Finding the Right "Welfare Mix" For Today

Friday, February 7, 2003 – The past two decades have seen significant changes in Canada's socio-economic environment, changes that demand accommodation in our social and economic policies.

The advent of the knowledge-based economy, changing labour markets, changing gender roles, new definitions of the family, an ageing society, and a growing number of working poor, are some of the phenomena unforeseen in the years immediately following 1945, when much of our system of social protection was crafted.

Recognition of the need to readjust social programs initially coincided with concern over the worsening financial situation of governments in the 1980s. Accordingly, the response was often to cut back spending and rely on the market to solve the problem through job creation and economic growth.

By the late 1990s, with public balance sheets improving, but poverty rates rising, especially for families with children, it was evident that the market needed help.
Western welfare states have set about redesigning their social programs to take into account the new environment and to recognize the need to integrate social and economic policy.

The effect is often to alter the "welfare mix" – the relative importance of each of four sources of welfare: *market* income, benefits and services provided by the *family*, services provided by *governments*, and those provided by the *community*.

Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network and Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance at the Université de Montréal, recently completed a paper on this subject for Alberta's Department of Human Resources and Employment.

In ***Redesigning the Welfare Mix: Social Policy Challenges,*** Jenson explores the notion of the welfare mix, outlines the current challenges common to many countries, and examines the responses of the countries of the European Union and the United States. This sets the stage for an exploration of the responses of Canadian governments, useful comparisons with experience abroad and suggestions for a more robust welfare mix in Canada.

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