

WE WILL WIN

**ACTION PROGRAM
TO CONFRONT THE
LIBERAL GOVERNMENT
AND CRISIS IN BC**

Prepared by

Anti-Poverty Committee Members
For Reorganizing and Restructuring

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Introduction

Seven Anti-Poverty Committee members prepared this Action Program following the resignation of four members from their recently elected positions to the steering committee of the organization. The report is based on strategy discussions that took place throughout the month and half that led up to the elections at the Annual General Meeting. The strategy discussions took place in a general strategy meeting on Sunday, November 10th and continued in campaign strategy meetings since then. These four APC members and others believe that the progressive strategies proposed through these meetings cannot be carried out by the organization in its current state. The strategies require focussed, united effort from all members of the organization and an open, cooperative organizational character that is such a departure from the current state of the organization that drastic change is required to even begin to approach these strategies.

The majority of the Action Program is focussed on organizational and political changes that must take place before the campaign strategies can be enacted. There are very simple but controversial points laid out in the program that must be accepted and enacted before the Anti-Poverty Committee can work on the campaigns it has assigned itself. This document cannot be taken as a personal assault against any member of the organization or as an attempt to excuse any member from the part they have played in bringing the organization to the place it is in now. This is a forward looking document, one that is critical of the work we have done in the first ten months of existence and an urgent call to address our mistakes. We must cement the foundation of our organization before we can build upon it. We must be united by a common vision, a common strategy, a common politic, if we are to proceed.

In Solidarity;

Anti-Poverty Committee Members for Reorganizing and Restructuring

Overall Strategy

Campaigns

We use campaigns to identify ourselves to people and communities we want to work with (our constituency). Through campaigns we show that we understand the conditions that affect poor and working people and that we are fighting against these conditions for concrete things that we illustrate in demands specific to each campaign.

Campaigns develop out of a need to identify the most important issues that poor people face. We pick campaigns that will deal with issues affecting a broad segment of the working class. We also pick campaigns based on where the ruling class is making key attacks on us.

It is important that the campaigns are accessible to all poor and working people in the City, not only in presentation but also involvement. The campaigns must be clearly laid out and developed, not based around a specific event, but with an approach that shows the issue as a vast problem that affects everyone and that everyone can easily identify with. There will be problems with some segments of the working class denying that some issues affect them directly (ex: working people and welfare rights etc...) but through education and alliance building, a lot of these false divisions can be and must be broken down. Campaigns must be structured in such a way that people can easily become involved, not only in the grunt work but also in the strategizing and planning.

We need to ensure coordination within and between our various campaigns. Generally we should bring people into the organization through our campaigns. However, when people become involved as members, they should have a clear understanding of all the campaigns we have. They should have a clear understanding of why we are doing these campaigns. This allows people involved to move beyond the 'single issue' mentality and develop a more broad understanding of why we are under attack. We need to ensure that clear connections are made between the different issues that we address, and allow coordinated efforts between them. Demanding higher shelter rates for people on welfare, for example, would be a project taken on by both the Welfare and the Social Housing Campaign. In the Campaign against Cuts to Women's Services, issues of social housing and welfare are dealt with, so coordination will be required here as well.

The four primary objectives of campaigns are:

1. To mobilize and activate people
2. To unify the working class against the false divisions created by the ruling class throughout all of history.
3. To develop our skills organizationally and to expand the notion of who "we" are.
4. To bring focus to our work by selecting key issues that best approach our goals.

Networking

If the various other organizations that are already established were launching an effective fightback campaign against the government (and capitalism), we would simply join them rather than start our own organization. Nonetheless, many of these groups are useful in their own capacity in terms of resources, experience, membership etc. We need to network with groups that have something to offer in the movement against Campbell.

Many poor and working people are organized to some extent through unions, churches, community centres, support services centers, cultural centers...through networking with these

groups we can gain exposure to their membership. Developing working relationships with organizations that people already work with and trust enables them to develop trust in our group. Networking also allows for effective intervention in the politics of other organizations. Joint projects with other organizations are a crucial part in shifting these groups towards a more militant politics, while expanding the political dimensions of our organization, our analysis, and our capacity.

Prioritizing our work

Campaigns:

We are working in an incredibly dynamic environment, where the BC Liberals are attacking on many fronts in a series of consecutive, well-timed policy changes. The Liberals brought in the \$6 training wage and froze social housing. Then there was 'Black Thursday', where tens of thousands of jobs were cut. Then we were faced with drastic cuts to welfare and a gutting of employment standards. This strategy of spreading out the attacks over an extended period of time is designed explicitly to confuse us, forcing us to jump from one issue to the next before we have a chance to develop an effective defence on any issue.

To deal with this, we need to reassess our campaigns whenever new cutbacks happen. In some cases, previous cuts may pale in comparison, and we will need to pare back and focus on the more important fronts. Generally, however, when new attacks are launched, we need to stick with the campaigns we have and develop new ones where necessary.

When it is necessary to launch a new campaign, we need a small number of people to lay the groundwork for the campaign, then bring in new people to work on it. This reverses the trend from spreading ourselves too thin to expanding our organization with each new campaign.

The work we have done up to this point on the cuts to Disability benefits is a good example of this. We had a very successful forum, in conjunction with VSW, which brought out primarily new people, and are following up on this with a meeting to plan action. If this develops into a campaign, we will have successfully launched a new campaign based on expanding the involvement in our group with people directly affected by these cutbacks.

Communities & Regions:

As for prioritising communities and regions on which to focus, there are two factors we have to keep in mind: 1) the diverse demographics of the working class in the Lower Mainland, a diversity which must be reflected in our organization, and 2) the number of areas in the lower mainland where poor people live.

The downtown eastside is but one of the areas in the lower mainland (or BC for that matter) with a high concentration of poor people. There are several other neighbourhoods throughout the lower mainland (such as Whalley, South Vancouver, areas of Port Moody and Richmond, etc.) that are clearly poor neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods are diverse, with many ethnic communities concentrated in particular areas. It is extremely limiting to focus on the downtown eastside if the goal is to build a diverse, broad based movement of poor and working people. We need to branch out as much as we can to other areas, establishing contacts and bases of support throughout working class communities in BC.

Tasks and tactics:

A variety of tasks and tactics are used in our work. Mass demonstrations, forums, direct actions, leafleting, press work. With the pace of change inherent to our work, we always need to assess which tactics and tasks are the most important. Calling demonstrations when momentum is low only demoralizes us. On the other hand, when momentum is high, we need to fan the flames.

Popular and internal education

In order to be a successful and dynamic organization and movement, we have to always be developing, both internally and externally. In our external education work we are providing information to working class people about the different attacks being waged against them. We are also giving people information about what we think about the situation, our political analysis, and the action we are taking against these attacks. The education is not one-way, though: during leafleting, public forums, and workshops, we put ourselves in direct contact with people, and are given the opportunity to learn from them: their experiences and analysis, what they think of the government, what they think of us and our approach, what they would like to see happen, etc. The more direct contact we have, the better we can assess the consciousness of people. We get a better idea of how people perceive our politics and we see our shortcomings. It is very educational for us to be humiliated in public by the poor and working people we claim as our constituency.

Internal education is essential for building a conscious, stable organization comprised of conscious, stable people. Knowledge is empowerment: the more educated we are, the more effective we are in all aspects of our work, and the less we rely on simply a few people to do most of the work, be it the practical, strategic, or political.

There is educational work on racism, sexism, homophobia (etc) that is essential to elevate consciousness within the organization and ensure that we have a broad-based working class group. By this we don't mean simply workshops or reading: we also mean education through work. For example, a non-Native who does not understand the importance of sovereignty for First Nations will learn best by doing work with a First Nations organization that is dealing with sovereignty (assuming that this person is not too racist for Natives to even want them around). There is educational work in terms of what our enemy is up to: people in the group should know which MLA's head which ministries, the specific pieces of legislation important to our work, basic statistics on employment and unemployment, the demographics of the working class in BC. There is also educational work in terms of skills necessary for organizing: use of computers, typing press releases, layout, public speaking, networking, research. Most of these skills are developed directly in practice, and it is good to have members with certain skills share them with others.

