

WHY STUDENTS ARE TAKING ACTION ON POVERTY

The face of poverty in Manitoba includes students, graduates with massive student debt, and the thousands of potential students who are shut out of university and college due to high costs and lack of student supports.

Governments everywhere recognise that widely-available public education at all levels is one of the best ways to bring people out of poverty, yet inadequate federal and provincial resources are dedicated to improving access and quality. When governments expect students and their families to fill the funding gap, the results are disastrous. Economically and socially vulnerable groups are shut out of opportunity. After paying for tuition fees, textbooks, course supplies, and rent, students on loans have nothing left for food and other basics. That's why ending the tuition fee freeze in Manitoba, in the midst of a global economic crisis, was such a mistake. Because too many students face poverty, and because 125,000 Manitobans live in poverty, the Canadian Federation of Students–Manitoba is calling on

you to help build a province-wide campaign for a Poverty-Free Manitoba. Let's build on the work that anti-poverty organisations do every day, by uniting students and youth, Aboriginal communities, and community and labour organisations in a call for a real plan to end poverty and social inequality, one that includes a government commitment to lower tuition fees, grants for students, college and university transition programmes, and access to education for all.

LET'S BUILD A UNITED MOVEMENT FOR A FAIR ECONOMY



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CALL TO ACTION

TARGET
POVERTY

THE CAMPAIGN
FOR A

POVERTY-FREE
MANITOBA



DEAR SUPPORTER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE,

I want to thank you and your organisation for the work you are doing every day to reduce poverty in Manitoba and beyond. As you know, the call to action to fight poverty in Manitoba is as urgent now as it ever has been. In the midst of a global economic recession—in which hundreds of thousands of Canadians have lost their jobs, food bank usage across Manitoba has increased, one in five children in Manitoba live in poverty, nearly one in three Aboriginal people lives in poverty, and 12.4% of all Manitobans live below the poverty line—the place and time to take action for a Poverty-Free Manitoba is here and now.

“Poverty is an affront to human dignity, and represents a violation of basic human rights.”

The provincial government of Manitoba has made some progress, but for nearly a decade, those gains have simply been inadequate, and now the provincial government is backtracking in key areas. The lack of childcare spaces and good jobs has left single parents in Manitoba among the most marginalised in our province, while dire lack of infrastructure, resources and supports for Aboriginal and Northern communities means that a shocking number of Manitobans are living without access to clean water, basic healthcare, and proper housing. Poverty in Manitoba strips 125,000 people of their most basic human rights.

It is common knowledge that high-quality public education—from early childhood through to university and college education—and unionised jobs are the surest ways out of poverty in Canada. While the creation of decent jobs and a reasonable income for all requires government and private sector collaboration, public education policy is directly within the grasp of our provincial government. Still, many communities in Manitoba do not have access to primary and secondary education, and the cost of post-secondary education has risen out of reach for many Manitobans. That cost is now set to rise even further.

The outbreak of the H1N1 virus in Aboriginal and Northern communities, and the acute lack of housing across the province are recent reminders that government failure to take action has dire consequences. Poverty can only be prevented if we stand together to make a Poverty-Free Manitoba our priority.

The provincial government's 2009 anti-poverty strategy, *All Aboard*, has left many groups in doubt about the province's long-term indicators, targets, budgets and plans for addressing poverty. Fortunately, many groups have responded to the province's lackluster plan with their own proposal. A report released in May 2009 by Make Poverty History Manitoba and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—*The View From Here*—sets out a realistic plan to reduce poverty in Manitoba by 25% over five years.

