

## **Chew On This October 17<sup>th</sup>**

Every year, on The International Day for Eradication of Poverty, “DignityforAll” a national campaign for a federal poverty reduction plan organises “Chew on This!” asking people across the country to hand out bags with an apple and a postcard calling for a poverty reduction plan. The Action Team has participated around lunch hour for several years in a row. Who would like to do it this year?

### **Podcast**

joys, Cynnimon, Doug and Omar met in the Inspiration Lab last week to test out the equipment. They are hoping to schedule their first interview with Jean Swanson for early October.

Samara has started a podcast listening club in Vancouver. Maybe they could review our first episode.

### **Rethink Giving**

The Action Team has been using the RethinkGiving banner in December to try to build on the massive charity fundraisers to mobilise people to fight for more longterm solutions. We’ve has a poster, a lesson plan for schools, and last year we did a social media “Advent Calendar.” To see our resources from previous years visit: <http://www.rethinkgiving.ca/>

What do we want to do this year?

The charitable impulses in December comes from a genuine compassionate place (But it can also come from a guilt place) so it’s a great opportunity to build on that.

Bill was appreciative of the work that has been done in schools to address the massive pushing of children to donate cans of food in schools. If we want to be in schools, December is probably too late to start because much of the organising of food bank drives will have been already finished. Omar to contact Barb Ryeburn of the BCTF for her input on what we can do in schools and timing.

### **PRC Update**

- Seth Klein did a presentation on the different ways to measure poverty and suggested using the Market Basket Measure in all our targets. These are the main three low-income measures produced by Statistics Canada.
  - Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO): for years the most commonly used measure. Under LICO, people who spend 63% or more of their income on shelter, food and clothing (calculated by applying the Consumer Price Index to the 1992 Family Expenditures Survey) are considered low-income. This is becoming increasingly unreliable because since 1992, housing costs and other necessities have tended to rise faster than the general CPI (and in BC, for example, the cost of housing is much higher than in other provinces)
  - Low-Income Measure (LIM): LIM actually measures relative poverty. It sets the low-income line at 50% of the median household income. It is also could for international comparisons.
  - Market Basket Measure (MBM): A family is considered to have a low income if they are unable to purchase a basket of essential goods in their community (shelter, food, clothing and footwear, transportation and other basic household needs). It doesn’t use

gross income, but rather the actual income available to purchase these necessities (taking into account deductions for childcare, income taxes and mandatory payroll deductions). It is the only measure that is sensitive to regional specificities.

- The raise the disability rates and return the bus pass campaign continued with rallies across the province on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods launched a project called “Sharing Our Reality: PWDs in BC”
- Trish pitched an election campaign based on external advice “Value BC: It’s worth fighting for.” The Coalition rejected it. They appreciated the effort to appeal to broader voices, but did not want to lose the focus on poverty.
- There was consensus to make our recommendations for social housing: building 10,000 new social non-market housing units a year.
- There was consensus to support the CCPA’s position on MSP.  
(<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/bc-should-eliminate-msp-here-are-two-better-options>)
- Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House asked for help opposing Gladstone High School’s closure.

### **New Reps**

Cynnimon and Tara’s term as Action Team reps at the Coalition is coming to an end. Who would like to do it next?

### **Guest Speaker: Bill Hopwood, organizer for Raise the Rates BC**

*This year, Raise the Rates’ Welfare Food Challenge starts October 16<sup>th</sup>. If you want to join, fill out the form here: <https://welfarefoodchallenge.org/join/> See the notes below for more information.*

Raise the Rates is technically a coalition of 40 groups across BC; in practice, what makes Raise the Rates different is that: they are an activist group, not a charity; quite happy to be in the face of establishment; don’t receive funding from the government; most of the activists live in poverty, have lived in poverty and the vast majority live on welfare.

Bill’s opinion: the politicians of all parties follow; they don’t lead. None of them are saying we have to raise welfare to 1500 a month. Real change happens from public pressure and community power.

Raise the Rates takes the “hard end of the poverty spectrum.” Everybody cares about child poverty; but much less attention on adult poverty. Almost all children are in poverty because the adults are in poverty.

Welfare and social assistance are positive words, but they’ve been assigned, as part of a broader political shift, a derogatory tone. Because these policies have been attacked over thirty years, welfare has been turned into punishment.

Basic welfare has not been increased in 10 years. For a single adult on welfare it’s \$610/month. According to the City, an average SRO rents for \$500. Leaves you \$110. According to the Provincial Health Services Authority, a healthy diet costs over \$200/month. So if you pay your rent and buy your food, you’re already in debt.

