

“No Small Matter”: Child Policy Research

by

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It is an honour to be invited to present the Davidson Dunton Research lecture this year. I would like to thank the Vice President-Research, Feridun Hamdullahpur, and the members of the committee for the invitation to do so, and Mary Moore who did the behind-the-scenes work for this event. I also want to acknowledge my friends and colleagues – faculty and graduate students, past and present – who make Carleton a stimulating and supportive place to do research. And I want to thank my husband Rob and daughter Kelleigh for their patience, their humour and their unflinching, if not uncritical, support. Finally I thank all of you who have taken time at the end of a long day in the middle of the week to come and hear this talk.

Let me begin by addressing the title. One might ask why the point - that child policy research is “no small matter” – needs to be made. Aren't children, and thus child policy, the motherhood issue par excellence?

It may not, indeed, seem necessary to assert the importance of child policy research in Canadian society at large. Over the last decade, there has been a lot of talk about child poverty. More recently, the federal, provincial and territorial governments have made the “National Children’s Agenda” a centrepiece of the social policy renewal process. There are also numerous important child policy studies being done by research institutes like the Canadian Policy Research Networks, the Canadian Council on Social Development and others. My work accords, however, with the claims advanced again and again in many of these studies: With some exceptions, not enough of the right sort is being done to enable the full development of all of Canada’s children.

Perhaps the point most needs to be made within academe itself. We like to focus on the big questions – like globalisation, productivity determinants in the “knowledge based economy”, challenging the canon, and mapping the human genome – and leave children to the small world of everyday life. I will argue, however, that child policy research offers a privileged window into how Canada is responding to major changes in families, labour markets, and governments.

I am not, of course, alone at Carleton in recognising the importance of research on children and on child policy: In Psychology, Tina Daniels is doing research on the nature and function of children's social relationships and Monique Sénéchal, on young children's language and early literacy skills. Daiva Stasiulis (Soc.) and Radha Jhappan (PS) are engaged in a major research project examining the way childhood and children's sexuality are represented in American popular culture. In terms of research on policies related to children, Linda Duxbury and Judith Madill from the School of Business are doing important research on work and family stress. Vince Della Sala (political science) and Susan Phillips in School of Pub Policy and Admin have published work on child care policy in Italy and Canada respectively. Frances Woolley (Econ.) was awarded a prize for an outstanding research contribution by the federal Policy Research Initiative, for her work with Carole Vincent, on the tax treatments of families with children, with a particular focus on child care expenses. Last year, Dominique Marshall (History) won the Jean Charles Falardeau prize for the best book in French in the humanities and social sciences for her book, *Aux origines sociales de l'état providence: familles québécoises, obligation scolaire et allocations familiales 1940-1955*. Her current research is on international rights of the child in the interwar years – an important study which, inter alia, helps to place contemporary discussions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, signed by the Canadian government in 1991, in historical perspective.

You may have noticed that, with one exception, those doing research on children and child policy are all women. I suspect this is not accidental. It does say something about the long shadow which the sexual division of labour casts on academe. The key point I want to stress here, however, is that, at Carleton, I am not alone in recognising that research focused on children and child policy is “no small matter.”

The rest of my talk proceeds via four steps. I will begin by laying out three reasons why we need to pay attention to policies directed to children. I will then establish two dimensions of social policy that allow us to put Canada's response to these challenges into a larger context. In the third part I will use these to examine one example of child policy that I have worked on most –

child care. And I will end with an assessment of where the National Children's Agenda might be headed – and the vision I think should guide it.

There are at least three good reasons why we need to pay attention to policies directed to children: what some have called the “care crisis” resulting from the decline in the male breadwinner family norm that formed the foundations of our postwar social policies; the looming “population replacement” crisis, and the emergence of what some call the “knowledge based economy”. Let me elaborate on each of these in turn.

Changes in labour markets and in families have brought about the erosion of the male breadwinner/housewife-caregiver family which became the norm in the postwar years. While this decline is happening in many OECD countries, it is the most advanced in Canada, along with the United States and the Scandinavian countries. In 1999, 71 percent of all Canadian women with children under 16 were in the labour force on a full time basis. Sixty eight percent of mothers with children under 3 were active in the labour force. That represents a dramatic change since the 1960s. Canada also ranks with the US, and not far behind the Scandinavian countries, in the labour force participation rates of lone parents. And social policy reforms are contributing to this. Whereas in most provinces lone mothers were once allowed to rely on social assistance until the children were as old as 16, this is no longer the case. In some provinces, in fact, lone mothers are expected to return to paid work as soon as the child has reached 6 months.

