

"The time has come to stop blaming the mirror for not being a window, for presenting us with things we would rather not see. The time has come for a little common honesty. The poor, after all, are not, as some still pretend, poor of their own accord. The poor have no uncommon moral flaw that sets them apart, let alone condemns them. They are casualties of the way we manage our economy and our society — and that fact is increasingly obvious to the poor themselves." Report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty.

## POVERTY IN CANADA

It exists. A Senate committee recently completed a big study of it. The following is a report on that committee's report by Tom Kelly, an American writer who spent five years as Regional Director of Inspections and Director of National Affairs for VISTA in Washington, D.C.

Three years ago the Senate of Canada appointed a special committee headed by the Hon. David A. Croll, of Ontario, to investigate and report upon all aspects of poverty in Canada. The Committee's duty—and its limitation—was to advise the Senate and indirectly the country of what it found. The Canadian Senate is not the dominant legislative body and the report is not, as it would have been in the U.S. Senate, a preliminary to legislation. It will, however, provide considerable input to planning in this area and can influence legislation prepared as a result of the Federal Government's White Paper, "Income Security for Canadians," published in 1970. A good portion of the Senate Committee's recommendations bear on provincial government services as well as on federal funding and programmes.

The Committee, after travelling from Newfoundland to the Alaskan border and hearing witnesses at hundreds of public sessions, made its report late last year. It is in effect two reports — one on the fact, dimensions and characteristics of poverty in Canada, the other on Canada's Welfare System. The separation is a sound one; some Canadians, as some Americans, assume that the poor are those who live not by their own work but by the benefits provided by the state. This is not true — almost two-thirds of poor Canadians live in families where the family head works and usually works hard.

This is perhaps the major point made in the lengthy report — that the poor are not parasites, that indeed the majority of them work longer and harder hours than those who are not poor. The second major point is a simple, shocking statistic: A fourth of all Canadians are poor.

The Croll Report is the most comprehensive in Canadian history. It describes in detail the social services provided and not provided, the education of the poor, the economics of the poor, the health of the poor, the housing of the poor and the law and the poor. It recommends a "comprehensive anti-poverty program for the Seventies, the heart of which is a Guaranteed Annual Income."

It has inspired criticism as well as approbation. To a great degree it speaks for itself. As the Committee members candidly note, its arguments "are a form of special pleading . . . We are confident that by frankly revealing our biases, by emphasizing our determination to eliminate poverty . . . and by documenting our convictions . . . we will be heard and heeded."

This review summarizes the first two sections — the definition and description of the poor and an account of the Welfare System.

### PART ONE [THE POOR, THE WORLD WE LEAVE BEHIND]

By Committee definition twenty-five per cent of all Canadians are poor.

Defining poverty by statistical measure is difficult, as has been said. Poverty is not only a condition of economic insufficiency, it is also social and political exclusion.

The Committee sought a "poverty line" that related to the "average standard of living." One is poor not in a vacuum but in the society of which he is a part. In monetary terms it concluded that a single person in Canada who has less than \$2140 a year is poor. The line for two is a \$3570; for three \$4290. A family of ten is poor if its annual income is less than \$9290. The report could not analyze spiritual richness in a person's life, but it probably can be said safely that those people called poor would rather not be.

### [WHO ARE THE POOR?]

It was found that 5,135,000 of Canada's 20.5 million people are below the line. For many Canadians they are invisible: "the poor are not seen and being out of sight are out of mind."

They are often old; 27 per cent are 65 or more. They are ill educated; 89 per cent never finished high school, 41 per cent didn't finish elementary school.

They live most often in cities, 55 per cent of them are urban, and many are concentrated in two provinces, Quebec and Ontario. Quebec alone has more poor than the Western provinces combined.

Most live in families headed by men and most of the men have full-time, poorly paid jobs.

### [WHY ARE THE WORKING POOR POOR?]

All evidence demonstrates that the poor are poor not because they do not want to work but in spite of working. The "Work Ethic" of Western man seems to have played them false. They work in unskilled jobs because they are unskilled in the terms of an increasingly technological society. They work for the minimum wage or less. They work in seasonal fields.

When unemployment rises they suffer far more than anyone else. In 1960 when Canada's unemployment rate was 6.7 (approximately what it has recently been), the rate for office and professional workers was only 2.3. The rate for the unskilled labourers was an appalling 19.3.

They often work for less money than they would receive from welfare.

Fifty-seven per cent of all Canadian male labourers work in "service or recreation" industries, making less than \$4000 a year. Eighty-seven per cent of Canada's female unskilled workers are in the same industries at the same or lesser wages. The labour unions are concentrated in high-wage, heavily capitalized industries, such as steel or auto manufacturing—sixty-five per cent of Canada's workers are outside the union fold.

They work in laundries, cleaners and pressers, in cotton, yarn and woolen mills, in processing leather, in knitting mills, in manufacturing clothing, in gathering wood, as clerks in retail trade.

They work on farms. About 100,000 Canadian farm families live in poverty. Most of these poor farm families are headed by men or women over forty-five. The poor farmers are very poor but they are not at the bottom of the rural economy — 572,000 people live in the country in poverty who are not farmers. A great many of these are Indians or the Métis of mixed ancestry. The rural poor are often the ones left behind, those too old or ill or apathetic to move to the city as farming became an industry inextricably involved with the urban cash economy. Most of those who moved have not prospered, they merely became the urban poor.

The poor not only get far less from the nation's economy, they are in effect taxed more to support it. Sixty-five per cent of the income of those making less than \$2000 goes to taxes. Those making \$10,000 or more pay thirty-seven or thirty-eight per cent.

### [WHAT THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS]

The Committee made six recommendations affecting the working poor: 1. That full employment be a prime goal of the country's fiscal and monetary policies. 2. That "equal work for equal pay" legislation be passed and enforced. 3. That unionization of workers in low pay industries be encouraged and facilitated. 4. That anti-discrimination laws be enforced. 5. That job-development be vigorously pursued. 6. That minimum wage rates throughout Canada be revised upward.

### PART TWO [OUR WELFARE SYSTEM—A COSTLY MISTAKE]

For various reasons, some ethical or moral, some economic and expedient, most western nations provide some kind of welfare system.

Canada spends very large sums to provide something like security for the poor. The money has only made their lives a little less desperate. It has failed to provide an opportunity to escape poverty. It has not made it possible for the poor, or even their children, to perform the greater part of the job of lifting themselves.

Only some thirty-seven per cent of the Canadian poor are supported by welfare. A few of those, some ten per cent, are employed persons whose wages make a welfare supplement necessary for employable persons out of work. The rest, the overwhelming majority, are people who are not capable of earning a living, the elderly, the sick, the mothers alone with dependent children.

No one speaks well of the welfare system. It is not controversial, for everyone is against it. It came to be in legislative fits and starts spread over forty odd years. The Federal Government began in 1927 with an old age pension program. During the great Depression the economic hardships which affected a near majority of Canadians engendered a series of more specific programs — family allowances, job training programs, aid to the blind, youth grants. Each program was distinct: each aimed at a special group.

By the fifties it was apparent that a broader approach was vital. The Unemployment Assistance Act was passed, to provide help for those who were not specifically old, or young, or blind, but who were out of work. It served but not well