

POVERTY FORUM

at People's Summit on APEC

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The People's Summit on APEC

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) means business!¹ The question for many is whether APEC would also improve the lives of ordinary people?

Leaders of the 18 “economies”² which were members of APEC at the time of its meeting in Vancouver in November, 1997 have been committed to trade liberalization. In countries like Canada, which had experienced recent and intense political argument about free trade, a majority of people questioned the alleged benefits of trade agreements like NAFTA, or APEC, or how governments and transnational corporations are implementing economic globalization. In some other countries that were part of APEC, however, there had not been a public debate about whether they should now be part of an unclear “agreement” called APEC.

By having the annual meeting of APEC in Canada, with this country's reputation for wide, internal democratic debate, APEC raised the possibility that it might open its discussions to sectors which had not been represented at previous meetings. Therefore, numerous Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and the Labour Movement organized the People's Summit as the alternative meeting to APEC on a bigger scale than at previous APEC meetings so that the views of civil society³ could be expressed openly.

The People's Summit on APEC included diverse groups which assumed responsibility for holding forums where questions about APEC could be raised. The Canadian Organizing Committee for the People's Summit planned that delegates from the forums would meet together in a plenary where the results of the forums' discussions would be the basis for deciding what to say to the APEC leaders. There were forums organized for youth, women, and domestic workers and forums which focused on themes including sustainability, workers' rights, human rights, APEC's corporate agenda, critical issues on APEC, the world peasant round table, public education and research, media, as well as poverty.⁴

¹ Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT) official web site says “APEC's mandate can be summed up in a single phrase: ‘APEC means business’. Although APEC is an official dialogue between Asia-Pacific economies, it has been driven by the needs and interests of the private sector from the start.”

DFAIT website: www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca

² “Economies” rather than countries describe membership in APEC in order that China and Taiwan be considered in an equivalent way to the other members, since each country disputes which is sovereign in Taiwan.

³ Of the many definitions of “civil society”, here the most relevant meaning will be as defined by the Policy Working Group of the Canadian Organizing Network for the 1997 people's Summit on APEC, and published in a discussion paper “Canada and APEC: Perspectives from Civil Society” on July 30, 1997. “[W]e consider civil society to be voluntarily organized associations of people, autonomous of the state and operating outside the marketplace, that wish to participate collectively in the political, economic, and social lives of their communities, nations, and regions.”

⁴ The proceedings may be read on the Virtual Summit: www.vcn.bc.ca/summit

Both the APEC and People's Summit meetings differed from what each side had planned. On one hand, Canada acted similarly to previous hosts, like Indonesia and the Philippines, where state authority was used to limit the expression of dissent to APEC. The Canadian police using pepper spray on peaceful students became the enduring image of the meeting, rather than an open exchange of opinion about APEC. On the other hand, the People's Summit was not able to agree upon a common statement to present to the APEC leaders, and instead the Organizing Committee had to offer delegates the chance to sign a simple "preambular statement" to express what individual participants felt after the plenary.⁵

The successes of the People's Summit were the networking which occurred through the forums about each of the issues which were discussed, and also the cooperation among participant groups after the Summit to ensure that the views of civil society will be expressed at future APEC meetings.

⁵ The preambular statement is also on the Virtual Summit: www.vcn.bc.ca/summit

Poverty Forum

A forum to focus on poverty was a clear attraction for people who questioned the assumptions and the operation of APEC, since its meetings do not even consider social issues or listen to people or organizations beyond its economies' political and business leaders, and so do not discuss the social and economic needs of poor people in their countries.

If "APEC means business", then in contrast, the people's groups that form part of civil society stressed justice. Participants wanted to expand APEC's focus, or to oppose what it was as of the autumn of 1997.

Earlier in 1997, a number of organizations agreed to form the **Working Group on Poverty (WGOP)** in the Greater Vancouver area of British Columbia because it was clear to them that immigrants and refugees to Canada were experiencing poverty for a longer period than previously in this relatively rich country. The People's Summit on APEC offered a chance to discuss these local concerns in a wider national and also international context. The interest of the **International Council of Social Workers (ICSW)** in APEC and in the People's Summit meant there was a partner with which the WGOP could organize a forum on poverty.

The ICSW has existed for 25 years and is active advocating social change in 74 countries around the world. Among other goals, the ICSW works to create an enabling environment in countries where a majority of people have had no access to power over their lives, in order that they be enabled to make decisions which affect them. The People's Summit offered an obvious venue for the ICSW to explain its work.

The poverty forum planning committee planned to focus upon "Social Exclusion" as the theme for examining poverty issues, and to explore the theme by addressing three of its aspects with speakers on panels, to be followed by small group discussion. The panel speakers were asked:

- 1) to address key barriers to ending poverty,
- 2) to give examples of programs or policies which have contributed to ending poverty, and
- 3) to suggest strategies for action to eradicate poverty.¹

This report reproduces the comments delivered at the forum in the three panels, each one followed by a record of the discussions in the small groups.² Questions and answers were scheduled after each panel discussion, but the timing made it difficult to offer adequate

¹ The forum's agenda is copied as Appendix #2.

² The record of the discussions have been collated from the minutes taken in each group, and presented here as a whole.

time after each panel, and so the record of the question and answer periods have also been collated and presented together after the third panel in this report.

The comments of the indigenous speaker³, who had been scheduled to speak as part of the first panel, but who unfortunately was not able to attend, forms appendix #3.

Representatives of the planning committee met the very night of the forum in order to present the highlights of the discussions in a brief report to the plenary on the following day.⁴

The publication of this report represents the final tool intended by the planning committee to stimulate discussion among anti-poverty groups, especially in B.C., about the ways that the causes and consequences of poverty include local, national, and international perspectives.

³ Viola Thomas' comments form Appendix #1.

⁴ The Forum report to the plenary of the People's Summit, including proposals for action, is reproduced as Appendix #3.

Thanks

Profound thanks are due to many persons and organizations that contributed to making the Poverty Forum a success.

The **Working Group on Poverty (WGOP)** formed an ad hoc planning committee for the forum which consisted of **Julie Buxton, Patsy George, Kuldip Gill, Enzo Guerriero, Eva Robinson, and Holly Whittleton.**

The persons who volunteered to speak to the forum and to chair the panels all expressed stimulating ideas that have already motivated some participants in the forum to organize others to fight poverty: **Sunera Thobani, Gideon Rosenbluth, Henning Karcher, Denise Nadeau, Marta Torres, Julian Disney, Cindy Carson, Linda Moreau, Shashi Assanand, Eva Robinson, Darlene Marzari, and Holly Whittleton.** Thanks are due to **Viola Thomas** who forwarded us the presentation which she intended to make at the forum.

It should be emphasized that most of the speakers' comments in this report have been reproduced as a result of recording them by audio on the day of the forum, and so by volunteer transcribing afterwards. In particular, both Henning Karcher and Julian Disney had no chance to comment upon what appears in this report. Our sincere hope is that what appears here is an accurate reflection of their comments.

Still others helped to make the day more relevant personally for participants by facilitating the small group discussions after each panel: **Michael Goldberg, Hilal Bangash, Nora Curry, Kanak Khare, Julie Buxton, Jeana Wiginton, Vasso Vahlas, Collin Mercer, Deepthi Jayatilaka, Shelly Haynes-Marrelli, Vera Rosenbluth, Eva Robinson, Laura Acton, and Sulinder Puri.** Thanks are due to two facilitators whose names were misplaced, and also to the persons who recorded the points of the discussions in the groups, and who did so anonymously.

Organizations participating in the WGOP, especially the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies & Service Agencies of B.C. (**AMSSA**), the Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C. (**IVMW**), the Multilingual Orientation Services Association for Immigrant Communities (**MOSAIC**), and the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. (**SPARC**), were each active in informing their contacts about the forum.

The **IVMW** identified numerous low-income immigrant and refugee women in locations throughout the province of British Columbia to attend the forum.

MOSAIC organized numerous volunteers to assist registering participants, seating them in the hall, and distributing food at lunch time. The organization's staff were invaluable performing many of the last-minute details to ensure that the forum took place. Particular individuals from MOSAIC should be recognized: **Laurie Winter** for organizing most of

the volunteers who assisted directly at the forum, **Jeana Wiginton** for collating the contents of the workbooks which were distributed to participants, **Hana Sepahi** and **Koichi Tsumoto** for transcribing the speeches from the forum, and **Nok Punchana** and **Kian Ghaffari** for preparing the mailing list of the people who registered. Koichi also offered invaluable time and advice concerning the formatting, the layout, and the editing of the report. **Louise Wong** and **Chava Glouberman** completed the final formatting and layout of the report.

Enzo Guerriero transcribed the speeches for the entire duration of the forum.

SPARC published a succinct review of the themes discussed at the forum in its newsletter mailed to organizations in locations in all parts of B.C., thereby spurring further discussion of the issues raised here.

Organizations which funded the forum were crucial: **Canadian Heritage** paid the travel costs of numerous immigrant and refugee women who live elsewhere in British Columbia; **St. James Community Services Society** supplied a nutritious lunch for participants; and **MOSAIC** contributed the administrative costs of producing the fliers that advertised the forum and the workbooks that participants used that day.

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Panel One: Key Barriers to Ending Poverty

Sunera Thobani

Globalization, Women, and Poverty

I would like to begin this morning by identifying what I think is the strongest barrier that we face today in eliminating poverty. It is the neo-liberal globalization process which puts trade liberalization at its centre. That is the biggest barrier that we face today. As the APEC leaders get together at their summit, we should recognize that is where barriers are being strengthened, and new ones created, against eliminating poverty.

APEC is part of the larger globalization process. In Canada, we are experiencing the negative effects of NAFTA, and now we have governments negotiating the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). APEC, we should recognize, is part of this larger trade liberalization agenda, which is being promoted in various places through various different agreements.

Globalization, the current phase that we are living through, should be viewed historically. Globalization is nothing new. The colonization of the Americas, the colonization of Africa, of Asia, of many parts of the world, was the beginning of the globalization process. We have lived in a global economy for the last 500 years; this is the point from which we should begin our analysis.

The current form of globalization has taken the form of Structural Adjustment Programs in countries of the South, and in the restructuring of the welfare state in countries of the North. We should recognize that both are intrinsically connected. Structural Adjustment Programs in the South have increasingly been defined as a process of recolonization, as destroying the gains which people's movements have achieved. In the face of those gains, old historical patterns of exploitation are currently being intensified, and APEC is very much part of that agenda.

APEC promotes trade liberalization. What this means is that our governments define the needs of business, the increasing of trade, and profits through trade, as their priority. These "needs" are central to how our economies are being restructured. It is not the needs of communities; it is not the needs of populations; it is not the needs of people or of women that is driving this agenda. It is only the "needs" of business to make more profits. It is the ability of capital to be able to move even more freely across borders in pursuit of more profits. Trade, at whatever cost, is what drives the APEC agenda.

Businesses and governments have strengthened their partnerships to create increasingly favourable conditions for business. We have to look at the consequences of this: Who is paying the price? As we hear from the experiences of women in country after country in the Asia Pacific region, it becomes clear that it is women who are paying the heaviest

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price for this trade liberalization. The increasing poverty of women today is not an accidental byproduct, but an inevitable consequence of the policies which have been pursued by governments.

When social programs are cut back, when social programs are labeled as unfair subsidies which hinder the working of the free market, it is women who pay the costs of the services which have been cut back. When services are not provided for the sick, for children, for the elderly, it is families who have to provide that care, and within families it is women who provide that care. When corporations come in and stay only for as long as they are making profits, and then leave with no consideration for the environmental consequences of their practices, with no consideration for the unemployment and poverty that they leave behind, it is women who hold our communities together. It is women who hold our families together. We have to recognize that poverty is the No. 1 women's issue today globally.

Globalization actually depends on women picking up the pieces. It depends on women's unwaged work increasing to provide the services which governments are no longer prepared to support.

In the countries of the North, in Canada for example, a lot of attention has been paid to the uneven impact on women's lives. The feminization of poverty has become part of our analysis. But we need to also address the racialization of poverty which is taking place. Because increasingly in the countries of the North, if you look at the communities which are being devastated by poverty, it is disproportionately people of colour. Aboriginal communities have been hit the hardest in Canada. If you look at immigrants and refugees, levels of poverty are incredibly higher because sexism and racism come together in the lives of women of colour. It is very important we recognize that globally, poverty is a racialized phenomenon, and that in the advanced capitalist countries that is also the reality that we are living with.

In Canada, we have seen the cutbacks to social programs be justified, be legitimized, by political leaders who blame immigrants and refugees, who scapegoat immigrants and refugees. Today, we live in a climate where politicians can, and do, point the finger towards immigrants and refugees, saying that they are coming into Canada solely because of the generous social programs. They can say that taxpayers are paying for programs which benefit immigrants and refugees. And politicians are using that racism to introduce more policing, more surveillance of the whole social security system in this country, and also to bring in restrictive immigration and refugee policies.

We have to recognize in Canada that immigrants and refugees also work, and that we are also taxpayers in this country. The policies which are being promoted by the Canadian government, which is a member of G7, and which is represented on the World Bank and at the IMF, are increasing the conditions for migration globally. They are increasing poverty, they are increasing political instability, the consequence of which is increased

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migration. And at home the government is using this increased migration as the basis on which to mobilize support, turning populations against each other, turning “Canadians” against immigrants and refugees. We are living in a climate where this racial intolerance is getting stronger, and is being used to legitimate the cutting back of all of the social rights which people have won.

The biggest challenge which our movements face today is: are we going to stand up against this pitting of communities against each other? Because ultimately that is what the globalization process depends on to be implemented. It's by turning people against each other, turning people in the North against people in the South, by turning “Canadians” against immigrants and refugees, by fueling a strong backlash against women who are fighting for their rights. And I think this is where our movements have to really make a commitment to stop this pitting of peoples against each other. We are at a crossroads, we are at a very important point today in the development of all of our societies. Are we going to hang on to the little privileges that some of us have been able to win and be pitted against those who are being disfranchised even more? Or are we going to say “No, we will build solidarity. Until the last woman is free from the threat of poverty and violence, no woman is free.” Our movements really need to make a commitment to make the people who are most marginalized in our society, who have been made the most powerless in our society, to set the agenda for us. Their needs have to drive the policies of governments. Feed your populations first, meet the needs of communities first, before you start promoting trade! That has to be the place from which we really build our strategies and our actions.

The increasing racism that we live with is very, very visible in the media coverage of the APEC Summit as well. We have seen every commentator, every columnist in the country stand up and express outrage at Indonesian President Suharto being allowed into Canada, at the Chinese leader being allowed to speak at the dinner that has been organized by the City of Vancouver. It's quite right to condemn these leaders for the human rights violations which are taking place in their countries. But what about Bill Clinton when he comes here? Is the US government not involved in human rights violations globally? Does it not support and promote conditions which increase human rights violations? Is the Canadian government likewise not responsible? Through its role in the G7, in the World Bank, in the IMF, in promoting the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI)? Is the Canadian government also not responsible for creating the conditions under which human rights violations are taking place globally? So let us condemn the leaders, but let us do so in an anti-racist way, not by targeting Asians as being more undemocratic than Westerners. It's very important to stand against the racism which is being promoted even as this summit is taking place.

In terms of human rights violations, last year the National Action Committee (NAC) and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) organized a cross-Canada Women's March Against Poverty. We went through many, many towns, cities, villages, 90 in all, marching across the country and the three key issues that women identified in whichever

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community we visited were poverty, violence against women, and unemployment. For those who want to talk about human rights violations, we need to look at what is happening inside Canada's borders before we start talking about Asian "cultures" and Asian undemocratic "traditional" values. Speak to the single mother who is struggling to raise children on social assistance which is increasingly cut back and she will tell you stories about human rights violations. Speak to the migrant worker who comes to Canada and who is not allowed any rights, except those specified in the employment contract, about human rights violations. Speak to Aboriginal leaders about the conditions in their communities. They'll tell you about human rights violations. It is very important for those of us who live in Canada, and who live in the other G7 countries, to hold our governments accountable for human rights violations both at home and for the role they play internationally in increasing these violations.

