

1. Full Employment

Many of the witnesses appearing before the Sub-Committee stressed the importance of a federal government policy of full employment if poverty among Canadian adults and children is to be alleviated. Quite apart from the impact of high levels of unemployment on social assistance programs, witnesses indicated that parents should be able to earn an income sufficient to permit them to finance the shelter, clothing, food, recreational and other needs of their children. Employment insecurity for parents and/or inadequate income may require labour market work by youth, who may either leave school to pursue full-time work or work while going to school full-time. A representative from the Canadian Teachers' Federation told the Sub-Committee that:

One of the things I found in my class a year ago was that a number of my children were working, and I am talking about grade 6 and 7 children. They were working at a McDonald's five to six hours after school . . . (A) 13-year-old boy . . . was actually dancing in a discothèque until 3 a.m., . . . I do not think that this is an isolated case. I trust it is not common, but it is not isolated.⁵⁷

It was felt that job creation must occur, and that training and other job skill programs are required in order that the unemployed can take advantage of employment opportunities. The Social Planning Council of Edmonton told the Sub-Committee that:

employment income is the most critical source or potential source of support to poor families. Better access to better terms of employment, not just minimum-wage jobs, . . . should be the goal of all economic and social policy developed by the federal and provincial governments.⁵⁸

2. Minimum Wage Rates

The unavailability of jobs was viewed, however, as only one part of the income inadequacy problem. Many witnesses gave testimony regarding the "working poor" who, even though employed, live in poverty, perhaps as a result of the low minimum wage rates in Canada. A low-income mother from British Columbia told the Sub-Committee that:

As hard as it is to live on welfare, it is even harder to work at minimum wage jobs. . . . Working outside the home full-time [means] I [can] no longer take advantage of things like the food bank. It [means] extra costs for work expenses and day care.⁵⁹

Many witnesses recommended that the federal minimum wage be increased. Some groups, including the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services⁶⁰ and the Canadian Labour Congress,⁶¹ suggested an hourly rate of \$6.00, while End Legislated Poverty suggested a rate of \$8.00 per hour;⁶² the recommendations of other witnesses fell within this range. Finally, Professor Allan Moscovitch, of the School of Social Work at Carleton University, suggested to the Sub-Committee that the minimum wage be raised to a level that would yield an income equal to the relevant LICO.⁶³ An increased minimum wage was suggested both for those workers under federal jurisdiction and as a signal to the provinces.

⁵⁷ *Proceedings*, Issue 8, p. 9.

⁵⁸ *Proceedings*, Issue 13, p. 63.

⁵⁹ *Proceedings*, Issue 9, p. 65.

⁶⁰ Submission to the Sub-Committee.

⁶¹ *Proceedings*, Issue 10, p. 70.

⁶² *Proceedings*, Issue 9, p. 70.

⁶³ *Proceedings*, Issue 7, p. 9.