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News release

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Poverty and Political Parties

Moncton – With a little more than a week left before election day, the NB Common Front for Social Justice considers that poverty is not a priority for certain political parties, especially the issue of citizens on social assistance.

Early summer, the Common Front for Social Justice met with the leaders of four political parties: David Coon (Green), Blaine Higgs (PC), Kris Austin (PANB) and Jennifer McKenzie (NDP) to discuss our suggestions on how to reduce poverty in our province. We did not meet with Brian Gallant, but met with the following key ministers: Cathy Rogers, Stephen Horseman, Gilles Lepage, Roger Melanson, and Wilfred Roussel. We have also sent our proposals to all Members of the Legislative Assembly.

<<We provided the leaders and ministers with our list of proposals as well as the proper documentation explaining each one, and told them that if they were serious about reducing poverty in our province, these proposals should be included in their electoral platform.

The first area was on low-wage workers, the second one was on social assistance recipients and the third one was on pay equity. (Attachments)

During those meetings, we mentioned to the leaders that we would evaluate their electoral platform and report publicly our findings. We have read each platform, except for the Liberal one that is not yet available.>> explained Pauline Gallant, co-chair.

Low-income workers (NDP, Liberals, Green)

<< We are encouraged that the Green, NDP and the Liberals are proposing to increase the minimum wage over the next four years. The NDP is proposing changes to the employment standards, one of them was paid sick days. Also

positive is the fact that the Liberals would modernize different labour laws.>> says Pauline Gallant. <<The Progressive Conservatives don't seem to consider low-income workers as important because their proposal will do nothing for them. As for the People's Alliance, they seem to consider minimum-wage workers non-existent, because they don't appear in their platform,>> continues Ms. Gallant.

Social Assistance (Green, NDP)

As we are well aware, there are more than 36,000 men, women and children depending on social assistance to survive. All of them have a revenue below the poverty line and they need better policies and programs to help them.

Revenue. For Pauline Gallant << This time it is the Green Party and the NDP whose proposals would change positively the revenue of social assistance recipients. As for the PC and the People`s Alliance, they have nothing in their platform. The Liberals have been silent on this issue, an indication that it is not a priority for them. It is sad to realize that the basic rate of social assistance recipients have not increased in the last four years and that their situation is getting worse.

For disabled citizens on social assistance, only the Green has proposed changing criteria to make it easier to qualify.

Policies. As we well know, the Social Development department policies are very restrictive and need to change. On the issue of changing policies, the Green Party is proposing to eliminate rules that are restrictive, three of them that we have been advocating for (household economic unit, income assistance clawbacks and disability. The PC is not proposing changing policies but wants to rework programs to help people move out of poverty. Nothing from the other parties.>>

There is a huge demand for social housing and the province has negotiated a deal with Ottawa that should bring millions of dollars in the province. Again, it seems that only the Green and the NDP realize the necessity of affordable housing, but even their proposals are timid. We had hoped that each political party would have understood that to help individuals and especially families, we need more affordable and accessible social housing where a person just pays 30% of his revenue.>>

Pay Equity (Green, Liberals, NDP)

The issue of pay equity is supported by three political parties. The Green Party would amend the 2009 legislation to include pay equity in the private sector,

without regards to small or large employers. The Liberals would impose pay equity upon local government and organizations such as universities and nursing homes by 2020 and to large business (50 employees and more) by 2022. We hope that this commitment would be acted upon. The challenge will be to enact the legislation in the first year of their mandate. If this does not happen, then, there is a real possibility that its implementation with the large businesses will not happen. The NDP is saying it wants pay equity in the private sector right away, starting with the community care sector. In its platform, it mentions requiring a pay equity study, something that has been done before. It seems that for the PC and the People's Alliance, women are not a big issue because they are not proposing anything on pay equity.

Democracy and Electoral Platforms (Green)

We commend the Green Party for having unveiled their electoral platform right at the beginning of the campaign. It is unacceptable that political parties who are vying to become the government should not inform voters well in advance what they are standing for. We certainly condemn the Liberal Party vigorously for playing the media circus of dishing out piece by piece part of their electoral plank.

If we want citizens to make informed decisions, it is of the utmost importance that they receive all the necessary information well in advance of the voting day, so they discuss it, digest it and make an informed choice.

We strongly believe that it should be mandatory for each political party to publish their electoral platform when the writ is dropped.

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