

a poem he submitted to a contest held by Spare Change, the Edmonton street paper.

How many seek for the same position?
A dead end, low pay reality.
Should I give up my dreaming ambitions
And settle in sad mediocrity?

What grows as they pass away
Is, where I am and could be
If I'd money, which today
Makes money which makes money.

Poverty is "no money", so they say
No money finds no food to devour
Hunger has hid health and colour away
Sick complexions send spirits sour.

Poor esteem, to lower faith
Lack of hope, is low of trust
Dishonesty's loss of face
Has no respect, and is cursed.

But a little aid, give to them discussed
Build self-esteem, for accepting truths
From dust, must, rust just one hope helps adjust
Towards the higher spirits light that soothes.

As respect brings brighter face
Not with ill, but energy
Eat a meal, enjoying taste
Earned their self, and glad to be.

Martin's poem won the contest, and soon after he got a job with the Edmonton Food Bank, where he is now employed.



British Columbia

Jean Swanson
End Legislated Poverty

Here's the bad news from BC as of March 6th:

Last fall the government came up with a fancy plan they call BC Benefits, as well as a new law that requires people to live in BC for 3 months before they can get welfare.

Poverty groups were outraged by BC Benefits and the government's sales pitch on it. The plan chops \$46 a month from the poorest people in BC, single, so-called employeables. It slashes \$81 a month from childless couples on welfare and ends the flat-rate earnings exemption for all but people with disabilities. This exemption allowed single parents to keep the

first \$200 they earned at work plus 25 per cent. Single people could keep the first \$100 plus 25 per cent. The government plans to take \$39 million out of the hands of people on welfare with this maneuver. In addition, the government will now force single parents on welfare to look for work or training when their youngest child reaches the ripe age of 7, reduced from 12. This is regardless of the number of children in the family.

Accompanying the requirement to look for work when your youngest child is 7, is a Child Benefit of \$103 per child per month for working families, but nothing extra for families on welfare. The full benefit is to be paid to all working families whose income is up to about \$50,000 per year. The combination of the \$103 per month per child plus the requirement to seek work when your youngest reaches 7, could be used to force single parents into minimum wage jobs where they'd get the grand sum of \$43 a month more than they would on welfare—if they have no childcare costs. The policy is disrespectful of women's work in the home. The combination of the two policies could condemn poor children to a life with an exhausted and poor mother instead of just a poor mother.

BC Benefits claims that it gives youth aged 19 to 24 an "entitlement" to education. In fact, it ends their "entitlement" to income, because if youth refuse government programs designed to put them in the labour force, they will be cut off welfare. Poverty groups call this workfare and are outraged. The "entitlement to education" scheme works like this: for the first seven months on welfare youths have to actively search for jobs. In this period most will go off welfare on their own. No education or work. In the eighth and ninth month, they will have "help" from the ministry in "active" job search. No education or work. In the tenth month, if they're still on welfare, they are supposedly "entitled" to education or a job. The job could be a job where the government pays employers \$8,000 to hire them a minimum wage. The education part has people bewildered. It turns out that people who used to be able to go to university or college and get student loans for school expenses, will now have to get student loans to pay the whole lot. As a result, End Legislated Poverty has been flooded with calls from people saying: "If I'm entitled to education, how come my worker is telling me that I have to go off welfare or quit school?" Apparently youth in the tenth month of welfare will be eligible to receive other types of training without being kicked off welfare. But since that doesn't start until ten months from January, no one knows yet if it will happen.

The government raves that BC Benefits is, for the first time ever, ensuring that families get help with eye and dental care. It turns out that some of the money for this comes from slashing eye and dental care from single "employables," and that only children, not entire families, are covered.

In addition, refugees and people in need from other provinces have been denied welfare and sent into the streets because they have not lived in BC for three months. This is the first time in 30 years that a provincial government has blatantly turned away people in dire need. When advocates started using a "hardship" section of the welfare regulations to get some money for people, the government promptly abolished it. They are also forcing people over 60 to apply for their early CCP benefits, which are then deducted dollar for dollar from welfare. As a result of applying when they are 60 instead of 64, people will get up to 30 per cent less in CCP benefits when they turn 65.

The Workfare Hurts One and All Coalition has been working to make BC Benefits an issue within the NDP and the recent NDP leadership contest. Although they have succeeded in making it a big issue within the Party (an NDP provincial council meeting voted 41 to 46 to defeat a resolution calling for a review of BC Benefits) and within the leadership contest, the majority in the Party has supported the program. New leader Glen Clark supports BC Benefits and rejected an opportunity to replace current social services minister Joy MacPhail when he shuffled his cabinet recently.

Meanwhile, the Liberals are being cagey, planning billions in tax cuts, but not announcing, yet, a massive attack on welfare. Anti-poverty activists fear that the BC Benefits and other welfare measures that take money from the poor will make it impossible for the NDP to act as a credible welfare critic even in opposition.