Our movements have achieved much. The Women's Conference, which started off the People's Summit, took a very clear position against APEC, against APEC policies. What I'd like to do here is to invite you to come out with as clear a position about where you think the barriers to eliminating poverty comes from, and how to fight them. So I invite you to look at the work that has been done by the other Forums, including the Women's Forum, which took a very clear position on APEC, and said that we do not want to be included in APEC through gender-sensitive policies. We see these policies as fundamentally flawed. We see these policies as promoting the erosion of democracy, promoting human rights violations, and increasing poverty. And we take a clear stand against it. So I invite you to consider taking just as clear a stand from the work you will do today.

In terms of what we need to do in Canada, there are many organizations which are fighting poverty. I think it is very important that we build coalitions with the groups which are doing the most radical, grass roots work, which are challenging at the most fundamental level how power is structured in this society, and how economic resources are allocated. Grass roots anti-poverty activists need, and should receive, the support of progressive movements, and they should play a leadership role. Anti-poverty activists have to be supported, and have to be at the centre of the organizing we do.

I think that we have to work very hard to develop a feminist analysis of poverty, but also an anti-racist one which clearly addresses the very mean-spirited racist targeting that we are seeing of immigrants and refugees in all the countries of the West today. This has to be the basis upon which we develop strategies, to end poverty in all our communities.

Thank you very much.

Sunera Thobani, Professor of Women's Studies, at Simon Fraser University in Canada

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Gideon Rosenbluth

Political Power and the Poor

The elimination of poverty is mainly a political problem...the elimination of poverty is primarily the responsibility of governments. They must provide an enabling environment for people's empowerment at all levels.

(UNDP, *Poverty Eradication*, 1996, Overview)

In order for men to advocate anything, they must in the first place be able to earn a living.

(Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, Chapter 1)

So Professor Friedman is telling us that the poor lack political clout because they are poor, and the UN is telling us that to alleviate their poverty requires political action. You can see that according to these highly respectable and conservative sources, the poor are in a Catch-22 situation. To eliminate their poverty requires government action, but since government action is determined by political power, which the poor lack, the poor have a problem.

I have been asked to speak about barriers to the alleviation of poverty in Canada, and essentially I am going to document that what is lacking in Canada is indeed the political will to eradicate poverty. At the end, I will say a few words about how the poverty problem in Canada differs from that in less developed countries, and how the two are related.

Poverty in Canada

So, what about poverty in Canada? Canada has a very productive economy and a reasonably efficient system of democracy. The productive economy and democratic decision making have produced great progress in reducing poverty. But this very progress has led to a situation where the remaining poor are a minority. So they lack political clout not only because they are poor but also because they are few, and those who have political power are not willing to proceed with the redistributive policies that are both economically and technically feasible and that would eliminate poverty.

How Many Canadians Are Poor?

According to the most frequently used way of counting the poor in Canada, there were in 1995 5.2 million poor people, or 17.8 percent of the population. 1995 is the last year for which we have this information.

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That's not a small number, but it is a minority, and, what is more, a minority that lacks political cohesion. It consists of 1.5 million children, 6 hundred thousand seniors (called "elderly" by Statistics Canada), and 3.1 million other adults.

What's more, this figure is based on a definition of poverty that would be regarded as laughable by people in the less developed countries. It takes as poor anyone whose family income is below Statistics Canada's "low income cutoff". That is a cutoff level determined by how much of your income has to be spent on the basic necessities of life, if you are an "average person". At present you are counted as poor if your family income is at a level where ON THE AVERAGE over 55% is spent on food, shelter, and clothing. Clearly that's a very liberal definition, and there are lots of people even in Canada who would consider themselves pretty well off if they could confine their expenditure on the basic necessities of life to 55 percent. But the point I am making now is that even on that liberal definition the poor are still a minority.

The Poverty Trend

The poor are a minority because of the progress Canada made from the thirties to the seventies in reducing poverty. In our chart, "Percentage of Canadians in Poverty"¹, we can trace this progress from the sixties. The percentage of people with incomes below Statistics Canada's magic low income cutoff fell from about 34 percent in 1967 to a bit over 15 percent in 1981. Then however progress ceased.

The percentage of the poor rose in the severe recessions of the early eighties and the early nineties, fell in the recovery of the late eighties reaching its lowest point in 1989, and meandered up and down in the jobless recovery from 1993 to 1995.

What's more, evidence not based on statistics suggests that poverty not only cycled up and down in the eighties and nineties but increased. The Statistics Canada surveys don't seem to count people who live on the street without a home address, and we have seen increasing numbers of them in our cities, including children. The Globe and Mail reported on October 23 that in Toronto the shelters for the homeless are forecast to see 6,560 applicants by Christmas, "a 67% increase from last December". Similar crises are reported from Vancouver, Montreal, and Calgary. One may guess that a count of the homeless would not add more than one percent to the 5.2 million poor estimated by Statistics Canada for 1995, but their increasing importance on our streets indicates an upward trend in poverty. So does the increasing importance of food banks which were, I think, unknown before the eighties.

The Barriers

We therefore have to ask, what were the barriers that the declining trend of poverty hit after 1981. What were the forces impinging on poverty that changed between the sixties

¹This and the other charts are reproduced on pages 12 and 13.

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and seventies on the one hand, and the eighties and nineties on the other. We can point to two immediate factors raising the economy's output per head rapidly in the sixties and seventies, and not in the eighties and nineties:

1. As shown in the chart, "Labour Demand and Supply", employment was increasing in the sixties and seventies and more and more women entered the labour force, so more and more families had multiple earners. This process came to an end in the eighties.
2. Output per person employed, measured in terms of the household goods it will buy, rose fairly rapidly in the sixties and early seventies, but rose hardly at all after 1975. See the chart "Real GDP per Employed".
3. Two other factors made the distribution of this output less and less unequal in the sixties and seventies, and more and more unequal in the eighties and nineties.
4. While unemployment always rose and fell with the business cycle, it rose to much greater heights in the eighties and nineties than in the earlier period. This is shown in the chart "Unemployment Rate". Unemployment leads to poverty not only because the unemployed are likely to be poor, but also because when there is more unemployment, real wage rates are lower, and more of those employed get only part-time work.
5. In the sixties and seventies our social safety net was being constructed and improved. In the eighties and nineties federal and provincial governments expenditure cuts have torn holes in it. When I speak of the social safety net I refer not only to social services and income support, but also to the related services of health and education. How much poverty is generated by unemployment depends very much on the social safety net.

Government Responsibility

We have now identified four barriers to the continued reduction of poverty and we have to ask: Are these barriers due to government policies? It is fairly obvious that the damage to the social safety net is a government responsibility, but what about the end of employment expansion and the rise in unemployment? Well, these were also the result of governments, federal and provincial, adopting certain policies and rejecting others.

It is important to note that the rising trend of employment was not halted by any shortage of labour. The unemployment rate was above 7 percent when employment declined in the eighties.

The major factors halting the expansion of employment were:

1. The Bank of Canada brought about rising interest rates in its pursuit of zero inflation, and

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2. Governments, federal, provincial and local, slashed their expenditures in the pursuit of deficit reduction.

The Bank's objective in causing high interest rates was to create unemployment, on the theory that this was necessary to prevent inflation. High interest rates create unemployment by limiting business spending on plant, equipment, and inventories, by limiting household spending, particularly on new homes, automobiles, and appliances, and by reducing our exports and increasing our imports.

We all know that unemployment and poverty damage society and families. The policy decision that we should create this damage in order to achieve stable prices reflects the distribution of political power in our society.

Expenditure slashing by governments destroys jobs, a process for which economists use the fancy term "fiscal drag". It destroys directly the jobs that government expenditure creates: either jobs in government employment, or in non-government institutions financed by government such as schools, universities, hospitals, or in businesses from which governments buy goods or services, or which governments subsidize, or in businesses where recipients of income assistance, unemployment insurance benefits, or government pensions spend their money.

Of course in addition to the jobs destroyed directly, more jobs are destroyed indirectly by the reduced spending of those who have lost their jobs and income.

Canadian governments, federal and provincial, began expenditure slashing around 1975 when they were first freaked out by the appearance of deficits in their accounts and the resulting debt. But expenditure slashing is an extremely inefficient way to reduce government debt, and in fact debt continued to accumulate through the eighties and nineties. It is inefficient because it reduces employment and economic growth. Reduced economic activity reduces government revenues, and that pushes the deficit up. The increasing number of unemployed and poor people pushes up expenditure on unemployment benefits and social assistance, as well as social service, health service, and crime prevention. This upward push on expenditure means an upward push on the deficit. So while expenditure slashing reduces the deficit directly, these indirect effects put it up.

We can see that in the eighties and nineties government policy set up a vicious circle in which the Bank of Canada's policy promoted unemployment, which led to deficits in government accounts, which led to expenditure slashing, which led to more unemployment. The federal government's much touted success in balancing its budget, promised for next year, is largely due to the reduction of interest rates that has taken place in the last couple of years, since the Bank began to realize that it was stopping the economy dead in its tracks.

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Government Responsibility: The Social Safety Net

We now have to discuss the fourth barrier I mentioned. Our income support system, and our support system for advanced education and health services have not met the increasing demands that rising unemployment has placed on them because government expenditure slashing has torn holes in our social safety net.

I have time only for a few examples of these trends from both federal and provincial government policies.

The federal unemployment insurance scheme was greatly improved in 1971: Coverage was expanded, benefits were increased, and the period of employment required to become eligible was reduced. (Hanvelt, 1980, 1992)

After 1975 a series of amendments to the system moved it in the opposite direction. Contribution rates for employers and employees were raised, and the federal share reduced. Benefits were reduced and the period of employment required to qualify was increased. Benefits to repeated users of the system were reduced. The percentage of the unemployed receiving benefits has declined substantially.

These changes have, of course, increased the burden on the provincially administered system of income assistance. But other federal changes have served to emasculate that system.

In the sixties the federal and provincial governments negotiated the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) under which the federal government refunded to the provinces 50% of their income assistance costs. These federal payments were made conditional on the provinces meeting standards of service quality including universality, adequacy, the right to appeal administrative decisions, freedom from workfare, and mobility between provinces. This plan has been eliminated by the present federal government. Federal transfers earmarked for social assistance are now included in the "Canada Health and Social Transfer" (CHST), are much lower than CAP payments would be, and are not linked to actual expenditure on income support. So in effect the money can be spent by the province on anything at all. Correspondingly the federal government has dropped the conditions imposed on CAP payments, except the mobility requirement. (Goldberg, 1997)

Federal transfer payments to the provinces for health services and advanced education have also been transformed from shared cost programs in the sixties and seventies to lower payments now included in the CHST, not related to provincial expenditures. As with social assistance, this transformation has reduced federal control over standards of service. It is therefore not surprising that provincial expenditures have declined in relation to the need, and standards of service have been eroded.

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Another shared cost program from which the federal government has withdrawn is social housing.

For an example of provincial policies that have torn holes in the social safety net we need look no further than our home province, British Columbia, which has enjoyed a “left wing” government since 1992.

A recent study by “SPARC”, the Social Planning and Research Council of BC (Goldberg, 1997) points out that since 1993 there has been only one policy change in BC that benefited the poor. That was the “family bonus” which supplements the earnings of the “working poor” if they have children. In terms of cost it was more than made up for by four recent changes listed by SPARC that harmed the poor:

- They reduced the income support allowances of people without children.
- They canceled the provision that allowed people to earn small amounts of money without having their welfare payments reduced.
- They drastically reduced the amount of money one could have in the bank while receiving welfare.
- They required the unemployed to engage in nine months of job search before they are eligible for government-financed skill training.

SPARC has estimated that the cuts in the purchasing power of income assistance payments by successive BC governments since 1982 have left these benefits below their 1982 purchasing power, which was not generous, by amounts ranging from 10% for single parents with two children to 44% for single people without children.

The article in *The Globe and Mail* that I quoted before (October 23) emphasizes the role of government policy in putting people on the street. It says that the increasing number of homeless people on the streets “is attributed to the economy, tighter welfare rules, and other shifts in government policy. Many people living in the street were previously in mental institutions, especially in Vancouver. Others simply cannot afford a place to live.” The article also stresses the shortage of social housing.

Conclusion: Poverty in Canada

I have said enough to show that it has been **government policy choices** that have given us rising poverty in the eighties and nineties in place of the declining poverty of the sixties and seventies. Were other policy choices possible? Yes, they were. Poverty in Canada could have been eliminated in the seventies if policy plans far advanced in federal-provincial discussions between 1973 and 1976 had been implemented. I quote the following from a critical study of Canada’s social services published in 1992:

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“A technical advisory committee, the Working Party on Income Maintenance, was established to investigate the...feasibility of developing a comprehensive income support and supplementation system” which would “substantially replace many of the partial, targeted programs (such as unemployment insurance, CAP, old age pensions and family allowances)...While there was agreement in principle on the desirability of such a scheme, specific agreement at the federal cabinet and federal-provincial levels was never achieved... The failure...to achieve an acceptable universal income support system coincided with the shift to a conservative agenda focused on fighting deficits and inflation”. (Hanvelt, 1992, p.245)

It seems clear that poverty has not been eliminated because of a failure of political will. It is a reasonable guess that this failure of political will reflects the minority status of the poor in our relatively rich society, and the fact that in our system wealth can buy political power. The poor are poor because the rich and the middle class are seen by politicians as unwilling to be taxed enough to permit the abolition of poverty.

Poverty in Less Developed Countries

Now, what about poverty in Less Developed Countries? When I was a young kid in Europe and started asking why we didn't just tax the rich to give money to the poor, my elders and betters explained to me that even if we took all the income of the very rich and distributed it among the poor, there would be so little per person that the poor would still be poor, and the rich would be annoyed and would refuse to run the economy for us, and we'd be in a big mess. Such assertions at that time were based on an almost complete absence of relevant statistics, but it was very likely true that the poor were so many and the rich so few, that the problem of poverty could not be solved by redistribution alone.

By and large that still describes the situation in the less developed countries. The poor are a majority of the population, and if they lived in efficient democracies, which most don't, and if they had leisure and learning to understand where their interests lie, they could have political clout. Secondly, the economy of a less developed country is not producing enough goods and services to eliminate poverty, even if there were no super rich people. So here the barriers to the alleviation of poverty include all the things that keep output per person low: There is not enough physical capital, education, skills, and technical knowledge, economic arrangements are not efficient, and social institutions are lacking. These problems may be addressed by governments, rich business men and landowners, or by multinational corporations, but the poor are not likely to get much of the benefit unless they can gain political power.

How does this relate to our internal poverty problem? Well, if our governments are as reluctant as they are to alleviate the poverty of their own citizens, they are not likely to devote great resources to the alleviation of the poverty of foreigners in distant lands. And while we can see them negotiating trade and investment deals expected to benefit their

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powerful political supporters, they are not likely to want to encumber these deals with provisions for the alleviation of poverty in their trading partners.

Where does that leave the poor in the less developed countries? Professor Friedman has taught us that one must be able to earn a living in order to have political power. But in the less developed countries the poor may have to get political power in order to earn a living.

