



*Family Network*

# Building Blocks for Canada's New Social Union

MARGARET BIGGS

*Working Paper No. F|02|*



CPRN

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# Contents

Foreword	v
Acknowledgments	vii
1 Introduction: A Framework for Discussion	1
2 Rethinking the Social Union: Key Issues	5
a. Intergovernmental Relations	5
b. Democratic Engagement and Accountability	7
c. Social Policy Renewal	8
3 Lessons from the Canadian Experience	11
a. The Canada Assistance Plan: An Accountability Gap	11
b. Education: Accountability as a Catalyst for Change	14
c. The Agreement on Internal Trade: A Tale of Caution or Hope?	15
4 Lessons from Abroad and Down Under	21
a. The European Community: Decision Making and Democracy Trade-Offs	21
b. Germany: The Potential and Pitfalls of Intergovernmentalism	23
c. Australia: New Ways of Managing National Business	25
d. Conclusion	29
5 Toward a New Social Union	33
a. Building Blocks and Instruments	33
b. Architecture for a New Social Union	39
c. Conclusion: First Steps	43
Appendices	
A CPRN Roundtable on "Governance and Accountability in the New Social Union"	49
B CPRN Core Funders and Funding Sponsor	51
Notes	53
References	55

# Foreword

In the February 1995 budget, the federal government closed the bookends on the social policy structure of the postwar period. The terms of the social union were fundamentally altered by two decisions: federal transfers to the provinces were collapsed into a single pool of funds known as the Canada Health and Social Transfer; and the size of the cash transfer was cut from \$17.4 billion in 1994-95 to \$13 billion in 1996-97. Another decision is yet to be honoured. That was the plan to work with the provinces to develop "through mutual consent, a set of shared principles and objectives that could underlie the new transfer."

At the time of the budget, CPRN was only two months old. We immediately turned our attention to the shape of the new social union, which we define as the web of citizen rights and obligations that give effect to our shared sense of social purpose and common citizenship.

The first project was *Exploring Canadian Values* by Suzanne Peters, which began a process of clarifying the underlying social values of Canadians. That report was published in December 1995, and the work continues under the title *The Society We Want*, a tool kit for public dialogue on social values.

The second project, which began in September, when Margaret Biggs joined us as Research Fellow, focused on the form and function of the new social union. What would be the governing structures for a more decentralized and much leaner social safety net? How would citizens be able to influence the shape of this new union? And what would be the intergovernmental process that would coordinate the actions of federal, provincial and territorial governments who share responsibility for social programming?

In this Working Paper, Margaret Biggs has adopted a case study approach, looking at the Canadian experience in areas such as social assistance, education, and internal trade, as well as the experience of intergovernmental decision making in the European Community, Germany and Australia. Her analysis builds upon the debate that took place at a CPRN Roundtable in March 1996, which included federal and provincial officials, as well as experts from the private and non-profit sectors. It also picks up many of the themes in the Ministerial Council Report to Premiers on *Social Policy Reform and Renewal*, which was released in March.

The paper sets out the building blocks for creating and managing a renewed social union in Canada. It is intended to help governments frame their discussions about how to maintain a shared national (not federal) dimension to social policy

across the country and how to enhance the participation and transparency that are essential for democracy. The paper is also designed to help citizens and interested groups to parse the rather difficult debate that lies ahead as we construct a new version of the Canadian social union.

Judith Maxwell  
President

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