

Inside this issue:

May Day—Celebrating Workers	2
Tapas for TAPS	3
What's Love Got To Do With It?	4
Make Poverty Public	5
Be Counted—Vote!	7

MySelfServe Maze

The New Income Assistance Application Process

By Daniel Jackson

The Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) has leapt into the 21st century with an updated online application process for income assistance. This application also acts as the initial gateway to Persons with Disability (PWD) assistance. While better software can be helpful, this new application is a further movement away from providing accessible services that actually work for the people who need to access these services. I'll lay out what you need to know before



discussing some of the problems that I see.

What You Need to Know About the New Income Assistance Application

The new income assistance application is on MySelfServe, the Ministry's online portal, but there are a few steps you have to take before you get there. First, you need a BCeID, which

you set up online at www.bceid.ca. You then need to create a MySelfServe account, which you do online, at myselfserve.gov.bc.ca. For both of these, you need access to a working email address.

Once you have the basics, and you've waited for MySelfServe to process your signup (about ten minutes), you can proceed to apply for income assistance. The questionnaire will ask for details on your housing, banking, and employment situation and history. You are required, in the most basic cases, to have digital

(See IA Application, page 2)

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MAY DAY—CELEBRATING WORKERS

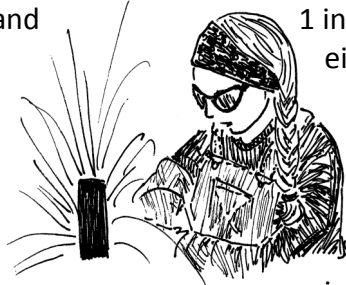
By David Huxtable

May 1 is International Workers' Day, a holiday celebrated around the world—but not in the US, where it was initiated as a day of protest in support of an eight-hour work day. In 1884 the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada made a resolution in favour of an eight-hour work day: "...that eight hours shall constitute a legal day's labor from May First, 1886, and that we recommend to labor organizations throughout their jurisdiction that they so direct their laws as to conform to this resolution by the time named."

The 1880s were violent. Protests and strikes demanding the eight-hour work day were brutally suppressed by employers and governments. Particularly significant and brutal was the government response to the 1886 general strike in Chicago. That year, Chicago workers joined others across North America in demanding an eight-hour day. On the third day of the strike, a bomb was thrown into a crowd, killing four workers. Four labour

leaders were hanged for this in 1887, despite a lack of evidence.

In Paris in 1889, the Congress of the Second International—an international organization of unions and socialist parties—called for workers around the world to protest on May 1 in support of the eight-hour work day.



Over the 20th century, as the workers' movement gained strength, May 1 transitioned from a day of illegal protest to a legal holiday in celebration of workers and their struggle. May 1 is seen by many activists in North America as a commemoration of the four workers hanged unjustly for the 1886 bombing. But May 1 is much more than that. It is an international celebration of the contributions of workers and their fight for justice. ■

Check us out at
www.tapsbc.ca

Taproot is published bi-monthly. Newsletter artists:
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(Cont'd from IA Application, Page 1)

photographs or scans of:

- your physical SIN card (providing the number is not sufficient)
- two additional pieces of ID (one of which must be photographic)
- a recent photo of yourself
- stamped bank statements for the last 60 days (not online printouts)
- your lease
- bank profile forms for all banks
- evidence of your work search activities

You also need to provide these details for your partner, if you're married or common law. If you cannot provide all of this, you can save your application and return to it once you have the documents ready to upload. If you are unable to provide digital documents, you must bring paper copies to your local MSDSI or Service BC office and submit them there. Be warned, though—the Ministry will likely close your file if there is no activity on your application for a period of five days.

Once you successfully complete the online application and upload or submit all documents, you are placed in the queue for a phone intake interview. The Ministry will call or use

(See IA Application, page 3)

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for
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Tickets \$75

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For tickets contact:
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(Cont'd from IA Application, page 2)

MySelfServe messaging to schedule this. If you do not have access to a phone, the Ministry claims that an in-person intake process is always an option, so make sure you request this during your application by entering a comment at the end which clearly states that you have no access to a phone. The timeline for scheduling a phone interview is between two and twenty business

days, depending on the urgency of your application. If you are fleeing an abusive relationship, the wait time is up to five business days. If you are facing imminent homelessness, or are already homeless, the wait time is up to ten business days. These wait times are in addition to the mandatory 30-day work search period that is required before you apply for income assistance, and in person

(See IA Application, page 6)

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WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

By Stephen Portman

For most, falling in love and deciding to move in together is a decision that is entered into freely. You get to know a person you like—maybe love. You find an apartment and start building a shared life together.

Over time, financial and social dependence tends to grow, and after 24 months of living in a “marriage-like” relationship, the Family Law Act begins to apply to your happy cohabitation. You are now effectively spouses, with all the legal and social implications that apply.

