

# A NEW LOOK ON POVERTY

Claude Snow, March 1, 2005

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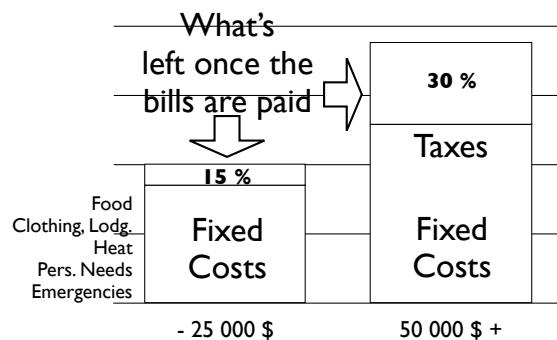
## The fate of the poor

- They often have physical or functional limitations.
- They have little control, autonomy or freedom.
- They are rarely considered on an individual basis.
- They are often seen as abusers of the system.
- We make moral judgements and attack their character, thus avoiding to hear their suffering.
- The closer the poor are, the less we see them.

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## A small income offers very little leeway



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## WORK AND FAMILY LIFE

- The longer the hours of work needed to reach the Poverty Line, the harder it is to work and maintain an enriching family life.
- In NB, family of 4, on minimum wage = needs to work 101 hours per week to reach the Poverty Line.

Source Canadian Institute on Child Health, The Health of Canada's Children, A CICH Profile, 3rd Edition, 2000.

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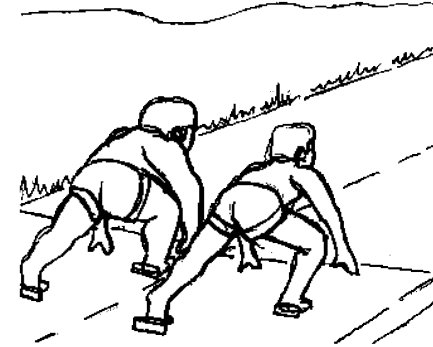
## Limitations and Needs

- Needs are different. Individual capabilities differ. The access to resources also differ.
- The poor, like us, need to have some recognition and success. They have the right to access a decent job, without discrimination nor privilege.
- They must deal with the consequences if they do not respect the laws.

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## Starting Off on an Equal Footing?



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## Right-Wing Agenda

- Government is seen as a controller.
- It assures law and order and prevents disruptions.
- It must protect the status quo.
- It must not take into account the individual differences and the social inequalities.
- Everybody is responsible for its own fate.

«GOD HELPS THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES»

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## Reasons for NOT Allowing More

- Everybody should be entitled to the same benefits, regardless of their needs.
- Giving more to the welfare recipients is a disincentive to the working poor to work.
- Giving out more creates new needs and dependance.
- Less assistance encourages people to work.

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## What about Fraud?

- Sometimes, those who are financially insecure tend not to declare some of their earnings.
- **THE OTHERS:** For many of the others, social assistance is a gold mine to them.
- Some believe they are justified in charging high interest rates to those who have poor credit rating.
- Patronage, favouritism, fiscal evasions, etc. are only accessible to the richer.

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## Priorities of the Left-Wing

- Government must provide adapted services, like public transportation.
- We must provide everyone the opportunity for self-fulfillment.
- We must share the public wealth so that everyone has equal opportunities.
- The individual is a citizen before being a consumer.
- Our objective should be to minimize hardship.

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## 2 types of Justice

- Egalitarian (giving out the same benefits to all)
- Social (giving out to all an opportunity to gain success in life)



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## Fundamental Rights

- The right to fill one's primary needs to be able to subsist (not a privilege).
- ... to make choices and have preferences.
- ... to live in dignity.
- ... to be free from intrusion in one's life.

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# WELFARE REFORM

TORONTO STAR • MONDAY, MAY 10, 2004

## Sound footing for welfare reform

Deb Matthews hopes to "start to unlearn" the stereotype of a welfare recipient as a large, able-bodied man. The rookie MP from London is on a province-wide tour to find out what's wrong with Ontario's social assistance system, what can be done to fix it and how it feels to live on welfare.



Carol Goar

She's only halfway through her 12-city journey but she's sure of one thing: No one wants to stop on welfare. It's a miserable, degrading existence. And politicians have made a success by targeting those who need help.

"We can't tolerate this," Matthews says. "We've been putting down people on social assistance for too long."

"I think our government should be judged on how well we help our most vulnerable citizens. After nine years of shouting welfare recipients, passive rates, minimizing eligibility tests and snide cracks about beer-drinking welfare scroungers and drug-addicted hand-

Matthews, who is parliamentary assistant to Community and Social Services Minister Sandra Petricola, asked for this assignment. She wanted to overhaul a part of government that was clearly out of step with her values and those of her party.

Her report will not be ready in time for next week's budget. She will call for a massive infusion of cash, to the dismay of many anti-poverty groups.

Matthews' objective is to produce a 30-year blueprint for social assistance reform, identifying steps the government can take immediately and longer-term changes.

