Quebec's Anti-Poverty Plan – A Commentary

May 28, 2004 – It was a North American first, going well beyond the customary rhetoric and hand-wringing. Two years ago, Quebec's National Assembly, under a Parti québécois government, *unanimously* passed a law to "combat poverty and social exclusion." The law's goal is to "transform Quebec over a ten-year period into one of the industrialized societies with the least poverty."

The law recognizes poverty as a barrier to the exercise of civil rights and a brake on economic and social progress. It also acknowledges that those who live in poverty are the first to act to improve their situation and that of their families. And, importantly, it describes the fight against poverty as a social project that must engage Quebec society as a whole. Finally, among additional measures, it committed the government to coming up with a plan of action to achieve the law's objectives.

In April of this year, the Quebec government, now under Jean Charest's Liberals, introduced its anti-poverty action plan, almost a year late and amidst much skepticism from social activists and public interest organizations. As it turned out, the plan surprised many of the government's critics with its progressive elements.

CPRN asked Alain Noël, Director of the Université de Montréal's Centre de recherche sur les politiques et le développement social, – and who prepared an essay for us on the original anti-poverty law (*A Law Against Poverty: Quebec's New Approach to Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion* – to assess the Charest government's action plan.

His verdict: The plan's reforms to social assistance, supportive of the working poor and their families, will benefit a large number of low-income households. The removal of the punitive aspects of the current system is also laudable. But Noël finds the plan neglects those so disadvantaged as to be unable to enter the job market. He also argues that the plan lacks the same social perspective embodied in the anti-poverty law itself. It fails to set targets, monitor progress and hold the government accountable, and it makes no provision for engaging citizens and civil society in the anti-poverty effort.

After examining the events leading to the birth of the plan, he concludes that even its progressive elements would not have seen the light of day had there been no anti-poverty law and had there not been a strong social movement in Quebec demanding reforms.

To access or download the full text of Noël's commentary, ***A Focus on Income Support: Implementing Quebec's Law Against Poverty and Social Exclusion***, click here.

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