Gideon Rosenbluth, Professor Emeritus, Economics, University of British Columbia

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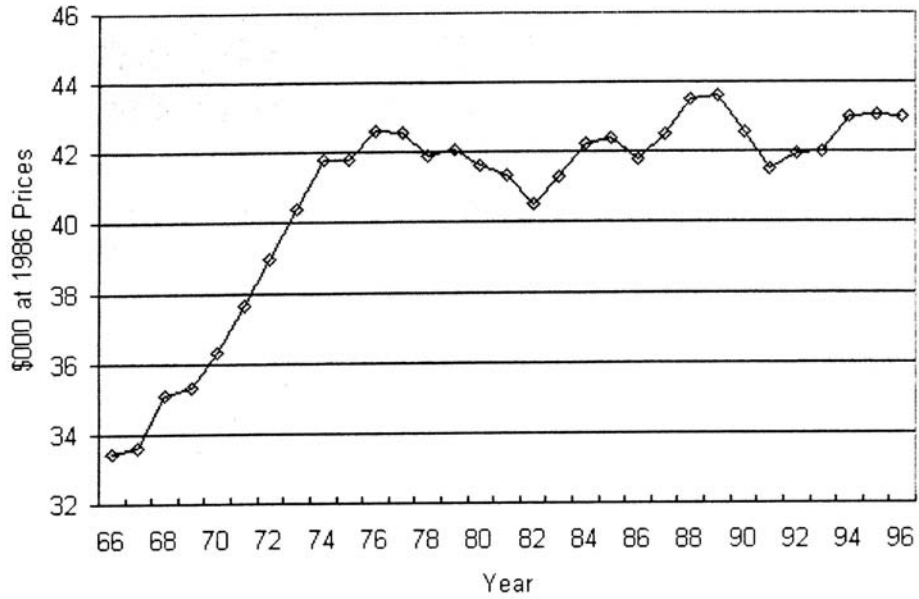
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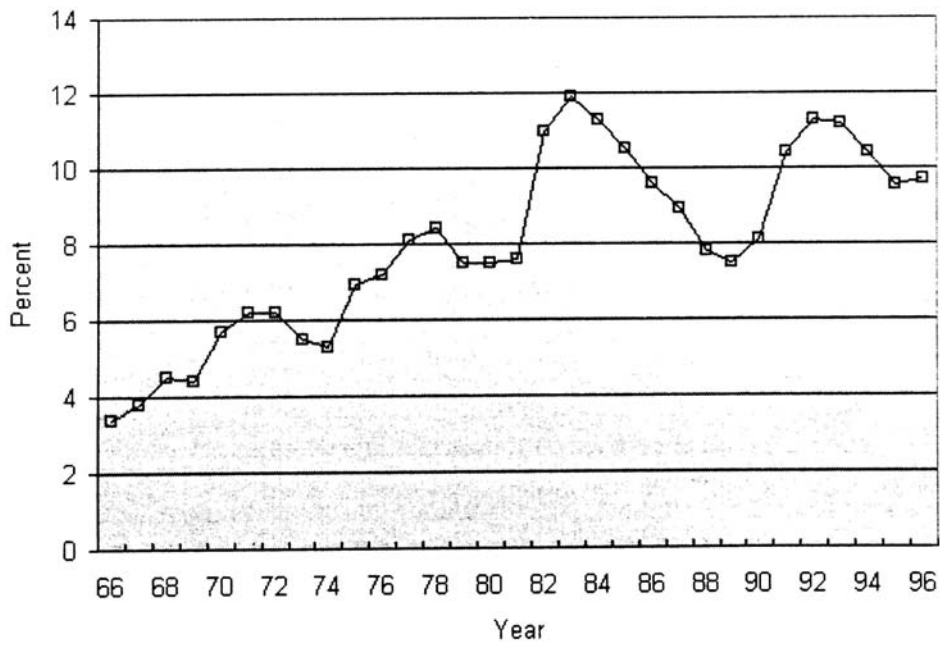
Panel One: Key Barriers to Ending Poverty

Chart

REAL GDP PER EMPLOYED 1966-1996
(GDP Deflated by Consumer Price Index)



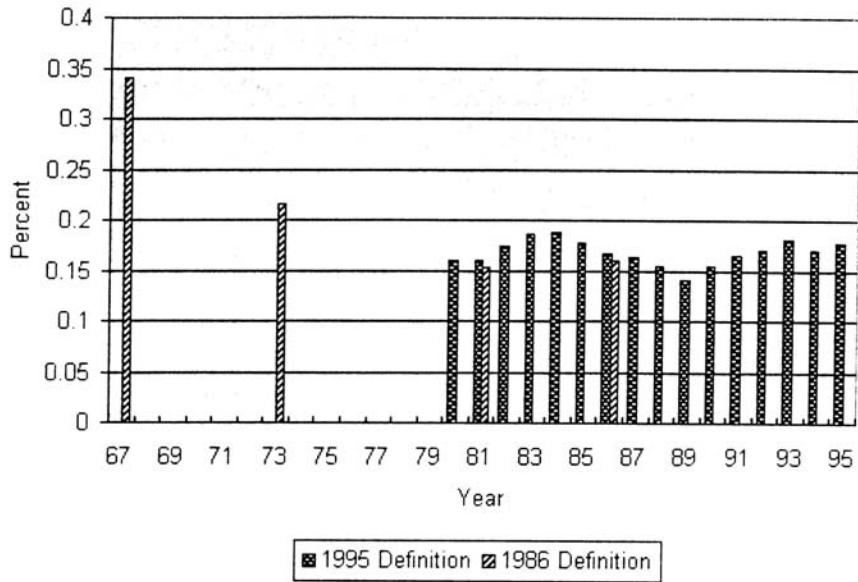
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE 1966-1996



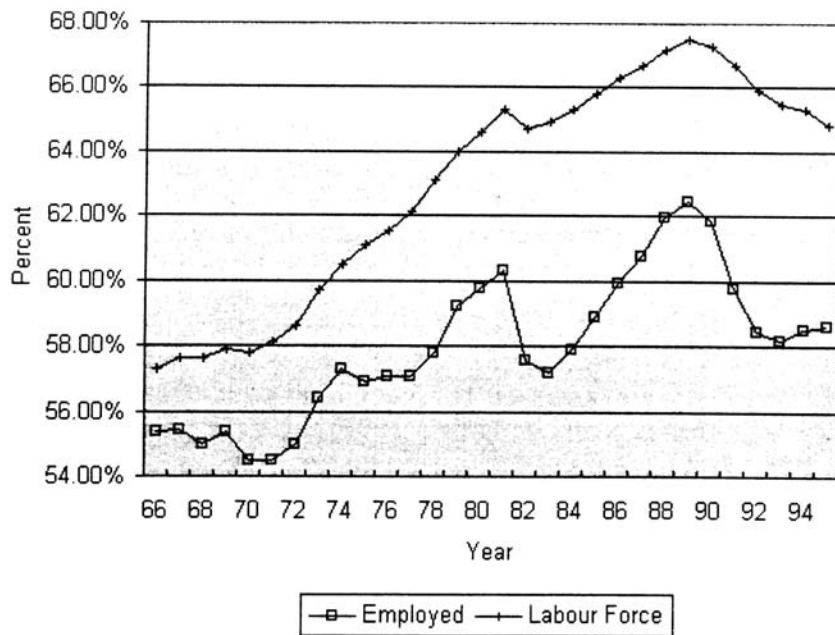
Panel One: Key Barriers to Ending Poverty

Chart

PERCENTAGE OF CANADIANS IN POVERTY
1967-1995



LABOUR DEMAND AND SUPPLY 1966-1995
Per Head of Working-Age Population



Panel One: Key Barriers to Ending Poverty

Group Discussion

Small groups focused on the question:

“What key barriers have you or the group that you work with experienced in addressing poverty issues?”

Points raised in discussion were generally around the following headings:

[A] Public myths and stereotypes about poverty

- beliefs/attitudes that poverty is inevitable and cannot be eradicated, and that poverty is necessary for a capitalist system.
- the belief that money/the economy is morally neutral and that corporations have no social responsibility other than maximizing profits.
- the lack of access to information, including: employment opportunities; working with other groups, especially in smaller communities; and fears by people who are below or different from the middle class.
- a lack of political will to confront poverty, including: the continued selling/purchasing of arms; funding reductions to organizations/groups involved in the struggle against poverty, such as women’s groups; and believing that charity is a solution to poverty.
- public awareness of the extent of poverty in Canada is low
- no agreement about what poverty is
- being stereotyped as no-good, lazy, drug-addicts by media and the public because one is on assistance

[B] Prejudices against poor people

- governments not listening to, nor understanding, poor people
- governments paying back loans on the deficit, instead of investing that money in social programs
- public myths and stereotypes of poor people make it difficult to convince politicians about negative aspects of programs like BC Benefits in Canada
- “blaming the poor” attitudes in society
- governments not involving poor people in policies that deal with their issues, i.e., governments should seek input from them
- public perception of poverty is that it is “evil” because it’s the “fault” of people who are poor that they are in poverty
- different levels of abuse of new Canadians as volunteers – voluntarism, instead of work
- youth on social assistance suffer from pressure to fit in with their peers, and so their stigma and shame result in being unwillingness to apply for assistance

[C] Self-oppression by poor people

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- the poor are reluctant to speak out
- the poor feel a barrier of shame
- gender differences affect attitudes of the poor, i.e., men are more aggressive and better educated and women are not allowed to participate fully in economy
- the poor are often divided, yet fighting for the same cause, and so not as effective as if they were united
- the poor often lack a common analysis, and an understanding, of poverty so that people feel at ease talking about poverty issues and their causes
- day to day pressures, eg., single mothers, leading to no time to be concerned
- fear to speak out because poor people fear losing what they receive now from government or being punished unfairly
- poor people and workers blaming other poor people for being poor

[D] Society maintaining the status quo, and not considering issues of poverty

- politicians lacking the understanding of people's real needs
- polarization of wealth
- too much time spent "curing" rather than "preventing" problems that result in poverty
- lack of tax fairness
- the poor are affected by the cost of programs which they need, eg, transportation, low-cost housing, education, and child care, and so their ability to represent themselves is restricted
- lack of education in the school system about the corporate agenda and its effects on poor people
- media manipulates how situations really are to the point where those experiencing difficulties are brain-washed into thinking they should be grateful to have a job (no matter how bad the conditions)
- government offices and agencies are too fragmented, and unwilling to work together (eg., combining services of education, housing, employment, mental health, drug & alcohol)
- more money spent on prison system than on families
- voluntary organizations which engage in advocacy cannot get charitable status
- treaty process
- market economy is for business, and does not serve people in need
- poverty itself limits the ability of people to begin helping themselves
- business community needs to take more social responsibility

[E] Cultural barriers

- poor immigrants and refugees often do not know how to access the system or to get information; they may have language barriers; they may have skills or credentials which are not recognized

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- few options for new immigrants because of barriers of language and against the participation of women, eg., pregnant women working on farms inhaling pesticides
- it is harder for immigrants to find jobs in small cities
- immigrants have a hard time understanding their rights and so presenting their views to government
- when they don't have their immigrant papers, they don't get social assistance benefits
- many immigrants seek jobs in areas which are saturated, and so require retraining in order to seek employment
- lack of information: language (written & spoken), literacy, i.e., social assistance workers not listening because they have no capacity due to time/training lack

[F] International factors

- government corruption, i.e., foreign aid does not reach the poor
- basic social and economic human rights are being violated
- over-consumption of resources in wealthy countries
- security of tenure: lack of consistency in residency, for eg., in Philippines' squatter areas
- neo-conservative economic agenda, eg., government policy restricts work opportunity for nannies, refugees without papers from home country
- homelessness, eg., conversion of living space to tourist facilities
- isolation of people, especially those living in rural areas

Panel Two: Programs and Policies that Work

Henning Karcher

UNDP and Poverty Alleviation in South Asia

When thinking about this presentation, I realized that I face two options. Either I could try to present to you a range of activities that the **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** is carrying out in the Asia Pacific, or I could focus on one specific initiative which I feel is particularly interesting and successful. I decided to choose the second option, but I didn't want to deprive you of the overview. So I have brought with me descriptions of some of these activities and those of you who are interested are welcome to pick them up and get an impression of what we are doing in different countries there.¹

The initiative I would like to talk about is entitled “*South Asian Poverty Alleviation Program*”. Its point of departure is a resolution adopted by the Heads of State and Governments of the SAARC Countries, the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation, at their summit in Dacca, 1993. They decided at this summit to eradicate poverty from South Asia by the year 2002, evidently a very ambitious target which cannot be realized. But it represents an important commitment and point of entry for this program.

They also decided that they would operate at three different levels. At the macroeconomic, they wanted to introduce pro-poor **policies**; at grassroots level, they wanted to work through **social mobilization**; and they wanted to engage in regular participatory **monitoring** to see progress, and also to a certain extent to exert pressure upon themselves that they were moving forward in line with their commitment. So the UNP program works with South Asian governments in these three areas: policy, social mobilization and monitoring. The participating countries are: India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Nepal.

The most advanced component of the program is **social mobilization**. Here we focus primarily on organizing the poor. What does it mean in practice? The poor are brought together in rounds of discussions and we determine in the dialogue what are their priorities, where they would like to join hands, and what they would like to do first together. Then some resources are provided from outside, because they provide most of the resources themselves, labour primarily. Very often this is the area of physical infrastructure. For example, in Nepal, a group would like to build an irrigation canal which would have immediate economic benefit for all of them. They work on it, we provide some additional resources from outside. They see that they can accomplish

¹ Among the UNDP websites, the following one describes the activities to which Mr. Karcher refers, for the Regional Poverty Alleviation Program for Asia and the Pacific:
<http://www.edu.cn/undp/regional/ras95001.htm>

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something. And this is the first step to working together and then taking on more and more ambitious programs over time.

The second element is **savings and loans**. Savings turn out to be extremely important, also as an element of empowerment. We have found that even the poorest of the poor, for example, in Bangladesh, are able to save maybe only one rupee a week, or a cup of rice a week, but still, because there are so many of them, they accumulate significant amounts of money within a relatively short period of time. Very quickly they are able to extend loans amongst themselves, without any support from outside; initially, for emergencies in the family, deaths in the family, and all sorts of happy occasions like marriage, and most importantly, for economic activities, for small enterprises undertaken by them in a whole range of fields. As it is easily understood, this experience that they can save and give loans amongst themselves makes them feel empowered. They don't depend on the government, they don't have to depend on the donor, it's just their own accomplishment.

The third element is **training**. The program provides training, both in technical subjects, for example, related to the enterprises, but also in management. And this is something I would like to underline, that some managerial skills present an integral part of this approach. The savings and loans scheme, in particular, has to be handled in a very professional manner. It has to be transparent. In every community one visits, they have a big book. They call it a "passbook", where every transaction is entered. Every rupee saved is entered, and every loan taken is entered. In addition to the master book, they have small passbooks which they carry with them all the time. So at all moments they are able to pull out a booklet and see, "Aha, this is the amount I saved, this is the loan I've taken"; and every amount paid back, of course, is also entered. Those who manage the program, the chairpersons, the treasurers and the secretaries, all need to be trained. They must be in a position to handle this system.

Let me now, before I move on, very quickly show a few transparencies which reflect the progress made under this scheme. As I said, there are six countries involved, but I will show it only very quickly for two, for Nepal and Bangladesh.² Here you see the accumulated growth of community organizations from October 1994 to September 1997, approximately 210. The next one shows the growth of membership, now approximately 8,200. Cumulative growth of savings, the point I made earlier: you can see that it started modestly and then really caught up in a very steep line towards the end. Now the amount saved in Nepal by these groups is in the order of five million rupees. The exchange rate is 56.7 rupees to the US dollar. Here you see the credit disbursements. The blue line, the upper line, represents all the savings; the lower line, project funds.

As I mentioned earlier, we do provide loans from savings, but also we add some resources from outside, because in order to be able to undertake larger projects, that is very important. If you compare this chart with the earlier one, you will see that the

² The progress of these schemes can be found on the following UNDP website:
<http://www.undp.org/undp/povertyhome/index.htm>

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amount of loans vastly exceeds the amount of savings. This is because the money is rotated very fast. For emergencies, very often a loan may be for three months, six months; it is paid back and the same money can be given to others. So we have here approximately a rotation of three to the amount saved. The next transparency reflects the training courses. The thick colours are managerial, and credit-related courses; and the blue ones are technical. And the number of trainees is approximately 530.

Now we come to Bangladesh, where the program is slightly larger, and of course in a very different environment. I should say that one of the strengths of this program is that it operates in a very flexible manner. In different South Asian countries, we see that different approaches are taken and different solutions are found to problems. The sub-regional approach enables us to exchange these solutions amongst the countries. This is indeed taking place in a very exciting manner.

We have here a couple of community organizations in Bangladesh, again beginning from 1994, and approximately 600 up to September 1997. Membership here is approximately 26,000 and we have it broken down by gender. The red line, the lower line, women; the middle green line, men; and the blue line, cumulative. As you can see, it is almost fifty-fifty in terms of men and women. Here is the growth of credit dispersed. The upper line is all savings, the largest amount; the second line represents resources received from the Commercial Bank in Bangladesh; and the small relatively flat line the resources provided under the project from the UNDP. The total credit dispersed is approximately 12 million taka and 43.6 taka are equivalent to one dollar. Here you see the growth of savings. The last amount is seven million taka. And the training courses in Bangladesh, again divided amongst managerial and technical. Approximately 2,300 people have been trained.