Finally, educational work on the international situation is essential. We need to encourage people in the group to look outside of BC and consider the broader picture. This raises our understanding of how capitalism and imperialism create poverty and oppression. To see the international dimensions of our struggle is at the same time humbling and empowering. It allows us to see the true scope of our struggle, the tasks we have ahead of us, and the need to work as part of an international project in the long run.

Campaigns

The Functioning of Campaigns

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE APC CAMPAIGN PROPOSALS

WELFARE—TRAINING WAGE
HOUSING – LEGAL DEFENSE – COMMUNICATION & EDUCATION – WOMENS

Despite discussion at the general strategy meeting and subsequent campaign meetings, the strategies for these campaigns have yet to be adopted into the structure of APC. Without major structural changes and a clearer understanding of what these proposals mean, the APC will not be capable of carrying out these campaigns in an honest and effective manner.

All of these campaigns require a strategic focus on outreach, something APC has failed to do in the past 10 months with the welfare and training wage campaigns. Outreach is not only random on-the-street distribution of materials, it means identifying and focusing on regions in the GVRD that we must target for politically strategic reasons. It means that people must do the majority of their work outside the office, with people outside the APC. It means communication and education within the group and with our identified constituencies. Despite much talk of how important it is to outreach, people have proven that they are incapable of implementing the structure that they rhetorically agree is necessary.

These campaigns require us to be able to work in open partnership with other organizations and people who are not members. We must be able to integrate others into our decision making process to organize inclusively with them. Networking and alliance building with other groups is something unheard of in the past ten months with the training wage campaign and something done only recently with the welfare campaign. The feedback from VSW regarding our partnership during the disability forum further convinces us of APC's inability to build alliances in its current state. Members of VSW could clearly see the organizational and structural problems of APC and they urged us to address these problems, their future work with us would be determined by it.

These campaigns will only work in a group that addresses organizational sexism and racism and works effectively to change. We agree that there must be more women and people of colour in APC, but this group cannot be open to anyone who does not know why they are in APC and what their commitment is. Exempting marginalized people from these requirements will result in an apolitical group that tokenistically votes minorities into positions of prominence despite politics. It is both sexist and racist to assume that women and people of colour do not have solid political analysis and that we must bring them into the group for other reasons.

We believe that if APC adopts the action program we're presenting there is potential these campaigns will function in accordance with their strategies. If APC continues on its path, does not recognize the severity of the crisis and does not immediately implement solutions, the organization will remain nothing but an ineffective status-quo group and these campaigns will not even come close to meeting the objectives laid out. Taking on these campaigns without organizationally and structurally revamping the group will only prove to further shrink the APC and will maintain our image as a club of arrogant white parasites feeding of the attacks on poor and working classes.

Campaigns

Notes on Strategy for Campaign to End the Training Wage

The demands of the campaign:

Primary demand: End the Training Wage

Supporting demands: raise the minimum wage to \$11/hr, demands addressing the changes to employment standards and issues of 'illegal,' or undocumented workers.

WHY THE CAMPAIGN TO END THE TRAINING WAGE?

Despite our work in trying to raise consciousness on this issue, there still seems to be a common conception, both outside and inside APC, that the training wage is only affecting a small portion of the population – that is, only young workers with no experience who are paid the training wage are being hurt. For this reason, it is important to start by highlighting why we are doing this campaign, since it is precisely its far-reaching affects that make this such an important campaign.

At its base, this campaign is about organizing low-wage workers in the fight against the provincial government. For Vancouver, although there are industries like textiles where people are even more exploited and paid less than the minimum wage, the service sector is among the largest in terms of labour participation. In 2001, 12% of all jobs in BC were in the retail sector. Compare this with resource-based jobs (Forestry, fishing, Mining Oil and Gas), which made up only 2.2% of the total jobs, including 'support activities'. This in what is referred to as a resource-based economy. Employment in food & beverage stores alone accounted for more than this (3.2%). Being in the most urbanized area of BC, the proportion of people in the service sector goes up even higher.

Of course, it is in this sector where most workers earn the training wage, minimum wage, or poverty wages. The average weekly earnings for a person in the service sector was \$225.73 in 2000, compared with an average of \$626.45 for all industries. Considering that one would need to make \$10 an hour working fulltime to just to be at the low income threshold, this means that the average job in the service sector provides 56% of this amount.

A person working fulltime at \$6 an hour would make this average amount (\$240).

To sum up, a very significant number of people in BC work in the service sector, and people working in BC's service sector make poverty wages. It is therefore essential for any anti-poverty group in BC to do work in this sector, and to focus on this sector when pushing for increases in wages and rights for all low-income workers. The training wage campaign is important because it is taking on the issue of wages for low-income workers. It lays bare the attacks on the poor that Campbell is making against the working poor, and puts our work in building the anti-Campbell movement firmly in the working class tradition of fighting for higher wages.

What differentiates this from a significant amount of union organizing is that it is a fight to raise the wages of ALL workers by starting at the bottom. A raise in the minimum wage always raises wages across the board. With this campaign we are also attempting to organize where unions traditionally stay away from: the working poor, women, people of colour, immigrants and youth.

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Because of the range of people in terms of demographics that need to be involved in this campaign, we need very broad-based outreach. There are, however, key groups that we should focus on for this campaign. We are currently developing a different outreach workshop for each of these four groups.

1. Youth

Young people are one of the most important groups we need to organize in this campaign. First, these are one of the main groups being 'legally' paid \$6, and second, it is always the youth who play the most active role in any successful movement. Aside from leafleting at high schools and other areas where there are lots of youth, we need access to high schools. We have already been asked to do a presentation for a class in Britannia; we also need to make links with the BCTF and individual progressive teachers who would be willing to let us do these presentations at schools. Check Your Head is another possible avenue for this. The parents of young people earning the training wage are another important group to connect with.

We should not forget working class university students in our outreach. Over half of young adult minimum wage workers, and 12% of adult minimum wage workers, are full-time students. For this, we need a greater presence on campus: tabling/leafleting, speaking, networking with student activists, and workshops. This campaign is one of the best for making links with and intervening in the student movement.

2. People of colour and 'Illegal workers'

Racism in Canadian society lays itself bare in its class structure, and one need only check out any McDonald's restaurant, textile factory, cranberry field, or janitorial agency to see this. Workers from other countries are heavily exploited and face severe, illegal working conditions at the hands of Canadian business. The training wage is but the latest abuse, where workers from other countries are lied to about their rights ('you need experience in this country to make \$8') or accept \$6 because they have no choice for fear of joblessness and/or deportation. No campaign for the rights of low-wage workers can ignore this situation.

We have many avenues here for outreach work with people of colour and immigrants: groups that do advocacy like MOSIAC and PICS, ethnic community centers and organizations, anti-racism groups, etc. We also need to ensure that our materials are translated into a variety of languages: Chinese, Spanish, Punjabi, Hindi, Tagalog, and others.

3. Women

All the available statistics show that women routinely make far less money than men, and they make up the majority of low-wage workers. The paid work of women (like the unpaid work they do) living with a male partner is almost always undervalued, viewed as 'secondary' or supporting work, whereas their male partner is considered the 'primary' earner. In fact, for poor families, this 'second wage' is very important for the family's well-being. There are also a high number of single women both with and without children who rely solely on minimum wage jobs to get by.

The sexualised nature of women's work in the service sector is an important issue as well. In many (if not most) service sector businesses, women make up the majority of workers serving customers, and are expected to be 'polite' (read: flirtatious) with all male customers for the sake of increasing the sales of whatever service is being offered. This puts women at risk of men who 'get the wrong idea' about their politeness, which can lead to an uncomfortable work environment, stalking, and worse (this was a huge problem at the Safeway where I worked).

