

## **Our Low Minimum Wage is Overt Poor Bashing**

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, May 01, 2009

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It's interesting how economistic we are, all obsessed with how politics affects the economy. What's galling is how the economy is some nebulous thing that is measured by the GDP and not by how it serves human beings.

Gordon Campbell criticizes Carole James because she's not had broad business experience. He's been in politics for a quarter century, but let's forget that for a minute.

Campbell's criticism is an attempt to frame leadership in economic terms. But what about human leadership and social leadership and political leadership? His has been totally absent.

Switching to the minimum wage debate, right and left fight over studies supporting or defending the neoliberals' low minimum wage. Throughout the debate, the morality of a poverty wage is ignored.

This reflects very badly on our society, since we are so eager to ignore the human reality of an economic policy.

Wouldn't it be amazing if we actually spent a week during the campaign talking about issues and completely ignoring the economic implications?

We could talk about elements of our society that are right, wrong, good and bad. Then we could finish the week and ask the economists to build a model to reflect how we want our society to be.

If this notion strikes you as crazy and naive, then maybe you are too economistic as well and can't see the human forest for the economic trees. And as a political economist, I have this vision problem too sometimes, so it's important to have occasional reality checks.

Whatever is on your mind now, read Stephen Hume's moral analysis of a low minimum wage below. It's hard to disagree with it without ending up with you merely trying to justify greed and bashing the already poor. If I'm wrong, send me your justifiable defense. I dare you.

[\*Why the minimum wage should be raised.\*](#)

*Statistical wrangling among economists aside, it seems to me there's a clear moral dimension to the debate.*

*In the eight years that B.C.'s minimum wage was frozen, inflation drove up the cost of living index. And as businesses raised prices to cover their costs, the average hourly wage in B.C. was also increased over the same period. It rose by 24 per cent. Provincial politicians voted themselves a 29-per-cent increase over the same period. Some senior public servants were granted increases even greater than that by the*

*legislature.*

*This effectively means that while the mainstream shielded itself from inflation with wage and price increases, those working poor compelled to accept the frozen statutory minimum saw the purchasing power of their wages erode by 17.4 per cent.*