The program is based on the assumption that the poor know best how to use their skills. And it is really only a matter of freeing them, removing certain constraints and strains that hold them back. I had an opportunity just last week to visit our component of this program in India, and I must say it was thrilling. Just to give you a few examples of areas where they have become economically active, and I should say the program really targets the poorest of the poor, I will say something on the targeting in a moment. But let me just give you a few examples, for example, landlords who lease two acres of land to grow sugar cane; or landlords who lease an orchard to harvest tamarind trees; landlords who jointly operate a stone crushing enterprise and in the process create employment. With the very modest investment of 5,000 rupees, I've seen four additional work places created. And this is the case with most of these enterprises. Other examples are flour mills; livestock keeping is very popular, for example, rabbits, pigs, goats, sheep; the purchase of a cart and horse; purchase of a bullock-cart; also, activities in the social sector, for example, women are trained to attend at births, and to carry on this profession with payment.

I am sure that all of you have in mind the issue of **targeting**. Do these activities benefit everybody in the community? Do we have a situation where the rich and the elite hijack our program? We pay a lot of attention to targeting. In India, for example, we go first of

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all to those areas where untouchables live. Therefore, already where a program starts, we are dealing with the poorest of the poor. Moreover, within each group, we do try to identify the people who are most deserving; and it was touching to see that in all the groups I spoke to, they had determined to give loans to the poorest people, that the poor should be the first to benefit, while others in the group agreed to forego their chance, and to wait their turn. There was a considerable spirit of solidarity that was unleashed through this process.

Sustainability is an issue that comes up in these programs, and I shall give you two examples. I saw a school project in Pakistan: there the community had developed a reputation for the efficient use of resources for the building of schools. So the Public Works Department gave them money for five schools, and because they added their own labour, they were able to build ten. Then the question came up of who was going to teach? As many of you know, there is a problem of absenteeism. Teachers often come from cities, and they do not want to teach in rural areas. In this particular instance, the community decided to select a young woman from the village itself who was willing and interested. She was trained under the program. In order to make it totally sustainable, the parents decided to pay five rupees per child per month. Therefore, we had a situation where the teacher came from the area, who knew the community, who was willing to teach there, and where there was no dependence upon the government for the salary because the local group was able to pay it.

Is this all too linked to economics? Do we forget all the major **social ills** of these communities? Again, almost as a side-effect, these are also tackled. As I mentioned, I visited India last week, and I had meetings with large groups of women. Indeed, in India 98% of the participants are women. It is amazing to see how women stand up in these big groups and speak about issues, like **family planning**, for example, which they verify they have spoken about among themselves. They said that they realize that a large number of children causes an economic problem for them, and so they have decided among themselves that they each will only have two children.

The next issue to discuss was what the women were doing to accomplish their aim? Have they had operations? A number of women stood up and each said that she had had the operation. It was amazing that this issue of population, which is so often considered a very complicated and difficult issue to deal with, had become an integral part of the concern of the community as a whole. In fact, it was tackled in a very concrete fashion.

Considering **education**, is there a gap between the literate and the illiterate? Were the literate people the ones who were leaders and who dominate the process? The answer is no. I saw many groups where the illiterate women were the leaders, that is, the elected presidents or chairpersons. At the same time, there is a realization that education is important, and so there were many instances where they started literacy classes among themselves. They want to take loans, and they don't want to give their thumb-prints. That is the first motivation, since they want to sign for themselves; so they want to become

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literate. Over time, they also manage basic numeracy. It is very amazing to see many women who are not at all trained are in fact very successful at business.

Child marriage is a very exciting issue. As many of you know, in India it is not at all uncommon for girls to be married as of the age of twelve, and to become pregnant soon afterwards. I saw groups of girls between the ages of twelve and eighteen who gathered every day to discuss topics of relevance to them. They told me that they had decided that they would not tolerate being married under the age of eighteen. I asked how they accomplished that? One father admitted sheepishly that he had had offers to marry his daughter, and he was greeted with protests. He replied that he was going to do it anyway, to which they replied that they would go to the police, since it is illegal to marry below the age of eighteen. So he backed off.

Child labour is discussed very openly in these groups, and they said that it is often linked to education. Therefore, by initiating education programs in our groups, and in particular, by initiating pre-school education and also education for drop-outs, automatically the motivation of parents to keep their children educated is enhanced and the motivation to set them to do child labour or ...[note]³

The poor often do not know how to access government programs. They find it cumbersome to fill out the forms, to go to the offices, and probably they do not take the red tape in these offices very well. One of the key accomplishments of these groups is to create their awareness, as a community, of how to approach and benefit from government services. We avoid divisions between our groups and the local government, because a division could be explosive in the long run. Therefore, we make efforts to ensure that the local chairperson of the *Punchayad Raj* (village organization) cooperates actively, and that the elected representatives become a part of the movement; and we let them take some of the credit for successes.

Finally, the issue of **upscaling and mainstreaming**. The overall results are quite encouraging. We now have approximately 250,000 members of these groups. This is not small in absolute terms, but it is a drop in the ocean compared to the number of poor in South Asia, which exceeds 500,000,000. So the issue then, is how to scale this up. One key would be to organize access to other sources of capital, from the government and from banks. This is an area on which we are now working. There are a number of policy issues which make it difficult sometimes to access capital from government, which I will not dwell upon now.

To what extent are the governments interested in scaling this up? To what extent do they support this approach? Generally, the reaction has been very positive. In Nepal, there is a government decision to increase access from seventeen to forty districts. In Bangladesh, the Prime Minister just visited the area three weeks ago, and established a steering

³ Unfortunately, there was a short break in the audio tape recording Mr. Karcher's remarks at this point. The UNDP website for the program that Mr. Karcher was explaining, including a report concerning UNDP work on poverty in India, is at: <http://www.undp.org.in>

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committee with ten federal secretaries aimed at scaling this up. In India, this is also the policy of the government of the State of Andhra Pradesh, which itself has 70 million inhabitants.

To close, let me underline once again that the key to this program is **empowerment**. One can see that the dependence of women and men on landlords and money lenders has been significantly reduced. One can feel there is a new spirit of self-confidence and pride, and that is perhaps the most important aspect. This morning one speaker from the floor expressed the view that aid is only relative. I do not share this view, since there are some exceptions, and there are also some rays of hope.

Mr. Karcher is Chief of Country Operations Division of Regional Bureau for Asia & the Pacific for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in New York City, U.S.A.

Note: *Mr. Karcher changed locations with the UNDP from New York to Nepal soon after the Poverty Forum, and therefore was not able to correct or add to his transcribed remarks. He gave permission to John Argue to edit or explain what was missing from his remarks. John added these endnotes.*

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Denise Nadeau

Listening to Poor People Organizing

I'd just like to preface my remarks by saying that I am speaking here as an ally of the anti-poverty movement. I work as a popular educator in the women's movement, the labour movement, and in ecumenical social justice circles. I come to the issue of policies and programs, not as a policy expert, but as someone who has been part of educating and organizing against impoverishment and for social justice for many years.

I have three assumptions underlying my analysis of "programs and policies that work for poor people" – the theme of this panel.

The first is what we mean by poverty. "Poverty" is a term that appears neutral, a state, a way of defining people in terms of scarcity or what they lack, a term which ignores all other reality or values of people, who they are or want to be. I prefer the word *impoverishment* because it includes agency; it acknowledges that poverty is connected to injustice and exploitation. It does not assume that poverty is the result of lack of education and training and that if we just give people these, and motivate them, they will no longer be poor. In an unfettered free market economy, impoverishment, exploitation, is built into the logic of the system. The rich become richer at the expense of the poor, because they can accumulate wealth without limits.

It also helps to be specific about who the impoverished are. They include the unemployed, those on social assistance in countries with social welfare, minimum and low-wage workers, migrant workers, domestics, aboriginal peoples, refugees and recent immigrants, landless peasants, communities victimized by racism, students, the homeless, the mentally and physically disabled, and the displaced middle classes. With corporate globalization the number of women in all these categories is increasing, while cutbacks in social programs are also increasing women's unwaged labour in the home and community.

My second assumption involves how I understand history. I see history as that of cycles of struggle. For instance, here in North America the sixties and seventies were an up-cycle – workers and the impoverished wrestled large concessions from capital to improve the social wage and workers' rights. Peoples' struggles were central to these gains. Black women led the National Union of Welfare Rights in the U.S.; in Toronto the Mother-Led Union pressured the state that women on welfare should get the same wages as foster parents (hence pushing up welfare rates); and in Quebec welfare rights groups, or "militantes populaires", won many victories for social assistance recipients based on a conscientization program around welfare rights as human rights.

The eighties and nineties can be seen as a down-cycle – with capital striking back with economic restructuring, which was also an attack on women and workers who had made

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some gains in the previous decades. Whether we are beginning another up-cycle remains to be seen, but this gathering, and all the other anti-APEC organizing happening here this week, is a positive sign of the growing strength of “globalization-from-below” – a term which is now being used to describe the linking of popular struggles internationally in the fight to create an alternative to the neo-liberal global corporate agenda.

My third assumption is about APEC. APEC will in no way benefit the marginalized, the impoverished. It will only increase impoverishment. Engaging with APEC, trying to wrestle social clauses that protect labour, the environment, and economic and social rights, is not only a strategy that takes away energy from people’s struggles, but if successful, may actually limit the scope of people’s movements within these countries to fight for better conditions.¹ As well, such clauses could be used by the richer countries against the poorer ones to protect the richer ones’ interests. Our experience of the environmental and labour sidebars in NAFTA is that these do not work; they aren’t enforceable and are ignored. It also makes no sense to argue for protections in an economic union whose very definition is to be against any protections that hamper trade. If we are to organize around international protections, they will need to be framed in another forum than the likes of APEC or MAI or the WTO. Lastly, most popular movements in the South are against social clauses – is it not time we listen to them and be in solidarity with their needs as impoverished peoples?

So what does all this mean if we are going to talk about programs and policies that work for the impoverished, that end poverty – rather than just being more services, or training programs for non-existent jobs that increase feelings of worthlessness and failure, and often result in increasing poverty? Wolfgang Sachs, a German economist, says that “Whoever wants to end poverty should build upon sufficiency”² Now Sachs is speaking in the context of global impoverishment and is challenging development policy that sees “poverty” as the problem and “growth” as the solution. He is talking about economic and community self-sufficiency and self-determination, a goal we are also hearing from southern ecofeminists who challenge the global marketing of food and resources which are destroying and impoverishing millions of people.

How can we translate this concept in the North? Sufficiency means providing for the needs of daily life; building community and alliances; affirming dignity, identity, and culture. It means resisting all homogenization – e.g., the belief that all poor people are the same and that everyone should drink Coke and watch Pocahontas – and affirming people’s diversity. It also means autonomy, that people have democratic control and participation in decisions affecting their lives and are not controlled by the state. It includes the fight for land (when applicable) and culture – what sustains people. Lastly, it

¹ Tadha D’Souza, “Linking Labour Rights To World Trade: Trade or Worker’s Rights”, article on email on gattwd@xorso.ch.planet.gen.nz

² Wolfgang Sachs, “Archaeology of the Idea of Development”, *Envio*, September 1997 (also in *Global Ecology*, ed. Wolfgang Sachs, Zed, 1997)

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means countering the logic of neo-liberalism, promoting values and practices that undermine the logic of profit and competition.

Needless to say, adding a social clause within APEC would not meet any of these criteria. What I'd like to do now is look at some of the programs and policies in North America and Europe that are being proposed by poor people organizing and that are part of actual grass-roots campaigns – as opposed to policy formulated by think-tanks and professional policy makers. I am as interested in these programs, as much for the goals or ends of the campaigns themselves as for how the process of organizing them contributes to building dignity, identity, and a movement.

The Living Wage Campaign in the U.S. is a campaign that is growing and that involves a demand for a wage which is 110% of the U.S. Federal poverty line for four (which is considerably lower than the Canadian poverty line). This is a demand for a minimum wage that is high enough to live on and get basic needs met. It is organized by coalitions of labour, community, religious, and welfare rights groups in different cities throughout the U.S. Early this year a coalition in Minneapolis/St. Paul won the battle to force businesses that receive government funding to create or retain jobs that pay a living wage. The City Council also agreed to prohibit contracting out current city jobs to companies that don't pay a living wage³ I recently talked to an African-American United Methodist minister in Oakland, California, who said their coalition had just managed to pass Measure K, which means that all future policies around children and youth in Oakland will have to be linked with a living wage.

Linked to this campaign has been recent anti-workfare campaigns in New York and San Francisco which link the living wage to the fight to organize workfare workers in unions. Groups like ACORN in New York, which has just had a successful vote of 16,000 to 200 to form a union, and POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights) in San Francisco, are fighting for equal pay for equal work – comparable wages and benefits as other city employees – and equal health and safety protection. The ten year old “Jobs with Justice” coalition, which is a national labour-community coalition in 30 U.S. cities, has become involved with workfare organizing by setting up Workers Rights Boards to involve local community leaders in the fight for workers rights.

All these campaigns are important because they are pro-active, and because they challenge three main prongs of the neo-liberal agenda in an offensive way. Most neo-cons and neo-lib policy people are proposing to reduce or abolish the minimum wage, reduce welfare rates and force people on social assistance into workfare, all measures which will then serve both to lower and to subsidize corporate wages. However, it has now been documented in the U.S. that lowering welfare rates will reduce wages for the lowest 30%

³ *Z Magazine*, July 1997

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by 11.9%⁴ All the above policies increase impoverishment rather than reduce it. The Living Wage Campaign combines the interests of unionized workers threatened by workfare, of people on welfare, and of social justice groups in solidarity, in coalition organizing at a local level which challenges the very logic of the neo-liberal agenda.

Another movement against impoverishment that has recently emerged is Action For A Europe Without Unemployment, Job Insecurity, and Social Exclusion, a loose coalition of progressive unions, welfare rights and community groups. The first European March Against Unemployment, Job Insecurity, and Social Exclusion occurred in June in Amsterdam where 35,000 came from all over the European union to protest the increasing impoverishment of Europeans across the different countries in the E.U. On November 20 a second march was held at the Luxembourg Social Summit to press for the following demands: job creation with a massive reduction in working hours without loss of income; the 35 hour work week; an income giving everyone a decent standard of living – whether salaried, part-time, full-time, unemployed or unemployable.

What is significant about this emerging social movement in Europe, which brings together a wide cross-section of those impacted by neo-liberal economic policies, i.e. the low-waged and the unwaged, is that it is fighting for the restructuring of the work week, a demand that actually can have a significant effect on unemployment. As well the wage demand is similar to, if not more comprehensive than, that of the living wage, again challenging the market logic of creating a huge pool of desperate unemployed and underemployed to drive down wages.

These campaigns, initiated by poor people working with labour and community groups, shed some light on what is now the prominent policy direction that is being taken by most provincial governments and many social policy analysts (including some who regard themselves as progressive) in Canada – alleviating child poverty. Federally this strategy has become the National Child Agenda. This focus on child poverty seems to assume either that these children are orphans or worse – reflecting the poor-bashing ideological framing of current welfare policies – that their parents are so irresponsible that they must be circumvented if the welfare of the child is to be improved. As a result it bypasses the most critical factor in alleviating child poverty – the income of the parent(s). The National Child Benefit, which provides a small amount of money to waged low-income families with children, will not benefit over 60% of Canada's poor children, those whose families are on welfare.