If you are poor and on income assistance, the process is quite different. In B.C., if the government—in the form of the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation—is satisfied that a relationship demonstrates (1) financial dependence or interdependence, and (2) social and familial interdependence consistent with a marriage-like relationship, it can determine two individuals to be spouses and cut back income supports after only three months. That's one eighth the time the rest of us get to decide how we want to share our lives.

This heavily accelerated

process allows for far less individual freedom for both partners and creates a level of dependence that can result in real harm. The impact that this class-based legal distinction inflicts on the less fortunate and marginalized people of B.C. (predominantly female citizens and their children) is chilling.

Take the story of Sarah, a single mother who was evicted from her home this past September. Sarah is out of work, as she is recovering from a motor-vehicle crash that severely restricted her basic mobility. She is also being treated for symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from a traumatic childhood that she is only now starting to come to terms with.

Because of this, she has been forced to leave an affordable apartment in which she has happily raised her child for the past two years.

Sarah's monthly provincial income assistance totals \$877. With this amount she must cover rent, food, clothing and other life essentials. With a vacancy rate in Victoria that is nearly non-existent and some of the least affordable housing in Canada to choose from,

TAX CLINIC

At TAPS
Every Thursday
9:00 to 4:00
First come, first served.

Please note:
We are doing taxes for 2014, 2015, 2016 only until the end of April. Starting in May we will also do taxes for prior years.

DAPHNE

We are sad to note the passing, at age 84, of our wonderful front desk volunteer Daphne. Through her 17 years at TAPS, Daphne's genuine love of people and her deep compassion for others made TAPS a welcoming place for our clients on Friday afternoons. It has been a blessing to know her.

All of Us at TAPS

Sarah has had little option but to move in with her ex-boyfriend, Larry.

They are no longer romantically involved, but it was the only available option. Not a good option—the only option.

Three months after moving into Larry's one-

(See What's Love, page 5)

(Cont'd from What's Love, Page 4)

bedroom apartment, the government sent her a letter requesting Larry's financial information, as her file was to be updated. Larry had to report his monthly income from his job as a cashier, where he makes \$1,500 a month.

As Larry and Sarah are sharing a one-bedroom apartment and all associated bills, the B.C. government determines them to be in a marriage-like relationship. Sarah now has no income of her own, and she and her daughter are forced into dependence on Larry's already low monthly income to survive.

Larry must now support three people on his very humble wage. This is the last thing Sarah wanted, and her loss of independence has made her even more vulnerable. Needless to say, the household becomes tense and this undesirable situation gets worse.

There are thousands of Sarahs in B.C.—women who are forced to become rapidly dependent upon an ex-spouse or a new boyfriend and, as a result, become far less able to exercise independence. The unfortunate result is that when subjected to this power imbalance, which can include violence, women are

FEDERAL DISABILITY ADVOCACY PROJECT

TAPS' Federal Disability Advocacy Project can provide information on CPP-Disability, the Disability Tax Credit and the Registered Disability Savings Plan. If you would like to speak with an advocate about any of these benefits, or would like help applying, contact Caitlin Wright at TAPS at 250-361-3521.

less able to leave.

When the Family Law Act came into force, it was widely touted for alleviating the risk of domestic violence. The same standard should no doubt apply across economic-class divides.

Chilling also is the level of governmental inaction on this matter—especially given the relative ease, administratively and financially, of allowing people in poverty the same legal deference afforded to the more economically secure. It is well past time for the definitions of spouse that apply to people in poverty to be the same that everyone

MAKE POVERTY PUBLIC: ELECTION 2017

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these electoral districts:**

**Victoria-Swan Lake
Victoria-Beacon Hill
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**Plus a service fair with
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else lives by.

West Coast LEAF, a women's equality organization, submitted a detailed proposal to the provincial government, complete with the evidence needed to make these changes, and the draft legislation to get it done. All that is needed is the political will and a pen stroke. ■

(Cont'd from IA Application, page 3)

intakes have a longer wait time

During your phone interview, the Ministry may request further documents, and may also require a second phone interview once those documents are submitted.

What's Wrong with Income Assistance Intake in BC?

Income assistance is explicitly designed to be the support of last resort, for people who have exhausted all other possibilities. People who have exhausted all resources are necessarily desperate, often on the edge of homelessness, or already experiencing homelessness. The level of technical savvy, access to electronic resources, and time required to successfully apply for income assistance is an incredible barrier to accessing this support. Perhaps, were the Ministry providing access to computers or phones, or if they were willing to work with applicants to reach approval, this new application would be a manageable hurdle. As it stands, the Ministry searches to find a reason for denial. They also consistently direct people to charitable organizations for assistance completing their own application. The Ministry, and

the government controlling it, knows that advocacy organizations are deeply reluctant to refuse to assist clients in these situations. We are fully aware that the barriers the Ministry has put in place will completely prevent many very desperate people from accessing income and disability assistance without our help. And without that assistance, these people will doubtless end up homeless, and perhaps worse.

