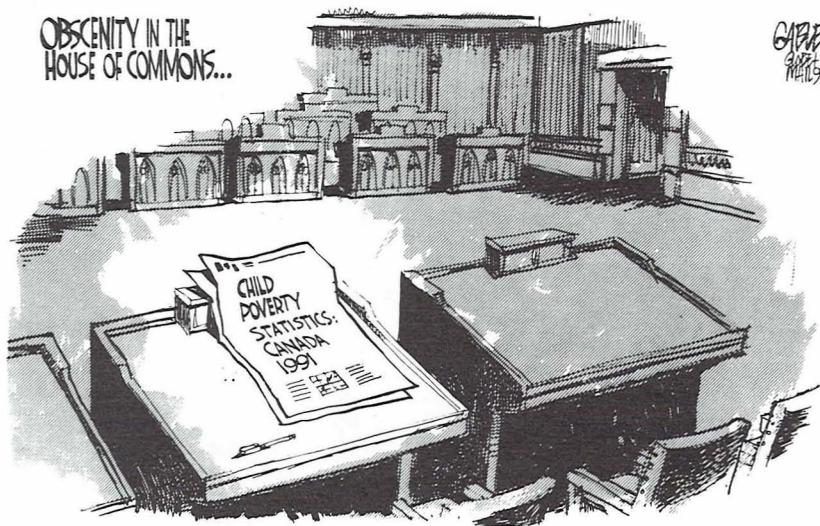


Campaign 2000

Partnerships to End Child Poverty

By Rosemarie Popham

Des organisations communautaires et nationales ont lancé Campagne 2000 pour soutenir la résolution approuvée en 1988 par tous les partis politiques pour « éliminer la pauvreté chez les enfants d'ici l'an 2000 ». Grâce à des partenariats comme Campagne 2000, les efforts déployés en faveur de l'équité par des féministes et des groupes de défense de l'enfance pauvre, en collaboration avec d'autres organismes ou groupes d'intervention, seront maximisés.



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Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada partnership which invites all people in Canada to work to secure the implementation of the House of Commons resolution “to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating child poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000.” (House of Commons, November 24, 1989.)

The unanimous support for the resolution followed several years of lobbying by low income people, poverty activists, feminist organizations, and social justice groups. Campaign 2000 was launched in November 1991, as a long-term, non-partisan undertaking to monitor the plans of all political parties to end child and family poverty. It is a commitment that child and family poverty can be dealt with in a country that claims status as the second wealthiest country in the world.

The Campaign 2000 Declaration describes the broad policy commitments required—commitments that “do not depend on the creation of new wealth, but on the political will to use our existing wealth in a manner consistent with democratic values and international standards.”

Campaign 2000 is anchored in partnerships between people, communities, and organizations. Feminist organizations and child poverty activists are natural partners. They share a commitment to social justice—to a society which provides equity and opportunity regardless of gender or the income of one’s parent(s). Moreover, women continue to be the primary caretakers of children. The relationship between child poverty and female poverty is painfully brought home by the fact that 52 per cent of single mothers and their

children live in poverty in Canada—five times the rate of Sweden, four times that of Norway, more than twice that of Israel, and almost one half again as high as the UK. (CCSD)

Children: a shared responsibility

Poor children live in poor families, but not necessarily in poor countries.

Beginning with the partial de-indexation of family allowance (the baby bonus) in 1982, Ottawa has quietly backed away from the government commit-

ment made after the Second World War to recognize the cost of raising children and the contribution made by parents in Canada. Over the past decade, Canadian families have lost many of the income gains that were made in the preceding 40 years. While some analysts blame this on economic restructuring, European countries facing the same economic realities have maintained their commitment to families with children.

A cornerstone of the Campaign 2000 Declaration is the principle that “Canada’s children are a shared responsibility which requires both the commitment of private resources and the contribution of public resources. Public policies therefore must strengthen and protect the ability of families and communities to care for their children.”

The elimination of child poverty will require participation from all political parties, and leadership from the federal government to "finance national programmes, maintain national standards and create a framework with provincial governments for the development and implementation of national standards to end child and family poverty." (Campaign 2000 Declaration)

The goals of Campaign 2000

1. Raise and protect the basic living standards of families in all regions of the country so that no child in Canada must ever live in poverty.

Parental unemployment is the primary cause of child poverty, yet one half of all poor children live in families where at least one adult works full or part time. *Employment and Labour Market Policy*, a background discussion paper for Campaign 2000, notes that "the failure of family and poverty rates to decline in the 1980s largely reflects developments in the labour market, specifically stagnant real wages and family income, high unemployment, and the polarization of opportunities into high-paying and low-paying jobs."

Pay equity, employment equity, adequate minimum wages and social assistance levels, and a national child care system, are centre pieces of income adequacy. Child poverty activists have focussed as well on income policies which reflect the value society gives to the work of parenting.

Since 1945, Canada has provided a family allowance in modest recognition of the contribution all parents make by caring for children. However, in February 1992, the federal government proposed a new targeted child benefit which would dismantle the universal family allowance, arguing that the family allowance is too expensive and doesn't get money to those who most need it. The proposed child benefit redirects money from families earning more than \$65,000 to those earning less—resting the commitment to fight child poverty not on the symbolic shoulders of all of society, but on those of other parents. This is a fundamental shift from a philosophy in which children are a shared societal asset and a shared responsibility of all of society.

2. Ensure the availability of secure, adequate, affordable, and suitable housing as an inherent right of all children in Canada.