I'm detouring a bit on my topic here to reflect on what kind of policies actually challenge the logic of neo-liberalism. If you look at some of the earlier research behind the National Child Welfare Agenda, reflected in the Report of the Federal Advisory Council on Population Health, there is documentation that shows that where there is a more even distribution of wealth, i.e., less of a gap between rich and poor children, families are

⁴ US Economic Policy Institute, quoted in "US Studies: Welfare Cuts Push Wages Down", *The Long Haul*, December 1997

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healthier.⁵ The population health approach calls for “action on the broader determinants of health”, i.e. reducing socio-economic inequities, and in another document on Determinants of Healthy Child Development, states as its first policy intervention of 24 proposed interventions an incomes policy (for families) which leaves no children under the LICO (Low Income Cutoff Line)⁶ Yet this is conveniently left out of the current proposals. Hence the entire “alleviating child poverty” policy framework easily fits into the neo-liberal agenda, avoiding policies like living wages or higher minimum wages, shorter work weeks, free universal access to 24 hour day care, and job creating – all of which could contribute to ending impoverishment – for “safe” programs like pre-natal supplements for poor mothers.

A third type or model of organizing against impoverishment is Human Rights Organizing – i.e. organizing around impoverishment as a violation of economic and social rights and defending the maintenance of adequate social welfare as a human right. When in April 1996 Canada passed the Canada Health and Social Transfer, ending the Canada Assistance Plan and drastically cutting provincial budgets for social spending, anti-poverty activists fought the legislation on the basis that it violated human rights. In May of 1995 the National Anti-Poverty Group, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and the Charter Committee on Poverty Issues made presentations to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, specifically arguing that the CHST, in ending CAP, violated the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to be free from hunger and the right to work freely chosen. While the committee agreed with the presenters and wrote a letter to Canada, unfortunately there are no enforcement mechanisms to pressure signatory countries to comply with UN conventions.

While we were not able to stop the CHST, human rights organizing remains fertile ground for anti-poverty work. The campaign against the CHST did raise people’s awareness that they had human rights, which is really important in strengthening people’s sense of entitlement and rage. When I was researching this article I discovered that much of the successful popular education and organizing around welfare rights in Quebec in the 70’s focused on human rights⁷ In the US this summer, in Philadelphia, the Kensington Welfare Rights Union organized the Poor People’s Embassy to document human rights abuses against poor people – and organized a march and presentation to the UN in New York. Working through the Internet this group is educating around conditions like homelessness, unsafe living conditions, and women being forced to live with an abuser because of lack of resources, as gross human rights violations. Like many popular educators in Latin America this group is using human rights discourse to also define new rights. Human rights education is also key to the fight for real democracy as people

⁵ “Building a National Strategy for Healthy Child Development” Report of the Federal, Provincial, Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, May 1997

⁶ Clyde Hertzman, “Policy Options for the National Child Agenda”, September 1997

⁷ Gisele Ampleman, et al., *Pratiques de Conscientisation: Experiences d’éducation populaire au Québec*, Nouvelle Optique, 1983, chapitre 2

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realize they are entitled to have a say in determining the conditions of their lives and that they are entitled to humane living and working conditions.

Another significant area of anti-poverty organizing has been the fight against poor-bashing here in Canada. End Legislated Poverty in BC and NAPO nationally have focused considerable educational resources on showing how bashing poor people – blaming the victim – is an essential part of the neo-liberal framework. This campaign has two significant impacts for organizing: it helps poor people feel better about themselves and increases awareness of how the injustices and indignities to which they are subject are part of a broad strategy to undermine the rights of poor people. But it is also critical to the movement to gain allies for poor people's struggles amongst other popular sectors, specifically the labour movement. Often it is the working poor who have most internalized the poor-bashing myths, rather than realizing that it serves the interest of corporate capital to have the workers closest to the bottom resenting and attacking those on the bottom. While we are still far from the type of coalition work occurring in the US here in BC we have had some good examples: the WHOA Coalition – Workfare Hurts One and ALL – an anti-workfare group which includes several unions; the incorporation of economic literacy and education about poor-bashing and impoverishment in British Columbia Teachers' Federation lesson aids and in the Hospital Employee Union's education programs. Both these unions also financially support anti-poverty work and speak out on poverty issues.

A strategy that is slowly gaining ground in anti-poverty organizing is the globalization of struggles, i.e., making global links to develop common strategies and build awareness. Possibly the most ambitious example of this and one to watch in the next few years is the Bread and Roses World March of Women Against Poverty in the year 2000, initiated by the *Federation des Femmes* in Quebec. In 1995 the Quebec women's movement organized a ten day women's march against poverty to the capital of Quebec City. They succeeded in winning 7 of their 9 demands from the Quebec government, the result of a year-long systematic popular education and organizing campaign that won them public support. A year later NAC and the CLC organized a Women's March Against Poverty across Canada, a march which had less success in winning its demands but which managed to raise awareness of women's impoverishment across the country.

As of November 1997 the *Federation des Femmes* have 200 women's groups in 50 countries agreeing to organize a six month local campaign between March 8 (International Women's Day) and October 17 (The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty). Groups will organize a national march, local activities, and will use a popular education process to educate and organize around local demands and global conditions and strategies, as well as the march's two main demands – to fight for the redistribution of the planet's wealth and that women produce only half the planet's wealth (including housework). The next two years leading up to the march are a time for exchanging information and strategies internationally.

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In closing I want to pick up on the theme of the redistribution of the planet's wealth – a key strategy to ending impoverishment. Redistribution can happen through policies like raising the minimum wage and welfare rates to a living wage, recognizing the value of women's unwaged work, providing pensions and social benefits for women's unwaged work, a progressive tax system that includes taxing corporate wealth, monetary policies that lower interest rates, allow inflation and support job creation, immigration policies that allow the free movement of workers and the right to migrate with adequate supports, and trade policies that end free trade and support local sufficiency. Globally many impoverished peoples are fighting for land reform to maintain their self-sufficiency and it is that struggle which is key to their survival as peoples and cultures. Here in Canada a swift resolution to the treaty process and land claims, with a recognition of women's rights within these resolutions, is necessary for securing a land base for First Nations sufficiency.

This has been a brief look at just some of the things that impoverished people are organizing around and for in the context of globalization. What is common to all these struggles is that they are pro-active, they are organizing for a better life rather than just reacting against cutbacks. They all either contain demands or raise critical awareness – e.g. around economic and social rights and poor-bashing – that link sectors and promote alliances. In all these organizing campaigns there is a vision of what would end poverty, build unity, and affirm the dignity of people. If we really want programs and policies that work to end poverty then we should listen to what poor people are organizing for.

Denise Nadeau is a popular educator living in British Columbia in Canada. She has taught courses in popular education and organizing at UBC School of Social Work and Vancouver School of Theology. She currently works as a consultant with labour and women's organizations. Her email address is dnadeau@web.net.

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Marta Torres

Working Together to Confront Poverty

It is good to be here today. I would like to share some aspects of the struggle of the Coca Cola workers in Guatemala twenty years ago.

I shall start by reading parts of a letter by a British trade union. “In 1975, the workers at the Coca Cola bottling plant in Guatemala began a struggle against their employers that was to last on and off for ten years. In the course of that time, three General Secretaries of their Union were assassinated and other members of families and friends and legal advisors were threatened, arrested, kidnapped, beaten, tortured, shot, or forced into exile. The Guatemalan Trade Union Movement is one of the smallest and most persecuted in the world. Astonishingly, STEGAC, the Coke workers’ union, won its battle with one of the world’s most powerful multinational corporations, Coca Cola, thanks to strong support from other Unions within Guatemala, and to a very effective campaign of international solidarity. This is not just a remarkable story of the courage and determination of working people in a distant country. It poses important questions for trade unionists everywhere.”

How did the Coca Cola workers in Guatemala, against all the odds, manage to win substantial concessions from a giant American Company? Why did they receive so much support from other workers in their country? How was international solidarity action mobilized? And why was it so effective? I shall share just a few things today, to try to explain why this struggle that happened twenty years ago is still valid today.

I would say the first reason is because this struggle forced Coca Cola, a powerful corporation, to take the social responsibility that comes with profit. People have been brought into this struggle against corporations for many years, but it is just the beginning. There is much more to do; not only in Guatemala, but in many other countries. That is so, especially with the Multilateral Agreement of Investment (MAI). Corporations cannot have profits only. They need to take the social responsibility that comes with it. To have money, to have power and prestige, is not a license to destroy people as they have done in Guatemala. That should be very clear.

Why is this important in our struggle against poverty? Last year, when I was in Guatemala, one of the workers of the Coca Cola union asked me to go to his home to see how he and his family live now. “Fifteen years ago, there were eleven of us in one room.” Now, the result of union organizing has permitted them to live in dignity. **This was able to happen because the workers believed in themselves and in coming together. We need to believe in ourselves.** We need to believe that we have rights and to know more about those rights, that we are persons, and to defend passionately those rights and freedoms. One of the worst parts of poverty, or impoverishment, has been that we begin

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to believe that we are not persons. We begin to believe that we do not deserve to live with dignity. We begin to believe that it is normal to live that way, and that is not the case.

The other thing that was very important is that those rights were defended, not only passionately, but with a very good sense of humour. People did not give away the power of having fun and of partying and of being together. You cannot give that power away, despite the torture, the killings, and the disappearances. That is part of our spirit. Workers were willing to work very hard, and to take the risks that were needed. The union was taking risks that would affect our lives very deeply, but there was a collective goal. It is important to stress that we can do it only by coming together. That does not mean that we become the same, think the same, act the same, or wear the same uniform. No, it means that we come and work, like a potluck. It means that we bring what we have, our qualities, our gifts. At the same time, by coming together, it helps us to limit our weaknesses and that is very important. Let us make no mistake. One individual, two individuals, won't be able to make it. We have to come together.

Another aspect that is important to mention is that people work together and educate themselves, and try to learn what is going on, which interests were behind the corporation, and how to struggle against it. Also, there was a certainty that no one was going to do something for us. We have to do our part. We need not be afraid to do what we are called to do. It may be difficult, and we tend to feel that we don't know. But at the end, it is like swimming. When you get into the water, it is cold at the beginning, but later on, it is really good to be there.

The other part that the workers said, is that one person is not the union, not even the executive, but it is all of us. We are all responsible for it. That was essential. We worked with our differences. We had difficult times. We had problems. We had tears. And we also were able to work with different sectors. Solidarity was an essential part – national and international. But that was only possible because people worked, and risked. If that hard work, if that sacrifice had not been there, the solidarity would not have come.

It is true that the Coca Cola union in Guatemala has been for us a symbol of our struggle. Coca Cola corporation has also been a symbol for us, representing a lot of pain for many of us. But at the same time, we know that corporations are not all-powerful. They are vulnerable, and they need to be called accountable, and they need to be responsible. They won't do it on their own; they need our help. It was clear for us that the corporation did not care about the workers, and did not care about human rights. There was only the language of money that the corporation spoke. It was economic pressure that forced the corporation to sit and to negotiate at the table. That pressure came from solidarity, from different parts of the world.

It was very moving to see, in cases like Denmark or Sweden, that workers in their bottling plants would stop for fifteen minutes, and their employers would know that the reason was that workers' rights in Guatemala were not being respected.

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We also learned how to use legal tools, and how to use the forums that are there, not just for government, but for people. The context in which this struggle happened, was a context in which not only the corporation but also the power of money and media was against the workers. Which newspaper wanted to publish something about the struggle, if they had advertising from Coca Cola? It was very difficult, but at the same time, people learned.

Last week, I heard Bob Smith from First United Church talking about hope. That is one of the things that we need very much in these times of struggle in these countries. We need hope, and we need the inner freedom to question the situations which are unjust, and not to be afraid. We also need to work for change and be aware that we can only do a small part. It will be other generations that will have to carry on the struggle. At the same time, we need to believe that there are alternatives, and we can wield it.

A long time ago, someone in the Church said that hope had two daughters, anger and courage. What I wish for people in unions and in struggling in different groups and organizations against poverty is that anger be used rightly, with all our potential, and not to destroy, but to build; and the courage to do the work and to take the risks that are needed.

Ms. Torres works with the Christian Task Group on Central America in Vancouver, Canada. She is from Guatemala, where she has experience on poverty and human rights. She was given the MOSAIC award for Human Rights in 1990.

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Group Discussion

Small groups focused on two questions:

- [1]) **“What has been your personal/agency’s involvement with programs and policies to alleviate poverty?”**

Discussion took place generally around the following headings:

A) Advocacy for people’s rights

- advocacy for the rights of women and children
- organizing to save social programs & human rights
- fighting BC Benefits
- providing a food bank through the Unitarian Church
- fighting BC Transit fare increases
- understanding barriers and hearing what impoverished groups want/need
- educating people to lobby

B) Education & public awareness-raising

- helping privileged people to recognize the problems of the poor
- succeeding to fund-raise by encouraging communities to take care of one another
- raising awareness about the utility of organizing and forming coalitions/alliances
- community programming, for eg., on global justice, and reaching out to all classes
- educating people about poor-bashing
- providing education for groups of low-income people
- youth educating other youth about the effects of poverty
- scholarships for deserving students
- schools are working with community representatives to offer a “whole” service, including before and after school,
- inner-city youth in Victoria, for 17 to 24 year olds, have created their own model without government funding, to create programs that include private people and small business, and they have charity status

C) Social integration

- integrate multicultural groups into mainstream society
- community organizing, socio-economic programs
- skills training, self-sustaining projects
- empowering people; building self-esteem
- organizing and strengthening communities, and not separating or labeling “poor” people

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- organizing co-operatives; literacy programs for indigenous people
- housing initiatives in Prince George
- providing support services in the education system
- donations of time, money, clothing, and household items
- programs such as “Night’s Olive” to keep youth off the street
- Youth Advocating Change (YAC) researches concerns, brainstorms needs, and advocates to end youth poverty
- “Dusk to Dawn” overnight youth drop-in
- in Victoria, a coalition of different groups, including churches, youth, housing service providers, business, downtown neighbourhood association, community social planning council, and government cooperated to look at a collaborative way of communicating, providing service, and engaging in economic development
- Hellenic Canadian Congress of B.C. promotes multiculturalism, and also interaction between people and communities
- the HCC has organized a “family project” which helps people get information about language training and available social services

D) International perspectives

- international development experiences, especially village community savings and loans, which empower communities and so make a difference to people’s lives.
- eradicating polio internationally by supplying polio vaccine
- supplying fresh water to poor areas in the Third World
- UN tries to influence policy in grass-roots communities

[2] What lessons can we learn from these examples (both those given by the speakers and participants in the group)?

Numerous lessons were identified:

- solidarity, and mobilization following events such as this.
- the work is painstaking and long-term
- it’s important to set achievable goals in order not to lose commitment
- poverty is a measure that tells us the economy is not working well
- much wasted money could be redirected to help alleviate poverty
- organize to get issues on the public agenda
- listen to the poor: they know the issues best
- it is difficult to organize when struggling to survive
- instilling confidence among poor people, treating poor people equally to others, and not making anyone feel inferior in building a coalition
- self-determination: communities need to determine their own needs
- respect: do not impose outside ideas onto a group
- perseverance: even small contributions can have large effects

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- involvement: immerse yourself in a community
- hope: something can always be done
- motivation & planning
- partnership: more people will produce a stronger result
- hard to effect change when basic needs are not being met
- demonstrate the fact that the poor are not the ones responsible for their poverty – it is governments which are responsible by maintaining high unemployment as an express government policy
- we need to convince the government that corporations pay their fair share of taxes

Panel Three: Strategies for Action

Linda Moreau

Confronting Classism and Poverty

Thanks to the organizers for asking someone from End Legislated Poverty to speak. From the day's discussion, we know what's wrong, we know why it's happening. From now, how do we work together to make it right? I'm talking to you with the expectation that we are all here to learn, and that we each want to do the right thing, that we want to work together and be together in a fair and respectful way.

What I want to do in this time is to talk about oppression, focusing on class oppression. I want to give you some suggestions on how to work and act against class oppression, and I'll end with some actions that End Legislated Poverty has organized, as examples.

About class, we use Statistics Canada's study on the distribution of wealth to start people talking about the issue of class and classism. This study was done in the late '80s and shows that about 60% of Canadians own 12% of the wealth; that would be like what we would call impoverished people and working class people. About 30% of Canadians own about 37% of the wealth, and those would be middle class. And about 10% own 52% of the wealth. And there's concentration as you go up higher, so that 4% of Canadians own about 40% of the wealth. And that's the class system in Canada.

