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CCPA-NS PROVINCIAL DIRECTOR BECOMES CHRONICLE HERALD COLUMNIST

BY FRED FURLONG—CHAIRPERSON

Nova Scotians now have the opportunity to read an alternative policy column once a month in the Chronicle Herald. The Herald invited John Jacobs to file a monthly column beginning in March 2004. John has been our key staff person at CCPA-NS since Spring 2000, for the first years on a part-time basis.

This honour has been well earned. Under John's leadership media coverage of CCPA-NS reports and activities has increased steadily. In fact, CCPA-NS has become an organization of note when public policy is debated whether in public forums or in the media. Columns appear every fourth week. Since columnists choose their own topic this is a prime opportunity to present important issues in a measured and less reactive way than

when the media calls for a commentary on a given issue, on a given day.

The March column focused on Government Budgets More Than Dollars and Cents. The April compared progressive (fair) and regressive (unfair) taxation options that governments can levy to raise revenue. It asked Who Will Pay the Price for Balancing the Books? The May column examined gas price increases. The first column is inserted in this newsletter for your enjoyment. All columns are available on the CCPA-NS website. All CCPA-NS Steering Committee Members extend congratulations to John on the successful filing of his first columns. We are looking forward to more great reading in the months ahead.

CCPA-NS TO RELEASE EDUCATIONAL REPORT EARLY THIS FALL

The Educational Commodities Market: Accounting for Learning in Nova Scotia
by Mike Corbett and Tony Kelly

It was more than a century ago when Marx argued "commodification" would develop side-by-side with capitalism. He reasoned that more and more human processes would become quantified and then turned into marketable commodities. Today, the emphasis on the measurement of intelligence and learning continues to grow. Take for example the importance being placed on standardized testing and governments' tendency to push this type of testing as the gold standard of education performance. Are these tests little more than a powerful form of educational commodification?

Debates of issues like this are why the Nova Scotia office of CCPA is working with Mike Corbett (Acadia) and Tony Kelly (McGill) to complete a broad examination of education as a core public service alongside the call for increased accountability within educational systems. While preliminary work is centred on standardized testing in the school system, the report will look at several school and post-secondary education issues. Corbett and Kelly's investigation of standardized

testing is based on the premise that the market logic and numbers games currently in play are not a particularly effective way to increase our understanding of how children learn or how learning outcomes for students can be improved. More over, this research will outline how "teaching to the test," can further discriminate against students and communities that have long histories of educational failure. The report will make policy recommendations concerning the place of standardized testing in the context of a larger framework of educational assessment practices that support children, and can help parents and communities understand learning.

The aim of the report is to outline ways in which the commodification of education can be resisted through a focus on community-based education and a broader and more inclusive vision of educational standards. The report is poised to be a welcome and useful tool in the heated debate surrounding educational standards, standardized testing and the rapid incursion of market logic into public policy discourse.

NOVA SCOTIA WOMEN ASSESS INCOME ASSISTANCE REFORM

BY KATHERINE REED

A few years ago, the Department of Community Services in Nova Scotia implemented the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) Program. Shortly following, women's centres in Sydney, Pictou County, and Antigonish secured funds from Status of Women Canada and began assessing the program's impact. A set of recommendations aimed at improving the overall EISA program was given to government in 2003. Soon the centres will complete a second report entitled Social Assistance Reform in Nova Scotia: Making it Work for Women. Both studies used a participatory, action-oriented approach to create a better understanding of the program and the changes needed.

The current work zeros in on the Employment Support Program component of the ESIA program. In August 2003 interviews began with 40 women on social assistance. Information on program policy and delivery gathered from front-line departmental workers and administrators is also being included.

Most of the women interviewed appreciate, and make use of, the new employment supports as they attempt to improve their future prospects. However, it's clear inadequate supports are creating considerable barriers.

For example, a mother of one child working full-time and paying \$25 per day for child care needs about \$550 per month, whereas the program allows a maximum of \$400 per family even when more than one child needs care. Overall, the levels set do not meet the basic costs of living, costs related to special needs or the actual costs of entering employment or upgrading skills.

Women also say better information about all aspects of the social assistance program is needed. The quality of service pro-

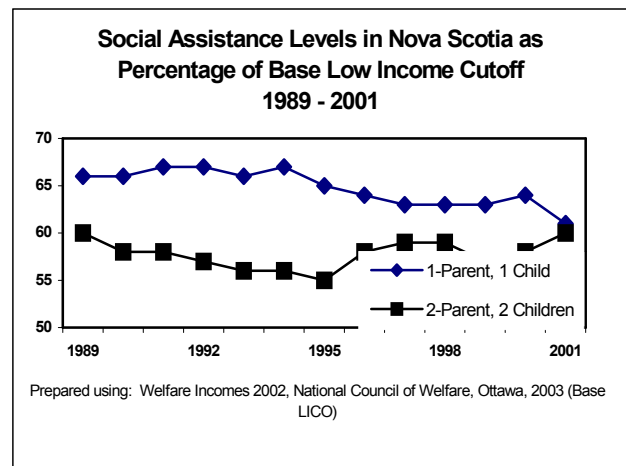
vided to women by social assistance caseworkers is another major concern. The need for sensitivity training and a higher standard of front line delivery of services is being brought forward.

