

New Mental Maps

A Message FROM THE President



How are we coping with the risk society of the 1990s? Canadians exhibit a sobering mix of anxiety, insecurity, and alienation, despite much good news on the economic front.

The industrial economy is in remarkably good health, especially in western Canada. And, although some jurisdictions still have a distance to go, public sector finances are in much better shape. Deficits are falling, government operations are becoming more efficient, and progress has been made in reducing overlap and duplication.

One reason for the anxiety is the stagnation in average incomes and the decline in real purchasing power, after taxes. But the insecurity stems from sources that go well beyond the usual measures of material well-being.

Slowly but surely, Canadians are being asked to take on more risk — by employers, by governments, and even by their own families. They experience greater risk of an involuntary job change or of a job with no benefits, the risks associated with high debt burdens, the risk that they can no longer count on key public services — such as health care, pensions, or unemployment insurance. They see their children encountering more risk — in the streets and in the labour market. They experience more risk of burglary or violence than 10 years ago, and they see more homeless people on the streets. Finally, they feel the ambivalence and conflict inside families, once the bulwark of stability and personal supports.

Some of these risks are new, many are simply more visible. Together they constitute an economic and social transformation which is shaking Canadian society to the core. More and more, we are facing a Risk Society. [Beck] As a result, people are more preoccupied by the need for security.

This transformation is mirrored in other countries. In a survey of 43 countries (including Canada) undertaken for UNESCO in 1991, Ronald Inglehart identified a shift in values

from scarcity (earning more money) to security and quality of life.

Here, in Canada, the focus on security is fostered by a strong sense of collective responsibility and a desire to hold onto the ties that have bound us together in the postwar period. Those ties were forged in part by compassion, in part by the conviction that this country is rich enough to be able to take care of its own, and in part by the sense that we owe this to each other and to our children.

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But that sense of collectivity is in tension with the trend toward individualism — and the renewed emphasis on self-reliance. We all have the responsibility to make enough effort to look after ourselves. But how much effort is enough? And when does collective responsibility kick in, and for how

long? Confusion and frustration show up in a difficult debate about the “deserving” versus the “undeserving” poor, as if there is a single cause to explain why a person is poor.

Inglehart also describes the rising suspicion of hierarchical authority, centralization, and bigness. This is reinforced by headlines about large profitable corporations laying off staff, and by the sense that governments are not as effective as they should be.

In the United States, where individualism has always been dominant, there is a widespread desire to diminish government. Some of that rhetoric spills over to Canada, but the polling data show clearly that Canadians expect “good” government, or, more recently, “efficient” government.

The reaction against centralization has also played into the perpetual debate about federalism. Already a decentralized federation, Canada has committed to much more decentralization of delivery and responsibility in the past two years — social supports, labour market programs, and economic development, among others.

What citizens are saying, however, is that they want some kind of broadly based framework to buttress the national sense of social security that they value so highly — 94 percent want national standards for health care and 88 percent for university and college education, for example. [Peters] They are thirsting for a sense of belonging. [Ekos] How can such a framework be created at a time of decentralization and fiscal restraint?

Squaring this circle places incredible demands on public policy. It requires a new kind of leadership and a different sense of the role of government. It also requires a new conception of the role of citizens and public officials. An educated citizenry that is preoccupied by security and quality of life expects to participate in the democratic process in a substantive way. It demands high levels of integrity from public officials and corporate leaders.

In addition, it requires a new kind of federalism. Canadians are fed up with the turf wars and mistrust that put federal and provincial governments in deadlock. They expect governments to find new ways to work together to serve citizens. The current system is highly decentralized. But actions by one government have impacts on the others, and there are few mechanisms to manage this interdependence.

In a CPRN Working Paper, *Building Blocks for Canada's New Social Union*, Margaret Biggs has laid out five different models of federalism and identified options that would help to rebuild trust and to put in place the basic machinery required for identifying goals, solving problems, and, most important, settling disputes, and being accountable to citizens.

What then is the role of government in these turbulent times? Governments must go beyond the drive for efficiency to engage citizens in a dialogue about the shared values and principles that should guide public policy. [Mintzberg] As Leslie Pal has said, “management is an empty vessel, it has to be directed at something.” It has to have a clear sense of what government should do. It requires “soul.”

