



Federal Election 2004

HOW THE LIBERALS HAVE HURT CHILDREN

The number of poor children is increasing despite the federal Liberal government's pledge to eliminate child poverty. Today, 786,000 children in Canada live in poverty. Almost half of sole parent women are poor and so are the children. Nothing has been done to address this deplorable situation. In fact it has been made much worse by the massive social program cuts instituted by Paul Martin when he was finance minister.

Women and mothers are poor because they are under-employed and paid low wages. Paul Martin's privatization agenda is making things much worse. Privatization is forcing women out of better paid, public sector jobs into privatized, low-wage, non-union positions. These actions are hurting women – but they are also hurting children.

Children are also suffering because they don't have access to quality child care programs. The federal Liberals have failed to deliver on their long-standing promise to put in place a pan-Canadian child care program. Instead the Liberals put in place a program referred to by child care advocates and parents as the "ABC – Anything But Childcare" program. This program gave money to the provinces without strings attached and only 8 per cent of the total funding was spent on child care services.

The vast majority of young children in Canada are being looked after through unregulated and informal arrangements. Regulated child care spaces were available to only 12 per cent of children in Canada, yet 73.4 per cent of mothers with young children are employed and need access to child care.

Physical inactivity among children and youth is reaching epidemic proportions. More than half of children and youth are not active enough for optimal growth and development. Physical inactivity and unhealthy eating have become public health issues, yet the federal Liberals have done nothing to address the problem. Funding cuts and downloading of responsibilities has put huge strains on the budgets of provincial and municipal governments and they have in turn cut funding for education, public health and recreation.



Canada's children are victims of Liberal fiscal, economic and social policies. There was no need for the massive cuts imposed by Paul Martin. While Martin was finance minister, the overall economy grew. But children did not benefit from that growth. Thanks to Paul Martin the rich got richer while poverty increased, leaving kids behind.

Why the Conservatives are no better

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Stephen Harper is on record as opposing "new money for social assistance in the name of 'child poverty.'" In the House of Commons, Harper said, "Our position generally has been to recognize the need for reduction in the area of federal transfers and specifically in the area of welfare." In 1994, he congratulated the Reform party for its efforts to push the Liberals further to the right. He said there had been many "positive" developments as a result. "Universality has been severely reduced. It is virtually dead as a concept in most areas of public policy. The family allowance programme has been eliminated and unemployment insurance has been seriously cut back."

What the New Democrats say

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The NDP says it is more important to eliminate child poverty than give tax breaks to banks. Jack Layton wants to see an increase in the Child Tax Benefit. He says low-income families receiving the child tax benefit should not have their social assistance benefits "clawed back." The New Democrats advocate a National Housing Strategy so that every child has adequate, safe and secure shelter.

The NDP promotes the idea of an Early Child Care and Education Program that is national in scope and available to all children. This plan would cover pre- and post-natal care, early learning and child care. It would support parents both at home and in the labour market. The program would be integrated, accessible, non-profit and high quality, assured by national standards. The NDP believes child care workers deserve decent wages.



What we want

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We want to see an end to child poverty and a more equal distribution of income. We need progressive taxation, government income transfers to households, as well as public services and unemployment insurance.

The federal government needs to provide support for children by promoting a liveable minimum wage, increasing the supply of affordable, safe housing and supporting local programmes to promote healthy, active living.

The federal governments should commit sufficient funds for the development of a publicly funded, quality pan-Canadian child care system (for children from birth to 12 years of age) that is fully inclusive and meets the needs of every child regardless of their ability, language, culture, family income status or where they live.

Each provincial/territorial government should be required to use federal child care funds to build a publicly funded child care system that is high quality, inclusive, affordable and universally accessible, not-for-profit, and accountable for all public funding.

The federal government must support a human resources strategy for child care workers that leads to higher quality care.