We could discuss the various forces which have led to these changes – the ideals of second wave feminism, launched in the 1960s; changes in families including the rise in the rate of separations and divorce; and/or the fall in average male wages, which has been particularly pronounced in Canada and the US. We could also talk about what it really has meant for gender equality. What I want to underline right now, however, is what this means for the provision of much primary care. In other words, it can no longer be assumed that mothers/wives/daughters are there, ready, willing and able, to care for young children, the sick, and the frail-elderly. Yet this is precisely what the postwar social policy regimes, in Canada and other Western countries, did - and often continue to do.

That is, the social policies of the postwar era in various ways focused on the male breadwinner and the risks – unemployment, illness, industrial accident, and retirement – that could impede his capacity to support himself and his dependents. At the same time they assumed the domestic presence of a housewife and her capacities to provide primary care for young children, the sick, the injured and for ageing parents. Even today, when women's ongoing labour market participation has become the norm, governments often try to deal with the deficit-debt problem by trying to download responsibility for the financing and provision of care to families - and to the voluntary sector which has traditionally relied on the contributions of those very mother-housewives. This is leading to what some have called a "crisis of care." In other words, governments are looking to "families" and volunteers (for the most part, women) to care for the sick and the frail elderly. Yet most of those very same women need to work, whether they are in dual or single-parent families.

The "care crisis" intersects with two other developments to underline the importance of child policies: the demographic imbalance which Canada and most other OECD countries increasingly face and the demands of the emergent "knowledge based economy".

That is, just as labour market pressures and changes in families are making it imperative for women to remain in the labour market throughout their childbearing years, medical advances have prolonged life expectancy and enabled greater control over childbirth. In many countries, including Canada, this is giving rise to a demographic squeeze. People still retire at 65 but often with many active years in front of them and medical advances are also making it possible for the frail elderly to live longer. This is in many ways a good thing. The problem arises when it is put together with another development: people are choosing to have much smaller families, often later, or even avoiding childbearing entirely. This is reflected in the falling birthrate – from a high of 4 in the baby boom years to 1.6 at the end of the 20th century. Again, the ability to control reproduction is very important. The difficulty is that, taken with greater longevity, the question arises as to who will finance the pensions we boomers plan to live on and who will provide the important supplementary care? Public provision of arrangements that reduce the stress of trying to combine work and family won't solve the problem but they certainly can contribute to it. And

here I am thinking about decent provisions for parental leave, universally accessible and high quality child care as well as policies and programs that help parents of school-aged children.

The precise contours and demands of the so-called “knowledge based economy” are open to debate. What most agree on, however, is that the development of the capacity for “life long learning” is essential for future economic success on both the individual and societal levels. Thus many talk about the need to “invest” today in the workforce of tomorrow. As Carleton graduate, Denis St Martin argues, governments anxious to promote Canada’s competitiveness in the KBE are coming to see that investment in children is as much a part of the “social investment state,” as large grants to promote the development of the high technology sector. In their most recent study for CPRN, Caroline Beauvais and Jane Jenson show how these ideas are beginning to reshape social policy in Canada.

This shift was nicely captured by Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain in their report for the Ontario government – Reversing the Real Brain Drain: The Early Years Study. Their report stressed the need to invest in services, including early childhood education and care, for all young children. This kind of thinking also lies behind the “National Children’s Agenda” to which the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments have declared themselves committed. While there are different views as to how to go about this, most concur that, rather than tax cuts aimed at stopping the dribble of highly educated Canadians south of the border, what is needed is the social investments – in high quality education, including early childhood education and care; in universally accessible recreation and culture programs etc - required to enable the next generation – and, with this, the KBE (knowledge based economy) - to develop to its full potential.

Thus the lens of child policy brings into focus the challenges posed by the confluence of a number of important changes. The decline of the male breadwinner family norm creates a demand for new ways of providing and financing care. The population replacement problem tells us that if we want to achieve a sustainable age balance, we need to make it easier especially women, to combine work and parenting. And if we want the emergent KBE to include all, then we need to “invest” in programs that support the full development of all Canada’s children.

