

# Educated poor

## *Federal government committee wants to change definition of poverty to exclude students*

A report from the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women recommends that full-time students without dependents should not be included in new benchmarks evaluating poverty and income inequality.

The committee also says families headed by full-time students should answer questionnaires to establish their level of economic hardship.

"We're just trying to see who's really poor," says the committee chair, Progressive Conservative MP Barbara Greene. "[The report] is just another measure of poverty, an accurate one."

But Francois Dumaine, acting director for

the National AntiPoverty Organization, says the report is not accurate at all. "They [the committee members] are trying to sidetrack from poverty," says Dumaine.

He says his organization withdrew from the committee last year because it felt Barbara Greene was pushing an agenda to redefine poverty rather than fight it.

Dumaine says the exemption of students from poverty statistics shows how insensitive the committee is to poverty.

"It marginalizes the reality of many Canadians," he says. In fact, Dumaine says, student poverty is on the rise.

"We've seen a very big increase in the number of food banks on university campuses

across the country," he says.

But the report says poverty is a student's choice. "Post-secondary students make their choices voluntarily. Most students do not suffer a low standard of living in the same way as do truly poor persons."

Jocelyn Charron, communications officer for the Canadian Federation of Students, says students do suffer from low incomes and are suffering even more from government cutbacks.

"It may be true [that students] choose to go to school, but they don't choose the conditions where grants are cut, aid is cut and tuition is raised," he says.

Under the heading The Case of Students, the report says students "choose to forego current income in exchange for expectations of higher future income and in exchange for the intangible benefits associated with greater learning."

But Charron says the report reveals the government's misunderstanding of the conditions faced by students and the supposed benefits obtained from a post-secondary education. "They look on student poverty as a given," he says. "That mentality really shows their [the committee members] age."

The report's recommendations are now being reviewed by various government committees and won't be adopted until after the next election, providing the Tories are re-elected, says Greene.

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