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Ambitious Project Tackles New Social Architecture for Canada

Ottawa – Canada, with other countries, faces a moment of “fundamental choice”. It’s time to reassess our critical social needs and the way we choose to meet them.

New research from CPRN addresses the challenge of redesigning Canada’s “social architecture” to accord with an ageing society, new family structures, changing immigration patterns and the distribution of income and work in the knowledge economy.

Catching Up to Reality: Building the Case for a New Social Model, by Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN’s Family Network, is the first of CPRN’s new Social Architecture Papers. Jenson traces the socio-economic patterns and underlying understanding and prescription (what she calls “social knowledge”) that shaped policy choices from the 1940s through the 1960s. She describes how new social realities challenge that social knowledge, and she identifies new knowledge that demands a policy response more appropriate to current conditions.

“We are in a situation similar to that after World War II,” says Jenson. “There is a clear understanding that change is necessary and that the old practices are no solution for new problems.”

Social well-being depends on income and services from four major sources:

- Market income;
- Non-market services and benefits within the family;
- State-sponsored public services and income transfers;
- Community services and supports (volunteer-inspired).

The roles, responsibilities, and relationships, between these sources of social well-being, comprise what we call a society’s ‘social architecture’.

“Every country makes its own choices about the social architecture it wants, based on its values, experience and the state of its knowledge,” Jenson says, “Canada needs to re-examine the mix of responsibilities and relationships among these four sources of well-being in the light of profound changes in our socio-economic make-up.”

Those changes have overturned the idea of *typical* homes, families and workplaces implicit in social programs set in place in the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s. Some examples:

- Increasing inequality of family disposable income (stable from the 1970s to the mid 1990s, but rising since then);
- Divorce rates in 2001 were six times those in 1961;
- Births to non-married women as a percentage of all births in 2001 were eight times as high as in 1961;
- Lone-parent families were more than twice as common in 2001 as in 1961;
- The proportion of women over 15 in the labour force doubled from 1961 to 2001;
- The percentage of the population aged 65 and over, and 85 and over, both almost doubled between 1961 and 2001;
- The proportion of immigrants born in Asia rose from 3% to 58% and those born in Europe or the United States fell from 94% to 22 % between 1961 and 2001;
- The percentage of Canadians reporting Aboriginal ancestry increased almost fourfold from 1961 to 2001.

These data reflect structural change related to economic globalization, technological change, new forms of work organization and family structures, migrations of populations, new demographics and changing values. They represent a challenge to the old way of doing things.

“They require that we rethink the fundamental roles and responsibilities of employers, families, communities and governments and make new *choices*,” says Jenson. “Those choices will be the building blocks of a new social architecture.

“The policy communities of the 1940s acted with a sense of urgency. They also acted with a sense of vision, confident that opportunities for improvement lay ahead. No less is needed now.”

In addition to Jenson’s introductory paper, CPRN is releasing the following historical and comparative papers on the same theme:

The Canadian Social Model: The Logics of Policy Development, by Gerard Boychuk,

Social Protection Reforms in Europe: Strategies for a New Social Model, by Bruno Palier, and

One Discourse, Three Dialects: Changing the Social Model in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, by Roxanne M. Pawlick and Sharon M. Stroick.

Other papers on the way deal with the changing face of immigration, Aboriginal peoples, Canadian values, and governance. A final synthesis report will identify options for a new social architecture for Canada.

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