That is the first part of my argument. I now want to turn to an assessment of Canada's response to these challenges. In other words, all OECD countries are facing these challenges but they are not facing them in the same way. Some countries are choosing to tackle these problems in ways that enhance equality, social solidarity and democracy. In others, the favoured solutions are resulting in greater social and economic polarisation and the substitution of markets for politics. Let me outline two policy regimes to give us a way of thinking about Canada's response.

One dimension is caught by the comparative literature on social policy regimes which contrasts "liberal" and "social democratic" responses. These names are not, of course, to be equated with political parties. In other words, liberal governments can and have adopted social democratic solutions just as social democratic governments can and have adopted liberal solutions. Rather, the names refer to different ways of handling social risks in a market economy and providing various forms of care. Each regime accordingly rests on a particular set of relationships among families, markets and states. In addition, although for reasons of simplicity, I will highlight the differences between them, I am fully aware that liberalism comes in various shapes and sizes, some of which are much closer to the social democratic type than others – and vice versa!

In the liberal pattern, the main burden of care provision falls on families who can choose to "self-service" the majority of their care needs or to buy substitute services on the market. And their market power very much affects the kind of care they can purchase. The government's role is largely limited to a modest mitigation of labour market "risks"– e.g. unemployment, sickness and maternity/parental leave insurance (set at low income replacement rates). Such limited public support, however, is not enough for everyone and liberal regimes usually recognise that some will fall through the holes in this modest safety net. Thus supplementary measures may be provided, targeting the most disadvantaged, including their children. Identification of who can claim these benefits is made through various types of needs-tests, which can be quite invasive and degrading.

This pattern of provision does little to mitigate the class inequalities generated by markets. Nor does it contribute much to achieving economic equality as between the sexes. As a group of

international scholars put it, unlike some of the continental European regimes, the liberal regimes found in Canada and the US do not have strong policies reinforcing the male breadwinner family form. They are prepared to treat women like men and even to offer some recourse against wage and employment discrimination. They do not, however, do much to challenge the unequal distribution of care work. As the most recent Statistics Canada time use survey has shown, although the gap has shrunk over the last two decades, men still get the larger share of paid work whereas 2/3 of women's work day is uncompensated – childcare, cooking, housekeeping and volunteering. And, on average, women still receive take-home pay equivalent to 63% of a man's after-tax income.

The absence or weakness of universal programs, moreover, means a limited effort to institutionalize social solidarity. Postwar “social” liberalism did break, to some extent, with Victorian reliance on individual charity. Yet, to the extent that universal programs remained at rather low basic rates that had to be supplemented either through the market (for those fortunate enough) or through needs-tested programs for the poor, liberal systems continued to rely politically on individual feelings of charity. I can perhaps best illustrate this point through a good counter example. Canada's health care system, which is tax-financed, universal in scope and historically, of high quality, is something which, time and time again, Canadians have said that they are willing to pay for. This is in marked contrast to attitudes that can be stirred up around those living on social assistance or the homeless, who are increasingly forced to rely on private charity as entitlements are frozen or cut.

Research has shown, moreover, the response of liberal regimes to the decline of the male breadwinner family feeds the development not of an egalitarian KBE where all jobs require and remunerate rising skill levels, but to the emergence of a “split level” economy – a labour market increasingly polarized, as the now-defunct Economic Council once said, between “good jobs, bad jobs”. This is a point I am going to return to later. Here what I want to emphasize is that liberal regimes tend to meet the needs of the time-pressed dual earner, or single parent earner, family by allowing wage dispersion – or market income inequality – to grow. In this context, wealthier families can afford to purchase high quality early childhood education, housekeeping and food

preparation services. As one goes down the income scale, however, families are forced to seek care at a price they can afford and “self service” what they can’t. This pattern generates some good care jobs then – but many more bad ones, often in the very underpaid informal or black market.

Social democratic regimes are based on very different principles. Here governments support families and a more egalitarian distribution of time within them, reducing market power as a determinant of access to goods and services needed to raise a child. Here, generous and comprehensive social insurance (e.g. income replacement rates of 80-90%) is supplemented by high quality, universally accessible social services. Parental child care (including well-funded parental leave programs) is supplemented by publicly financed, non-profit child care, including after school programs. Recreation and culture are seen as a citizen right, not something either to be purchased according to market power - or maybe available on a subsidised basis for those considered “at risk,” in the hopes of keeping them out of trouble. The education and training systems are designed to support learning by all, literacy rates tend to be high, and education leave policies are geared to making it possible for most to engage in lifelong learning.