In a private meeting with welfare workers, they said if you're on the phone with someone on welfare for 10 minutes, the computer starts to flash "hang up the phone." They're only allowed to deal with 1 issue at a time; if you have more than one issue, you have to hang up and call again.

It's incredibly hard to get on welfare. For example, there's a 90+ page form that has to be filled out on a computer in one sitting. Librarians are asking for training because they're becoming like welfare workers because that's the only place people can get the computers for long enough to fill out the form.

You can't live on welfare; so people get by panhandling, charity, survival sex, stealing, getting on the bus without a ticket etc. The vast majority of people in welfare are NOT in the DTES.

What are the justifications for these conditions of welfare? We can't afford it; we'll make improvements when our finances improve. But BC has given massive tax cuts to corporations and its richest residents. These tax cuts are directly linked to social service cuts.

What does Raise the Rates do? Try to use humour; done funny videos; protests and demos; every year on CBC Food Bank day, they go to the CBC and ask them to discuss the causes of hunger; CBC frames Food Bank Day as a way to make well-off people feel good and doesn't discuss the root causes. One of their hosts called it "the greatest day of the year." When you fundraise to address other crises, you don't call it a great day. So every year Raise the Rates does the "Poor People's Radio" with music and speakers outside the CBC,

Every year they do the Welfare Food Challenge. In 2012, they organised the MLA Welfare Challenge where they challenged MLAs to live on the welfare rate for a month. Jagrup Brar who was the MLA for Surrey-Fleetwood did it and lost 26 pounds. They joked with him that if he did it for a year, he'd disappear. After that nobody wanted to do it, so to make it easier for more people to join, they turned it into the Welfare Food Challenge, where they asked people to only eat what can be purchased with the money a welfare recipient receives. Every year, with rising rent and expenses, this has gone up. This year is \$18; and they've cut out bus tickets from the calculation. (see the calculation [here](#); as you can see it's very very basic).

Everybody's who's done the Welfare Food Challenge lost weight and their emotional balance was disturbed;

So many people say they can't do it because of their health; Raise the Rates encourages people to say that publically because people on welfare don't have that choice

1 of the questions Bill put the group: how do we make change? How do we more effectively shame politicians to do something?

### **Discussion with the Guest Speaker**

Doug wondered if the Action Team can livestream the Poor People's Radio.

Ideologically, how do policy makers see the poor? A section of society has no idea what it's like to be poor. That's one of the things that the Welfare Food Challenge does. But there is also a large chunk of people who do have experience of poverty and no longer are (they say "I escaped, why didn't you get out") ex. 2 or 3 Liberal cabinet ministers who are disabled who have this idea. That legitimising myth is one of the really powerful legitimising factors

Cynimon: One important way to make change is to bring groups together; so that they can not not be heard

Appealing to the logic of the policy makers; making financial arguments; The power of the economic argument is to show that their arguments are not actually economic arguments and are ideological. It forces people who buy that argument to question it.

The media was more interested in Bif Naked doing the Welfare Food Challenge than the significant proportion of people in BC living in poverty.

One of the big challenges for not just Raise the Rates, but the Poverty Reduction Coalition and broader is the widespread ideological onslaught of neoliberalism

There is a widespread fear right now of downward prosperity

Eruption of the \$15 minimum wage is a sign of hope;

Even though, their minimum wage hike was pathetic, but the Liberals have probably not intended to raise the minimum wage as much as they have.

This year, we want to really ramp up poverty is a political issue; the last big anti-poverty demonstration was 10-20 years ago. Right now it's about 90% certain that the last week of February and first week of March there will be a week of action across the province leading up to a demonstration in Vancouver on March 4<sup>th</sup>. A lot of people will turn up if there's an atmosphere that encourages it.

Raise the Rates is also doing an art project titled "We Can't Afford Poverty." The first ten posters are going up in bus shelters next week. They are also working on videos and other posters etc. We want to get people to say, "I will vote to end poverty in BC"

If we want, we could re-brand the Poverty Mythbusters video to tie in with the Raise the Rates art project to get more coverage.

*I'm trying to convince people to join the Welfare Food Challenge; how do you do it? Most people who join the campaign start with a discomfort with poverty and the question is "what difference does me doing it have?" People underestimate what impact they can have; sharing what they're doing with the people around them. It goes back "how do we make change?"*