

programs. There are numerous businesses, non-profit organizations and government departments that contact the organization every year requesting barrier-free environment assessments of their buildings or facilities and requesting recommendations for improving accessibility. These recommendations are far more expensive to implement after initial construction. These high costs provide a solid argument for an Ontario Building Code that should be based on long-term thinking and planning and not based on short-term financial gains for the builders.

The Ontario Government has consulted with builders in order to develop the principles outlined in the document "Back to Basics". When will the consultation begin with disability organisations and with persons with disabilities in order to obtain their perspective on the Ontario Building Code? This is of the utmost importance as the Ontario Building Code has a profound effect on the lives of persons with disabilities. It can limit or expand a person's involvement in and contribution to the life of their community. It is important not only to maintain the accessibility requirements presently in the Ontario Building Code, but also to raise these standards to ensure that the needs of all persons in the community are taken into account.

NOTES

- 1.. Ontario. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Housing Development and Buildings Branch. *Back To Basics: A Consultation Paper on the Focus of the Ontario Building Code*, Toronto, 1996, p. 3.
- 2.. Ibid.
- 3.. Disabled Persons Community Resources. *Response to the Consultation Paper "Back to Basics"*, Toronto, 1996.



Labour

Cindy Wiggins

Canadian Labour Congress

Government budgets are about making choices — economic, social, and cultural choices. They are political choices because they shape the kind of country we will live in. For more than a decade, under both Conservative and Liberal federal governments, Canadians have been told that there is only one choice which can be made for the federal government budget. That choice has been to make massive cuts to social programmes and eliminate thousands of public sector jobs. We are told that this is necessary, to reduce the federal deficit and debt, and to keep inflation low, which further aids deficit reduction.

To achieve this, full employment as an economic strategy has been abandoned in favour of deliberate, high unemployment and high interest rates.

The pity of all this, in addition to the hardship and suffering this has imposed on far too many Canadians and particularly the poorest, is that these economic measures have done little, if anything, to reduce the deficit. The question is why are we sacrificing the well-being of millions of Canadians and crucial, national social programs for policies proven to be abject failures?

The labour movement, in cooperation with CHOICES, the Canadian Centre For Policy Alternatives, and many social action groups, believes that the government has more than one option when it comes to setting economic and social policies for the country in the federal budget. In developing the Alternative Federal Budget (AFB), we have shown that there are credible, realistic choices to be made which not only reduce the deficit and the debt, but also create jobs and begin to modestly expand our social programs. The AFB is rigorously verified by an independent econometric analysis.

The AFB addresses the real causes of the deficit — unemployment, excessively high interest rates, and an unfair taxation system. The budget meets the government's own deficit reduction targets of 3% of GDP this year and 2% next year, in addition to reaching a zero deficit within five years. At the same time, the budget results in the creation of twice as many jobs (400,000) as the government's budget will create.

This is done by reducing interest rates by 1%, which will lower the Canadian dollar to about 70 US cents. In turn, real economic growth would increase by about 1%. The AFB calls for the Bank of Canada to increase its holdings of government bonds to 15% over five years to lower the interest costs paid on the debt. The allowable limit of foreign holdings in RRSPs and pension plans would be lowered and all retirement savings plans would be required to hold a minimum of federal government bonds. The Alternative Budget would promote a "Tobin Tax" on international financial transactions, to begin to control the power and influence of international capital.

The AFB's direct job creation program is the linchpin of the budget. This year, \$2.8 billion would be put into job creation in the following areas: affordable housing, energy-wise homes, child care, R&D, regional and community development, and the ecological and other infrastructures. This funding would increase to \$3.4 billion in 1997-98.

The AFB rejects the federal government's approach of undermining the social and economic security of Canadians by dismantling national social programs. The budget takes the view that social programs are investments in people and contribute not only to the personal well-being of Canadians and to increased equality, but also to the economic health and potential of the country.

The AFB creates a number of National Social Investment Funds in the areas of health, education, income support, child care, housing, public

pensions, and unemployment insurance. Funding will increase modestly with the commitment to further expansion in future years. The Health Fund creates a National Drug Plan for low-income families and the Child Care Fund would introduce a national, cost-shared child care program. A Higher Education Act would set national standards for post-secondary education and increase student grants.

Over 80% of spending in the AFB comes from growth in the economy, and lower unemployment and social assistance costs. The remaining money comes from making the tax system more progressive. Tax highlights include a wealth tax on inheritances over \$1 million, a Corporate Minimum Tax, an Excess Profits Tax on banks, and the introduction of two new tax brackets for people with incomes over \$100,000 and \$150,000, respectively. The surtax on incomes below \$20,000 would be eliminated, and a Low-Income Family Tax Credit would be introduced as an anti-poverty measure.

The AFB shows that there are clear and workable alternatives. These alternatives are endorsed by 137 economists across the country. The labour movement hopes that by educating its members, and working with social partners, the federal government will be made accountable for the choices it has made at the expense of the vast majority of Canadians.



Newfoundland and Labrador

Bev Brown

NAPO Board Member

The last few months have brought more and more Newfoundlanders together at demonstrations, in forums and in coalitions to protest social programme cutbacks that seem to roll in with every tide. We are determined to fight last year's delayed federal cuts, which hit Newfoundland like a cruel winter storm on April Fools' Day this year, at a time when many people are being cut off The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy (TAGS) and forced on to welfare from lack of jobs.

About a fifth of the provincial population collected welfare in 1994, and this number has been climbing steadily since then. The welfare rate for single employable people, by far the largest group on social assistance, ranges from a shocking \$89 to a not much more substantial \$129 a month.

Kay Young, former Minister of Social Services, was not re-elected in February. Shortly before the election she walked out when a petition for increased subsidized low-income housing was being presented by a fellow Liberal member in the House of Assembly.

Bereft of creativity, our politicians only use two ploys to manipulate people. One is to announce a large cutback, and then chop the cut a little bit, which usually makes people really grateful . . . **not**. Premier Brian