This kind of regime does much to mitigate class inequality, as well as inequality between the sexes. It also institutionalizes social solidarity. Thus, for instance, in countries like Sweden, which offer comprehensive, universally-accessible social services of high quality, there is little sign of the kind of tax revolts found elsewhere, despite the relatively high tax levels. The social democratic social policy regime is also associated with more balanced post-industrial job growth. In other words, the needs of time-pressed families are met through publicly-financed high quality social services, provided by employees with a broad skill mix, who get decent rates of pay and relatively secure employment. These clearly include a well-developed array of child and elder care services and those designed to integrate the disabled into society.

The contrast between liberal and social democratic policy regimes gets at some important differences but there is another dimension that is especially important to Canadians: the kind of relationships that exist between the different levels of government as well as between governments and communities. Here the notion I’d like to present is something that might be

called “sustainable subsidiarity.” We have got used to hearing the term “subsidiarity” because of the European Union where it means that the Community will act only an issue cannot be adequately addressed at the national level. That puts it in a negative or minimalist light. What I am trying to get at here is better captured in the CPRN study, *What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada’s Young Children* which uses a “nested locales” metaphor to reflect on the kind of world children live and develop in:

Children are nested in multiple environments: the child within the family, the family within the larger communities of neighbourhoods and workplaces, the community as defined by different geographic and political boundaries, the public institutions that provide community infrastructure, **and the governments that provide the resources and enabling policies that allow each of these nests to function well.**

In other words, the basic idea here, as in the EU, is that emphasis is placed on families and local communities as the key sites “where things happen”. Subsidiarity is, however, “unsustainable” when it forms part of the kind of “downloading” that Anne Golden recently complained of in the Globe and Mail. Golden argued that “Cities are now the level at which federal and provincial policy initiatives are implemented, including welfare, training, immigration, settlement services, and social housing. Unfortunately, cities have little political, economic or fiscal manoeuvrability...” What is needed, then, is for superior levels of government to provide the financial and other supports to enable local communities to develop and deliver the kind of integrated services in turn required to support those smaller nests.

This idea is not new in Canada. In fact, it lay behind a number of measures adopted in the postwar period like fiscal equalization in the 1950s and the Canada Assistance Plan. Few are perhaps aware that a major impetus behind CAP was the recognition that the old system of voluntary service provision, supported by charity and local governments, was no longer adequate in the face of growing demands. The need for provincial support for locally delivered community services was then coming to be recognised in New Brunswick (the Byrne Commission), Quebec (Boucher) and Manitoba (Michener). In turn, federal social policy makers wanted to make sure that all provinces would have the capacity to support local community/social services. With its promise to share costs with the provinces on a 50-50 basis, CAP provided an inducement to do

so. In other words, a version of “sustainable subsidiarity” was built into Canada’s postwar social policy regime.

It is this system that was torn asunder with the bundling of CAP and the EPF into the Canada Health and Social Transfer fund in 1996. One of the questions I have is, will the Social Union Framework Agreement, and the “National Children’s Agenda” that it has spawned, provide a new basis for “sustainable subsidiarity”?

These two dimensions help us to get a handle on Canada’s child policies as a response to the challenges posed by the decline of the male breadwinner family norm, the “population replacement” issue, and the emergence of the KBE.

Lets look at the example of non-parental child care provision. Canada’s pattern of provision clearly fits the liberal mould. For the most part, it assumed that middle and upper income families are able to rely on themselves and/or their market power to meet their care needs. Limited relief for the costs of raising children came in the preferred liberal form of tax deductions. Thus the old deduction for a dependent spouse recognised that some families chose parental care while the Child Care Expense Deduction, introduced in 1972, permitted dual earner or lone parent earner families to deduct a small portion of child care expenses from their taxes. Special needs-tested provisions were, however, provided to address the situation of lower income families. From the mid-1960s to 1996, Ottawa made funds available through CAP to subsidize child care “for those in need, or in danger of becoming in need.”

CAP thus did open up the possibility of federal support for child care for some – those able to establish “need” but it also permitted the systematic under provision of quality, regulated child care spaces in child care centres or registered family day care. Approximately 80% of children are in some form of unregulated, informal child care and this applies to pre-school and young school-aged children. This situation is in marked contrast to the “social democratic” Scandinavian countries as well as to countries otherwise classified as “conservative” like France, Belgium and Italy.