Whenever they are confronted with the problems of an online-only application, the Ministry argues that increasing digitization doesn't bar anyone from receiving assistance, because those who really need can have an in-person intake process. If you have difficulties having the Ministry schedule an in-person interview, please contact Stephen or Daniel at TAPS, as we have not heard of anyone managing to successfully complete an in-person intake.

Considered on its own, this new application could seem a relatively benign attempt to update a dated platform, and allow users to make use of smartphones and similar technology. But when one considers the Ministry office closures, the removal of most in-person

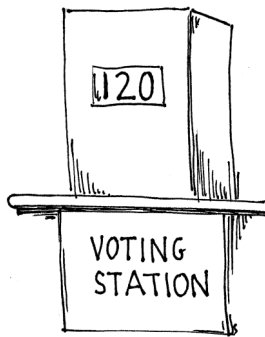
service options, and the mounting documentation requirements, it is clear that the Ministry is focussed entirely on cutting costs. They do this by making income assistance as difficult as legally possible to obtain, instead of assisting their desperate clients through challenging periods, or supporting them while they search for work. Fewer recipients, less cost. They do this by forcibly downloading their responsibilities on charitable community organizations, instead of providing responsive, efficient service. Fewer responsibilities, less cost. And, last month, they did this by rolling out a platform which requires smartphone-based internet access, instead of creating an intake process that can meet the needs of their clients. Fewer completed applications, less cost. This is not the social safety net that most Canadians believe should be there for people when they need it most. ■

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BE COUNTED—VOTE!

The provincial election is coming up on May 9. In order to vote you must be registered. Early registration closes on April 11, but you can also register when you vote. From April 11 until 4:00 on May 9, you can register and vote at a district electoral office (DEO). Call Elections BC at 1-800-661-8683 after April 10 for the address of your local DEO. You can also register and vote at a polling station on election day.



On election day, you will need to prove your identity and address. There are several ways to do this. You can show one of the following pieces of ID: a BC driver's licence, a BC Identification Card (BCID), a BC Services Card (with photo), or another card issued by the Government of BC or Canada that shows your name, photo and address. You can show a Certificate of Indian Status issued by the Government of Canada.

Alternatively, you can show two pieces of ID. At least one must have your current address. Examples of acceptable ID are: healthcare card, birth

certificate, Social Insurance Number card, Correctional Service Canada Offender Identification Card, income tax assessment notice, government cheque or government cheque stub, utility bill, or prescription medication container, among others. Expired ID is acceptable, as long as the information shown on it is still current.

A voter without acceptable identification can be vouched for by another individual,

known as a voucher. The voucher must have the necessary identification documents and be: a registered voter resident in the voter's electoral district; a spouse, parent, grandparent, adult child, adult grandchild or adult sibling of the voter; or a person with the authority to make personal care decisions for the voter. The voter and the voucher must each make a solemn declaration confirming the voter's identity and residential address. A voucher who is not the voter's relative or personal care authority may only vouch for one voter.

If none of the previous options work for you—for example, you do not have an

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

TAPS has advocates who can help you apply for Person With Disabilities status (PWD) through the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation. TAPS can also help you with an appeal if you have applied and been denied. Call us at 250-361-3521 for more information. If you are at the appeal stage, be sure to get in touch with us as soon as possible after receiving your letter of denial, and tell the receptionist you are calling about a disability appeal.

address or adequate ID—you should still be able to vote by having an administrator at an organization whose services you use—for example, a shelter or Our Place—fill out a form called a Confirmation of Residence, confirming that you are a resident or use the services of that organization. Confirmation of Residence forms will be available from April 10 at your local district electoral office. ■



Together Against
Poverty Society

ABOUT TAPS

TAPS was established and registered as a society in 1989. We provide legal information and representation on issues relating to income assistance, provincial and federal disability benefits, residential tenancy, and employment standards to people in the Greater Victoria area. We also provide public legal education in these areas and on broader poverty issues.

You can reach us between 9:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday to Friday, by phone at 250-361-3521 or in person at #302 - 895 Fort Street. The office is closed daily for lunch between noon and 1:00 pm and is closed to walk-in clients on Monday and Friday mornings.

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The best way to support TAPS is by becoming a monthly donor! Please complete and submit the form below and attach a void cheque.

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Together Against Poverty Society, #302 - 895 Fort Street, Victoria, BC, V8W 1H7

Date: _____

Please debit my bank account (attach VOID cheque):

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I would like this donation debit to be processed through my account on the 25th of each month.

Signature: _____

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