

Provincial Election 2014

Questionnaire for Political parties

April 2014



New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc.

www.frontnb.ca

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1- Increase revenue

- a) **Minimum wage.** Eleven percent (11.1%) of workers in New Brunswick earn minimum wage and a high number of these are women. Only once between 2001 and 2014, our minimum wage was above the minimum wage average of the Atlantic Provinces. It has been at \$10.00 an hour since 2012 and the purchasing power of these thousands of citizens has been eroding since then. Presently, no public plan has been announced to increase the minimum wage.

What is your party proposing to do to change this situation?

- b) **Social Assistance.** There are close to 40,000 citizens depending on social assistance in our province. The vast majority of them have not received a basic rate increase between 2009 and 2013, even if the rate of inflation was 8.9% during that time. In October 2013, they received a 4 % increase and, in April 2014, they will receive a 3 % increase. Unfortunately, that will not cover what they lost in terms of purchasing power, and their revenue will still be under the poverty line. To better understand their situation, let us specify that, in 2013, 70% of those who relied on food bank to put food on the table were social assistance recipients. That represents an increase of 10% since 2009.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- c) **Pay Equity.** In New Brunswick, women's presence on the job market increased sizably between 1976 and 2014. Meanwhile, women's earnings have remained below men's, with women's hourly wages averaging \$2.35 less than men's, thus creating an 11.1% wage gap. This is partly because predominantly female jobs tend to be paid less than predominantly male jobs of equal value. As things stand, a considerable number of women are earning less, which can lead to a poverty situation for themselves and their families.

In 2010, the province enacted new pay equity legislation that applies to the whole public service sector, including the education and health sectors, as well as Crown corporations, but not the private sector. Thousands of women are therefore not covered by this legislation and are not paid equitably as men for a job of comparable value.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

2- Public programs

- a) **New Brunswick Drug Plan.** There are presently 70,000 families who don't have a drug insurance plan. Some of them are employed citizens but they don't

have an employers' sponsored drug plan. Others don't have money to pay for a private drug plan or they have one that has a narrow coverage.

The actual proposed government plan would mean that those who are less able to pay would have to pay a high annual premium and a co-payment in order to be included in this plan.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- b) Child care.** The availability, quality and cost of childcare represent a burning issue for many parents, particularly parents who earn a low salary or are living below the poverty line. That can be a real barrier for women who want to enter the workforce, but it is also one for those who have a job. On the other hand, child care workers need to earn a decent wage and have adequate working conditions and benefits. Presently, close to three quarters of child-care spaces are located in the three major cities leaving gaps for the rest of rural New Brunswick.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- c) Home Care.** In New Brunswick, one person in seven is 65 or over. Most of these citizens live in their own home and would prefer to continue to do so for many years to come. As the population ages, an increasing number of individuals will need home-care services.

New Brunswick does not have a public program in place to offer these both essential services to seniors. Instead, the province chooses to let some 50 private and community agencies sell their services to clients, while partly funding them. Because these services are not a part of a public program, there are inequalities in the quality and in the delivery of services in different parts of the province. There are differences in wages, working conditions, staff training and the ability to offer the services in official languages.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- d) Social Housing and Homelessness.** Housing is not just an amenity, it is an essential good. Access to adequate housing is included among the list of human rights. The province is responsible for ensuring that low-income citizens can access clean and affordable premises, suitable for human occupation. Therefore, the issue of social housing is a public concern, rather than a private one.

Presently too many citizens living in poverty have to pay more than 30% of their income for their accommodation and too many are living in substandard housing. There is also a need for more funding for housing repairs.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- e) **Literacy.** Poverty and illiteracy are closely connected. It is a vicious circle that is difficult to break. People from poor families, as well as the long-term unemployed, seniors, Native people, prisoners, people with disabilities, and racial and cultural minorities, all have higher rates of both illiteracy and poverty. They have fewer choices when it comes to jobs, education, housing and other things we need to have full lives.

The 2012 PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] study, carried out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, measured the extent to which 15-year-old students in Canada have acquired some of the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies. New Brunswick had the third lowest scores among the provinces in reading and science and the fifth lowest in mathematics.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- f) **People with disability.** New Brunswick has the second highest rate of disability in Canada at 16.4%. National employment participation figures clearly demonstrate that people with disabilities lack opportunities for employment compared to the general population. Approximately one-fifth, 22% of working age adults with disabilities live in low income households.

While we now understand that having a disability does not make you unemployable, the employment reality for adults with disabilities is far from acceptable. People with disabilities work half as many weeks per year as others, are unemployed longer, and spend nearly three times as many weeks out of the labour force. Meaningful employment is generally recognized as the primary method by which adults contribute to their individual well-being and that of the larger society. Persons with disabilities are still greatly overrepresented within the ranks of unemployed Canadians.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

- 3- A Fair Tax system.** Income tax is the way for government to generate revenue in order to provide services to its citizens and to make the government function. It is a fair system because it is based on the individual ability to pay; the higher your revenue, the more income tax you pay.

Presently, the levels of individual income tax and corporate tax are not generating enough revenue and the provincial taxation system has lost some of its fairness.

What is your party proposing to do to change the situation?

**Note: Please return the Questionnaire, before April 25, 2014, to the:
NB Common Front for Social Justice Inc., 51 Williams Street, Moncton, NB,
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