For those who think in terms of social policy regimes, this is not surprising. Canadian social policy generally fits the liberal mould. Yet we have to be careful about the conclusions we draw

from this. In other words, there is an ever-present danger in academic work of letting classifications like liberal vs social democratic regimes take on a life of their own. It is one thing to use such concepts and the classifications that they produce to describe actual policy patterns. It is another when we fall into thinking that these regimes determine what happens. Part of what I want to show you then is that, while Canada has a liberal social policy regime and this is reflected in its child policies, this didn't have to be that way. Moreover, it can be changed for the better. In other words, "politics matters."

We can thus ask, "if there can be exceptions like Medicare, why didn't it happen in this case?" CAP, which was the first real federal offer of support for child care, was introduced at almost the same time as we got Medicare, in the 1960s. Moreover, the real leap in child care funding only happened after the Royal Commission on the Status of Women had issued its calls for a national child care program, built along social democratic - and "sustainable subsidiarity" - lines. Why didn't child care follow that more "social democratic" pattern, then? I wanted to know the answer to this question and I couldn't find one in any of the existing literature so, with the enthusiastic help of one of my graduate students, Carlos Novas, I ventured into the national archives where we discovered some really interesting stories.

The first centered on what was happening in the 1950s and 1960s. Though this was the heyday of the male breadwinner family form, there were still a lot more working mothers than people expected, causing the outspoken former Mayor of Ottawa, Charlotte Whitton, to write a letter in 1951 to the National Employment Service, complaining that women needed a place to put their babies during the daytime. Later in the 1950s, Marion Royce, Canada's first Director of the Women's Bureau in the old Department of Labour, authorized a survey which documented the fact that a surprising number of mothers were working - in fact, 21.8 percent of working women had preschool children. But both the 1958 survey and a later one of day care needs (1964) revealed a puzzling phenomenon: despite the need, the women were reluctant to voice a demand for child care. Let me quote the 1964 survey just to give you a flavour of the times:

Although they are entering the labour force in growing numbers, there is still a widespread reluctance to take up the question of substitute care for their children. Fear is expressed that better day-care facilities might encourage more women to seek employment. Meanwhile, working mothers are often uneasy about their children, and

their work suffers in consequence. At the same time, in many communities there is strong evidence of inadequate care.

At this time, then, there was a veil of silence on the labour force participation of the mothers of young children. Many continued to see the male breadwinner family as the only acceptable form. Mothers might take paid work, but only if they were forced to by economic necessity. To extent that a demand for CC can be said to have existed, it was being articulated by local social welfare councils. In fact, the Family and Child Welfare division of the Canada Welfare Council played a critical role in supporting such local efforts to document the need. But the way the demand was framed was very much consistent with the dominant ideas of the time – and thus also consistent with its inclusion in the Canada Assistance Plan which made access to subsidised child care contingent upon passing a needs test.

Interestingly enough, the decision to include child care as one of the community services the federal government would contribute to funding was influenced by developments in the US but there was an important difference between the two countries. Whereas in the US, federal interest in child care subsidies was linked to the idea of getting lone, often black, mothers off social assistance, in Canada, it was clearly understood as a provision which would give lone mothers a real choice between relying on social assistance or taking a job.

The theme of “choice” also ran through the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. But here it wasn’t just poor mothers who needed subsidised child care to make it possible to choose work and family. All women required publicly supported access to quality child care so that the choice between staying at home and entering the labour force would be a genuine one. The commissioners were explicit that this support required a new day care act, removing child care from CAP with its “residualist”/needs-tested orientation. They also recognised that any such act would have to be based on a form of “sustainable subsidiarity”. In other words, federal legislation would support and encourage provincial legislation that, in turn, would provide the framework for local delivery.

The report of the RCSW was not one that could or would be ignored. Yet we know that we didn’t get a national day care act then and we don’t have one now. What happened? This is

where the archival research really paid off for I found two additional “chapters” in the story of Canadian child care policy. The first unfolded right after the commission reported, when the federal government set up the machinery to look into the implementation of the report’s recommendations. Here “femocrats” – a term used to describe feminists within government bureaucracies, usually in positions like Status of Women or the Women’s Branch of the old Ministry of State for Citizenship – played an important yet largely invisible role that led to the widening the terms of CAP-based assistance. Backed by pressure from the then newly elected NDP government in BC, people like Freda Paltiel fought for, and won, substantial modifications to CAP. They didn’t get all they tried for but they did manage inter alia to widen the definition of those “in need” so that it was possible to include many middle, as well as lower income families. None of the provinces took full advantage of this, however. A decade later, the Cooke Task Force found that no province was using the scope for including higher income families which the revised terms permitted! In other words, we did have a form of “sustainable subsidiarity” but one that clearly provided inadequate inducements.