As with outreach and education work for people of colour and immigrant workers, we need closer ties with different women's organizations. Our relationship with VSW is a good start. We need to further network with organizers and advocates at women's centers and groups like Justice for Girls.

We need to get an endorsement for our campaign from all of the groups we network with.

Aside from the focused outreach, we need to continue with broad outreach and educational work. This includes:

- Leafleting
- Job clubs
- More forums and public meetings
- Picketing of businesses
- A campaign poster

The educational component of this campaign is really important, and for this we need a variety of leaflets and pamphlets on different aspects of the training wage and our campaign against it (info on McDonald's, the changes to employment standards, why \$11/hr, etc.)

Of course, contact directly with workers is essential. We need targeted postering, stickering, and distribution of our materials in and around businesses using the training wage. Our move into organizing in the workplace leads to the next important aspect of our strategy for the \$6 campaign: our relationship with labour unions.

UNIONS

Aside from building links with BCTF, there are two other types of unions that we need to work with, and each requires a different strategy. Some unions, like BCGEU, we approach for solidarity and support in a broad sense, and this can be for general support of all APC work. Secondly, there are unions that can, are, or should be involved in organizing low-wage workers: for example, the CAW and BC FED. This is obviously the most important aspect of our intervention in the organized labour movement.

We will be setting up meetings in the coming weeks to talk with these unions about working together on this campaign. We need to get material support for them, but we also need to push them to organize businesses that are using the training wage. If we can, it makes more sense to use what tools already exist for exploited workers. There are several reasons why unions don't generally do this kind of work, and we have to intervene and encourage them to get involved in the fight for the rights of low-wage workers.

In the long-term, depending on where things go with our attempts to get these unions involved in the fight against the training wage, we need to look into the possibility of setting up a labour union of our own.

TARGETTING BUSINESS

With this campaign, targeting business as well as the government is essential, as we will be doing next Saturday with McDonald's. We have to go after the businesses that pushed for and are benefiting from the training wage. This can take the form of picketing and leafleting, organizing campaign meetings around specific employers, action at business headquarters. We might want to look into boycotts, but generally it is best to only call boycotts when the people working for the particular business support it or are calling for it.

As we saw on November 4th, when we want to have big mobilizations it will be easier to get people out when the action is specifically against the government. For this, we can take action in many different ways: targeting Graham Bruce, the Employment Standards office, etc.

RESEARCH

It is important that we both conduct our own research and keep on top of other research being done that relates to the training wage and other issues of low-wage workers. So far we have not come across any credible studies on how many businesses are using the training wage. We also need to study the more general changes in the economy, both at the national and international level (GATTs for example).

\$6 IN RELATION TO OTHER APC WORK

The development of this campaign should be one of the main priorities of the APC, yet so far we have been seriously neglecting it. An important characteristic of this campaign is that at this stage it is primarily focused on education and outreach, and there are not really the type of short-term 'wins' as with advocacy and casework to give people the immediate sense of accomplishment. Given this, it is easy to neglect it in favour of more exciting work. Based on the potential for broad mass-based organizing that this campaign provides, it must be a priority in our overall strategy to build a mass-based movement against the provincial government.

Welfare Campaign Strategy proposal

General objective of APC's welfare campaign:

To use the welfare campaign as a strategy for mobilizing and unifying the working class against the false divisions created by the market labour of state capitalism, exposing the present governments and discrediting social democracy in the process.

DEMANDS:

The demands are central to the campaign, but in form, not in specifics. Demands should be flexible and informed by the general direction of the campaign.

The demands must draw people into the campaign in a unified manner. They therefore must be accessible but stay uncompromising and unco-optable by social democracy: i.e. they must challenge, expose and discredit the welfare state.

The demands must consistently represent/be informed by the general strategy and vision of the campaign which must be clearly articulated through all the education and propaganda material produced and should inform all tactics used.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Mobilise and empower working class people to defend their basic rights of subsistence that have historically been fought for and won (welfare, workers compensation, E.I., disability benefits, etc.) Here we must emphasize the direct dependency of the state on isolation and stigma of the unemployed to ensure instability and insecurity amongst poor working people in order to manipulate the wage market. We cannot make a differentiation between employed and unemployed people in our strategy, but must approach these FALSLY divided groups with different tactics:
 - a) Unemployable. People on disability benefits, on welfare or eligible but not receiving benefits due to systemic discrimination and mechanical bureaucracy. We ought to demonstrate how they do not fit in the capitalist labour market and show the state's responsibility in assuring that they do not live in abject poverty. Outreach on broad level through survival and defence strategy, using tactics such as education, casework and mobilisation.
 - b) Transitionally Unemployed Workers. People on welfare, E.I., workers compensation. Same outreach as category a) and c) should be appealed to through survival and defence strategy. Emphasis should be put on linking unemployment and the worsening conditions of the wage market. Using same tactics: education, casework and mobilisation.
 - c) Employed Workers. Wage workers must be pressure to see welfare issues as their issues: i.e. it is directly linked to their security through labour market manipulations and attacks on organised labour through exploitation of reserve workforce and low wage workers (scabs, sub-contracting, training wage, etc.). Outreach should be consistent with a) and b), and involve education, casework (organised labour should be pressured to directly partake in casework direct actions such as flying squads) and mass-mobilisation through coalition building ("unemployment council" of VDLC in solidarity movement)

Note: it is important to reiterate how imperative it is to remember that these three categories not only overlap but are simply operational categories to be used for efficiency of tactics, but that one of the main goal of this campaign is to unify all of the working class and concretely overcome these separations.

2. Expose the fundamental inequities of the "Welfare State" and discredit social democracy. By doing so and while doing so we must tackle the demonization of poor people and fight poor bashing. We must isolate the links between welfare destabilization and insecure, exploitative, dangerous employment to build a mass movement against the capitalist state, bosses and all levels of government. This is the desired outcome of 1. and we must build towards this by including a clear and coherent analysis of the root causes of poverty, false divisions of the working class and government/business connections in all of our propaganda and education literature. We must formulate our demands in order to make concrete and specific gains that are consistent with the broader goal/campaign.

TIME FRAME:

Three Months:

- Develop "community specific" and culturally appropriate literature around race, gender and ability awareness that pertains to systemic discrimination within welfare bureaucracy.
- Develop connections with labour and community groups through active alliances and networking.
- Concentrate outreach and networking in outlying districts of Vancouver (starting with Surrey, Burnaby, New-Westminster, etc.)

Six Months:

- Mobilise groups networked with into co-ordinated but independent flying squads.
- Mass inclusive action/actions (depending on success of outreach in different regions) around the anniversary of Bill 26 and bill 27 (April 1st, 2003)
- Begin research on legal challenge for the 24 months/ 60 months time limit and other major deadlines that will be creating a crisis in which the only possible response is a collective response. (Deadline: April 2004)

NOTES ON SOME TACTICS:

Forums, Literature and Propaganda:

1. Education: Forums, literature and propaganda should always portrait issues in the context of the campaign and/or encourage tactics and strategies consistent with the general vision of the campaign and general vision of APC.
2. Mobilization: Forums, literature and propaganda should provide a space for people to organize and mobilize towards action and concrete steps in pressuring this government and its lackeys.
3. Alliance Building/Networking: Forums are an organizational tool that should be aimed at developing alliances that we are interested, willing and capable of sustaining in active manner. Literature and propaganda should be specific to issues and specific to targeted communities and constituencies. It is important to be aware that translation into different

languages might not be enough in most cases. We must develop concerted cultural awareness.

Casework: Different Constituencies:

1. Dependent/ institutionalised (Unemployable)

We need to act as allies towards these communities, without becoming support base. We can provide a space for them to organize and work on building trust and relationships from which will ensue the development of organizational skills, foundations in these communities.

