

Radio links:

From <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/morningreport> :

07:18 [Child Poverty Action Group To Present Case](#) (duration: 4'21")

CPAG says the Government's family assistance policies discriminate against 300 hundred thousand children.

[nb - the figure as stated in the case is 250,000 -RS]

Government fight looming over child payments

NZ Herald

28.11.05

By Simon Collins

The Government has been forced into a court battle to stop beneficiary families making claim to \$3000 a year under the Working for Families package.

In a landmark case, the Child Poverty Action Group has won the right to take legal action over Government policies it says discriminate against the 250,000 New Zealand children who have at least one parent on a benefit.

The Human Rights Review Tribunal ruled the group can legally challenge the exclusion of beneficiaries from a new payment which gives families an extra \$60 a week from April.

The Government intends the payment to go to families that are not on benefits - thus dubbed the "in-work payment" - and it is meant to give parents an incentive to get off welfare.

Labour's Working for Families policy was introduced last year after criticism that it was not doing enough to help low- and middle-income families.

Extending the scheme was a key plank of Labour's election campaign and announced just days before National released its tax cut plans.

The court case is the first to be taken under amendments to the Human Rights Act allowing Government legislation and policy to be challenged.

Child Poverty Action claims the payment breaches a clause in the Human Rights Act that prohibits discrimination on the grounds of being a beneficiary.

The Crown has appealed and the case will be heard in the High Court at Wellington early next year.

The policy is budgeted to cost \$289 million in its first full year and \$350 million in the second year.

Extending it to the 250,000 children who have at least one parent on a benefit would cost \$3120 a year for each family, or around \$390 million if families have an average of two children each.

The \$60-a-week payment would give a 25 per cent boost to the weekly income of the average solo parent on the domestic purposes benefit, who at present get \$241 a week after tax.

Child Poverty Action spokeswoman Susan St John, an Auckland University economist, said the proposed payment discriminated against children because of their parents' situation, over which they had no control.

"If children whose parents are working need this money, why not other children?" she asked.

"Not all parents are consistently able to take up or find employment - and inadequate income during childhood can mean a lifetime of suffering and disadvantage."

Green Party social services spokeswoman Sue Bradford, who has campaigned to make the Working for Families package non-discriminatory for people on benefits, said the Human Rights Review Tribunal ruling was a significant advancement.

"It is great that they are coming out and saying beneficiaries do have human rights.

"If you are going to help poor people you should actually help the poorest of the poor."

Social Development Minister David Benson-Pope would not comment on the case yesterday.

- Additional reporting: Ainsley Thomson

The figures

- * \$60 a week for families with one to three children, plus \$15 a week for every extra child, from next April.
- * Payable to families who are not on benefits.
- * Child Poverty Action Group wants it extended to 250,000 children with at least one parent on a benefit.
- * Would cost \$3120 a year for each family.
- * Total cost about \$390 million.

NZ Herald

From www.scoop.co.nz :

Govt must stop discrimination against poorest kids

Monday, 28 November 2005, 11:14 am

Press Release: Green Party

28 November 2005

Govt must stop discrimination against NZ's poorest kids

The Green Party is calling on the Government not to appeal a Human Rights Review Tribunal decision that could see an end to discrimination against some children from low-income families.

Green Party Social Development Spokesperson Sue Bradford says the tribunal's decision, following a complaint by Child Poverty Action Group over the Child Tax Credit and the In Work Payment, should be allowed to proceed to court.

Children whose parents are on benefits are not eligible for the Child Tax Credit, which was introduced in 1996, nor for its replacement, the In Work Payment, to be introduced in April next year as part of the Government's Working For Families initiative.

"It seems that this Labour-led Government is determined to push people off benefits and into work at almost any cost. There seems little regard for the children who are being penalised by this process.

"It is clearly unfair that children whose parents are on benefits are not eligible for this financial assistance when their classmates, whose parents may be earning the same, are.

"The Greens congratulate CPAG for their tenacity and determination on bringing this ground-breaking and highly significant case," Ms Bradford says.

"I call on the Government not to appeal the Tribunal's decision, but to have the courage to make a policy decision in favour of equity and in the best interests of all New Zealand children.

"Like CPAG, the Green Party has been fighting Labour since the 2003 Budget on the aspects of the Working For Families package, which entrenches structural discrimination against beneficiaries."

Maori Party Salutes Child Poverty Action Group

Monday, 28 November 2005, 3:10 pm

Press Release: The Maori Party

28 November 2005

Maori Party Salutes Child Poverty Action Group

Tariana Turia, Co-leader, Maori Party;

"The Maori Party congratulates the Child Poverty Action group for their landmark case to bring legal action against the Government over its discriminatory policies" said Tariana Turia, Co-leader, Maori Party.

"Poverty is a huge blight on this nation" said Mrs Turia. "The Maori Party has consistently challenged the Government to recognise that poverty has become entrenched, especially amongst Maori, Pasifika, sole parent and benefit dependent families".

"Poverty works at many levels" said Mrs Turia. "It is of key concern that six out of every ten Maori adults had an annual income of \$20,000 or less".

"For a Government that prides itself on its unemployment rate, it is an absolute travesty that the most recent Household Labour Force survey revealed that the unemployment rate for Maori has steadily increased over the last year from an actual rate of 8.3% in September 2004 to 9.1% in September 2005. This contrasts markedly to the unemployment rate for Europe which was sitting at 2.2% in September 2005".

"As the United Nations Special Rapporteur revealed on Friday, 'the gap in social and economic conditions is actually growing larger and an increasing proportion of Maori are being left behind'".

"In the Poverty Indicator Project it revealed that Maori and Pasifika women were over-represented at every foodbank participating in the survey; and over-represented in low-paid work and benefit statistics".

"We met today with Te Puna Whaiora Children's Health Camps, and learnt that 48% of the families working with that organisation are Māori" said Mrs Turia. "Poverty was a key factor in increasing risk amongst these families".

"One wonders what more evidence this minority Labour Government needs to address the issues of poverty and deprivation, which are particularly marked for Maori and Pasifika families" said Mrs Turia.