

Anti-Poverty Committee News

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Don't Be Fooled

BC Welfare Legislation Remains Oppressive to the Poor

The Active Community Presence Committee of Stop the Welfare Cuts Coalition urges British Columbians not to be fooled by the recent Liberal government's addition to the exemptions of the Two Year Time Limit cut off.

As Benita Bunjun from Vancouver Status of Women notes, "Let us not forget that as of April 2002 the Liberal government of BC introduced wide-ranging regressive changes to income assistance, affecting approximately 150,000 British Columbians." Such changes are designed to enable a cut of \$581 million, approximately one-third of the Ministry of Human resources operating budget over the next three years (Klein and Long 2003). These changes occurred and are still occurring at the same time as intense restructuring of almost all other government services, including health education, labour, and the environment.

"The reality is that BC's current Employment and Income Assistance Act and Regulations continue to be detrimental to the lives of people on income assistance," says Megan Oleson of the Anti-Poverty Committee. Since April 2002, the BC Liberal government has attacked poor, women and the marginalized by implementing the following welfare changes:

- * Restructuring of Disability Benefits – complete overhaul via assessment review for every person on Disability Benefits.
- * Cuts to rates and benefits – welfare benefit rates for employable single parents have been cut by \$51 a month (BCCEDAW, 2003) and support allowances for single "employable welfare recipients between the ages of 55 and 64 have been cut by between \$47 and \$98 per month, while couples in this age group have lost up to \$144 per month (Klein and Long; BCCEDAW, 2003)
- * Two year time limit cuts and reduction – Starting April 1, 2002, single and couples without children classified as "employable" by the Ministry of Human Resources will only be entitled to receive benefits for two out of every five years. In addition, after the two year time limit, benefits for single parents and two parent families will be reduced by \$100 and \$200 per month respectively.
- * Targeting single moms – single parents categorized as "employable" are expected to work as soon as their youngest child turns three.
- * Two year independence rule – Applicants age 19 over are required to demonstrate that they have been financially independent for two consecutive years before they are eligible to apply for income assistance.

The Active Community Presence mobilizes all communities to fight welfare cuts. Join us on Monday Feb 23 at 1pm across the province we will be organizing and participating in a Day of Action. We are inviting groups and individuals to adopt a welfare office, and to rally and show their fight back to cuts to welfare. For information and an Organizing Tool Kit contact APC at 604-682-2727.

Action Update

"Safe Streets" A Dead End

On Tuesday February 10th, the Housing Action Committee (HAC), the Anti-Poverty Committee (APC), End Legislated Poverty (ELP) and a fist full of supporters stormed the stone sidewalks of Gastown. The small army of well over a hundred poor and working poor people lined the streets in a mass "pan-in." Tourists, who usually walk by panners with disdain, were overwhelmed with shock. The police who are more then used to harassing individual panhandlers where left powerless by the mob.

Members of ELP passed "know your rights" cards down the lines of out stretched hands and hats. The card clarifies the law protecting a person's right to panhandle under section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. ELP made the cards after years of legal battles which have finally succeeded in upholding poor people's right to work.

The mass demonstration was a response to the growing poor bashing coming from business and government. The Business Improvement Association (BIA), a committee of Vancouver business owners, carries a lot of weight with the city and often throws that weight down upon people living on the streets or who make their living on the street. They are further conspiring to persecute poor people by pushing for more by-laws that would enable police and private security to ticket and push around panhandlers.

Recently the top goons of the BIA have hired free agent Dave Jones as their crime czar. Dave Jones has a long history of oppressing poor people. Before being recruited by the BIA, Jones was a top cop in the Downtown Eastside. During the heroic Woodward's squat he was instrumental in developing the police and city's "divide and conquer" campaign. He worked tirelessly to undermine the solidarity in the squat and on the streets. He is also a world renowned strategist of crowd control and was involved in the security discussions regarding the bloody G-8 demonstrations in Genoa, as well as the G-8 meetings two years ago outside Calgary. *con't on the next page*

refuse to retreat!

"Safe Streets:" A Dead End

con't from the front page

Now with his long history of police repression he has moved on to crime prevention in the private sector. It seems his first crusade on behalf of his BIA employers is to conquer the livelihoods of panhandlers. He has publicly stated that the first step is to encourage the public to refrain from referring to people asking for change as "panhandlers," but to call them "beggars" instead. He envisions people purchasing pretend keys from charities and handing them out to people in need who can then redeem them for a sandwich.

Unfortunately for Jones and his cronies he has lipped off too loud outside of closed meetings and we on the street have heard of his plans. When we marched pass his office, (that he had to flee from) we left a letter warning him we are sick and tired of his begging to the police for more enforcement and that we don't want any of his solicited bullshit.