The revised CAP also offered federal money to cover part of the operating costs (salaries and fringe benefits, supplies etc) of public or non-profit centres in provinces which chose the new “income tested” (rather than the older “needs tested” route which remained). This created something of a bias in favour of non-profit forms of delivery which is exactly what the newly forming child care advocacy groups across the country were demanding. They felt strongly that quality tends to be sacrificed when the profit motive enters into the child care equation. Ontario, however, stuck with the old funding route, which offered subsidies to “needy” parents in commercial as well as non-profit centres and Alberta was rich enough by that time to ignore the federal government entirely. To this day, almost ¾ of child care places are in commercial centres in Alberta.

The second story forms part of former Minister of Health and Welfare, Marc Lalonde’s social security review – and its one which I suspect our President knows more about than I, for this happened when he was working for the federal government and his name did crop up several times in the documents I found!

The story as I have been able to piece it together is as follows. For a brief while it seemed as if the femocrats and their new ally, Howard Clifford, the national day care consultant – a champion of universality, with strong grassroots connections – had a real opening to securing federal support for universally accessible child care. A new Social Service Act, which would have offered the provinces cost-sharing according to a range of formulae (from universality to income-tested), was in the works. Had this passed the basis for universally accessible, high quality child care would have been laid. Instead, the bill was withdrawn in 1977. CAP continued to be the primary means for the federal government to induce the provinces to invest in child care and as we know, it has not been enough. The Act was one of the first victims of two looming political crises: the growing crisis of faith in postwar “social liberalism”, or of what many call the Keynesian welfare state; and the crisis of Canadian federalism, especially our inability to work out a solution that genuinely includes Quebec.

There have been at least two other moments when a national child care policy seemed about to happen. Under the last Trudeau government, important public supports to achieve economic equality between the sexes were considered, including child care as a right for all citizens. The 1984 Abella commission came out strongly in favour of this, as did the Cooke Task Force Judy Erola set up shortly before the 1984 election was called. In addition, in line with the policy of promoting citizen participation, the federal government helped to establish, and then to fund, the first national voice for child care – the Cdn Day Care Advocacy Association. Backed by NAC, the unions, and anti-poverty groups, the CDCAA became a strong voice for universally accessible, high quality and comprehensive child care. By “comprehensiveness,” they meant child care centres for working parents and services to support children at home with a parent or in some other informal care arrangement.

Unfortunately, Cooke reported to a new government and one with quite a different agenda. Yet, the 1984 election did highlight issues of gender equality. Remember the televised national leadership debate chaired by Caroline Andrew, the current Dean of Social Science at the University of Ottawa? Thus the Mulroney government did come up with its own proposals for a child care act. Child care advocates and their allies rejected it for several reasons, however.

While it would have taken child care out of CAP, it did not impose any national standards. Moreover, it gave the green light to funding the operating costs of commercial as well as non-profit providers. Finally, it put a cap on federal contributions – something which we have unfortunately become used to, but at the time was viewed as a step backward from the “sustainable subsidiarity” CAP offered. Child care advocates were not able to persuade the government to alter the bill but their opposition was such that the government allowed it to die on the order paper when the 1988 election was called. And they never bothered to revive it.

With the benefit of hindsight, some say the supporters of child care should have taken what they could have while the going was perhaps not good, but not as bad as it would become. Perhaps. Maybe if there had been separate child care legislation, it might have escaped the fate of CAP – that is being rolled into the CHST, the block funding arrangement introduced in 1996 which seriously damaged, if it did not destroy, the postwar form of sustainable subsidiarity. We will never know the answer. The problem with this kind of ex post reasoning, however, is that it ignores the context in which the actors made their choices.

In other words, actors in the mid-1980s were understandably working with a very different, and much more optimistic, sense of the possible than many of us are today. This raises the larger question of how to maintain a belief in, and commitment to, egalitarian and solidaristic ideals even while one faces the world as it is. Or as one of my favourite theorists, Antonio Gramsci, put it – one needs to maintain a healthy “pessimism of the intellect, leavened by strong “optimism of the will.” I will return to this as I close. Before I do, I would just like to say a few words about the National Children’s Agenda.

