

Basic Income Guarantee and the Federal Election Campaign Agenda

For promoters and champions of Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), it is a disappointment that there has been little discussion of BIG in the 2015 election campaign. Judging by the content of the debates and election platforms, it would seem that there is complacency about the large number of Canadians trying to survive on low incomes; trying to eke out an existence without enough money to cover the basic necessities of food, housing, clothing, and normal everyday living.



Image: James Goneaux freeimages.com

The major parties' fixation on "the middle class" conceals the reality that too many Canadians fall well below the middle class ideal. To bring the concept of class into the public debate in a meaningful way, we must dare to identify that there is an "underclass" of the low income and impoverished people who are being ignored in this campaign. Other language that is being used during this election campaign is just as unsettling. What is meant by the emphasis on "hard working Canadians"? Are the "hard working Canadians" who struggle to survive on miserable wages, often working several jobs to survive part of this so-called middle class as well? The constant reference to "families" keeps listeners and viewers thinking of children, who of course pull at the heartstrings. But what about the tens of thousands of households made up of one person, or two elderly people and no children? What of the people who cannot work because of disability or because there are no jobs?

It is not as if Canada were doing nothing to close the poverty gap. There are many important programs directed at poverty reduction. However, Old Age Security (OAS), the Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance (EI) and the Canada Child Tax Benefit are not designed, either separately or together to address the standard of "livable income for all residents and citizens" as a basic human right.

The PEI BIG Campaign, under the direction of the PEI Working Group for Livable income, presents an evidence-based position that Basic Income Guarantee is a coherent, cost-effective alternative to the current medley of general services and social support programs. During the last provincial election here in PEI we heard all the party leaders speak out in support of BIG, however to make this a reality, Federal, Provincial and Municipal governments must cooperate with each other and with communities across the country. A great deal of work has already been done to determine both the cost to implement BIG and the cost to each jurisdiction of not enacting Basic Income for all.

The question we would like to ask all potential MPs and the party leaders is:

Will your party and you, personally as an MP, whether you are in power or not, actively and publicly support and work toward the complete elimination of real, systemic poverty in Canada, by enacting policies for Basic Income Guarantee? This includes a minimum 5 year pilot project in PEI and other Canadian communities prepared to take this on.

– Trish Altass and Marie Burge, Working Group for a Livable Income