"It's going to be easier to write than I thought because the themes that are coming through are so strong and consistent," she says. "The people who work in the system know what needs to be done."

The first imperative, Matthews says, is to fill the system of the crude stereo-

types that are preventing caseworkers from dealing with the real-life problems that clients face.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution," Matthews says. "These are people with a variety of factors in their lives. Otherwise, they wouldn't be on welfare."

Unfortunately, many of the stereotypes that Matthews is talking about — single mother, the would-be cheater — are built right into the computer program designed for the previous government by the multinational consulting firm Accenture.

Matthews won't say what she thinks the ministry should do with its costly judicially litigated software. But she notes with a smile that front-line workers in many jurisdictions have found ways to outsmart it.

The second function of her report will be that the system is overburdened with universal rules, time-consuming verification procedures and excessive documentation.

"Our caseworkers spend too much time photographing and not enough time giving people the help they need," she says. "They have stayed in the system because they want to do social work and paperwork."

Matthews will recommend that the government simplify its complex application process, speed up the delivery of benefits and free caseworkers to treat clients like human beings.

But that message will be that individuals need support, not lectures or coercion, to move from social assistance to work.

"That means affordable housing, accessible child care, transit fare, job training and drug and dental benefits. In the case of immigrants, it means help getting Canadian work experience, in the case of clients with health problems or addictions. It means finding proper treatment and counselling."

"When things fall apart, it's never just one problem," Matthews says. "Everything the government does is linked. Her final argument will be that public attitudes have to change."

It is simply wrong, Matthews says, to equate poverty with laziness, irresponsibility or failure. It is unacceptable to look down on people who need social assistance. Most are young with children, the comfortable majority could hardly imagine.

Matthews' research began in Scarborough on April 14 and will end in Chatham on May 10. She says she will have heard from roughly 200 social assistance recipients, local caseworkers, ministry officials, low-income advocates, employers and labour representatives.

"We're pretty excited about some of the things we'll be recommending," Matthews said. Whether they'll be adopted, who knows?

Although she hasn't been a member of the Legislature for seven months, Matthews has indicated that she will give her proposals extra weight. She is a brother-in-law is former premier David Peterson. She chaired the party's election campaign in 1997 and 1995.

Matthews doesn't want to raise unrealistic expectations. She is a back-slasher and money is tight.

But she can promise the province's poorest citizens that their views will be reflected in whatever she submits, their dignity will be respected by her government and their lives will start to get better.

Carol Goar's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

- «Many of the stereotypes, the selfish freeloader, the negligent single mother, the would-be cheater, are built right into the computer program designed for Ontario by the multinational consulting firm Accenture. It's judgment-laden software is costly.»

# How We Generalize

- Our mind tends to form images and then, associate these images. Some images are stronger and recurrent.
- Once we form an image on a person, we tend to extend it to other individuals.
- When we apply the same image to everyone, we generalize. We start making judgement errors.



# Getting Rid of Negative Images

- When we see a group of recipients waiting in line in a bank, we get a negative image of them, knowing that they are treated differently. It conveys the message that we must take special precautions.
- When we give out charity, we expect gratitude in return. Those who benefit feel they are panhandlers.
- When we use sarcastic expressions to describe "welfare", the images are scornful.

# Myths and Prejudices

**WELFARE**  
Most recipients cheat the system

A MYTH is a thinking pattern that has nothing to do with the actual facts

**RECIPIENTS**  
The more they have, the more they want.

A PREJUDICE is a preconceived opinion

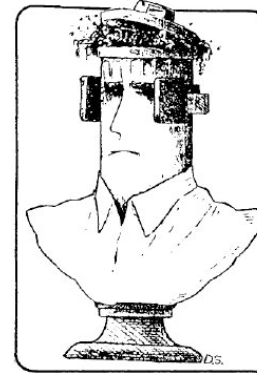
## Harm Caused by Myths & Prejudices

- They inspire Fear, Threat, Ridicule or Pity.
- They make us minimize the problems of the poor. We then draw a line between us and them.
- They are an obstacle to a genuine public awareness.

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## Prejudices = A Form of Violence



Prejudices cause harm to:

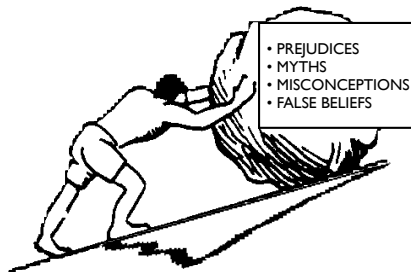
- the reputation
- the dignity, the worthiness
- the self-esteem
- personal integrity

They hurt, destroy and kill.

They prevent integration, self-development and fulfillment.

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## The battle against PREJUDICES



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## Conclusion

- Every individual is a prisoner of his own life experience. No one can eliminate his prejudices, but can become aware of them. (Edward Murrow)
- Helping without judging.
- We tend to condemn what we do not understand. (Cicero)

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## POVERTY: GETTING INTO ACTION

Claude Snow, March 1, 2005

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## Basic Common Needs

- Housing, Heat, Food, Clothing and Health Care.
- Material, physical and emotional Security.
- Interpersonal relationships, Integration and Participation in community life, Human Warmth
- Love, positive Self-Image, Respect and Appreciation.