The optimist in me wants to say that the Agenda, which is one of the key pieces of the “social policy renewal” process in which the federal, provincial and territorial governments are engaged, represents a new opening – a new possibility for establishing “social democratic” style child policies in the context of “sustainable subsidiarity”. My grounds for optimism include the challenges I started out with: the “care crisis” posed by the erosion of the male breadwinner family, the need to do a better job of ensuring “population replacement” since we can’t rely on immigration to close the entire gap, and the social investments especially in our children, required

to enable Canadians to participate in the KBE. And it does seem that governments are not unaware of these challenges – at least to some extent. In addition, the Social Union Framework Agreement does contain a clause which suggests a commitment to ensuring that Canadians have access to an equivalent level of service no matter where they live – in other words, “sustainable subsidiarity”, perhaps?

In the short and maybe even medium term, however, my grounds for optimism are more than outweighed by those inducing pessimism. What are these? Let me begin with the first major social policy renewal initiative focused on children, the National Child Benefit (NCB), which I see as a largely regressive form of liberal social policy.

The NCB is composed of several elements. The first is a tax for those with children under 18. Although more than 80 percent of Canadian families with children draw some benefit, the amounts are gradually reduced for all with family incomes of \$30,004. In other words, even if it gives at least a little bit to many, it is not a universal program like the old Family Allowances and thus is less effective in generating social solidarity. Moreover, even those receiving the full benefit receive an amount that falls well short of the actual costs of child rearing. There is, of course, an additional NCB supplement for low-income families only and the full amount is only paid to those earning less than \$21,214.

A key provision here is that the provinces are allowed to “claw back” from social assistance recipients an amount equivalent to the supplement and reinvest it in other child supports. Some of the provinces have added to the amount thus “freed” whereas others have simply reinvested the amount clawed back. Thus Saskatchewan and Ontario have invested about the same amount in programs for children, even though Ontario’s population is roughly ten times that of Saskatchewan’s. In their reinvestment strategies, moreover, some provinces have focused primarily on very young children. While the clawed-back monies have been used, to some extent, for early child care, school-aged children have largely been ignored.

This focus on the very young has been the hallmark of much that has been done under the NCB and constitutes a central part of the NCA at least as it has been developed to date. The work of people like Fraser Mustard has unwittingly contributed to this to the extent that it can be –

and in Ontario, has been - interpreted to mean that the “window of opportunity” for supportive intervention has largely slammed shut by the age of six. Those involved in debates about child policy are concerned about this as well, which is why, for instance, the CPRN asked me, with the able assistance of Caroline Beauvais, to examine policies for school-aged children across Canada. We found that in certain policy areas – health, literacy – and in certain provinces, including Ontario, school-aged children are not getting enough attention. Only in provinces that have adopted broader, relatively comprehensive child strategies, like Quebec, Saskatchewan and BC, is there a real effort to provide the kind of supports required.

What about child care? Doesn't the NCA represent a window of opportunity to at least replace CAP with other, even more inclusive arrangements? To be sure but we need to ask, what kind of child care, for whom and why? The NCB and the newer NCA leave it completely to the provinces and territories to decide. Thus, it is only in Quebec, which, by the way, does not participate in either the NCB or the NCA, that child care – for young school-aged children as well as preschool and toddlers – has become a citizen right, available on a voluntary basis to all, including those on social assistance. BC has also taken steps in this direction and it seems that Manitoba is considering a major new initiative along similar lines. In other words, in some provinces, child care policy is moving in a “social democratic” direction. In others, however, the situation is quite different.

For instance, in Ontario, child care is very much part of a broader “workfare” strategy. Thus the Ontario Child Care Supplement for Working Families offers a maximum of \$1,100 per annum (far short of the cost of child care, especially quality child care) for families whose parents are working, in school or in training. The supplement begins to be reduced once family incomes reach \$20,000.

This program can be criticized not only for its particularly narrow targeting of beneficiaries but also because it does nothing to increase the number of regulated child care spaces. Unlike the CAP subsidies, which supported places in regulated child care (either centres or family child care), this supplement is available to those who have had to turn to the informal, unregulated sector. I have heard from a colleague at McMaster that the province has hired a number of “child

care brokers” to find child care for social assistance recipients required or wanting to participate in Ontario Works.