It's new to talk about class, and to educate people about that issue. I liken it to when feminists started talking about sexism. In fact, the word sexism didn't exist until the '60s. Before the second wave of feminism in the '60s it was very common to blame a woman who was raped for her rape. It was common to say, "What were you wearing? Where were you?" With classism, there is the same way of blaming the victim. We're not as developed in our sector, the anti-poverty sector, in talking and educating about this issue. We do a lot of this work, and I am inviting you and urging you to help us develop ways to talk about it, and to educate people about it, and act against it.

I'm just going to say a bit about internalized classism, and then I'll focus most of my talk on how non-impooverished people can be allies to working class and low-income people.

Internalized classism is where you experience the oppression yourself. Let's consider being able-bodied, the oppression would be being disabled. You internalize all the oppressive attitudes that people have in society about disabled people. And this works with classism too. In my own experience, growing up poor, it didn't take me much time to notice my family's position in relation to others was very different, and I had a feeling of inferiority as soon as I went to other people's houses and saw that they had a lot more stuff and a lot more space than we did. And I wasn't very old before I started blaming

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myself and my parents, and feeling ashamed of us. From then I have felt, and been overwhelmed, and controlled and battled with this oppression that I had internalized. The voices of my internalized class oppression say things to me like “You are stupid”, “You can’t read”, “You’ll never be as good as so and so”.

As my friend Rose Brown says, “Internalized class oppression is like going to the beach every day with a winter coat on.” If you feel and think this way, think about and talk about ways to find your pride. Label the feelings and thoughts as soon as you become aware of them and, if you like to read, find books that are positive and celebrate our class.

Now I want to direct my words especially to people who don’t feel internalized classism, who have more privilege. Class privilege in society are things like education and money, and your position where you work. You may not have a lot of money in your job, but you have power over people. Generally, class privilege is like all privilege, race privilege and gender privilege. It is invisible to those who have it. So I challenge you to notice your privilege, to make lists of your privileges, and use them in a responsible way. Don’t ignore them.

I want to say a little about guilt too, because guilt comes into this topic as well. I urge you not to ignore your guilt. It may be your conscience talking. Although I do wonder about me saying this about the value of guilt, because I was raised Catholic, and so I have to watch myself around this. But if you have privilege, you have responsibility. I’m just going to read a little bit from some of the material that we have that helps us talk about these things. Then I’ll tell you about some of the ways that we at End Legislated Poverty work around it, this big issue of class and classism.

Two of the things I’ll read are suggestions for people on how they can equalize the power among us. And I’ll just read a few of these things, because I think they are very valuable. This is especially at meetings, but it’s good for interactions in and out of meetings too.

Don’t interrupt.

Don’t assume that you are more capable.

Don’t assume that anyone is more suited for anything.

Don’t ask others to explain or prove or justify themselves.

Don’t expect others to be grateful.

Don’t take everything personally.

Don’t expect to be trusted.

Don’t try to guess what’s needed.

Do ask questions.

Do take risks.

Do make accessible all information so others can decide if they are interested.

And I have some other suggestions from a great handout that’s for men working with women.

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Limit your time to talk as a fair share.

One of the things that we do in our meetings is to say at the beginning, to work out a set of agreements on how we are going to conduct ourselves, like, I will not interrupt, I will notice if I am speaking more than my fair share of the time, or less than my share, and I'll adjust myself. And you can tell if you are speaking more or less your fair share as, if there's ten people in a meeting, and you are speaking more or less than one tenth of the time. We pick an observation person to help reflect on people's participation. We ask people to volunteer to be observers on the process of meeting, and then during the meeting to reflect on how people are doing.

I'd like to give a couple of examples, before I end, of things that we have done where middle class and working class, low-income people have worked together really successfully.

- 1) One was that instead of having an all-candidates' meeting at the last federal election, we had a federal election fiesta. We had people who were affected by policy – groups that represent women's groups, youths, aboriginal groups, low-income people – to speak to the issues, and we only gave the candidates a couple of minutes to speak. We had games and snacks and a bus for people with childcare. It was a very successful, positive event.
- 2) The other thing we do is have weekend meetings, where we get together people from different locations, like all over Vancouver Island, and talk about classism and barriers to working together. They are like think-tanks for a weekend, where people don't have to worry about child care and food and everything. It's really successful.

I'd like to end by saying that low-income people are in a minority, but there are more people hurt by the corporate agenda than are benefiting from them. So we are in a majority, and our strength is in that, and in knowing that we are right. Thanks very much.

Linda Moreau is an organizer with End Legislated Poverty in Vancouver, Canada.

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Cindy Carson

Organizing against Child Poverty

Campaign 2000 is a national campaign to build support for the 1989 all-party resolution to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000. It is a non-partisan movement to ensure that all political parties commit to national and provincial policies to eliminate child poverty. I'm here today to talk about Campaign 2000 and I think it's really appropriate in this panel when we're talking about strategies, to be talking about this particular topic because it involves action, both on the international level and down to the local level. I'm going to be sharing with you a couple of points and talk about some of the things we've done, whether we have had success or not, and what we have learned.

First internationally, in 1989, we had the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. And that convention was signed by just about every nation in the world, including Canada, and gave children the right to an adequate standard of living for healthy development. In 1990, the World's Summit for Children developed a Plan of Action. They agreed that the fulfillment of the basic needs of children must receive high priority. The plan of action recommends international economic agreements that will benefit children in the families. I wonder if that's getting on the APEC agenda.

Nationally, what happened was after the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child many advocates in Canada lobbied the MPs to take up the matter. They succeeded in getting all parties in the federal parliament to pass a resolution unanimously. The resolution reads that they will seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000. What a victory. But nothing happened. In fact, poverty increased. So back to the drawing board.

Advocates got together. National groups formed a coalition, called Campaign 2000, and the goal was to monitor and promote the resolution. Partners include the Canadian Council of Social Development, the Child Care Advocacy Association, the Canadian Council of Churches, Canadian Mental Health Association, Canadian Teachers Federation and many others. Each year they have released a national annual report card. This report card looks at what's happened in the past year, and what's happened compared to when the resolution was passed. What we've found is that we have many more children in poverty than we did back in 1989. We now have over 1.3 million Canadian children living in poverty.

The group also tried to use as many opportunities to get the message before the media as possible. They developed a video on child poverty. They did lobbying at all levels to all political parties and levels of government and they developed and promoted programs and policies that could be effective in reducing child poverty.

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One of the main initiatives right now is the concept that we call the **social investment fund**. This is a comprehensive approach to ensure adequate income and services for all families. They have estimated what these recommendations cost. We could eliminate, absolutely eliminate, child poverty in Canada, with an investment, an annual investment of seven billion dollars. Now when I hear seven billion dollars, it sounds like a lot of money. But to put it in perspective, if Canadian corporations were contributing taxes at the G-7 average, they would be providing an additional twelve billion dollars in public revenue. Seven billion, twelve billion. I don't understand why we are not doing something about it.

Campaign 2000 has worked hard in coalition building. They've built a network and they are continuing to build a network of national partners and community partners in the provinces. BC has been very active over the years. In the early 90s, a number of groups led by the Social Planning and Research Council did creative public education events, such as partnering with *The Body Shop*. For those of you who don't know, *The Body Shop* is a local business, and together they promoted the theme "Light a fire under the powers that be". They displayed huge posters, they sold T-shirts, they distributed postcards to go to politicians. They did a fantastic job in raising awareness of the issue.

In the last couple of years, under the leadership of First Call: the Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, groups in BC now work together under the banner of BC Campaign 2000. Groups include the BC Teachers' Federation, the Social Planning and Research Council, the Vancouver Richmond Health Board, the BBI Research, the Working Group on Poverty, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, to name a few. And what have we done? The number of strategies that we have taken includes developing what we call the community child poverty action kit. This is a kit that contains a video on child poverty and a little booklet that has some information about, and ideas about what different communities can do. It has been shared by communities across the province, and people have been encouraged to raise the issue in their communities, to raise discussion, and to ask for commitment from their politicians to start working on this issue. We've also developed lesson plans for teachers. We've reached out to all schools and these plans have gone to all schools hoping to reach the young people.

Speaking of young people, we have supported a group of youth to help find solutions to poverty. They call themselves Youth Advocating Change, and they are here today. I want to thank them particularly for joining us today, because this is a very adult-oriented event and young people can bring a lot to help us find solutions.

BC Campaign 2000 also produces an annual report card. In the back, I have some samples so you can have a look at them later¹ We have produced this for the last two years. The 1997 edition is coming out this Thursday, November 27. At 9:30 a.m. it will

¹ BC Campaign 2000 has a website on which the report card is available:
http://www.sunnyhill.bc.ca/first_call/

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be released at BCTF offices. And we are hoping to have a lot of media coverage and to get the word out.

Our goal this year is to try to reach many people that will not normally hear about child poverty, such as business groups and professional groups, etc. And we need your help to get that word out and if you are at all interested in helping, the phone number is (604) 875-3629 or 1-800-307-1212.

So you might ask “Have you been successful?” The answer is yes, and no. Yes, in 1990, child poverty wasn’t on the agenda. But now federal and provincial governments are talking about it, and about what to do. They’ve developed what they call a National Child Benefit, specifically to try to address this issue. No, we still have poverty. It hasn’t been reduced; it’s growing. We need to work on it.

What have we learned in the process? I think there are three things that we’ve learned: it takes capacity building; a specific focus helps, and it takes long-term commitment.

- 1) **Building capacity.** We can’t work on issues as huge and complicated as this issue alone. We need to work together. We need to make partners. We need to work in coalitions. And we need to find resources to be able to tackle these kinds of issues. Part of the success of Campaign 2000 was the ability to obtain funding for a coordinator. Massive change takes massive organization, and we need to have somebody to coordinate all that activity.
- 2) **Special focus.** Campaign 2000 focuses national attention on child poverty. By focusing on child poverty, we are able to focus our energy and to grab the public’s attention. Yet it’s no secret that child poverty is related to all poverty, to housing policy, to fiscal policy, and the list goes on. Our hope and belief is that if we crack this one, we will get movement in the others. But there’s danger inherent in every strategy and the major problem is that there is a danger that others are getting hurt in the process. We have an example of this when the BC government reduced social system benefits to single people, and used the “savings” (they called them) for programs for poor working families. This is unacceptable. Even though our efforts to focus attention on a specific issue have without a doubt been successful, we must also fight against the pitting of the so-called deserving poor against the undeserving poor.
- 3) **Long-term commitment.** Social change does not happen overnight. You have to be in it for the long haul. We’ve been working since 1990 and we still have much work to do. But change does happen. Let me give you an example of our neighbour to the east, Alberta. That province has gone through tremendous cuts that have affected the vulnerable part of the population. They’ve been fighting the deficit. And now that they succeeded, they’re talking about a fiscal dividend and

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what they are going to do with that, where they're going to invest that. When the Premier of that province invited a hundred business people and civic leaders to a meeting to make recommendations, they were almost unanimous. They did not want tax reductions, they wanted to see health, education and social services made a priority. There is hope.

Soon you'll be asked to answer a question "What are you going to do in the next 30 days?" I'd like to suggest one answer to that question that you might want to consider. I'd like to ask for your help in a campaign to help families in BC. Many of you may know that the National Child Benefit is a federal attempt to bring all federal funding and moneys for families together under one umbrella. And what they intend to do is to provide a cheque to all low-income families. But part of that, is that the Provinces expect to take the equivalent amount away from families on social assistance. So the Federal Government is going to say, "Here you are, here's your cheque", and the Provincial Government says, "Well, wait a minute. We provide you with funding already, so we'll take that away." So children and families living on assistance, who are the poorest of the poor, are not going to benefit at all from the National Child Benefit.

We are saying that's not right. We want to do something about that. So we have designed a petition, and those young people I mentioned earlier have those petitions in their hands, and are going to come and share those with you. If you would like to sign the petition, you will be helping us out in terms of trying to fight this, and help low-income families.

While they are doing that, I'd like to share something that came across my desk just recently. It's a poem, and I think some people say that pictures are worth a thousand words. Sometimes a poem says an awful lot, too. I think this is relevant to what we are talking about in all our efforts today. It's called "The Low Road", and it's by Marge Piercy.

*What can they do
to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can
bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can
burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can
take your child, wall up
your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them
from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what refuge you can
but they roll over you.*

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*But two people fighting
back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake dancing file
can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army.*

*Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction,
love, massage, hope, sex.
Three people are a delegation,
a committee, a wedge. With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization. With six
you can rent a whole house,
eat a pie for dinner with no
seconds, and hold a fund raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own
newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand your own media;
ten million, your own country.*

*It goes on one at a time,
it starts, when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they say no,
it starts, when you say We
and know who you mean, and each
day you mean, and each
day you mean one more.*

Thank you.

Cindy Carson is the Provincial Coordinator of First Call, the British Columbia Child & Youth Advocacy Movement, in Vancouver, Canada.

Note: The BC organizing office is named First Call, located at #L408 - 4480 Oak St., Vancouver, BC, V6H 3V4. Telephone is (604) 875-3629 and fax is (604) 875-3669.

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Julian Disney

An International Enabling Environment to Fight Poverty

I want to thank our own organization in Canada, the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW, Canada) for offering me the opportunity to speak. First, I want to give you some background about the ICSW, so that you know a little about the experience on which I am drawing for what I am going to say.

We have existed 69 years, all around the world, and are active now in about 80 countries, mostly developing countries, and we consist of organizations which either work with people who are poor or vulnerable, or actually consist of people who are poor and vulnerable.

We fight over a number of issues, but particularly about issues relating to poverty. I want to refer you to some publications that we produce, and in particular a brochure about social development which we have made available at this conference, so that you may learn more about us.¹

Social Development Summit

We have been particularly active in the last few years in the context of the Social Development Summit, which was held in Copenhagen in 1995. As you probably know, there were three core issues for that summit: poverty, employment, and social integration, or as some of us prefer to call it, “social inclusion”, or at least getting rid of social exclusion. I think, in view of comments made earlier today, it is particularly important to recognize that the second and third of those topics, employment and social inclusion, are crucially linked with poverty. We have tended to see poverty as the principal area of our concern, both in building up to the Summit, and the follow-up from it.

We have also, however, put a lot of emphasis on a fourth issue which emerged from the Summit, and that is the importance in each of the three core areas of creating an enabling environment, and particularly an enabling environment at the international level, which will enable governments, organizations, families, individuals, enabling for all of them to be able to reduce the incidence of poverty amongst their communities and their own families. And I want to come back in a moment to emphasize the importance of the enabling environment, especially at the international level, in fighting against poverty.

First, I think you all will have received some material which is headed the “Message to Manila”, and which is something that we produced, together with other NGOs, at a forum that we organized in Kuala Lumpur, and which took place about two months ago. It was in preparation for a very important regional meeting of Social Welfare and Social Policy Ministers that was held in Manila. After the Social Development Summit, it had been

¹ Social development information is available on the ICSW website: <http://www.icsw.org/>

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agreed, largely at our suggestion, that there should be held every two years, in each region, a meeting of Ministers in the social area to work out what progress had been made. We believe very firmly that it's at the regional, or even the sub-regional level, where there are perhaps six to eight countries that are near to each other, that most of the effective action for follow up, is likely to occur. Therefore, we have put quite a lot of energy into trying to ensure that those meetings are held, and one of the best ones so far has been the one held by the Ministers from the Asia-Pacific region.

Now that is not the same region as APEC. These are the countries on the other side of the Pacific. Of course, since most APEC countries are over there, it has a lot of relevance for the work of APEC. I hope that you will get a chance to look at that Message to Manila, because it was an indication from a forum of NGOs, drawn from about 27 countries, of what they thought were some of the priorities that should be taken forward, in relation to the Summit.

I'll come back to some of them in a moment, but I want to draw your attention to the four priorities at the bottom of the second page, specific targets which we suggested should be focused on.² Now, in each national setting there are hundred of targets, that such and such should be done by the year so and so, or that such and such a characteristic or a phenomenon should be reduced by such and such a date, but they proliferate so much that they end up by not having a great deal of impact. We were very keen to try and focus upon a few, and then really expect the governments, and the inter-governmental bodies to be serious. So we managed to whittle down the list to four. Of course, lots of others are important, but if one does not have some priorities, then one is likely to have no impact at all.