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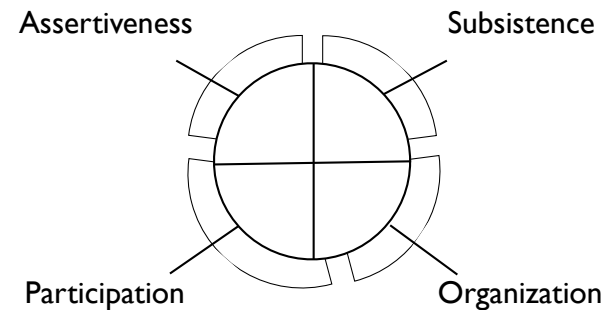
## What is Autonomy?

- **ECONOMIC RESOURCES** (i.e. financial means, education and occupation)
- **SOCIAL RESOURCES** (i.e. family and friends, external support, interventions)
- **PERSONAL ABILITIES** (i.e. the ability to organize one's life and to access resources)
- **ASSERTIVENESS** (i.e. the ability to assert oneself, emotional stability)

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## 4 Types of Poverty

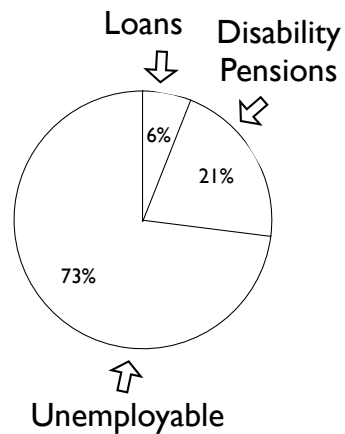


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## SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

- The majority are unable to work and receive assistance on a permanent basis.
- They are partially unemployable. They are not competitive on the labor market.
- They could do some type of work if they had continued support.



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## Giving out Fish or Showing How...

- “Giving out some fish” = a charitable donation such as a hand-out at the Food Bank.
- The problem with donations = never ending.
- Generosity = inequality.
- Food Banks are subsidized by government. The income assistance system is financed through public funds.

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## Giving out Fish is Risky

- The more generous people are in giving out donations, the less government is inclined to reinforce its social services.
- The citizens, even those who have the best intentions, CANNOT replace government.
- It is better to invest all our energy in getting decent income security measures.

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## Solidarity & Empowerment

- Giving a hand-out is a noble gesture but does not get at the root of the problem.
- Through solidarity, i.e. getting united to use our power of persuasion to resist measures which hurt people.
- A project = investing our talents towards a common goal, knowing one's rights and sources of assistance, asking the right questions.

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## Teaching How to Fish

- Teaching how to fish = Helping individuals to empower themselves through committed and organized collective action so that they can fish by themselves.
- ... helping them access resources and advocate for their rights.
- ... helping them to get mobilized.
- ... helping them to speak out and advocate.

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## Investing Ourselves

- Investing ourselves is an efficient way of fighting poverty.
- This means speaking out publicly by taking side in favour of the poor.
- It means taking side for social justice.
- It implies advocating better conditions for the poor and speaking against unfair laws.

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## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

«I wondered why somebody didn't do something, then I realized that I was somebody.»

(Anonymous)

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## Sharing our Knowledge

- We must teach the poor to raise the right questions.
- ... teach them to use the power of the words and the media.
- ... teach them to oppose wrong decisions.
- ... teach them to overcome the obstacles in a civil and legitimate fashion.

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## Working with the Dissatisfied

- Nothing can be accomplished with contented people. It is only possible to achieve progress with discontented individuals.
- Organized know-how is the greatest resource of community groups. Creativity is their most important asset, and the least expensive.

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## Leave it to the Giant “R-E-P”

3 great assets:

- Your **RESOURCES**, i.e. your information, your talents and the support you have.
- Your **EAGERNESS**, i.e. your courage and determination to do something. It is can overcome any opposition.
- Your **PLAN**, i.e. the way you want to attain your results. Clever strategies are the most efficient.

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## The Strength of Freedom

- You are socially involved and committed and aware of social inequalities. You thus have a freedom of speech.
- You can turn your words into action.
- Your freedom is what the decision makers fear the most.

«When I feed the poor, they say I'm a Saint. But when I ask why the poor go hungry, they say I'm a Communist.»

Mgr. Helder Camara,  
bishop of Brazil

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## Conclusion

The best way to fight Poverty:

- Through Public Charity?
- Through a Universal, Public and Well-Supported income security system?

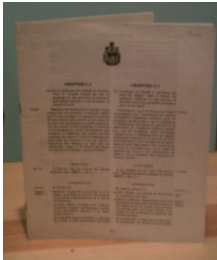
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# PROGRESSIVE DETERIORATION

BAG

LAW



HAT