2. Independent/ transitional

We want to work with them directly and cooperatively. By building a defence network, we can aim at organising regionally. We **MUST** work in outlying districts of Vancouver.
-We can develop literature for self-advocacy and empower people to work through the general loopholes of the bureaucracy by themselves.

We want to work with people, not for people. We should use casework only strategically, for organizational reasons. Casework is a networking and outreach tactic: insular casework/advocacy leads to atomisation, isolation and service providing agency work. It is a trap and works against ourselves.

We must develop clear perimeters of what cases we can and should take on. For the cases we choose to reject, we could have mechanisms for referral to other agencies, with which we should work on developing alliances and resource sharing (i.e. using their resources)

Proposal for APC Communication and Education Committee (Outreach)

In principle outreach is an activity of any organization that must support and be a backbone of the organization's campaigns with providing publicity and education. For that matter, for APC, it means to explain our politics and positions in a mass scale, to find allies, and to build peripheries and expand our political influence in a broadest possible way. In other word we can generalize outreach in two words, popularity and recruitment. It is always true that the level of consciousness of any mass of people is how organized they are in the organizations, so it could be said that the essence of any struggle that masses are involved is truly one word: organization. Then the core task of the outreach, which we are proposing to become Communication and Education Committee, is to help to expand and consolidate Anti-Poverty Committee.

PROPOSAL:

Name of Committee to be "Communication and Education"

Tasks and structure:

1) Distribution of Materials

- co-ordination and planning

2) Internal Communication

- reflective analysis
- political education classes
- skills sharing
- workshops
- discipline and conduct

3) Public Education

- newsletter content, production and distribution
- translations
 - non-campaign publications
 - non-campaign specific forums etc.

4) Communication

- consistent contacts with groups/unions to network and refer to appropriate campaigns
- similar relationship with media

APC Housing Campaign Proposal

Why we should do a Housing Campaign:

There are many sound arguments that could be presented in favour of an APC Housing Campaign however the most important thing to look at is how this campaign would fit into our overall strategy and Basis of Unity. The APC is an organization that is fighting the policies of the BC Liberal Government and the housing crisis has been intensified by the policies of this government. The APC is fighting the constant attacks that poor and working classes face under the capitalist system, the lack of adequate housing has historically been a tool used to in capitalist systems to oppress and attack poor people. Housing is a responsibility of all levels of government and thus the issue gives us an opportunity to target all levels of government. The APC is committed to fighting these attacks through mass mobilization. Housing is a bridging issue that works well to tie together a broad range of people in the poor and working class through a shared need. There is incredible potential for mass mobilizing around housing. With adequate outreach and an effort to target specific constituencies the campaign will increase the popularity and membership of APC. The Housing campaign will bring to the forefront an issue that is important to all poor and working class people. This campaign will work towards the overall strategic vision of the organization and will work to involve a more diverse range of communities.

HOUSING CRISIS STATISTICS

- There are 1,000,000 tenants in BC.
- Vancouver rental vacancy rate in 2000 was 1.6%, in 2001 it was 0.8%.
- CMHC considers a healthy vacancy rate to be 2.5%
- 10,000 seniors, families & singles sit on the BC Housing waitlist.
- The BC Housing waitlist is estimated to be 10 years long, "high priority"/emergency applicants in crisis situations the wait is "only" 2 years.
- 60% of Vancouver population rents.
- 85% of West End population rents.
- 50% of Vancouver renters pay over 30% of their income to shelter.
- Over 1/3 of Vancouver renters pay over 50% of their income to shelter.
- Average 1 bedroom in city in 2000 was \$733 per month.
- Full time minimum wage work in city is about \$1200 per month therefore a minimum wage worker pays about 63% of their income to rent.
- A person on welfare would pay about 143% of their income to rent if they were to live in reasonable, healthy accommodations. Welfare recipients generally pay about 75% of their income on extremely sub-standard shelter.
- A person working full time making the \$6 training wage pays about 76% of their income to shelter.

"Households should not have to pay over 30% of their gross income on rent, and a household is considered to be in core need if it does." -Cameron Gray, Director, City Housing Centre.

- 25% of all households in Vancouver are in core need.
- Only 8.5% of the housing stock in the city is social housing.
- Approximately 85 residential hotel rooms are lost to tourist conversion and demolition every year.
- 600 low income units have been lost in the DTES in last 28 years and the population of poor has increased.
- 400 units of social housing must be built a year to maintain the very insufficient 8.5% of housing stock.
- There is no new social housing being built or scheduled to be built.

What a successful strategy looks like:

EDUCATION/OUTREACH

Freezing social housing in this province is being presented as a necessary fiscal measure.

Education must be done to correct this misinformation.

- We need a strong and persistent outreach strategy with the goal being mass based mobilisation.
 - Specific constituencies must be identified and targeted within this strategy.
 - Single mothers, youth, the disabled, seniors, immigrants ...
 - Expansion into all areas in the Greater Vancouver area, implementing our outreach strategy in areas outside of the downtown core. Focusing on certain areas that have low vacancy rates, high numbers at risk and widespread poverty.
 - Building resistance to attack municipal governments in various regions in the lower mainland.
 - Targeted leafleting, workshops, recruitment, networking with people in women's, youth and community centres...
 - Developing forums, workshops and written materials on housing that are region and constituency specific.
 - Nation-wide network building with groups across the province and country. Building this issue in order to put pressure against the federal government.

ACTION

Our enemies must be identified and strategically targeted. Our targets are fluid, they will change based on the circumstances of each action. We must have an overall strategy that specifies the way in which we will target each of our enemies individually and we must build our actions in the context of that overall strategy.

We must identify the context in which our enemies are relevant:

1. Municipal Government

The civic government is essentially the government of "last resort" in regards to social housing. They are under increasing pressure. There is a better chance of getting results than when attacking the province.

2. Federal Government

The feds have the largest tax base and are historically associated with the development of social housing. With the current federal political climate, the Liberal government will be taking an angle wherein they focus on more social services. There is potential in targeting the federal government based on the 'leftist' slant they will try to push in the upcoming year.

3. Provincial Government

Despite their responsibility to build and maintain social housing the provincial Liberals have put freeze on all social housing. They have closed the Residential Tenancy Office in Vancouver and made have made changes to the Residential Tenancy Act that diminish the rights of renters. Through their legislation and policies, provincial government is significantly exacerbating the housing crisis.

4. Private Sector

Private developers that are pressuring the government for subsidies and tax exemptions, under the guise of building social housing. Business Improvement Associations and businesses that are promoting the gentrification of our communities. Real estate speculators, landlords, et cetera.

When undertaking actions we must clearly communicate our intentions and demands to our enemies, our allies and the public at large. Political action must be undertaken with the intent to strengthen the movement as a whole. We must be able to clearly articulate how our actions will move toward meeting our objectives. Our actions must use innovative and militant tactics that are effective with a commitment to strategic escalation. These tactics must be used in conjunction with outreach that will meet the specific goals of the action and in turn build towards our long-term goals.

- These tactics include, but are not limited to:

- Strategic Demonstrations
- Rent Strikes
- Occupations
- Squats*
- Homeless Encampments
- Residential Tenancy Casework**

* When undertaking actions such as squats our role should primarily be one of organizing and empowering the constituency.

** This casework must be done focusing on winnable goals, i.e. fax in arbitration applications, re-open downtown residential tenancy office. Casework is a direct action tactic that works to our overall strategy; it is not to be done as a social service. The casework must follow a model focused on self-empowerment for clients, moving away from dependency creating advocacy.

Strategy Meeting

Input from Sunday Nov. 10th

- The Housing Campaign can use the Declaration of Human Rights.
- Identify the relationship between housing and welfare.
- Develop a housing rights fact sheet.
- Squatting can be used as a direct action tactic to attack private property rights.
- Demand: "1% solution" All levels of government must dedicate 1% of revenue to housing.
- Potential for being a far-reaching campaign. We can find many allies around this issue.
- Very important issue for immigrants and working class, those with fixed incomes.
- Objective of campaign: Organize tenants associations.
- Potential in fact that renters exceed homeowners in population.
- We need to work with other groups when organizing squats using "Joint Squat Support Committees"

TIMELINE

Within 3 months we will have organized three major public meetings about the housing crisis.

