Working Poverty:**

The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Metro Vancouver is \$1008 (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. 1999) while the minimum wage is \$7.15 an hour. A single parent with two children working full time at a minimum wage job \$1, 460 including the BC Family Bonus child tax benefit. This leaves \$452 per month to provide food, clothes, transportation, household necessities, childcare, school fees and recreation.

### **Poverty in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1997)**

17.5% (5,222,000) of Canadians live in poverty.

56% of single parent families live in poverty.

95.7% of single non-earning women head families which live in poverty.

Nearly one in five (19.8%) people under the age of 18 live in low-income families. 42.8% of families with a parent or primary bread winner under the age of 25 live in poverty. 14% of all families were poor in 1997.

Statistics Canada estimated that to bring all people out of poverty in 1996 would be 17.8 billion, not an outrageous amount given the value of all goods and services produced in 1996 was \$820 billion.

Since Dec. 1995 the number of dependant children receiving BC Benefits has declined nearly 38,000 or 28.5%. Micheal Goldberg, SPARC's Program Director of Research, estimates that it would take nearly \$945 million a year to get all BC children above the poverty line. This is 1.76% of the Federal Governments \$166,486 million revenue in 1997/98.

### **General Statistics:**

According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO), federal cash transfer for social programs fell by more than 40% "in real capital terms" between 1993 and 1997. Food Banks started in 1981 and have doubled the numbers of people they have served since 1990. They now feed more than 2.5 million people per year. 41.9% of all people assisted by food banks are children. (Monitor 97/98)

From 1996 to 1997 the average Canadian workers' income increased by 2.1% (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives). The wealthiest 100 Canadian CEO's had an increase of 56%. The average CEO compensation which includes salaries, bonuses, stocks, etc. was \$3.45 million. (James Stanford, economist, Canadian Auto Workers Union, visiting fellow with CCPA).

In a major change to social welfare policy, the 1995 budget took away \$10.4 billion from health, education and social programs. Almost 85% went to investors and bond holders in the form of interest payments. The federal government is thus serving as a collection agency for the banks and wealthy financiers, passing the rich 35 cents of every dollar that it takes from the working population (The Monitor).