

BEHIND OUR SO-CALLED ON POVERTY

within Canada is minimal, and significantly grants produce few changes in respect to project timing, project size, or technology used...Roughly half of the incentive grants do not influence investment in any significant manner and can be considered to be windfall gains."

No wonder we citizens never hear of the backdeals and intricacies involved in the remaining myriad of corporate handout programs. It is not surprising when we finally find out that Canada gave away over 200-million dollars in grants to defence contractors over the past six years.

The state's half-hearted commitment to ending regional disparities is not accidental. In order to make any progress in such a venture, the government must not only subsidize a particular industry for a period of time but it must also subsidize a whole network of supporting services, consumer industries and a technical infrastructure.

What is particularly frightening is that the state bureaucracy in Canada, composed from a substantially different social background than the elite economic class, has not only perpetuated the economic structures of capitalism, but through universities and welfare programs provide the ideological mortar which cements the individual to capitalism. Thus, bureaucrats and legislators, in their dependence on the good favor of the public, generate the ideologies and politics of liberalism. They formulate the real problems of capitalism into a political vocabulary and practice that is devoid of any penetrating substance.

THE UNFAIR STATE

In the early 1900's, volunteer and charity organizations looked after those, who because of age or handicaps, were incapable of working. The protestant and frontier ethic was dominant in this era. It was believed that everyone could and should work to support themselves and their families. By the 1920's the burden of supporting old persons was beyond the means of charity organizations and local municipalities, and in 1927, the Canadian federal government adopted a pension plan.

After the depression, widespread unemployment was recognized as inherent in the economic structure and requiring large scale solutions. The various "social assistance" acts of the next forty years were passed large in response to the parliamentary pressure of reformists. Still they were financed regressively—the worker paid a higher percentage of his income for unemployment insurance and towards welfare schemes than did the millionaire.

There has never been any indication that the government intended to eliminate poverty. Benefits were never tied to need but only to earnings (as in unemployment insurance) or to minimal subsistence levels (as in welfare payments).

In 1966 the helter-skelter of social assistance services was organized under the Canadian Assistance Plan. Aside from a slightly improved co-ordination of services, its main new wrinkle was to promise provincial governments that the federal government would match all their social assistance payments with equal federal grants. Of course, the poorer provinces who most need the welfare subsidies could least

afford to allocate money in that area.

To briefly mention the types of problems with the present welfare system:

1. The bureaucratic structure of the programs often provides an incentive not to work. In five provinces, the minimum wage is lower than welfare payments. In all provinces single mothers who accept work are penalized by cuts in their welfare grants.

The only organization which has comprehensively examined itself, the Winnipeg Welfare Planning Council, declared that it was in a hopeless state of unco-ordinated duplication of services; fostering inefficient and dehumanizing management. 2. The administrative bureaucracy has very little understanding of the particular problems of the poor and more often than not perpetuates the myth that the poor are essentially responsible for their own problems.

Appeal boards and bureaucrats are mainly middle-class professionals who live in the suburbs.

The poor are usually dehumanized and degraded—simply given their monthly handouts, and not offered the information required to come to a broader understanding of the social and economic basis of their situation.

3. The government is not particularly concerned with finding employment for the unskilled or even training them to be skilled. To qualify for manpower training, one must be able to develop enough skills for an occupation within 52 weeks. This obviously discriminates against the millions of Canadians who have less than a Grade 8 education.

4. The worst part of the welfare plans is simply the inadequacy of the income and services provided. The rates of physical illness and psychological problems are much higher in these groups of people.

WARFARE ON THE POOR

When welfare grants rather than corporate scandals are highlighted by the media, it is natural that someone who can barely afford the deductions for social assistance programs, who is not entitled to the free drugs and services received by welfare recipients, will become angry at those on welfare and blame them for her deprived economic condition.

Because students are most articulate about the nature of their oppression, and with the least commitment, most prone to radical action, the government attempts to ensure that their unrest does not transform itself into political activity. Most of the 2 per cent of welfare "chiselers" are students whom the government deliberately leaves alone. They seem to feel that better they be stoned than they stone the citadels of power. The government's Committee of Youth affirmed that the same reasons operated in the establishing of OFY,

"For it was not unemployment per se which was seen as creating social unrest but rather inactivity and non-participation

in general."

The government meanwhile spends much of its energies ensuring that the true nature of exploitation is not revealed and that its fundamental relation to economic structures is mystified.

In 1968, the Senate established a committee in order to investigate the sources of poverty.

In 1971, all the evidence linking poverty to the capitalist economic system was specifically omitted.

The media are also responsible for perpetuating the myths of poverty. Jerry Goodis, a prominent advertising executive, testified before the Senate Committee on Poverty in 1968.

"The measure of editorial acceptability becomes 'How does it fit?' or 'Will it interest the affluent?' As a consequence, the mass media increasingly reflect the attitudes and deal with the concepts of the affluent. We don't have mass media, we have class-media for the upper and middle classes."

Not only do 70 per cent of revenues come from 100 companies, mostly American and supporters of the Liberal and Conservative Parties, but the media themselves are owned by only a few powerful interests.

Because any radical analysis is denied representation in both the media and the political arena, the grievances of the impoverished and powerless are framed and illusorily solved by those politicians that corporations can afford to buy.

The "liberal class", if you will, composed of professionals in the therapy and rehabilitation business, welfare administrators, government bureaucrats, doctors, dentists, lawyers, and academics are engaged in the repair of the more damaging of capitalism's consequences. They "fix" people up so that they can survive a while longer and if made "healthy" competitively rejoin the "rat-race".

The liberal may correctly see that capitalism distorts human potential and dignity. But, because he imagines that man's experience and social relations can be separated from his economic activity, the liberal surrenders the possibility of developing a critique of human experience and social relations under capitalism.

Although in the pitfalls of his soul he may vaguely sense the dead-end of such acceptance, he has developed to no theory to counter this temptation. He is left with no choice but to accede to the apparently logical demands of capitalism—albeit administered in a kinder and more sensitive fashion.

Liberal ideology hides from itself the very economic foundations upon which it is dependent and from which it grows. The extent to which the structures of capitalism dominate the vocabulary in which problems and solutions are posed are typically lost on liberals. The liberal fails to grasp the very ideological structures by which capitalism finally seduces him and conceals its deadly workings. In failing to penetrate the liberal employs his ideas as a self in the arsenal of capitalist weaponry.

