

Provinces need to pull children out of poverty ^[1]

Author: Frankel, Sid

Source: Winnipeg Free Press

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 Aug 2010

EXCERPTS

Canada's impoverished children deserve to be at the table of the country's economic recovery. Why then, on the agenda of the premiers meeting in Winnipeg this week, is there no mention of how to pull those families that suffered most damage from the recession along in the plan for sustained growth? They need a recovery more than anyone else.

In 2008, before the full brunt of the recession was felt, about one in every eight (13.3 per cent) Canadians lived in poverty (less than 50 per cent of median income after tax). That is about 4.4 million Canadians.

Canada has always had poverty rates in the upper half of those experienced by rich countries, and rates have not changed much over time. The poverty rate in 1976 was 13 per cent.

Why are our premiers collectively ignoring this situation? Through the years we have heard the same excuses for doing nothing over and over again. They tell us that tax cuts are essential to grow the economy to allow them to address poverty some day. But some day never comes. They say there are more pressing issues which demand government attention. And, of course, they say they can't do anything in tough economic times.

We don't buy these excuses. There are too many counter examples. Countries with high levels of wealth, such as the United States, have the highest levels of poverty and disparities in the industrialized world. So, it is not just about economic growth. High-tax Nordic countries with the lowest levels of poverty have strong economies. So, tax cuts aren't needed. High deficits during the Second World War did not stop the Canadian government from introducing Unemployment Insurance and family allowances. Or the National Child Benefit Supplement when there were high deficits.

There are some hopeful signs. On Nov. 24, 2009, the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion charging the federal government to immediately draft a plan to eliminate poverty for all Canadians. But Prime Minister Stephen Harper told the UN that poverty reduction is not his job. He passed the buck to the provinces and territories. Six provinces and one territory have developed poverty reduction plans, but many contain no targets or timelines, are vague, and are too limited to make a real difference, or simply rehash old announcements.

What is needed is political will and concerted collective action by all orders of government. That is why the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg and Campaign 2000 to End Child Poverty, in collaboration with the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the Canadian Council on Social Development, have convened a roundtable of business, labour, faith groups and civil society organizations on Aug. 4 to help the premiers to do their job. All federal parties were invited and MPs and senators from the Liberals, NDP and Bloc will attend. The Conservatives refused the invitation.

What we are asking for is simple. We want the Council of the Federation to establish a working group to report back in a year to outline core provincial/territorial roles and expected federal contributions to a joint plan "to eliminate poverty in Canada for all." And, we want the premiers to pressure the federal government to contribute to the plan and to join a task force to implement it. Is this too much to ask for almost 4.5 million Canadians?

To support the development of this plan, the Winnipeg Roundtable sponsors have developed five principles for consideration.

1. Constitutionally and historically, the federal government has a primary role in providing basic income for Canadians across the life cycle.
2. Provincial governments have primary responsibility to influence labour markets to provide work that pays enough for full-time, full-year earners to live above poverty; to provide adequate social assistance with dignity for working age adults and parents who are out of work, and to provide high quality and culturally appropriate public education.
3. Provinces and territories are responsible for early-learning, child-care and affordable-housing programs, but the federal government has responsibility to ensure adequate funding.
4. The federal government and provinces must support aboriginal communities in cities and on reserve to deliver poverty eradication initiatives to complement broader federal and provincial initiatives. First Nations children and families on reserve must have equal access to education, health, social and economic opportunities.
5. The federal and provincial governments must work together on a joint strategy to address the disproportionate poverty of Canadians with disabilities.

...

- reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press

Region: Canada ^[2]

Tags: advocacy ^[3]

poverty ^[4]

demand ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/08/provinces-need-pull-children-out-poverty>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/08/provinces-need-pull-children-out-poverty> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/advocacy> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/poverty> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/demand>