The objective of these meetings is to target people in high-risk areas, who are in pre-crisis situations in order to mass mobilize them around housing and to build towards a major action in March.

These public meetings will take place in:

- Port Coquitlam (Jan 15th)
- Surrey (Feb 5th)
- Mt. Pleasant (Feb 20th)
- *suggested/flexible dates

In December we'll focus on:

- Identifying constituencies we will target
- Identifying other groups working on housing (i.e. Victoria Renters Union)
- Documenting what resources may be available through these groups
- Identifying possible alliances we can build with local community groups, Developing relationships with these groups
- Mobilizing organizers to work on the campaign
- Researching the housing situation in each of the 3 communities
- Developing literature that is specific to each of these communities with appropriate translations
- Setting up regular and targeted leafleting and literature drop off in all 3 areas

In January and February we'll focus on:

- Logistical aspects of the meetings
- Maintaining communication and outreach within the 3 communities
- Organization and outreach for march action

Women's problems, women's solutions, and women's liberation are all inseparable parts of the class struggle

A general analytical approach and some perspective for discussion

I) Background and class analysis

* Women's oppression and how to struggle against it has been an issue at every turning point in the history of the revolutionary movement.

*The woman question cannot be divorced from the class question. Any confusion on this matter can only lead to erroneous conclusions and setbacks. It will divert the class struggle into a sex struggle of all women against all men.

*Historically, the sex struggle was part of the bourgeois feminist movement of the last century. It was a reform movement, conducted within the framework of the capitalist system, and not seeking to overthrow it. But it was a progressive struggle in that women revolted against almost total male domination on the economic, social, and domestic fronts. Through the feminist movement, a number of important reforms were won for women. But the bourgeois feminist movement has exhausted its era, achieved its limited aims, and the problems of today can only be resolved in the struggle of class against class.

*The woman question can only be resolved through the unity of working men and women against the ruling men and women. This means that the interests of the workers as a **class** are identical; and not the interests of all women as a **sex** (for example the ruling class women).

*Ruling-class women have exactly the same interest in upholding and perpetuating capitalist society as their men have. The bourgeois feminists fought, among other things, for the right of women as well as men to hold property in their own name. They won this right. Today, wealthy and bourgeois women hold fabulous wealth in their own names. They are completely in alliance with the wealthy and bourgeois men to perpetuate the capitalist system. They are not in alliance with the working women, whose needs can only be served through the abolition of capitalism. Thus, emancipation of working women will not be achieved in alliance with women of the enemy class, but just the opposite: in a struggle **against** them as part and parcel of the whole class struggle.

* Gordon Campbell's capitalists' offensive against women's rights is not aimed at driving women out of the work force. That is a normal practice of all capitalist ruling classes. Instead, the aim is to make women more vulnerable to increased exploitation. The goal is not to push women **out** of the labour market but to push them **down**—to jobs with fewer paid holidays, less safety, shorter lunch breaks, less union protection, and lower wages, less child care, less full time jobs and etc.

*Women have always made up an important component of the pool of unemployed workers, which is known as the industrial reserve army of labour. This reserve army never disappears under capitalism, even in the best of times. But in a period of capitalist stagnation (drastic decrease in investment and low economic growth), the owners of capital need to expand this army of the unemployed in order to intensify competition among workers and thus drive down wages. In this context, the latest layoffs in health sectors can be understood.

*The bosses' ideological campaign seeks to reinforce the idea among both sexes that women are "natural" recruits to this reserve army. They are "normally" only marginal workers, temporary workers, part-time workers, home workers. Women are only a "second" wage earner in the family. In periods of rising joblessness, there are always assertions by the ruling class that women should not really be counted as unemployed in the same way as men, who are considered the main wage earner. This propaganda is aimed at convincing women to accept, with less resistance and resentment, temporary unemployment, or new jobs at lower wages. All this is true despite the increase in households headed by women, a trend that will continue as the evolution of capitalism continues to disintegrate the family.

*The capitalists want women to blame themselves, not the social relations of production, for the economic and social problems they confront every day. The goal is to make women feel guilty that their

children are being permanently damaged by “abandonment” in child-care facilities (if they exist), or are being turned into lonely isolated kids. Rather than demanding—as a right—both child-care facilities and equal access to high-paying jobs previously barred to them, women are pushed toward being grateful for any job, at any wage.

*From the point of view of the capitalist class, the role of women is to be responsible within the individual family unit for what should be social tasks: education, care of the sick and elderly, and child-rearing. Women are supposed to see themselves as supplemental wage earners and, at best, temporary workers deserving lower pay than men. Progress in reducing wage differentiation between men and women and toward the socialization of the family’s responsibility is the only way that could prevent the vast shift of wealth from the working class to the capitalist class.

*Thousands of women cannot find work because of their responsibilities for the care of young children, lack of transportation, pregnancy, physical disabilities, and the discrimination faced by those who do not speak English.

*The increase in the immigrant population, which many BC researchers believe was neglected from the point of view of rights in the last 10 years marked, a great change in the composition of the poor and working class in BC. This change naturally deserves more attention to the immigrant population generally and immigrant women specifically.

*The Canada ruling class, in search of cheap labour, knows that this massive labour inflow is essential to their growth in productivity, which is based more than anything else on low wages, forced overtime, lengthening of the workweek, and wide use of part-time and temporary work.

Within this new situation immigrant women are the most vulnerable sectors of immigrants. The case of Filipino nurses and nannies are the best example of this super-exploitation.

This change be appreciated because the experience and traditions—and image—of the working class and labour movement in Canada are being enriched by the diverse cultures and lessons of struggles by workers and peasants from Latin America and the Caribbean, from Asia and the Pacific, from Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere. They have been subjected to harshest attack by systematic racism by practicing police brutality, new immigration laws and in BC the implementation of Training Wage.

*Women’s liberation is not a matter of interest only to women of the advanced capitalist countries with their relatively high educational level and standard of living. On the contrary, it is of vital concern and importance to the masses of women throughout the world. The third world countries are no exception. In BC it translates itself to the presence of thousands of this third-world women and, paying attention to their need and demands is of vital importance for APC.

II) Research examples

Some of the BC cuts and attacks on women:

*The Government of British Columbia is in the process of instituting massive cuts to welfare, including reducing support payments to single parent families, forcing people with disabilities to look for work, attacking basic disabilities rights, and threatening single parents of children over age 3 with further cuts if they are unable to find employment.

*Cuts to legal aid in BC will include drastically reducing family and poverty law services provided by the Legal Services Society, terminating direct assistance for landlord/tenant, EI, welfare, CPP disability, foreclosures, disability trusts and Supreme Court actions, and closing many Native and Community Law offices.

*Simultaneously providing tax cuts, slashing jobs, slashing social programs and services, most heavily relied on by women and children, not only demonstrates a lack of effective fiscal leadership for BC but also illustrates this governments intentional disregard for basic human rights.

*Women’s centres in BC, which provide information, support, referral, advocacy and other services to women experiencing violence, poverty and other human rights abuses, are also slated for de-funding in 2004.

Research material (I, II, III) from—<http://www.wmst.ubc.ca/FWCBCApr02.pdf>—

UBC Women's studies and gender relations

I- A majority of minimum wage workers are women (59%). Women constitute more than two-thirds of those over 25 working at minimum wage (70%). The new lower minimum 'training wage', at \$6 an hour, disproportionately injures women. Pending changes to the Employment Standards Act promise to erode still further workplace protections for all non-unionised workers.