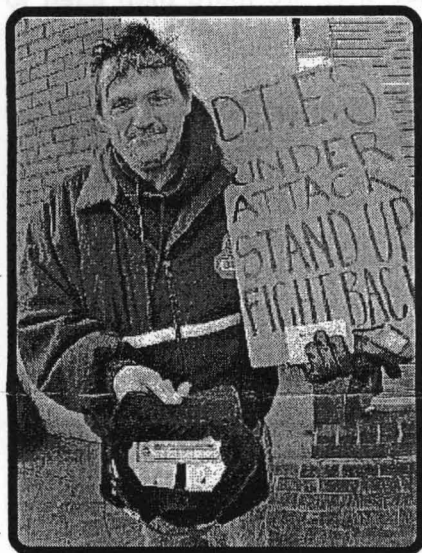
Representing the government's attitude is Lorne Mayencourt, the Liberal MLA for Vancouver-Burrard. He has threatened a few times now to push a private members bill that would see a series of new laws passed that would mimic the Safe Streets Act that was disastrously implemented in Ontario at the beginning of 2000.

The Ontario Safe Streets Act (OSSA) is an extension of legislated class war. It has given the police power to ticket, fine and/or detain street active people.

Using squeegeeing and "aggressive panhandling" as its justification for intensifying the then ruling Conservative parties war on the poor, a full out attack was waged on the streets by the police. Mass arrests and ticketing forced many people who depended on making their living through spare change further into isolation.

After waves of cuts to welfare and social services, women were left with nowhere to go. Involvement in the sex trade as well as overdoses increased. The Safe Street Act made driving through downtown less annoying for the wealthy but is a dead end for the poor.

The OSSA represents the ideology of the state and the aspirations of business. Through public manipulation the Liberals and the BIA are generating a propaganda



Feb 11th 2004, over 100 people staged a mass pan-in in Gastown.

war against poor people that will, as in Ontario, justify repressive laws. As the welfare cuts continue and policing increases, the city and province think that expanding the arsenal of laws and penalties will help keep poor people off the streets and out of the public eye. But by warehousing poor people in shelters and jails where the outside can not see in, the crimes of capitalism will continue with no accountability.

By marching through Gastown we have proven to the police, city, business and the government that we will not remain silent while they plot new ways to persecute our brothers and sisters. We have shown them, as well as ourselves, how rapidly we can mobilize a large group of people who can cause a great degree of economic disruption. We feel economic disruption is the only power we have as poor people.

If the Liberals are allowed to continue their assault on all working and poor people our actions will intensify. There are an increasing number of demonstrations on the streets and more people are attending. This mobilization is not being led by individuals wanting to go only so far but by the people who are fighting to win!

- David Cunningham

What is APC?



The Anti-Poverty Committee is an organization of poor and working people, who fight for poor people, their rights, and an end to poverty by any means necessary. The poor face constant attack under the capitalist system and these attacks have only intensified under the BC Liberal government.

The BC Liberal's brutal policies - the cuts to welfare, the six dollar training wage, the privatization of public services, the cuts to social programs, the restriction of democratic and human rights - all are designed to transfer wealth from poor and working people to the rich and powerful.

APC is committed to fighting the brutal policies of the BC Liberals through direct action, mass mobilization, and case-work. We oppose racism, sexism, homophobia, and all other forms of oppression. APC is an independent and democratic organization open to anyone who agrees with our basis of unity. We are committed to working in solidarity with the struggles of other progressive movements, locally, nationally, and internationally, to end poverty and injustice.

Get Involved in APC

APC General Meetings

Every Tuesday, 6pm, 327 Carrall in the DTES beside Pigeon Park Childcare and coffee provided

APC Office

The APC Office is open at 108-119 W. Pender between Mon-Fri 10-5 but we will be moving in March.

Donate

APC relies on donations from individuals & organizations. You can make a cheque out to the Anti-Poverty Committee.

New APC website:
<http://apc2.resist.ca>

The Active Community Presence: Mass Advocacy Campaign

Are you finding it impossible to make ends meet with all the recent cuts? Are you tired of being treated like dirt because you are on welfare? We practice 'politically minded' welfare advocacy. Our goal when we advocate in our community is not only to get what we need and are entitled to, but to demand the respect and dignity that are taken away when our access to social assistance is denied in order to pad the pockets of big business.

For more information contact one of these organizations: End Legislated Poverty at 604-879-1209 or elp@telus.net, Vancouver Status Of Women at 604-255-6554 or femantipov@vsw.ca or the Anti-Poverty Committee at 604-682-2726 or apc@resist.ca.