If governments are to nourish the soul of society, they will have to concentrate more energy on issues to do with integrity, the social union, and respect. Let me take each one in turn.

- Integrity in public policy means transparency as well as consistent, ethical behaviour. It appeals to Canadians’ sense of fairness — that we are all judged by the same rules. It also speaks to the sense that public institutions should be efficient — they should not waste the taxes paid out of our hard-earned pay cheques. Taxes are entrusted to governments in order to deliver services that we cannot provide for ourselves — education for all, health care when we need it, and income support for families in need.
- The social union means “the web of rights and obligations between Canadian citizens and government that give effect and meaning to our shared sense of social purpose and common citizenship.” [Biggs] The social union includes the social safety net, but it also embraces cohesive families and the network of civic institutions that meet day-to-day human needs. It requires an effective partnership between federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, all of whom contribute to the safety net, and to the well-being of families and civic institutions.
- Respect is a mutual obligation. Citizens must respect the laws of the land and the shared values of society. They must pay their share of taxes, they must make their contribution to civic and political life. Governments must also respect the contribu-

tions of citizens, creating opportunities for citizens to think through and express their views on important issues of the day. And, in a world where provincial governments have responsibility for much of the economic and social programming in the public sector, there must be mutual respect among governments.

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All three of these priorities are rooted in our sense of social cohesion — the sense of belonging and commitment that holds a people together. Social cohesion requires a shared mental map that tells us who we are as Canadians, what we mean to each other, and what our rights and responsibilities are with respect to governments.

People who share the same mental maps — that is, the values and beliefs about what is important in life — can achieve more than those who are divided by mistrust and by conflicting goals. The leadership role of government is to articulate the core values, and then demonstrate that the values serve as guideposts for policy making — through integrity, respect, and the social union.

In the new Risk Society, however, social cohesion is being eroded by plant closings, layoffs, and cuts in social programs. Some citizens have trouble bouncing back from these events. Those that lack resilience often become marginalized. They face social exclusion.

The Work Network project on the new employment structure has found that employment opportunities are shifting to favour the highly skilled and educated, while low-skill jobs are

actually disappearing. The result is that "there is less room in the labour market for the unskilled and the poorly trained." These trends lead to social exclusion, not just for poorly educated individuals, but for whole communities with limited human capital. All this makes the task of building social cohesion more formidable, and more important.

At CPRN, we want to help Canadians create the mental maps that will help them navigate these turbulent times, and thus to cope with the stresses of a Risk Society. Through our research process, we are creating the neutral ground where governments from many jurisdictions can meet each other and meet with experts from the private and non-profit sectors, including the people on the front lines dealing with social issues.

In the pages that follow, the Directors of CPRN's three Networks — Family, Work, and Health will report on their accomplishments of the year just passed, and their plans for the year to come. Taken as a whole, this is a research and communications program that breaks new ground, and builds a constructive base for good public policy. Our focus is on creating new mental maps, in all three Networks, as we

- learn how family members, including the children, adapt to a drop in family earnings,
- help to design new ways for citizens to hold governments accountable for social policy and to keep track of the trends in policy,
 - study the way communities and citizens can articulate their core social values,
 - develop the framework needed to define and measure social capital,
 - rethink the future of work in Canada,
- explore new models for public service in a transformed public sector,
- understand how Canadians can develop the skills to prosper in a knowledge-based economy,

- create an economic focus for research on HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and highlight the contribution of community-based supports,
- analyze the cost-effectiveness of services for children with special needs,
- challenge the view that community and home-based services cannot be cost-effective substitutes for care in an institution,
 - apply knowledge about the social and economic determinants of health to public policy, and
- assess the tax and legal frameworks for the non-profit sector.

In closing, I would like to thank the many funders (listed on page 22 and 23) who have supported our work in the past year, as well as the dozens of volunteers who serve on our Board of Directors (see inside back cover) and our steering/advisory committees. Together, you have helped us to realize our dream of an open, vibrant, and accountable research enterprise. We are honoured by the trust you have placed in us, and are committed to even greater excellence and creativity in the year ahead.

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