

New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice  
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For immediate publication

**Moncton (NB) – Members of the Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) have asked each of the political parties to tell them what would be in their electoral platform to reduce poverty in N.B.**

“All of the five political parties responded with their respective proposals and the CFSJ thanks them for it. The CFSJ believes that political parties need to be open regarding their proposals before and during election time so that citizens know what they are voting for” stated Ms. McCaustlin.

The CFSJ is convinced that some of the initiatives submitted by the political parties would go a long way toward reducing poverty. These include raising poor people’s income, implementing pay equity in the private sector, having a publicly funded non-profit child care plan, developing a public housing strategy, increasing the pension of seniors, emphasizing literacy and improving social assistance rates and policies.

In the area of poverty reduction, the responses received from the Liberals and the Conservatives were quite similar since they were both saying that the Economic and Social Inclusion Plan is sufficient to make a major inroad toward the alleviation of poverty. However, the CFSJ is critical of this Plan. The government has put in place a new Crown Corporation to administer it, thus taking away precious financial resources from people on social assistance. Moreover, the Plan is, in effect, downloading the delivery of programs to community groups and to the private sector. This is reducing the possibility of delivering programs to citizens at the same quality level throughout the province and will make it difficult to serve clients in the language of their choice. Since the Plan’s announcement in January 2010, only three proposals were implemented. All the others will not be put in place before one to five years.

“The Liberals are not saying anything specific regarding how much they would raise social assistance rates and when this would come into effect. The Conservatives are also silent on the date and the level of future social assistance rate increases” says Ms. McCaustlin.

“Members of the CFSJ are pleased to read that, in their program development, the NDP makes a distinction between an approach based on justice and one motivated by charity” says Ms. McCaustlin. The NDP party agrees with the need to improve a problem mentioned in the Poverty Reduction Plan, namely the elimination of bureaucratic structures. However, the CFSJ fears that removing several programs from government departments with the intention of transferring these to community groups and to the private sector is not a wise move and on that point, CFSJ is in disagreement. The NDP does, on the other hand, say that

that they would fight to preserve core social programs which are so essential to people living in poverty. The NDP party is supporting the CFSJ's demand for an increase in the provincial social assistance rates to the average of those in NF & L, NS and PEI. Both the NDP the People's Alliance of New Brunswick are supporting demands made by the CFSJ, namely to improve the Employment Insurance program, to increase the levels of the Canadian Pension Plan, the Old Age Security Pension and the Guaranteed Annual Supplement. These are programs that do help to reduce poverty.

"The Green Party's decision to put people and families first is something that the CFSJ certainly supports and is very, very pleased to hear that the party considers *getting people out of poverty* as their first priority for new spending" says Ms. McCaustlin. Along with the CFSJ, the Green Party believes that the dividends flowing from this commitment would be enormous. Their endorsement of an Annual Guaranteed Income is also welcomed by the CFSJ. Moreover, the party is proposing to demand for a "living wage" to help the working poor of this province. The Green Party is proposing a gradual and stepwise approach to increase the current appalling low social assistance rates. The CFSJ is certainly in agreement with their proposals.

The People's Alliance of New Brunswick (PANB) supports some of the CFSJ's initiatives. However, the CFSJ has concerns with some of their promises. One of these is that related to the implementation of a living wage. On this issue, the PANB considers consulting with small businesses, a sector that has traditionally been against a minimum wage increase. A discussion with the small and medium enterprises would not bring about the proposed living wage. On the question of pay equity, the PANB essentially supports what is in the current provincial legislation and does not push for extending it to the private sector. This party is in agreement with the some of the proposals of the CFSJ: improvements in subsidized housing, changes to EI programs and increasing seniors' income.

The NDP and Green parties are very clear on issues such as supporting a public housing program, legislating pay equity in the private sector, having a public child-care program and some literacy initiatives. The Liberals are proposing changes under their five-year plan to reduce poverty but they are not committing themselves to implement pay equity legislation in the private sector nor are they favouring a publicly funded child-care program.

"All parties except the PANB (which did not address this issue) are placing emphasis on the development of Social Enterprises as a way of delivering programs and addressing local issues. The CFSJ has been critical of this concept as it may end up reducing our public programs and services on which people living on poverty depends so heavily upon" continues Ms. McCaustlin

The last census indicated that over 100,000 New Brunswickers were living in poverty. They mainly fall under three categories: (1) men and women working full-time or part-time at minimum wages in all kind of low-paying jobs; (2) approximately 40,000 individuals who have to rely on social assistance to survive; (3) seniors who are eligible for the Guaranteed Annual Supplement, especially if they have health-related expenses. An aspect that is sometimes forgotten is that a high percentage of people living in poverty are women and children.

“In New Brunswick, one citizen out of seven is poor, a very somber situation. The Common Front for Social Justice is disappointed that, except for the Green party, no other political parties have placed low income people as a central election issue and a priority in their electoral platforms” concludes Ms. McCaustlin.

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*The Common Front for Social Justice is one of the largest democratic and popular organizations in New Brunswick, with close to 75,000 group members as well as hundreds of individual members. The Common Front brings together individuals and local, regional and provincial organizations to work towards the eradication of poverty.*