II- Most mothers with pre-schoolers are in the labour force (63% in Canada in 1999). Access to affordable, high quality daycare is essential. In most families, childcare remains overwhelming women's responsibility. Nearly 1 in 4 BC families (23%) are headed by single-parents, 83% of whom are women. Over half of female-led families live below the poverty line. In spite of these realities, the BC government has cancelled the BC childcare initiative and eliminated the before-and-after school care programs. It has also cut childcare subsidies available to low-income families, reducing the income threshold so fewer will qualify and providing lower subsidies for those who do. Families will be forced to rely on informal (unlicensed and untrained) care. And more women will likely take part-time jobs, commonly minimum wage, non-union, lacking benefits and security, to accommodate childcare needs. 28% of employed women already work part-time.

III- Largely as a result of childcare responsibilities, women are twice as likely as men to rely on social assistance (2.3% versus 1.2% nationally). The BC government's cuts to social assistance will significantly worsen the poverty of the poorest women and kids. Single parents are now considered employable when the youngest child turns 3 (down from 7). As childcare subsidies and programs have been slashed, people deemed employable may only receive social assistance in two of any five years. Welfare benefits for employable single parents have dropped by \$70, or 18%. The Family Maintenance Exemption, which allowed single parents to keep \$100 of child support payments, has gone. The Earnings Exemption, which permitted welfare recipients to retain up to \$200 of earnings, no longer exists. Full-time post-secondary students will now be ineligible for social assistance, ending an important retraining option, especially for divorced women who have been out of the labour market. Refugee claimants no longer qualify for assistance. People with disabilities will no longer be treated separately in the welfare system, a shift that may lead to their redefinition as employable. In sum, changes to the welfare safety net will make it more (not less) difficult for recipients to find employment, and deepen poverty among the poorest of British Columbians, the vast majority of whom are women and children.

III) Some suggested areas of work for our women campaign:

- 1- Welfare cuts
- 2- Child care cuts
- 3- Violence against women in general (including how poverty increases violence)
- 4- Violence against women in immigrant, women of colour, and aboriginal communities (including how poverty increases violence against women)
- 5- Cuts on women's centre (including sexual assault centres)
- 6- Cuts on women's legal aid services
- 7- Equality in pay (equity)
- 8- Racism

IV) Some initial and suggested ideas:

- 1- Opening new Women departments in women or immigrant centres with original speaking councillors and instructors in downtown Vancouver, east Vancouver, Surrey, New Westminster, Richmond and North Vancouver
- 2- Educational classes in APC on women issues and racism against third women in Canada and British Columbia

Legal Defence Strategy Proposal

Objectives:

1. To defend ourselves and our allies against political attacks (arrests, legal charges, physical assaults, media propaganda, internal division agitation) by the state government through its agitational infiltrators, repressive police force and corrupt legal system.
2. To build a network of allied communities and groups around the commonality of these attacks and the need for unified defence.
3. To outsource our concrete legal needs to supporters and expand our contacts, knowledge and skills in order to activate quiet supporters and expand the movement against the Liberal Government in BC.
4. To expose the Liberals and all Governments as reliant upon racist, sexist and overall oppressive policing to cripple social movements and control poor and working people in BC and around the world.

Why a strategy around Legal Defence?

Social Movements, such as the one the Anti-Poverty Committee is involved in building, are a threat to the absolute power held by the Liberal Government in BC. The government's understanding of this threat is illustrated by their attacks on the APC through the past months, both through individual arrests and general harassment / increased presence and antagonization at demonstrations, actions and even leafleting. It is the role of the Police to criminalize and intimidate people involved in radical politics to create divisions between them and others in the Province who have not yet been activated. The interests of the Police are the interests of the Government and the business community that we attack in defence of ourselves and our rights. When we organize against the Government, we are attacked by the Police and are forced develop a strategy to defend ourselves against them. The need for this is clearly illustrated by the state response from the incidents on May Day of this year, the arrests and charges at the Art Gallery, the massive Police mobilization around the Woodward's Squat and their attempts to isolate the APC in this incident and finally, by the Britannia Police Riot on October 3rd and the subsequent arrests. When it is necessary, we must take the fight from the streets to the courts and we must fight in the same way we do in all places; united and growing.

How to do this:

1. Incorporate our organizational propaganda / fundraising legal public work into a broad and networked campaign against state repression of communities of colour / indigenous peoples / "illegals" etc... (Based along fundamental principles of solidarity)
 - a. Put on joint forums / panels / tours
 - b. Release joint propaganda
 - c. Begin work immediately on the Britannia Police Riot case in conjunction with the Skwelkwel'welt Protection Centre, produce a joint pamphlet and organize a forum together.
2. Support other communities' struggles explicitly and implicitly
 - a. Organize actions of support for and with other communities and organizations.
 - b. Incorporate updates in allies situations / calls for support into our publications (newsletter etc...)
3. Put ourselves in the role of "supported" to offload work and to build dynamic connections with other communities and groups.

- a. Offload legal work... fundraising / legal co-ordination onto supporters (unions / students and student groups / other progressive organizations)
 - b. Approach other groups to do propaganda work for us... unions and groups to publish our articles in their periodicals and to write things in support of us, put on events for us etc...
 - c. Enlist "impartial" organizations to take on our cases publicly. (i.e.: The BC Civil Liberties Association should defend our charter right to organize.
4. Establish internal security protocol to be adopted in the same manner as the basis of unity (that it must be agreed upon to work with APC). Protocol will refer to:
 - a. Respectful conduct and security measures to reduce the hazards vulnerable / oppressed people are faced with when working with APC internally.
 - b. Behaviour and conduct at demos; to address such concerns as "inappropriate" police agitation and inclusivity.
 5. Approach legal fundraising in a targeted way to mobilize people around the material aspects of legal defence.
 - a. Establish timelines and projected funds necessary to win court cases.
 - b. Begin this with the Britannia case; we need to make \$10,000 by March 31

Six-Month Timeline:

Within Three-Months:

1. Establish Campaign Dynamics internally.
 - a. How it works with other campaigns.
 - b. Internal security code of conduct to combat agitation.
2. Joint efforts with other organizations; build connections with diverse communities provincially with international analysis.
3. Produce comprehensive literature with analysis outlining the relevance of defence work both for APC organizationally and in the context of involvement in a broader community.
4. Put on workshops for internal education around security protocol proposal.

Within Six Months:

1. Provincial Speaking Tour with another group (1st tour should probably be of college and university campuses)
2. Mobilization in co-operation with others around "illegals" and international law domestic application / relevance.
3. Begin work on legal Union presentation for networking and to ask for material legal support (monies / donated lawyers etc...)

Relationship to other campaigns:

1. Relate legal question to oppressed peoples in labour market and on welfare etc...
2. Examine the realities of social movement organizing and dissidence... negative impacts of these things legally for people of colour / women / single parents / children / illegals / disabled.
 - a. Focus on how to minimize these impacts within the context of effective action.
3. Jail support mechanisms... lawyers and propaganda work.

Organization & Structure

The Organizational Character of the Anti-Poverty Committee

At the APC general strategy meeting there was an obvious gap between the notion of where we have come from and where we have to go from here. We are at a critical point in the life of the organization and it is important that we look closely and honestly at what we have achieved and failed to achieve in the past ten months. Our successes and failures have as much to do with the organizational character of APC as they do the character of the political environment in BC. If we lack a realistic and progressive organizational character (meaning: political analysis, representative and balanced membership, functional and democratic structure and respectful discipline) then we cannot possibly take part in or sustain a realistic movement against the Liberal Government. If we cannot build a diverse mass movement against the Liberals in times as explosive and unifying as these then we have no hope when Campbell is eventually voted out of office and a more centralist government takes his place. (Ex: The Harris to Eve's transition and de-escalation in Ontario.) It is clear that most everyone in APC understands this to be true, but we have failed to articulate a vision of how we can bring about such change in the organization.

