

Let's push out poverty, not the poor!

End homelessness by building social housing

In the last 10 years poverty has become shockingly visible in Maple Ridge and throughout the Fraser Valley. Some people have reacted to this phenomenon by looking at the behaviours of low-income people to explain their poverty. They focus on visibly low-income bodies as the new problem and demand the government and police remove them as the obvious solution. Others have looked for the social causes of rising poverty. They call for more services like homeless shelters, and more public infrastructure like new social housing.

In this pamphlet we argue that poverty has increased because of broad social and economic changes in Western Canada since the 1980s. And we argue that increased poverty has become more visible because of massive government cuts to social programs. Therefore the solution is to make changes at social and government policy levels - beginning with supporting shelters in the short term and building all the housing that low-income, working-class, and Indigenous people need.



Where did this poverty come from?

In the 1980s the Vancouver area underwent the same changes as other cities around the Pacific Rim. The Provincial and City governments orchestrated a major turn in economic development policy. The government turned away from industrial manufacturing and resource processing and towards an economy based on high financial investment and speculation and real estate. This economic policy turn undercut the power of labour unions and

made jobs in Southern BC a predominantly (about 70%) service sector. Jobs today are lower wage, less secure, more temporary, and harder to get than they were before this shift in policy. The homeless who slept on Cliff Avenue in 2015 are the ones who had jobs in the shingle mills up the Fraser, in those factories now running skeleton crews or not at all. They are the survivors of families broken by the shattering of industrial jobs in Southern BC.

Why is it suddenly so visible in public spaces?

At the same time the Socred Government introduced BC's first austerity policies. Austerity is a governance policy that means cutting taxes for the rich and cutting social programs for the poor. Austerity was picked up by the Federal government, which cut regular social housing programs

in 1994, and expanded by the BC Liberal government when it was first elected in 2001. The programs and services that used to offer some supports for those who are very poor have been eliminated at the very same time that jobs for working class people have dried up.



“Deserving/Undeserving” is not a useful way to analyze poverty

Those who react against the increased visibility of poverty sometimes blame the behaviours of low-income people. The idea that people are to blame for their poverty is usually expressed by claiming that there are some people who are poor through no fault of their own (the “deserving”) and others who bear chief responsibility for their poverty because of their behaviours (the “undeserving”). The deserving are poor because of an injury, disability, old or young age, or bad circumstances. The undeserving are poor because of their addictions and criminality. In reality this idea works to punish all low-income people because it justifies austerity, under the banner that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher called “personal responsibility.”

But also, if you look closely you’ll find that the line between the so-called deserving and undeserving poor is really fuzzy. How many amongst the drug using homeless lost their jobs because of injury and their homes because of circumstance? How many would appear to be deserving if they had homes where they could live private lives? How many of us would appear undeserving if we were forced to live our every moment on the streets of Maple Ridge, in full view of prying, judging eyes at all times? No matter the behaviours of an individual, the condition of homelessness and poverty is the penalty of our time and our society. And its solution is first to remedy the loss of services and to claw back the depths of poverty.

Nothing about us without us: Homes not Hate

The Maple Ridge Street Population knows what it takes to end visible poverty and homelessness. In 2016, when the Province cancelled the promised housing at Quality Inn, this community drafted a call-out to define what they need to survive and to get off the streets of Maple Ridge... into homes:

- 1. Homes now!** We need housing right now, in Maple Ridge, our home, and a property where we can tent safely until the housing opens.
- 2. Fight anti-homeless hate!** There should be zero tolerance for anti-homeless hate.
- 3. Control over our homes and lives!** We want homes we govern ourselves and we want the government to work with us directly, as full members of the public.
- 4. End police and bylaw harassment!** Police and bylaw officers kick us out of parks, slash apart our tents, and seize our belongings. Harassment of homeless people must end.
- 5. End poverty and hunger!** There are not enough services or social supports in Maple Ridge or the Fraser Valley for low-income and homeless people. We need higher welfare rates, harm reduction services, and health and social services that we can all access.

The call from the Maple Ridge Street Population is for an end to politics of exclusion, an end to policing poverty by criminalizing and stigmatizing the bodies of low-income people. Let's support the Maple Ridge Street Population and create a community where everyone is accepted and feels belonging. Let's end poverty, not the presence of the poor.

Alliance Against Displacement in solidarity with the Maple Ridge Street Population
<http://stopdisplacement.ca> | organize@stopdisplacement.ca