In fact, when the Ministers turned to this task, and they picked up on our proposal, they only added one – they were only a little less disciplined than we were. They have five priorities, the four from us and one other. Now just placing priorities into a document does not achieve very much in itself, but at least it gets Ministers in that region and in this area, to take NGOs a little more seriously in their own detailed considerations amongst themselves as governments, than is sometimes the case. I'll mention a little later why that might be particularly important, and how that might be achieved.

Four Priorities in Message to Manila

We tried to choose four priority outcomes, and those tend to be of particular importance in developing countries. Canada, like my home country of Australia, does not have a very

² The four priorities from the Message to Manila are:

1. Reducing malnutrition by the year 2000 to half the levels in 1990, in every country where it has a significant presence
2. Providing all people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation by the year 2000
3. Providing all people with basic education by the year 2000, with a halving of illiteracy from 1990 levels and an emphasis on female literacy
4. Eradicating absolute poverty by the year 2010

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high level of absolute poverty. Many countries in the region do, and we took the view that that was the highest priority. We tried to address other problems, but we needed to look first at those which were the worst. Now in order to try to achieve those priority outcomes, we looked at three aspects of the enabling environment, which we think needed to be improved at the international level.

The first is the **international economic environment**. I'm not going to talk here principally about free trade, or whatever. That is very important, although I do think that sometimes in discussions about the impact of APEC, and certainly of macro-economic issues, it can be given too overwhelming a priority. There are a lot of other problems that are not just summed up in "free trade".

Perhaps the most significant of all, is **financial deregulation** which has led to the highly destabilizing, rapid and large flows of capital funds around the world. This has deprived governments of much of their ability to respond to the wishes of their own people, rather than to the short-term issues of the financial markets. Now that is something about which we complain a lot, but we don't do the detailed work of thinking how we should address it. I'm pleased to see that in the last few months, I think stimulated by what has happened in South East Asia recently, and also by the very vigorous criticisms made by Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, there is a growing recognition that we cannot continue with the wild, uncontrolled financially deregulated system that we have had for the last 10 or 15 years.

It is ironic, incidentally, that some of the countries which are the greatest success-stories in economic recovery are ones which have rejected that form. Argentina is one of the best examples. The Finance Minister of Argentina is hailed as a hero, because he tied its currency to the U.S. dollar. That has led to a huge increase in the economy and to a reduction in inflation, and a much better circumstance for the people of Argentina, although they still have a long way to go. But that breaches all the principles which have been dominating economic policy-making for the last 10 to 15 years, which is that all currencies should float freely against each another.

We have a saying in Australia that sometimes, "people are mugged by reality", and I think there is a slow-motion mugging by reality going on, and a recognition that the theories of financial deregulation are very damaging for economies and for businesses, as well as for people. So reducing that volatility, and restoring to governments and people some greater degree of control over their own lives is very important. That is not exactly the same point as many of the points being made about free trade and APEC, but I think it's a much more important one. There are a number of detailed ways to address that which are being addressed increasingly by international bodies.

The other aspect of the international economic environment that I want to refer to is **taxation**. I think those of us who are concerned about social welfare and social policy, think of taxation as purely a way to raise money to spend on the programs which we think are important. That is certainly an important part of it. But taxation really has a far more

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profound impact upon the scope and on the gravity of the problems about which we have been concerned. For example, distortions in the tax system which tend to favour types of investment which involve speculation in property, rather than commitment to enterprises which actually make things and provide jobs, have a very big impact. Now, that is an endemic distortion, and is an endemic bias in tax systems around the world – a bias against job-creating activities and in favour of speculative property activities. Most Finance Ministers know it, and don't like it; but they can't move against it on their own.

As a result, we have the kind of thing that if it were a direct payment, the APEC Ministers would be screaming, because it is a subsidy. There are subsidies all over the world, even in the form of tax concessions, to activities that are anti-jobs. Far more attention, both by governments and by NGOs tends to be given to the direct payment of cash subsidies, and not enough to the impacts of distorting tax concessions for these sorts of enterprises. There are many other examples one could add, but I would just urge you to devote some attention to learning a little more about the impact of tax systems on corporate behaviour and individual behaviour, and the ways in which we could try to address them.

I think there's mounting international concern about it. In the European Union, there is growing concern that they need to harmonize these things. For example, to cut out a lot of the loop-holes that enable enterprises to run from one country to another and never pay taxes anywhere, and deprive us of money that we need to pay for programs.

The second area that I want to talk about the enabling environment is the **legal environment**. There's a lot that can be said here, but I'll just mention three things very quickly. The first is the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. This is a U.N. Covenant, which has the same status as the Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, but it is much less known. The United States, for example, is very devoted for pushing political and civil rights, which deals with things like freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, but it has been very antipathetic to the other covenant which deals with things like the right to food and the right to housing, and a right to education, and a right to social security.

Now, that covenant is there; and it is ready to have life and force breathed into it. Canada, in fact, is meant to report next year on it. It is meant to report every few years. Each country has to report on whether it is complying with the covenant. Canada is meant to do that. It did not do a very good job when it reported last time, and I think that would be something that one could focus on, to try to make that a solid indication to the U.N. body concerned about the ways in which your country may fall short. We shall be doing the same thing in other areas where we have members, to try to bring that up.

Now, there are problems also in relation to the International Labour Organization Conventions. Those have force of law, but are frequently ignored. Although they should not be imposed too severely, I think sometimes they can be used as weapons by relatively well-to-do workers, in relatively comfortable countries, to in fact restrict the opportunities unfairly for developing countries to be competitive through somewhat lower wage rates,

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and less generous conditions. So we have to be very careful how we use that. But I do think that it is important.

The third area of an enabling environment that I want to mention is the **political**, and this is perhaps the most important. Therefore, I shall make that the last item to deal with. I want to emphasize particularly regional interaction between governments and between NGOs. It seems to me there's a lot of talk generally about doing things at the global level, or at the national level, but very often at the national level there isn't sufficient power to achieve a degree of control or influence over multinationals, etc. that one needs. On the other hand, at the global level, one is so often so much removed from the particular circumstances of a particular country, that it is very hard to take action which is both specific and appropriate.

So I believe there is a lot to be said for regional bodies that are now emerging with increasing significance. The Association of South East Nations (ASEAN) is one, the South Asian Association for regional Cooperation (SARC) is another, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is another; these are building up around the world, and they are very prominent in the minds of their governments. Much more prominent than the United Nations in most cases, and also in most cases, more prominent than APEC. I believe that it would be very useful for those countries, for the developing countries, and for those of us who are concerned about them, to focus particularly on those sub-regional groupings, where they can get together and develop their own ideas and their own impetus. And then go forth to try to persuade the more powerful countries in the world.

From that point of view, that is one of my main criticisms about APEC, and one of my main doubts about NGOs devoting a lot of time to APEC. APEC is a cross-regional body. It covers three regions – South America, North America, and Asia, and it will be dominated always, I think, by the U.S. and Japan, and later China. It is much better, I think, for many of the less powerful countries to be in groups of their own at first, to get their act together, as it were, and then sally forth and try to fight for their corner.

But the other point I would make about APEC, and I shall finish on this, is that there is at least an equally strong case for two approaches. One is to say let us get APEC to look at matters which are more social, and from a point of view that is more sympathetic to social issues. This has happened a little with the Human Resources Committee, but in general, it has not. As you see with NAFTA, there is a tendency for side-bars and side-clauses. It is all peripheral, and nothing much happens.

Maybe it would be better really to concentrate on a social APEC. We can say to Finance Ministers, "All right, you can have your APEC to play in", but encourage the Social Ministers around the world, and in this region, to build up their own strong interaction. Then, they could be in a stronger collective position, to fight what for many of them is a very similar battle with the Finance Ministers. Just as Finance Ministers around the world

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have a lot in common with each other, so do Social Policy Ministers. We may do better, instead of all of us being a boil on the fringe of APEC, as it were, we may be better to try to build up a social APEC.

The seeds of that are in this post Social Development Summit process. With these meetings which are now to be held every two years, on a regional basis between Ministers of Social Development, I think if NGOs work to encourage them and to build up their effectiveness, that may be at the very least an extremely important adjunct to working in relation to APEC, and it may very well be more constructive.

Julian Disney is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Council on Social Welfare. He is also Director of the Centre for International and Public Law, Australian National University in Canberra, Australia.

Note: *Mr. Disney was not able to edit his remarks due to other work commitments. John Argue added these endnotes in lieu of being able to append the material to which Mr. Disney referred in his remarks.*

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Group Discussion

The groups concluded by focusing upon this question:

“What is one key statement about poverty you want conveyed to the APEC leaders?”

[A] *Some groups decided to meet together and agreed on the following statement:*

Whereas poverty shows the failings of the market system,
And whereas governments and the people are the only mechanism which has the power to eradicate poverty,
And whereas developed countries have obtained much of their wealth at the expense of the developing countries,
And whereas the failure to eradicate poverty could be destabilizing to all members of APEC.

THEREFORE we recommend that a concrete plan be developed for the eradication of poverty,
And we recommend further that APEC members commit to the implementation of targets adopted by delegates from NGOs which met before the meeting of APEC leaders in Manila in 1996 and affirmed those targets in a Message to Manila:

- Reducing malnutrition by the year 2000 to half the levels in 1990, in every country where it has a significant presence
- Providing all people with access to safe drinking water and sanitation by the year 2000
- Providing all people with basic education by the year 2000, with a halving of illiteracy from 1990 levels and an emphasis on female literacy
- Eradicating absolute poverty by the year 2010

[B] *The other groups suggested various statements:*

- Think about the poor when you make your decisions. We will give you the right to make a profit – if you prove to be socially responsible, and we are part of who determines how to be socially responsible!
- The rich becoming richer and the poor poorer demands development of means for a more just distribution of the world's wealth.

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- Poverty exists. Since it is not going away, do not ignore it.
- There are long term costs for everyone, including the corporate world.
- Poverty excludes 2/3 of the population and we will continue to resist this social exclusion
- Put people first before economic development, because it is people who make the economy happen
- Governments should be accountable and responsible for a decent living income, regardless of whether or not a person is working
- Companies must be accountable to the government and to people through a fair taxation base, which includes the taxation of financial markets
- The formation of a people's tribunal and/or a people's based commission which would encourage and collect the voices and experiences of people experiencing human rights violations by the Canadian government, by companies, and by transnational companies. These voices and experiences could then be used both/either to take action (direct or indirect) against governments by the people, and/or to lobby the government. These voices and experiences would also be compiled at the local, municipal, federal governments and taken to the federal and international level of government

Questions and Answers

There were questions and answers after each panel. The following highlights a selection of all the questions and answers to add to the themes developed by the speakers during the panel presentations.

Questioner: Is the chief barrier to poverty capitalism itself?

Gideon: I don't believe that the abolition of capitalism is really on the agenda, at least for the short or medium term. I also do not believe that it is right to say that it is capitalism that is the problem, because as I explained, we made great advances in reducing poverty in Canada under capitalism in that whole period between the 1930s and the 1980s. The lack of political will to eradicate poverty is the real problem now.

In fact, it is becoming clear that the destruction of social programs is threatening the middle class, both because of the possibility of unemployment, and because of the destruction of the education system on which the middle class has to depend for its survival through successive generations. The hope for the future that I see is that there is a basis for forming coalitions of the Left and Centre, between parties or within parties, to replace the coalition of the Right and Centre that is governing now.

As for the less developed countries, the problem is that the majority status of the poor does not penetrate into political action because the governments are undemocratic, and military power is waged against the poor. The only hope there is that the direction in which this forum is working, that is, against the undemocratic character of these regimes, is the direction in which to go.

Questioner: Is there something for us outside our free market system, for example, taking note of Gandhi's strategy of having all the people of India stop buying textiles from England and to encourage Indians to weave their own clothing?

Sunera: In regard to the relationship of capitalism to poverty, I have argued that poverty is an inevitable consequence of how economic policies are being implemented today. When we organized the Women's March against Poverty, the most popular slogan was "Women want justice, not charity!" I think that movements have fought very hard for rights to democratize our political systems, and to even democratize our economies.

It is very important to know that these are fundamental rights that we are speaking about and that we call on governments to uphold and to support. One of the ways that the Right has been very effective in Canada has been to shift the debate from the language of rights to a language of consumers having choice, and to charities having to pick up the rest.

Questioner: If we boycott goods from places where people are growing crops for cash, to

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lead people to use that land for their own produce, do you think that would help?

Denise: I think boycott campaigns should be part of a larger strategy, by which we listen to what the workers who would be affected by it say about a boycott.

Marta: I think that boycotts, like strikes, should be used very carefully, and as a last resort. I think it is crucial to have the agreement of the workers who are affected by them.

Questioner: What do the organizers mean by “absolute poverty”?

Julian: There are endless debates and definitional disputes about it, but it is used here mainly to distinguish it from “relative poverty”. Some people define it as having only one U.S. dollar per week, and so very low income. Basically, it would mean the inability to have sufficient income for food and shelter. In contrast, relative poverty would describe most poverty in Canada or Australia, and that would be poverty relative to the prevailing income levels of their community. Absolute poverty is not relative to the income levels of a community – it is a basic level around the world.

Appendix 1: Presentation by Viola Thomas¹

Indigenous People and Poverty

First of all, I would like to “thank” the Coast Salish people for allowing us to hold this gathering within their territory. On the topic “People vs. Poverty: Who Will Win?” I say, No one will win – because we need to deal with poverty and our definition of poverty on every level. Furthermore you cannot have poverty without people because it is the people who define poverty.

If you look at the definition of poverty according to the Oxford Dictionary, it states: **poverty n.1 being poor: want. 2 (often foll. by *of, in*) scarcity or lack. 3 inferiority, poorness.** When you explore the definition of poor, again in the Oxford Dictionary, it states: **poor adj. 1 without enough money to live comfortably. 2 (foll. by *in*) deficient in (a possession or quality).** In the Aboriginal context, poverty or the present definition of poverty did not exist, for our riches were not based on material gain or monetary gain, for our richest resource was the well-being and health of the people. If the well-being of the people (I mean spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally) was suffering then you were considered poor.

Ours was based on sharing the resources of the land, “mother earth” for the benefit of all. Everything we needed in order to survive “came from mother earth”. I would like to know, when did we lose the ability to value a human life? For the Aboriginal people, the Indigenous Peoples of this land, our poverty began with the invasion of the Europeans to our continent who brought with them their Western ideologies. It was an ideology that centered around material gain at the cost of the well-being of the people – for a human life would be sacrificed and could be sacrificed for the benefit of another. When and where did the newcomers to this land lose the ability to value another human’s life? Where do they get this false sense of authority and privilege to govern over an entire nation?

The “doctrine of discovery” is a false legal term perpetuated by the courts and legal system. It has deceived the people of British Columbia, especially the Indigenous People of this country and particularly this province. Our situation is no different than what has been experienced by Indigenous People the world over – they too have been forcibly relocated. And why? For some obscured notion of progress. As Aboriginal people we still maintain – we are the Indigenous Peoples of this land and yet, we are continually dragged before the courts to prove so to this so-called democratic government – that we still maintain guardianship over the land because it is from the land that we were created. Christian ideologies did not recognize this belief and viewed us as less human for they say we lack a “soul”. Furthermore, we the First Peoples of this land were not recognized

¹ Viola Thomas was scheduled to participate in the introductory panel of this Forum. Since she was unable to attend, Ms. Thomas has forwarded the remarks she would have delivered to the Forum for this report.

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as citizens in this country and were only given the right to vote in 1960, that is, only 38 years ago!

Only those who volunteered their services for war were given the right to vote, but the price they paid was enfranchisement and to denounce their claim to their Aboriginal ancestry. This is ludicrous when you consider these men and women laid their lives on the line, so that the peace of this land may be preserved. The irony is that we the Indigenous Peoples of this land did not have the luxury of relocating elsewhere. This land is our home! Generation after generation of our ancestors are buried in the soil of this land from which we originated.