Another problem with the program is that it is cost-shared with the municipalities which are struggling to cope with the Harris government’s “realignment” of responsibilities as well as the costs of amalgamation. Thus, for instance, Toronto has not put a penny of its share of NCB monies into child care. All of it has had to go to the more pressing problem of shelter in Canada’s “global city”.

You might say, “so what. At least something is being done!” Yet to me this represents a step backward from the kind of more “social liberalism” of the postwar years, and is certainly far from the kind of high quality, universally accessible child services found in social democratic countries like Sweden.

I found another worrisome tendency in some provinces – especially ours. That is, programs like “Ontario’s Promise” or Nova Scotia’s new “Children’s Futures Foundation” in the field of mental health represent a turn back toward a 19th century form of liberalism, leavened by a commitment to a barely sustainable subsidiarity. Like CAP, these programs recognise that some provincial funding of locally provided community services is necessary. CAP saw the need for adequate, ongoing federal and provincial funding. These new programs, however, are designed to induce a return to the old charity model.

Thus for example, Ontario’s Promise is a 3 year commitment to promote a new partnership built around 5 promises to Ontario’s children and youth: a healthy start in life (focused on children up to age 6), a chance to develop an ongoing relationship with a caring adult; a safe place, offering meaningful activities outside the home; marketable skills and an opportunity to give back to the community. The government’s financial offer is modest to say the least - \$2 million over three years – and is not to be used to establish new or expand existing public programs. The aim is to channel private sector charitable donations to the voluntary sector. Thus, new and expanded initiatives by selected “agencies of promise” will draw their resources primarily from private donations just as they did in the old days.

This is not an isolated example. Ontario's initiative to aid participation by low income children and youth in recreation programs, the Endowment for Youth and Children in Recreation, operates along the same principles, as does Nova Scotia's new initiative in the important area of mental health programs for children and youth. I should also add that our universities are increasingly being funded this way. One might argue that this is one way to get the corporate sector to invest in education and community services – true, perhaps, but at the expense of reducing the sphere governed by democratic decision making. Inducing corporations to donate time, money and/or equipment, in other words, is no substitute for a democratically determined, and equitable tax system.

Finally, I am concerned that the direction the social policy renewal process has taken thus far reveals the choice of the wrong employment strategy for the knowledge based economy. That is, the narrowly targeted aspect of the NCB is part of a larger set of policies that in effect subsidize the “bad jobs” part of our increasingly polarized economy. As my former colleague, John Myles once argued, the best policy is not to subsidize bad jobs but rather to focus on creating good jobs. That may seem a tall order but remember the argument I put to you earlier about the difference in the post-industrial employment structures of social democratic as opposed to liberal countries. There is no reason why we have to stick to the latter. We can embrace a “social democratic” solution and in doing this, we would be investing in the kind of “social infrastructure” needed to really address all three of the challenges I outlined earlier. In other words, high quality, universally accessible child services both support the time pressed dual earner/single parent earner family and constitute an important part of a good post-industrial, “KBE” employment strategy.

I told you that I was going to come back to the question of “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will” at the end and I am. The last decade has been a particularly difficult one for many but one of its most pernicious effects has been the near destruction of what I might call our “social imaginations.” You can see it in the changed parameters of public debate, which have forced difficult strategic choices on child care advocates, feminists and others. To be heard, they have had to get on what seemed to be the only social policy bandwagon in town – the anti-child

poverty lobby. I am against child poverty too. The problem is that this preoccupation has made it harder to talk about other needs, including children who miss the narrow definitions of those “in need” or “at risk”, not to mention adults. And, as Carleton graduate Wendy McKeen argued in her doctoral dissertation, gender equality has also dropped from sight.

Realism is important but to keep our critical faculties sharpened, realism needs to be tempered by the capacity to imagine a better world. And here I would like to leave you with the positive vision that underpins much of what I have been saying. It is one nicely captured by an American social scientist, Nancy Fraser. Fraser challenges us to imagine “a social world in which citizens’ lives integrate wage earning, caregiving, community activism, political participation, and involvement in the associational life of civil society – while also having time for some fun. This world is not likely to come into being in the immediate future, but it is the only imaginable postindustrial world that promises true gender equity. And unless we are guided by this vision now, we will never get any closer to achieving it.”

You probably find this “utopian” and it is. Yet I agree with Fraser that it is not enough simply to critique and to oppose “what is.” We have also to imagine how it can be and here we can and should set our sights high.