The major causes of death for poor children are those associated with their poor living conditions. (*Unequal Futures*)

In 1991, close to one-third of all households living in co-operative housing were led by single mothers. Because child care is often available in co-ops, eight out of ten of the women residents work and are more likely than unemployed single mothers to be able to lift their children out of poverty. "These programmes have proven successful in meeting housing needs and with some revision could be even more successful. The argument that they are simply too expensive ignores the welfare and the future of a large number of Canadian children and will prove expensive in the long run." (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association)

The 1992 federal budget announced a freeze on social housing and as of June 1992, constitutional talks propose federal withdrawal from housing in favour of recognition of provincial jurisdiction in this area. This will mean a loss of commitment to national standards—a prerequisite for ending child and family poverty regardless of the province in which a family lives.

3. Create, build, and strengthen family support and community-based resources to empower families to provide the best possible care for their children.

Families need a range of resources to help them care for their children. In 66 per cent of two-parent families, both adults work. Child care is therefore a critical community-based resource to keep children out of poverty.

In February 1992, however, the federal government announced that it would not proceed with its commitment to a national child care strategy. It stated instead that through an initiative called "Brighter Futures," "it would work with the provinces, territories, and key community groups on initiatives directed to helping children at risk." (Health and Welfare) There is a shift away from national standards to help children at risk in favour of a model where federal dollars will be delivered to the provinces. Funding will not be tied to

expectations of standards. Existence, levels, and quantity of these critical services will vary dramatically depending on where a child at risk happens to live in Canada.

The total amount pledged to help 1 million children at risk was \$500 million for five years—\$1 per year for each poor child. As one advocate stated, this is a 40 watt plan which cannot deliver a brighter future. The day after the announcement of "Brighter Futures," the Department of Defense announced a helicopter contract worth twice the amount allocated to defend children at risk.

4. Improve the life chances of all children in Canada to fulfil their potential and nurture their talent, so that they might become responsible and contributing members of Canadian society.

The women's movement demonstrated

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the gender bias in our education system and paved the way for exploration of how societal institutions discriminate against poor children. While many Canadians still believe that the educational system is the great leveller for those born into poverty, born female or belonging to a minority group, the truth is that a good education is not available to all children.

Children, Schools and Poverty, one of the background discussion papers released by Campaign 2000, urges the federal government to assume its role in preventing poverty, as well as serving the currently poor. As the paper states, "While periodically spotlighting the poor evokes public concern, any outcry or reaction is short-lived. The poor, acting alone in their own self-interest, can make little difference. If poverty is ever to be eliminated, all Canadians, including those in the educational

field, must commit to persistent and uncompromising political action.” (Canadian Teachers Federation)

Public attention to children: an unreliable commodity

Over a hundred years ago, Canadian women began to lobby government to share in the responsibility for Canada’s children. The Women’s War Conference of 1918 urged the federal government to establish a Department of Health, one of whose first mandates would be to conserve infant life. Government, responsive to the need to capture the vote of newly enfranchised women, was sensitive to the urging.

With the second wave of the women’s movement during the 1960s, the focus on government responsibility for children, which had been vigorously pursued by child activists, was amplified through advocacy work by women’s organizations demanding a national child care programme.

At the beginning of the 1980s, politicians minimized the need for increased government involvement and even denied the existence of child poverty in Canada. However, research throughout the early 1980s made it hard to refute that the devastating effects of poverty on children’s life chances in Canada included higher infant mortality, a greater risk of chronic health problems, poor school performance, and higher school dropout rates. (Canadian Teachers Federation) With one out of every seven children relying on food banks in Metro Toronto, child poverty can no longer be dismissed as an isolated problem reflecting parental inadequacy.

The political ascendance of an issue reflects a convergence of opportunity, energy, research, level of saturation, optimism for change, media interest, international attention, and the echo effect created by diverse organizations and interest associations supporting the same goal. The creation of an echo effect through the building of partnerships is one variable over which activists can have an element of control.

Partnerships: Canadians’ commitment to the all-party promise

Despite the all-party resolution to work to eliminate child poverty, ground has been lost thus far in the 1990s. There has been an erosion of the commitment to national programmes and standards, of Canadians’ shared responsibility for children, of the programmes and supports for women and poor people, and of the funds for their advocacy organizations. Social policy activists and front-line organizations are under-resourced and increasingly beleaguered by issues of survival. This demands new partnerships and efficient use of resources to maximize, or even maintain, their work.

Issues like child poverty do not stay on the political agenda because they are serious or worthwhile. They are attended to because of a combination of factors—one of the most powerful of which is the echo effect of different groups speaking to the same issue. Without public support for an issue, even the most powerful partnership of organizations will have little success. Involving a broad base of Canadians in Campaign 2000 is therefore critical. But while people no longer deny the reality of child and family poverty in Canada, many feel overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness to change this reality for one million children.

The international development community has averted the lure of apathy by replacing the old images of Third World children with new stories of successful community responses to poverty. Called the “Shock of the Possible,” such initiatives can mobilize people to action through their commitment to social justice enriched by hope.

Campaign 2000 is a hopeful signal to Canadians that ending child and family poverty is within our reach. Through involvement in Campaign 2000 in their own communities, they can positively influence the future of this generation of children. Together, Canadians can send the message to all political parties that they care enough to ensure that the promise, to “seek to achieve the goal of eliminating child poverty by the year 2000,” is not broken.

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