May I suggest, the real principle that must be articulated to the people of Canada is that we the First Peoples have “allodial title” to the land. In essence “allodial title” is a belief that title to land is not derived from the church or state, but rather from the God (or “Creator” as is the preferred term in an aboriginal context). Allodial title is based on the premise that “the Alod is the hereditary estate derived from primitive occupation.” (Stubbs 1875, Murray 1888:236),* and the hereditary rights as pertaining thereto are “the same privileges and allodial rights as had been enjoyed by the original proprietors’ (Carte 1747,* Murray 1888:237)”, *ibid.*, pp.10-14.

Understanding the beliefs of the Indigenous Peoples explains why Indigenous Peoples continue to state that “these lands are not for sale”. The structure of land ownership brought by England, including Canada within its domain, is a totally forced foreign concept. It is not allodial, but rather feudal whereby certain lords became the “landlords” of estates of the Crown. Who is the crown? Kings and Queens were believed to hold the root title. Here the belief is based on God selecting the King, or Queen as the case may be, to own the land.

Based on “allodial aboriginal title” you cannot own the land, the land owns you; hence the aboriginal belief that we, according to the Creator and his teachings, are the caretakers. Neither the British nor the present government recognizes this aboriginal belief. The “terra nulla” theory as exerted by religious leaders and governments and set out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 did not apply because it was based on acquiring vacant land. This land was not vacant, it was occupied by a diverse population of Aboriginal people. We did not have the written word of the Gods, what we had was the spoken word of countless generations, yet we were considered as incomplete humans, as we were thought to be lacking a “soul” and could only be granted a “soul” if we converted to Christianity.

Within the Charter of Human Rights everyone has the fundamental freedom of religion and belief of conscience, how can a double standard exist to assert that Aboriginal people of this land are not entitled to our belief that encompasses the concept of “allodial title”? We continue to fight to have our rights be recognized in international law to assert

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“allodial title” and to have the “spirit of intent” of the treaties confirmed and complemented consistent with allodial title.

We agreed to live side-by-side for we come from a culture that survived based on the tradition of sharing. We did not give up our rights to our land, and why would we if our land and fruits of our land meant survival? We did not agree to give up the right to speak our language or practice our teachings and maintain the same rights extended to all immigrants to Canada who brought with them their languages and cultures. We never agreed to sell out or become homogenized by ethnocentric, imperialistic European ideologies.

We and our ancestors have seen multitudes of immigrants come to this country, Canada, with the hopes of finding a better life, free from terrorism and inequality. The terrorism and inequality experienced firsthand by some of you in this room is no different from the terrorism experienced by the Indigenous Peoples of this land. The changing face of the world with free trade agreements and the so-called global economy is essentially perpetuating the colonization process of Indigenous Peoples throughout the world, in this case the benefactor is the rich and the poor are punished. Because as the old saying goes, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer”. It is not only an issue of systemic racism enacted through legal manipulation to define “sovereign rights” of Indigenous People all over the world. The other barrier is the total extraction of all resources from all Indigenous People’s lands.

The diversity of Indigenous Peoples is quite evident in the province of British Columbia and is reflected in the 29 Indigenous nations that exist here. In British Columbia only two treaties have been signed, Treaty #8 and the Douglas Treaty, and when you speak to our elders, they will tell you this government has never been honourable in implementing the intent of the treaties. If you ask what programs have worked to address “people vs. poverty” I dare to say, “none”. The sooner this government succeeds in getting our leaders to sign on the dotted line the sooner they can begin the exploitation of our resources.

When you look at the situation of the majority of Indigenous Peoples of this land it is a pitiful sight. Once proud distinctive nations, we are now pressured by virtue of the Indian Act of defining who is an “Indian” and within the Indian Act there are 29 definitions. There is no other race of people subject to an Act. In fact, the implementation of the 1876 Indian Act parallels the apartheid system in Africa. It is the Indian Act and through this enactment of legislation that our own forms of self-definition and governance and relationship to the land have been eroded and it is no better than cultural genocide. So let’s call it what it is and stop pretending it is not happening in Canada.

When this government and courts even consider compensation to huge corporations like Skeena Silos, I have to ask, where are their priorities? It surely is not with the people. When will this government put boundaries on these huge conglomerate corporations? When all the land is gone, when all the resources and rivers dry up and they are only left

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with their money to eat! The right to food is a necessity. Take food away, along with the basics of air, water and shelter, and there is no telling how a human being will respond. It is evident on the streets of this city, Vancouver, hidden from the eyes of the world leaders under the guise of security. Come on, now you can't tell me that this government and APEC member countries can sink millions of dollars to put on an elaborate show for the benefit of these so-called influential world leaders, and yet deny basic needs to its own people. In a true democratic society which this country professes to be, the people are the government and in essence hold the power.

Then what is wrong with this Canadian picture? Can you imagine if every minority and underprivileged citizen was encouraged and educated about exercising their right to vote in an election? What a different picture we would be faced with today! The reality is the apathy of the entire situation. It has gotten so bad in this country that people have become disillusioned and apathetic to the whole process of democracy and this government is doing nothing about it. When the *Vancouver Sun* printed the results of a recent municipal election, the Westside had the greatest turnout. Who lives in the Westside? I can assure you it is not the poor people; they couldn't afford it.

Numbers provided by Alan Twigg in *The Province* on September 19, 1997, reflect the imbalance and issues of poverty. Number of countries whose per capita income is dropping: 93. Number of billionaires whose net wealth is 1.5 times greater than the combined national incomes of the world's 48 least developed countries: 10. Number of people experiencing chronic undernourishment: 800 million. Amount required for a global anti-poverty campaign to provide basic social services: \$80 billion. Number of billionaires whose net worth equals this amount: Seven. Number of children aged 5 to 14 active in the workforce, many of them in the sex trade or industrial jobs: 250 million. Number of children working full-time: 120 million. Amount spent annually subsidizing power stations that worsen global warming: \$100 billion. World's military spending in 1994: \$767 billion. World's per capita military expenditures in 1994: \$134. These figures represent the inequalities and imbalances.

When Premier Glen Clark was at the Richmond Centre to launch Asia Pacific Connections² he was quoted in the *Richmond News* when asked: Would First Nations people benefit from the APEC summit? His response: "Aboriginal people have huge potential," he continued, "specifically when it comes to the lucrative business of selling aboriginal art to Japanese visitors. A possible aluminum smelter plant in Prince Rupert could also bring jobs to native people." he added. Now is it not ironic when walking through "Gastown", one of the most highly promoted tourist hot spots, you will see who benefits from the sale of aboriginal art? It is not the Aboriginal people. They receive a measly percentage of the profits to the benefit of non-aboriginal entrepreneurs. Not to mention most art work produced by Indigenous People require natural resources, such as

² Asia Pacific Connections was the name for a regional tour during Canada's Year of the Asia-Pacific in 1997, sponsored by the British Columbia Government to educate youth about the economic, trade, cultural, and career opportunities for them in the Asia-Pacific region.

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fur and trees, and when does Premier Clark expect Aboriginal artists to get the natural fibres and furs needed when he is selling it all off?

He mentions the possible smelter plant in Prince Rupert and nowhere does he mention the consultation with Indigenous Peoples. The Carrier Sekani Tribal Council is very angry at the sellout of the Nechako River in the recent agreement struck between Alcan Aluminum and the B.C. government. First Nations were not consulted on the 1950, 1987 and 1997 agreements. The B.C. government has a fiduciary responsibility, under the Supreme Court of Canada law, to consult with First Nations regarding Aboriginal rights. The right to fish falls squarely in the middle of these rights, Carrier Sekani peoples have depended on the fish for their sustenance for untold generations. This deal, along with the previous deals, was made behind closed doors without any type of public input. This should make all British Columbians upset, particularly the downstream users of the Nechako River.

Who is benefiting from this deal? The B.C. government, by this recent agreement, has carved in stone Alcan's right to sell power to the United States using Nechako River water. Again, the money trucks line up to haul away our resources while our land and life slowly die. All individual and community efforts to promote economic stability will suffer severely unless there is complementary change to the economic opportunities available for Aboriginal people. The second priority includes dramatic improvements in the living conditions and community's infrastructures. More critical is the tools and the skills. Aboriginal people need to be involved at every step of the process, so in the long run we are self-determining on our terms. We require time to acquire the skills for business enterprise and a critical dimension in the area of human resources. In order for Aboriginal people to participate in the labour force we need long term training and employment strategies. Social assistance funds could be used to promote greater self-reliance rather than the historical dependency.

In summary, education and employment are key areas for the foundation for self-determination to take place. The imperialist ideologies of individualism that government is forcing us to accept must be replaced with our collective responsibility to individuals, families, communities, nations and the land. As long as the profit principles overrides the dignity of people, we will continue to see the systematic discrimination which perpetuates the genocide of Indigenous Peoples; the dehumanization of others and the continued exploitation of "mother earth" and all her children, particularly the unborn.

Note: Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal are used in the same context.

Ms. Thomas is President of United Native Nations in British Columbia, Canada.

Appendix 2: Agenda

Poverty Forum at People's Summit

November 21, 1997

9:00 a.m.	Opening
9:10 a.m.	Introductory Remarks: Holly Whittleton
9:15 - 10:00 a.m.	Panel: Key Barriers to Ending Poverty? Sunera Thobani, Professor, Simon Fraser University, Women's Studies Gideon Rosenbluth, Professor, University of British Columbia, Economics Chair: Shashi Assanand, President, Immigrant & Visible Minority Women of B.C.
10:00 - 10:15 a.m.	Questions
10:45 - 11:00 a.m.	Break
11:00 - 11:30	Group Discussion
11:30 - 12:00 a.m.	Panel: What Programs/Policies have Worked? Henning Karcher, United Nations Development Program Denise Nadeau, Popular Educator Marta Torres, Christian Task Force on Central America Chair: Eva Robinson, Executive Director, Social Planning & Research Council
12:00 - 12:15 a.m.	Questions
12:15 - 1:15 p.m.	Lunch
1:15 - 2:00 p.m.	Group Discussion
2:00 - 2:45 p.m.	Panel: Strategies for Action? Julian Disney, President, International Council on Social Welfare Cindy Carson, Campaign 2000 Linda Moreau, End Legislated Poverty Chair: Darlene Marzari, International Council on Social Welfare, Canada
2:45 - 3:00 p.m.	Questions
3:00 - 3:15 p.m.	Break
3:15 - 4:00 p.m.	Group Discussion
4:00 - 4:50 p.m.	Report Back
4:50 - 5:00 p.m.	Closing

Appendix 3: Plenary Report

November 22, 1997

The Forum was sponsored and organized by the Working Group on Poverty (WGOP) in British Columbia's (B.C.) Lower Mainland, the International Council on Social Welfare, and also by the Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C.

It opened with a blessing and prayer from Bob George, one of the indigenous elders from the land where the People's Summit is taking place.

The Forum attracted 250 delegates, representative of most of the APEC countries, including about 50 international delegates, and also including young and older people and a wide representation of persons from around B.C., and some from across Canada.

Speakers focused their comments from both an international and a Canadian perspective in three panels upon:

- key barriers to ending poverty
- what programs/policies have worked to end poverty?
- strategies for action

Small group discussions, following the panel presentations, discussed ideas for strategies, and also about cooperating among delegates and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) after the conclusion of this year's Summit.

These suggestions and ideas are being drawn together for a report which the Working Group will mail to all the participants of the Poverty Forum, and which we shall also make available to the Summit's delegates on the Virtual Summit.

Discussion

Poverty exists in every APEC country and is very prevalent in some of them. A substantial increase in poverty will result from the financial crises which have now hit several of the Asian member countries. On the other hand, there is an ample supply of resources within individual countries and in the APEC group as a whole to eradicate poverty. What is lacking is the necessary commitment from governments and reasonable cooperation from the business sector.

The Forum noted that every APEC member attended the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 which committed itself formally to the goal of eradicating poverty throughout the world. However, very little progress has been achieved on that pledge.

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The Forum's participants agreed that it is essential that the fight against poverty be placed at the top of governments' agendas, and is focused on specific priority outcomes. Participants agreed that the people's Summit urge APEC to adopt the specific targets for reducing poverty by the year 2000 which were endorsed recently by more than fifty Social Development Ministers from the Asia Pacific region when they met in Manila to discuss implementation of the Copenhagen agreements. Those targets include, for example, specified reductions in absolute poverty, infant mortality, and malnutrition, and also improvements in life expectancy and access to basic education.

The Forum agreed that these targets will not be achieved unless the heads of government gathered in Vancouver take personal responsibility for doing so, and then require all of their Ministers, especially their Finance Ministers, to help them to honour that commitment. In addition, APEC should schedule implementation of the Copenhagen agreements as a major agenda item for discussion at its next two meetings leading up to the United Nations' review of implementation scheduled for the year 2000.

Participants agreed that the People's Summit should urge APEC members to cooperate to create an international environment which helps to reduce poverty rather than to create it. This applies to the economic environment, to the legal environment, and to the political environment.

For the economic environment, participants agreed that a very high priority is to reduce the volume and volatility of speculative international financial transactions. The excessive large and sudden rushes of funds between currencies, often on the basis of misinformation or misjudgement, are extremely damaging to long-term productive investment around the world and cause great hardship to individual countries and people. They represent not a market at work, but a casino at play, where the operators are playing not with chips but with other people's lives.

Another high priority economically is to reduce excessive tax competition between countries which operates currently to discourage long-term investment, in both the public and private sectors, in the kinds of productive activities that will provide goods and services that the community needs, and also jobs for its members. It also deprives governments of revenue which they need badly to help strengthen their communities and economies.

For the legal environment, a high priority is to ratify and enforce the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. These rights – relating to essentials such as food, housing, education, and work – are denied to many tens of millions of people throughout APEC, including in those countries which are loudest in their insistence on other important human rights such as freedom of assembly and of speech. Yet little or no attention is given to them; indeed, attempts have been made to weaken them in recent years.

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Another high priority is to achieve full ratification and enforcement of core conventions of the International Labour Organization in relation to matters such as the right to organize and bargain collectively, child labour and forced labour, and prevention of discrimination. The provision of work opportunities for all is important but it must not be achieved at wage levels which are below the poverty line. However, great care must be taken to ensure that people in developing countries are not deprived unreasonably of their ability to attract work opportunities from other countries.

For the international political environment, regional intergovernmental bodies should play a more prominent role in fighting against poverty. This includes, for example, the long-established Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Pacific Forum, as well as emerging regional networks such as Mercosur. Closer interaction and cooperation at this level, between countries which are close together and in broadly similar circumstances, is much more likely to benefit the less-affluent countries and people, than is an ill-assorted multi-region group such as APEC which is dominated by a few major economies.

Agreement

Everyone in the Forum agreed that the focus of APEC simply on economics, and not upon the distribution of wealth and resources, and not upon the protection of human rights, is fundamentally wrong.

Everyone agreed that individual persons are not responsible for being impoverished, and that it is just unacceptable that the rich across this country are getting richer, and the poor poorer.

People who are poor in Canada are a minority of our population. However, the more important distinction is that a majority of Canadians, not just the minority of persons who are impoverished, do not benefit from APEC. They also do not benefit from the narrow economic focus of Canadian governments. Therefore, solidarity among the majority of Canadians, whose concerns are not being met, is crucial in order to change the decisions being made in the interests of rich people primarily.

Heads of government throughout APEC must assert personal responsibility for their countries adopting specific targets to reduce poverty by the year 2000.

Action

Therefore, the Forum's participants agreed that people's/community organizations in APEC countries will cooperate to:

- Expand the coalition of groups and people who are opposed to the narrow focus of APEC on economics.

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- Urge their heads of government to honour their countries' commitment in Copenhagen to eliminate absolute poverty.

And, people's/community organizations in Canada, in particular, will cooperate to:

- Priorize public education about poverty issues, so that eradicating poverty will be on the public agenda, and that myths which feed poor-bashing will just not be tolerated.
- Demand that the Canadian Government live up to its commitment to eradicate absolute poverty in this country, and especially, to eradicate child poverty by the agreed target year of 2000 A.D.
- Demand action by the provincial government here on Canada's west coast to change the legislation that keeps people impoverished, and also makes it more difficult to escape from poverty