A New Social Model for the 21st Century: The European Example

Friday, March 12, 2004 – Canada's social policy regime, like those of most Western countries, is badly in need of an overhaul.

Based on out-dated assumptions about social relationships and socio-political values, many of which date from the post-war era, it is unable to deliver effectively the social well-being that is its raison d'être.

Tinkering around the margins will not suffice. We need a new social model, based on today's social reality. One that reflects today's social consensus on how responsibility for our collective well-being should be shared between markets, governments, families and communities. (See, J. Jenson, ***Catching Up to Reality: Building the Case for a New Social Model***, the first of CPRN's *Social Architecture Papers*)

Last Fall, CPRN's Family Network launched a new project in search of that new social model for Canada. The result is the *Social Architecture Papers*, a series of 9 research papers, which will culminate in a final synthesis report by Jane Jenson, Director of the Family Network, in early summer this year.

In addition to a thorough assessment of the history and current social reality in Canada, the series includes a look at experience elsewhere.

The experience of the European Union, in some ways analogous to a federal system like ours, is of particular interest. Attempts by member states to reform their social model and the part played by European-level institutions in developing a common approach, are the subject matter of ***Social Protection Reforms in Europe: Strategies for a New Social Model***, by Bruno Palier, the third of the *Social Architecture Papers*.

Palier examines the political processes involved in achieving basic structural reforms in several countries and identifies the prerequisites for successful transformation of social protection systems. His paper is an instructive expedition that reveals the importance of attention to both the content and the strategic aspects of reform initiatives. He also demonstrates how the relationship between national institutions and institutions for coordinating national policies at the European-level is developing into a new mode of governance for social policy regimes.

The driver for reform is not cost-cutting, but a recognition of the critical importance of social policy to economic competitiveness and the need to adapt welfare regimes to new trans-national economic realities.

You can access or download a copy of Bruno Palier's paper, ***Social Protection Reforms in Europe: Strategies for a New Social Model***, by clicking here.

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