

The Croll poverty report

Cutting the revolution off at the pass

by Frank Abbott
Canadian University
Press

Senator David Croll's Committee has declared itself firmly opposed to poverty, at least in its present form.

On a similar level, clergymen have been known to oppose sin.

The Committee's sixteen senators have also discovered that poverty is not only unpleasant for them, but it is also unpleasant for the poor. Took 'em two years to find that out.

The report, presented amidst much fanfare and general rejoicing, reached the Senate on November 10 of this year. It contains 44 recommendations that propose to make poverty more bearable (read less visible) and therefore less of a problem. It calls for a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), a better and higher poverty line of \$1500 for a single person, \$3500 for a family of four and \$6500 for a family of ten. It also recommends forming an Applied Research Council, having better social services, better education, better consumer information, better health care for everyone, better housing, better legal aid, a better manpower system and more day care centres. In almost all cases the recommendations proposed only changes in government departments — the same policies, only "better".

The Guaranteed Annual Income is to replace the welfare system. It would, by im-

plication, perpetuate poverty because it is set at only 70 per cent of the poverty line proposed in the report, a line which itself seems to have been determined by minimal needs. It would also be discriminatory because it would not be available to single people under 40 or to non-Canadian residents.

Economic policy recommendations which should be the most important in the report are weak and vague, but still seem to contradict the current policies of the Canadian Government. Recent statements by Pierre Trudeau deal with the Croll recommendation for full employment by laying the blame for unemployment at the feet of the unemployed. In an interview with the Quebec French daily, *Le Soleil*, Trudeau said,

"There is no country except where there is absolute dictatorship in which everyone works all the time. In free countries like ours there has always been and there always will be unemployment because the citizens protect their freedom of not working where the state sends them. In Canada there are many jobs which are not filled."

He then went on to suggest that many unemployed people could get jobs as maids, and that others could go to work in the mines in Sudbury.

As a final damper to the Committee's hopes for full employment, Trudeau says in effect that unless the unem-

ployed want to help the Outremont servant problem they won't get to work at their old jobs, which they lost because the government doesn't want "inflation".

"Anyway, that does not mean that we are not constantly going to seek to lower the level of unemployment, but it does mean that in a given moment we meet with difficulties which are inherent in the very will of the workers to live in a free country where they will not accept any job imposed on them by the state", said Trudeau.

Reasons for poverty not given

The Croll Committee also urges: equal pay for equal work; that unions accept low wage earners into their ranks; non-discrimination; job and manpower training; and minimum wage legislation. The government has already accepted many of these points in principle so the recommendations alone will not help to deal with the poverty problem.

The report also deals with education, pointing out that there is little opportunity for the poor to get good jobs because they have little chance of completing their education. The report recommends that there be more vocational and technical training.

There is the unspoken assumption that the poor cannot expect to go to university. In fact, the subject is not mentioned.

In recommending better health care for the poor, the report tried to use the description of a poor family of eight provided by the Winnipeg Mt. Carmel Clinic. One child in the family had an infected ear and was running a high temperature but the slum family had no means of taking her to the hospital. There was also a very graphic description of the bad condition of the house, but the report did not give any hints of why people have to live in such conditions. Not unexpectedly there was no contrasting description of the healthy children of the ruling class who don't have such problems. It only decided that there was a correlation between poor health and poor housing but it didn't show the connection between the desire of greedy landlords to increase the rate of profit on their slum properties and the increased rents they charge for their neglected



houses.

Further on there is a section on birth control with the implication that there would be fewer poor people if they practised birth control. There is little chance that the lack of birth control information can be made up later by an abortion, for that too is the prerogative of the rich.

The poor also suffer under the inequities of the present legal system. The solution is to give them legal aid. There is no examination of the fairness of some of the present laws but everyone should have a lawyer to protect him or herself against them. It might be easier to simplify the law but that would perhaps mean fewer lawyers. (Some members of the Committee are lawyers.)

So the report does not really know why there is poverty, or if it does, it isn't telling. The vicarious poverty of the thirteen ancients on the Committee, indignant and sympathetic though it made them, is no substitute for a real examination for the causes of poverty. In that sense the Croll report was predictable. Last summer the four people who quit Croll's Committee — economists Peter Penz and Brian Hill and writers Ian Adams and Bill Cameron — foresaw this in their own report:

"...in the last few weeks of March it became obvious that what he (Croll) really wanted was a rather maudlin discussion of what it was like to be poor an indignant denun-

ciation of the inadequacies of the current welfare system, followed by a call for a guaranteed annual income. He certainly did not want to tell the people why they were poor."

Whether he wanted to or not he certainly didn't.

Report inspires anger

The Croll report inspires anger, though perhaps not in the direction that its authors would like, for the anger is directed at them. It is reminiscent of the type of speech that a conscience-stricken Carnegie would give to the local Kiwanis Club. It is both paternalistic and abstracted from the reality around it.

It takes poverty out of the larger social context and examines it in isolation under a microscope without looking at those other things that affect it. To discuss poverty, it is also necessary to look at wealth, why such a few have so much while four and a half million Canadians (one quarter of the population) have next to nothing in comparison.

According to the report, "The root of the problem lies in the set of assumptions of myths that we hold on how our society and economy operates." In other words, the problem will be solved when people change

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War games

by Walter Plaut

As the traditional season for wishes of good will and peace on earth began, some 30 male high school and university students assembled last Saturday at St. Mary's University to participate in the third semi-annual war game tournament. Five teams, including the Dal War Gamers, competed in numerous two-player board games which recreated the bloody battles of World War II.

The tournament's organizer, who wore a U.S. Army jacket and spoke of his unhappy years at West Point Military Academy, denied that war games encourage militaristic thinking. So did some of the other players, yet they still gleefully told one another of the thousands of men they had

wiped out and the planes they had shot down.

It was obvious that none of the youngsters had experienced the brutality of war themselves. Yet how far is it from cardboard war games to the official war games that "adult" soldiers play, and then to the real wars which really do maim and kill? In a day when most countries have renamed their war machine "Defence" Department, wars continue. Only when people refuse to support these institutions with their taxes, votes, and bodies, will peace on earth be a reality everywhere. War games won't help, nor will any of the other forms of competition which teach us to advance at the expense of other people's failures.

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Editor: Dorothy Wigmore 424-2507
Advertising Manager: Jim Tesoriere
General Calls: 424-2350
Room 334 — Student Union Bldg.