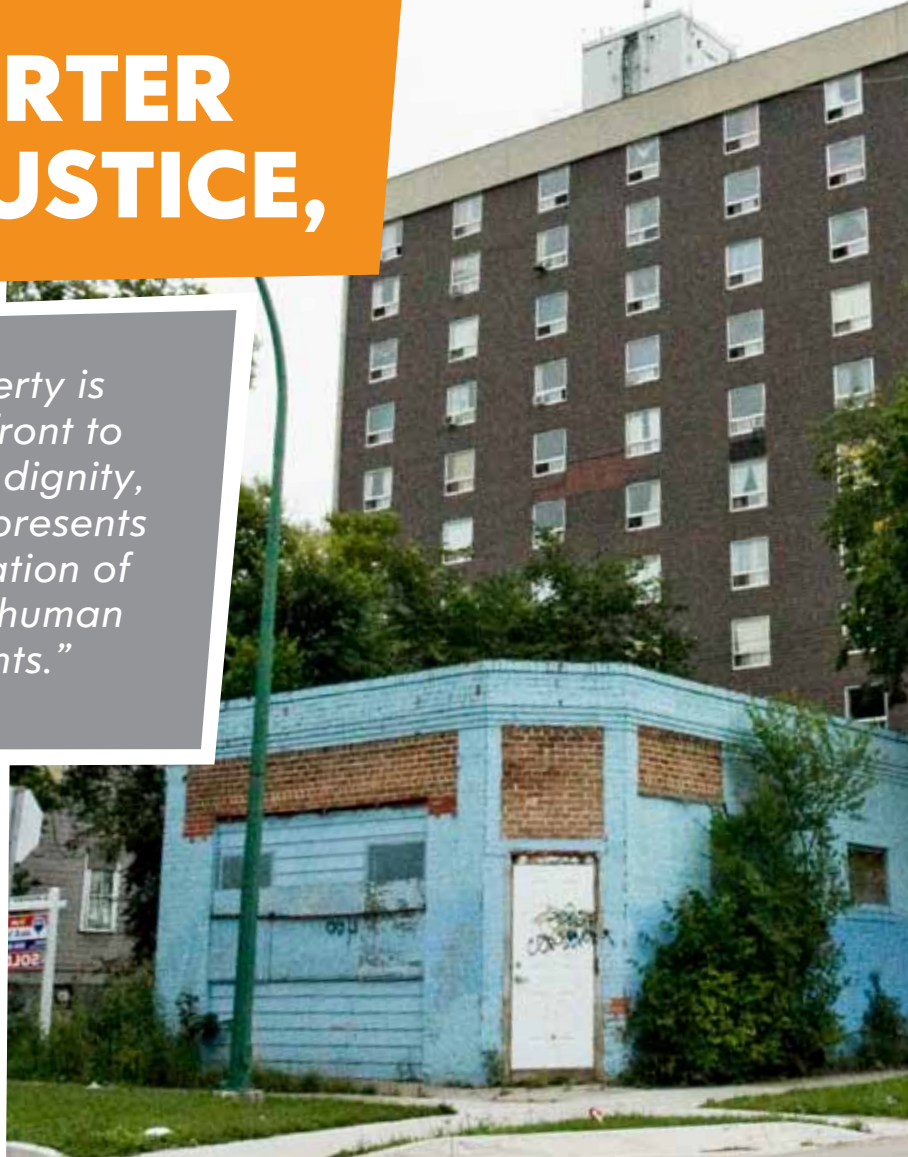
Backed with leading-edge research from progressive organisations across the province, students in Manitoba have resolved to take the reality of poverty to the decision-makers at City Hall, the Provincial Legislature, the Federal Parliament, and into the streets. The 42,000 students that form the Canadian Federation of Students—Manitoba have, launched a province-wide campaign for a Poverty-Free Manitoba to call on elected municipal, provincial and federal representatives to take action for a 25% reduction in poverty over 5 years.

We are calling on you and your organisation to join the broad-based coalition to grow a province-wide campaign for a Poverty-Free Manitoba and to mobilise for a provincial Day of Action on November 5, 2009. In doing so, your organisation will be able to showcase your campaign priorities, as they relate to poverty, alongside other groups, and bring these priorities to campuses, communities and governments. Similar efforts are being organised in Ontario, and other communities will no doubt join the call. Together, we can win a real poverty reduction plan for Manitoba.

Yours in solidarity,



Jonny Sopotiuik,
Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students—Manitoba



10 POINT POVERTY INDEX

- 1 Poverty:** 125,000 Manitobans live in poverty. 11.5% of Manitobans live below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO).
- 2 Poverty in Aboriginal Communities:** At 29% province-wide and a staggering 37% in Winnipeg, Aboriginal poverty is a crisis in Manitoba.
- 3 Child Poverty:** One in five children in Winnipeg live in poverty—the third worst rate in Canada. Nearly 56% of Aboriginal children under 6 years old in Manitoba live in poverty and more than two-thirds of children living in foster care are Aboriginal.
- 4 Poverty Among Newcomers:** Manitoba's immigration strategy brought nearly 11,000 new Canadians to the province, yet 32% of recent immigrants in Manitoba live in poverty.
- 5 Poverty and Disabilities:** Manitobans with disabilities are among the hardest hit by poverty: 16% live in poverty.
- 6 Unemployment:** Manitoba's unemployment rate is 5.2% for July 2009, up 39.7% since last year. There are over 33,000 unemployed Manitobans, and 30% of all unemployed workers in Manitoba are Aboriginal. Student unemployment in Canada hit all-time highs of 21% this summer.
- 7 Education Deficit:** While 70% of new jobs require post-secondary education, average student debt in Manitoba is roughly \$19,000 and student aid recipients are required to live at 30% below the poverty line. Despite this, tuition fees are increasing by 4.5% this year.
- 8 Gender:** Women are disproportionately affected by poverty compared to men. Income disparity between men and women means that women make only 67% what men do in comparable jobs. Women are the largest section of the population living in poverty. In particular, women with families, single mothers and senior citizens face poverty. Aboriginal women in Manitoba are also significantly affected compared to non-Aboriginal women.
- 9 Housing and Homelessness:** With vacancy rates of less than 1% in Manitoba's urban centres, more and more people are left without acceptable housing. Monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Winnipeg averages \$750, yet social assistance provides a family of three only \$430 for rent, leaving a deficit of \$320. Waiting lists for subsidised public housing are as long as 1,111 people.
- 10 Hunger:** Winnipeg Harvest helps to feed over 42,000 Manitobans each month: 3.4% of all Manitobans depend on food banks. Of these, 47% are children—the highest child food bank usage in Canada.

Manitoba's heartbreaking poverty crisis needs to be replaced with dignity and opportunity for all. Students across Manitoba are taking action!

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN!

LOW-INCOME CUT OFF THE POVERTY LINE

Statistics Canada's after-tax-low-income cut-off (LICO) defines a set of income cutoffs below which people may be said to live in dire circumstances. According to Statistics Canada, those who spend more than 55 per cent of their earnings on basic needs are living under the LICO. The LICO measure is a relative calculation as it is based on the percentage of income that individuals and families spend on the basic needs or necessities in comparison with the rest of Canadians. Most social policy analysts, politicians and editorial writers treat the cutoff as “the poverty line”.

