

News Release

November 14, 2011

For immediate distribution

Moncton – Mr. Higgs, how far should we tighten our belt in 2012?

The depressing situation

According to the 2006 census, over 100,000 NB citizens were living below the poverty line and the situation has probably not improved.

- > Numerous workers hold low paying jobs; over 50,000 have only part time employment and approximately 17,000 work at minimum wage.
- > In November 2011, over 25,000 households depend on social assistance,
- > Approximately 48,000 seniors receive the guaranteed income supplement and a large number of these may have to pay more for medications if the announced reductions in benefits go into effect.

Prices goes up, income lags behind

- > Gas, electricity and heating oil prices have gone up.
- > The Common Front for Social Justice's survey of food prices showed that the price of food has increased by 26.5% between 2006 and 2011. This has an impact on everyone but more so on people living in poverty.
- > The 2011 Hunger Count by Canada's Food Banks revealed that the number of citizens going to food banks has gone up. Compared to the 2008 numbers, food bank use by New Brunswickers has increased by 18.6% In March 2011, there were 18,539 food bank users: 65.6% of these were social assistance recipients and 16.4% held jobs or received employment insurance.
- > The Minister of Social Development, Sue Stultz, has seen the number of individuals and families barely surviving on social assistance going up by 2,550 between November 2008 and November 2011 and is now at 40,993. She knows there has been no increases in basic social assistance rates since October 2008 for the vast majority of them but has chosen to do nothing. Their purchasing power has decreased ever since.
- > The Minister of Post-secondary Education, Training and Labour has postponed by six months the projected increase of \$0.50 per hour to NB's minimum wage. Martine Coulombe will wait until April 2012 to bring it up to \$10. She is currently considering the implementation of a lower minimum wage for tip-earning servers in liquor-licensed establishments or restaurant/foodservice establishments that do not serve liquor.
- > Minister of Health Madeleine Dubé proposes to raise by 50% the annual ceiling of co-payment for seniors' prescription drugs from \$250 to \$500. This would affect citizens who are very sick and need a lot of prescription drugs, a high number who are poor and don't have a Health Insurance and in general more women than men because their life expectancy is greater.

The 2012-13 budget must help people living in poverty!

Today, we will visit eight MLA offices bringing a belt and a letter with our demands. We will also send a letter to all MLA asking them to demand the following question to our Minister of Finance:

Mr. Higgs, how far should we tighten our belt in 2012?

We understand our province has serious financial difficulties but these have not been brought about by people living in poverty. For the last number of years we have been tightening and tightening our belt. We have gone as far as we can. If you ask us to tighten it any further, we just won't be able to breathe. Choked by poverty, poor workers social assistance recipients, seniors, users of food bank are not able to meet their basics needs.



We urge Minister Higgs to hear the voice of the people at the lower end of the income distribution. They cry out:

- > With our limited income, we have to struggle every day to feed ourselves and our children, to clothe ourselves and to have a roof over our head.
- > Many of us get up and go to work every day for a low salary; many of us have no pension or medical plan and we anticipate that we will eventually join the ranks of poor seniors.
- > Remember, Mr. Higgs that we only have access to 5% of our collective wealth, while the 20% of the richest in our society own 44% of it.
- > In a country as rich as Canada and in a province like ours, we strongly believe that our taxation system and our political decisions can do much better at sharing the collective wealth being produced.

To all 55 Members of the Legislative Assembly, we ask that your decisions are such that they will alleviate a portion of poor people's financial burden. Some of these actions can take immediate effect while others should be included in the 2012-13 provincial budget.

Here are four demands which the Common Front for Social Justice asks you to support:

1. An **immediate** increase in the minimum wage to \$10.00 an hour.
2. The **rejection** of a two-tier minimum wage system for NB workers.
3. An **increase** in the basic rates of welfare recipients to bring them to the Atlantic average and an indexation of these rates thereafter.
4. The **establishment** of a solidarity program of \$50 per month that would help 25,105 households to buy food; this is the number of individuals who depend on social assistance in November 2011.

In conclusion, all 55 elected member of the Legislative Assembly are urged to take our concerns very seriously. Please choose to implement concrete actions rights now to help the thousands of citizens and their family who are living in poverty.

For Information:

Linda McCaustlin, co-chair – 855-7046

John Gagnon, co-chair – 548-9776

Aur a Cormier – 204-1134

Eight MLA office will be visited where members will present them with a belt and a letter with our demands.

Here are the contact persons for each region:

10:00am – Moncton: Linda McCaustlin – 855-7046

10:00am – Saint Jean: Susan O'Neil – 643-2000

10:00am – Fredericton: Melynda Jarrett – 440-4567

9:00am – Edmundston: Louise Guerrette – 735-4075

11:00am – Campbellton: Germaine Savoie – 753-5628

11:00am – Miramichi : Beatrice Loggie – 778-6680

11:00am – Bathurst: John Gagnon – 548-9776 or 545-0651

10:30am – St-Louis-de-Kent: Rose-Marie Gigou – 876-2735

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