The tokenized dismissal of issues affecting communities of colour / immigrants / women / single parents / disabled / queer and transgendered people reflects not only the organizational make-up of APC but also the limited political vision of the group. We have been unable to organize with the vast and diverse working class in the city because of this immaturity. We have been resigned to organizing almost exclusively around what is the most obvious and abject example of poverty in the city: the Downtown Eastside. Through doing this we have earned charitable praises from organizations and people throughout the city and have a reputation that brings us a degree of credibility but traps us in an "outside" role as far as most people in the city are concerned. We enforce the myth that poverty only exists in the downtown eastside, that the issues we organize around: Welfare, Housing, and to a lesser extent and perhaps only by association, Women's Issues and low wage workers rights are only issues of importance in the Downtown Eastside. We have to break out of this quarantine zone or be suffocated by it and it's insular, agency political dominance. This much was made clear by the strategy meeting discussion when, for every campaign discussion, "Outreach Outreach Outreach" was the consistent refrain. These same ideas were repeated and elaborated upon in the campaign strategy meetings that took place in the past two weeks.

In the Training Wage campaign we discussed the organizational marginalization of the campaign and the need to make links with Unions and immigrant community support groups to broaden the scope of the campaign. We decided to continue pushing education and outreach with targeted leafleting and presentations in high schools and forums in other communities and regions of Vancouver.

In the Welfare Campaign we decided to work in regions that lack sufficient support organizations and to focus on drawing working people into the fight for Welfare rights as their rights. Outside of the Downtown Eastside, there is little awareness of Welfare rights and little sympathy for the plight of welfare recipients; the work in the outlying districts of the city is extremely important, sensitive and difficult. Casework was referred to as a tactic in this struggle to mobilize people around the defence of individuals discriminated against by the system and to expose the fundamental inequality of the welfare state, only casework strategically relevant to this was discussed as worth taking on. Emphasis was made on race and gender analysis in relation to Welfare rolls.

In the Women's Campaign emphasis was made on drawing out Women's issues in all the other campaigns. We decided to work with Women's groups and to broaden the scope and constituency of all campaigns by drawing out the systemic discrimination against Women by the Government and to challenge sexist notions within APC to make the organization accessible for Women.

The Housing Campaign discussed moving into other regions of the city and focussing on drawing people in around the changes to the residential tenancy act and developing region specific housing literature with race and gender analysis. They talked about working with churches, unions and support groups to access their memberships and to break the myth of the only housing problem being homelessness.

The Legal Defence Campaign focussed on networking with other groups and launching joint campaigns to bridge work with immigrant and indigenous communities around the common and obvious enemy; the state. Discussion also focussed on safety and security protocols for internal organizing and for public situations that place vulnerable people at risk.

The Outreach Committee discussed changing the name to "Education and Communication" committee. The objectives pointed out were to research and make initial links with other groups APC should work with generally or in specific campaigns. Also discussed was the importance of internal education and political development so we can work with a broad range of people in an inclusive and democratic way.

Organizational changes:

Aside from the strategies of the organization and its campaigns, there are other obstacles and challenges in the pursuit of a mass based organization that is capable of involving and representing all the different communities that make up the working class of BC. We have an enormous struggle ahead of us within the Anti-Poverty Committee. It is not enough to talk about taking on the struggles of Women and communities of colour if we are unable to address the insular, status-quo left structural practices and policies we follow on a daily basis in the organization. At all times we must act as though we are working within a mass based organization that is responsible and accountable to itself for democratic and inclusive, accountable practices; we all play a role in this. There is no abstention from this decision. It has been raised at many meetings and gatherings that we are organizing in a white supremacist, male dominant fashion. Even if people deny these "explicit" behaviours, it cannot be argued that we have not internalised these modes of organizing implicitly. Abstention is compliance, if we do not actively (individually and organizationally) attack the insular, clique and friendship based organizing practices in APC then we will be bound to the road these things will take us down: irrelevance and destruction.

Some of these problems are structural, but most of the structural problems are that the structure we have adopted cannot be followed due to organizational difficulties. We must all be accountable to decisions made in meetings and value the goals and ideas of the organization above the spontaneous (if seemingly righteous) whims of the few. The office must become a place for organizing. People must spend time in the streets throughout the city. We must be respectful and disciplined if we are to make any headway in this struggle. We have to value political relationships above personal ones in context of the work and cannot personalize conflicts or criticism. We are all accountable to each other and must accept this accountability as a necessary as part of an organization. Above all, we have to trust APC and accept that we are part of something much larger than any of us or any group of us; and we have to expand forever the idea of who "we" are.

Towards an Organizational Character we can work with

Why does organizational character matter?

Any organization serious about fighting for the rights of poor and working people must strive to become and maintain a dynamic organization. The Working Class of Vancouver is a diverse and complicated class of people. Everyone involved in this organization are a part of this class of people. Who “WE” are as an organization clearly demonstrates how effectively we are organizing around the issues and needs of the Working Class. If the organization’s membership is predominantly white and young then we must critically analyse what type of organizing has been done to reach such a homogenous and privileged group exclusively. More important than that, we must examine what work we have NOT done and what we NEED to do in order to be in any way representative of the Working Class in the city. Only by this do we have any hope of mobilizing people in a genuine way against the Liberal Government. Only when we are representative of our “constituency” are we in any way a part of a democratic movement or any movement whatsoever. Our organizational character is all of these things. Our organizational character permits or forbids the type of organizing trumpeted in our campaign and overall strategies. We must develop an organizational character that builds and maintains a dynamic and representative organization. Every member of the organization must strive to live up to and improve the organizational character of the group, not just in meetings or at organizational functions but at all times. The status quo left in Vancouver has never managed to achieve this. To function without politically disciplined, democratic character is to function beneath a shroud and to actively maintain the racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ablist and overall oppressive status quo the ruling class has constructed. We must fight through this status quo to approach and fight the ruling class. Anything less is delusion.

What does this mean?

1. We are a political organization.

We are not “action based”. We cannot defeat this or any government by action alone. All our actions must be driven and enforced by our politics. We must articulate our politics clearly at all times, even when not in action. Our functioning internally as well as externally must represent these politics. We cannot abandon our anti-racist / anti-sexist politics in rhetoric and we must be accountable for our politics at all times. Our goal is to unify the Working Class against the Government and the ruling class and all our actions must point to this. This must be reflected in our literature, our structure and our behaviour through things like clear language, translations, accessible layout and artwork, transparent, inclusive structure and respectful behaviour.

2. Political Clarity.

We must discuss our politics without hesitation or embarrassment. We must openly discuss political motivations and differences in reference to all our campaigns and actions. We must discuss the political spectrum of the organization and its organizing at all general and campaign meetings. We must air our differences and work them out before them become irresolvable.

3. Strategic and political unity.

While we must air conflicts in meetings to address the politics behind them we must remain fundamentally united behind the organizational politics and strategy. If people do not agree with the fundamental politics and strategy of the group they cannot become members. It is important

that all members understand and agree with the basic foundations of the organization. When we take action it must be unified.

4. Vision based on the movement rather than the organization.

We must pay attention to and respect the work other organizations do. We must build relationships with other organizations that represent poor and working people in many capacities. We must attend other groups meetings and observe and participate respectfully. At all times we are representing the movement we are part of and must respect it above all other things.

5. Formal membership.

We are not part of the organization by accident or for “numbers” alone. We must function with “quality, not quantity”. We must strive for a respectful and serious organization made up of members who are equally respectful and serious. Interested people must apply to become voting members, though anyone who agrees with the basis of unity can work with the organization in a supportive role.

6. Adherence to structure.

We make decisions in meetings. Appropriate committees handle situations. We cannot undermine that structure by making decisions independently, unilaterally or in unsanctioned meetings. We must fight against cliquism, against people having special privileges or not being accountable because they are “friends”. All members must know how they can become involved in all things.

7. Accountability to decisions.

Decisions made in meetings must be held to and carried out. Decisions must be talked out and understood before they are voted on. Anyone who undermines a decision by carrying out their own individual program or by intentionally misrepresenting a decision made by the group must be held accountable through accountability process.

