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September 16, 2014

Poverty and the provincial election.

What the political parties are proposing.

The Common Front for Social Justice was part of many forums on poverty issues and, since last September, worked at raising citizens and political parties' awareness to the fact that thousands of men, women and children are living in poverty in our province.

Given that, during the electoral period, political parties clarify their priorities, development and intervention plans, we wanted to ensure that the unanimous social commitment of 2009 about reducing poverty in the province was not forgotten.

It is important to remember that, in 2010, the Government of this province, through the ***Economic and Social Inclusion Act***, L.N.B. E-1.105, made the eradication of poverty a collective and societal project.

We believe electoral campaigns are a good time to remind the parties about their commitments and ensure that the measures intended or promised are well targeted and contribute to reducing poverty.

The parties' programs have now been made public. We have examined them keeping in mind that the poverty we want to eradicate is defined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Canada adhered to, *namely a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.*

Based on the data on the most urgent needs and on the measures which would really make a difference for citizens living in poverty, we identified three major concerns which, in our view, cannot be ignored if we want to reduce poverty.

We want to share with you what were the responses from each political party.

<p>Our first concern addresses the revenues (minimum salary, social assistance basic rate and pay equity).</p>

Reducing poverty is, primarily, a question of reducing monetary poverty as specified in the Poverty Reduction Plan adopted in February 2010.

- Of the five parties, the Liberals, NDP and Green would increase the **minimum wage**, which is very encouraging. The PC and People's Alliance of NB are silent on it. The Green Party goes a step further on this issue; it is proposing to implement a *living wage* instead of a minimum wage which is a concept that the second Poverty Reduction Plan will be looking at.
- Only the Green Party is proposing to increase **social assistance** recipients' basic rates: 10% in 2015 and 5% in 2016. This would certainly have a huge impact on the lives of the close to 40,000 men, women and children on social assistance. All the other parties, except the PANB would continue to implement the second phase of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Unfortunately, this second phase is not concrete enough and has no real timelines. The NDP is proposing a *Social Assistance Bill of Rights* which is certainly a concept we would agree with.
- The NDP and the Green Party are for a **Pay Equity Act** in the private sector which would bring fairness to the thousands of women in the workforce.

Our second concern addresses the need of implementing public programs (drug plan, childcare, homecare, social housing, literacy, and programs for disabled persons).

If our society wants to conform to Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it must implement public programs which will improve the standard of living of the whole population and make a bigger difference for the poor who cannot afford to pay for these services in the private sector.

- As we are all aware, the Conservative government has introduced a **NB Drug Plan** that will be mandatory April 2015. The Common Front for Social Justice considers that the premiums and the co-payment are too expensive. Presently small businesses, which don't have a workplace drug plan, are refusing to contribute financially into it. The People's Alliance of NB Party wants it to be voluntary and propose instead a *Catastrophic Drug Plan*. All other four parties are supporting the present NB Drug Plan. The Liberal Party would not force small businesses with less than 50 employees who don't have a workplace plan to contribute to it, while the People's Alliance say business should not pay into it.
- The Green Party and the NDP are supporting the concept of a **public child care** system which is a proposal that we have been pushing for. The present, mainly private system is too costly for families.
- On the **Home Care** front, the Liberals, NDP and the Green are proposing different actions; from tax credits(Liberals, NDP) to increases in the pay of homecare workers(NDP and GP) or the expansion of the home-care services (NDP and Green Party) or pilot project (Liberals, GP). The PC would continue implementing the *Home First Strategy*. The NDP is the party that has the most elaborate proposals on this issue.

- **Social Housing** does not seem to be a real priority for any of the political parties even when we know that housing is a high ticket item for anyone who is living in poverty. There are no concrete proposals to increase affordable housing in the province.
- As we are all aware **adult literacy** is an important issue for businesses. The Liberal Party is the only one proposing to implement a *comprehensive literacy strategy* to change this situation. The PC and the PANB don't even mention it.
- The PC and Liberal Party want to continue implementing the **Disability Action Plan** while the NDP wants to develop a provincial transportation plan. The other two parties have not addressed this issue at all.

Our third concern speaks to the need of a fair tax system (personal income tax and corporate income tax).

By committing collectively to reduce poverty, we recognize that individualism and the concept of "every man for himself" are not enough. Reducing poverty is a question of social solidarity and pooling of our resources in order to redistribute them according to the needs. It is also admitting that reducing the revenues of the province will mean a loss for citizens, particularly the most vulnerable people.

- We are disappointed that no political party is proposing a return to the **2008 personal tax** levels. However, the Liberal and Green Party would increase **individual income tax for rich** individuals which is very positive. Only the Green Party would increase the **corporate tax**. The Liberal Party would reduce the **small business taxes** while the NDP would eliminate it, losing this way much needed revenues for the province.

The Common Front for Social Justice wanted to Make Poverty an Election Issue because of the dire conditions under which tens of thousands of New Brunswick citizens are living.

After analysing the political parties' platforms, it is clear that for the People's Alliance of NB Party this is not a priority at all. For the Progressive Conservative Party, it does not seem a pressing issue. We commend the other three political parties for their proposals. We encourage all political parties to collaborate with the new government to make certain that there are concrete programs and actions put in place which will truly help to reduce poverty.

The Common Front for Social Justice will not favour one party or another but, in order to help voters choose and evaluate the parties' proposals; we made a document giving an overview of the most important proposals to reduce poverty.

We also have a Facebook page where we offer comments on each of the electoral platforms.

Again, we encourage citizens to read the political parties' platforms, ask questions to the candidates, evaluate the proposals to reduce poverty and, most of all, get to the polls on September 22.

In closing, we quote Nelson Mandela to remind us that: "*Like Slavery and Apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.*"

Voting to reduce poverty can make a difference.

For information;

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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 and individual members. The Common Front brings together individuals as well as local, regional and provincial organizations to work towards the eradication of poverty.