The women's centres are now finalizing recommendations from focus groups held all around the province. The results will be presented to senior officials of the Department of Community Services soon. For more information call:

Every Woman's Centre in Sydney (567-2121)
Antigonish Women's Resource Centre (863-6221)
Pictou County Women's Centre (755-4647)

Katherine Reed is a member of CCPA-NS Steering Committee and can be emailed at: reebing@ns.sympatico.ca.

The graph below (prepared by CCPA-NS) shows the shortfall created by low levels of financial support from governments for families receiving social assistance.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED—SPECIAL APPEAL FUNDRAISING

CCPA-NS is seeking volunteers with experience raising funds—especially those who could help in the area of special appeals to members and supporters.

Provincial offices of CCPA must show a strong base of financial support within their province to remain as a viable part of the national CCPA framework. We have had some success increasing the number of members in Nova Scotia. The next step is to see if donations and other forms of financial help can be increased as well.

If you have time to become involved in either the development or implementation of a special appeals fundraising initiative for CCPA-NS and have some past experience that would help us build this program we would love to hear from you. Please call Fred Furlong, Chair of the Special Appeals Committee, at 445-0343.

**CCPA-NS STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS SEND A SPECIAL HELLO AND THANKS TO THOSE WHO
ATTENDED THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING IN PORT HAWKESBURY.**

CCPA-NS RESEARCH ON NS TAX CUTS CONTRIBUTES TO PUBLIC POLICY DEBATE & CHANGE

In the last edition of this newsletter the Conservative government's plan to put into effect on January 1, 2004 its proposed ten percent, across-the-board cut in personal income tax was described as folly. This April, our Alternative Provincial Budget (APB), released the week before the actual provincial budget, warned that social programs would be further under funded and economic development threatened if government stuck to its plan.

In light of expenditure pressures the government did change its plan; higher income Nova Scotians will no longer benefit disproportionately from the tax break—which started with \$155 refund cheques arriving in the mailboxes of Nova Scotia taxpayers just before last summer's provincial election.

This debate and change regarding the unfairness of this tax cut was led by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. It demonstrates that important gains can be made when balanced, non-partisan analysis is brought into the public forum to counter the limited views of business and government.

You may also recall that many CCPA supporters responded to the “windfall” by sending their cheque to us. This provided the Nova Scotia office with almost \$4,000 which helped fund this year's APB. At times when the impact of CCPA-NS can be so clearly identified—it is fitting that we all take time to celebrate and give thanks to those who work, volunteer or donate to CCPA-NS.

Teachers who teach beyond the knowledge society develop not only intellectual capital in their students but also social capital...

BOOK RECOMMENDED BY RON BRUNTON **TEACHING IN THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF INSECURITY** BY ANDY HARGREAVES

Hargreaves book focuses on education within the current geo-political economy. It belongs on the reading list of everyone concerned with education and is a valuable read for those concerned with public sector services and organizational management. Hargreaves makes an extremely convincing case that education is the critical investment required for successful inclusion into the knowledge society. He sees the term “*knowledge society*” as a misnomer and argues that “a knowledge society is really a learning society.” Of particular interest is the comparison of two sides in the knowledge society. He describes a very dark side “hungry for profit” that has an inherent tendency to bring alienation and isolation along with economic prosperity.

For Hargreaves, education systems have a critical role in sustaining, developing and nurturing democracy and he connects this back to teachers. He is diligent in his critique of the standards and standardized reform movements that have become commonplace in Canada, the United States and Britain.

The book celebrates teaching as a profession and teachers as professionals. It decries those forces, primarily driven by *market fundamentalism* that erode and destroy that professionalism. Hargreaves has brought to teachers, policy makers, parents and everyone a book that unravels our current social order in light of the intimate relationship it has with education.

An inspiring and highly recommended read!

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Recent CCPA-NS Publications

Promises to Keep: The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card 1989-2001

by Pauline Raven and Lesley Frank, November 2003, 15 pgs.

This report finds that 19.2% of children in Nova Scotia live in poverty – the third worst rate of child poverty in Canada and a higher rate than when the promise was made to end child poverty by the year 2000. In Nova Scotia 38,000 children live in families where incomes are sufficiently low to create severe difficulties.

Nova Scotia Alternative Budget Fiscal Plan 2004-2005

April 2004, 16 pgs

The APB fiscal plan identifies three fundamental challenges that must be addressed: under-funding of programs, services and infrastructure; insufficient revenue; and the size of the province's debt. The APB fiscal plan provides a realistic plan for addressing these challenges. It shows that Nova Scotia cannot afford the social, economic and fiscal price of an income tax cut.

Assessing Prince Edward Island's Fiscal Situation

by Wimal Rankaduwa and John Jacobs, February 2004, 14 pgs.

This report finds that the current and anticipated PEI deficits are manageable and well within the capacity of the province's finances. It concludes that PEI's fiscal situation does not justify cuts to program expenditures.

Equalization: Financing Canadians' Commitment to Sharing and Social Solidarity

by Errol Black and Jim Silver, March 2004, 28 pgs.

The report provides an excellent orientation to Canada's equalization program. It concludes that the program must move to a 10 province standard, to include Alberta, if the program is to meet the federal government's constitutional requirement to provide comparable levels of public services at comparable levels of taxation across Canada.

Free downloads of all Nova Scotian reports are available on the web

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