8. Accountability to responsibilities.

It is necessary to delegate responsibilities to committees and individuals in the group. Failure to carry out these responsibilities in a way representative of the group and the tasks assigned will be noted. Repeated or gross irresponsibility will result in accountability process.

9. Adherence to code of conduct.

Respectful treatment of others both in the organization and outside is demanded of all members. Breaches of the code of conduct will result in accountability process.

10. Accountability process.

Part of internal security is to have a democratic process to ensure that all members and people involved in the organization are acting in favour of the organization, its basis of unity and its character. Part of the Steering Committees duty is to carry out “accountability process” against people who are acting outside of membership requirements. This process must be open and democratic though there are times that confidentiality is important. Accountability measures vary from verbal and written warnings to conditional suspensions and expulsion. (i.e.: Someone who displays sexist behaviours may be warned. The second time, suspended to seek education and then re-evaluated. The third time the person may be expelled. Someone who consistently misrepresents the interests, politics and character of the group in public appearances may be suspended from participating in public appearances.) All decisions are contestable by the person charged but all members must agree to and support this process.

This organizational character must be understood, accepted and actively upheld by everyone who joins the group.

Structure

Our vision is to become a major opposition movement in BC against the Liberal government in absence of a viable and revolutionary leadership. Our perspective is to unite people, groups, and organizations under attack by liberal government in order to bring this vision to the reality. The purpose of our structure is based on two principles: 1) to facilitate the implementation of the Anti-Poverty Committee's tasks and perspectives (including the Action Program), and 2) maintain the organizational integrity of the movement for its consolidation and growth. On the basis of these two principles, the strategic thinking behind this proposal is to provide enough time for APC activists to implement our most important task:

Outreach.

The APC is at a crossroads. We need a structure that can ensure activists in the APC can be accessible to communities, groups, and movements. For that, we need, as soon as possible, a simple structure which both 1) ensures the strategy mentioned above is followed, and 2) does not contradict the integrity of the APC. We need to build committees based on our campaigns and outreach purposes to direct and implement our strategy, perspective, and Action Program.

Our structure, then, is based on our political tasks and our need for immediate work and action, not on abstract forms. We need regular general meetings, and a steering committee based on the number of members in the organization.

To achieve that, the concrete proposals are:

1. That the office be open only 3 hours a day, 5 days a week.
 2. The elimination of all committees not related to the expansion of the APC: office, newsletter, and finances committees
- We need the following committees, based on existing and clear campaigns:
 1. Communication and Education
 2. Training Wage
 3. Legal Defence
 4. Welfare (disability forum et al.)
 5. Other potential committees based on campaigns to be determined after the campaign structure is clear.
 - The highest decision-making bodies are the AGM's. Between these, the highest are the general meetings, whose decisions should reflect those made at the previous AGM. Between the general meetings are the steering committee meetings, which should reflect the decisions made at the general meetings.
 - The steering committee had been a center of controversy: there must be a clear definition of its role.
 - The steering committee is a working body and is the leadership body of the APC between general meetings.
 - All Steering Committee meetings are subject to review at general meetings and AGM's.
 - Steering committee meetings are open to general members, based on request, in order to speak to specific points or issues.
 - Under special circumstances, like the development of tendencies, factions, or serious political differences, members can attend steering committee meetings without request.
 - The steering committee reserves the right, based on security and safety, to declare certain meetings or sections of meetings in camera.

Membership Criteria

For the health and success of any organization, strong foundations must be laid. It is irresponsible to network and form alliances with other organizations, recruit new members or actively organize with our constituencies (all of the working class) without the most fundamental structure in place. The membership of APC needs to be clearly defined to improve the level of security and accountability of the group and its members. This would empower new members to make a conscious, informed and responsible choice in joining the organization. A loose definition of membership, one that is open to debate, is unacceptable and compromises the integrity of the group. Members should clearly understand, agree and respect the Basis of Unity and the Code of Conduct and be held accountable of both. Members need to have a clear understanding of the history, the overall strategy of the group, the organizational character, the structure and the strategies and visions of the different committees and campaigns underway.

To facilitate this, the structure and requirements of membership includes an orientation session and information package. This would be followed by the new member's articulation of their motivation for joining the group and the level of commitment they can offer. A minimum commitment of actively participating in one campaign and attending one general meeting a month is required in order to have voting rights.

All voting members must:

1. Agree with the Basis of Unity
2. Agree to abide by the Code of Conduct
3. Attend an orientation session to read, discuss and understand:
 - The Basis of Unity
 - The Code of conduct
 - A history of the group
 - The overall strategy of the group
 - The different campaigns visions and strategies
 - The organizational character, including the structure
4. Be interviewed to clearly articulate their motivations for joining the group and potential commitment to the group. The body delegated the interview process would report at a general meeting and the general membership would then accept or refuse new members by vote (simple majority).
5. Actively participate in at least one of the campaigns or committees
6. Attend one general meeting a month

Members that are absent without notification or for prolonged periods of time might be required to go through the process again.

Code of Conduct

The primary objective of the code of conduct is to ensure that APC members are following the APC basis of unity, the principles outlined in the organizational character, the overall strategy and collective decisions made in the general meetings and other organizational bodies.

The code of conduct must identify and block any methods of intervention used by the ruling class to divide oppressed people from or within APC. It must ensure that APC is a healthy organization with space for all oppressed people. Any behaviour or matter in contradiction with the basis of unity, organizational character or code of conduct will be stopped and violators will be put through accountability process according to the degree of their damage to the APC and its principles.

Principles of the Code of Conduct:

1. All members must adhere to the code of conduct.
2. No APC member can:
 - a. Perform any act of physical or verbal assault against any other APC member
 - b. Violate the honour or dignity of any APC member
 - c. When representing APC, no member can use inappropriate profanity that is in contradiction with the basis of unity, organizational character or code of conduct
 - d. Compromise the integrity of the group by committing unsanctioned or unrelated illegal acts that the group or members of the group at risk
 - e. Perform or enforce acts of racism, sexism, homophobia, or other forms of oppressive behaviour
 - f. Perform or tolerate acts of sexual harassment
3. Members shall not speak to the media on behalf of the organization unless delegated by the appropriate body
4. The APC does not sanction the use of weapons in its work
5. The organization encourages democracy in discussion and unity in action. When participating in public action or when representing APC, members must respect, carry through and defend decisions made at meetings.
6. Confidential organizational information (telephone numbers, addresses, internal documents and study papers, emails etc...) shall not be released to persons or organizations without clearance from the appropriate bodies

Implementation of the Code of Conduct:

1. Any political, legal or personal disputes between members shall be settled in a just and non-antagonistic manner by internal arbitration or mediation
2. For all situations which allege a breach of the code of conduct, basis of unity, organizational character or membership criteria against any member, a fact finding commission will be created. This commission will investigate the situation and bring a report with recommendations to the steering committee and the general membership for approval. The commission has the ability to recommend measures ranging from verbal and written warnings to expulsion.

All members are expected to uphold the code of conduct in all areas of their work with the organization.

Concrete Necessities

1. Accept the Action Program
2. Dissolve the Steering Committee
3. Close the Office.
4. Implement the Action Program
5. Revisit the Basis of Unity to comply with the Action Program
6. Do not revisit elections or resume office hours until the program is functioning.

Accepting the Action Program is the first step to rebuilding APC. In order to do this we must dissolve the steering committee. The Steering Committee was elected on the very principles that opposed the Action Program and it would be contradictory to maintain this body as it stands. As well, the office is currently functioning in a way that opposes the priorities laid out in the Action Program. The patterns that have become entrenched in the office will not change without structural changes. This will require a time period to clearly develop how the office will function to comply with structural changes. The basis of unity needs to be revisited and clarified to comply with the Action Program. The implementation of the Action Program is a necessity before resuming elections or office functions. The concrete roles of all of these things will be determined by the implementation of the Action Program.