Change and Choice: The Policy Challenges for Canada's Future

Friday, 1 March, 2002 – Canada and its citizens face a situation distinctly different from the one they knew in the thirty years following 1945. It differs, too, from the era of neo-liberalism and fiscal austerity that dominated the '80s and early '90s. The paradigm that shaped the post-WWII social contract has crumbled in the face of new technologies and shifts in social structures. We are now at a moment of "paradigm shift".

This is the premise of a presentation by Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network, to a conference of the federal Policy Research Initiative last December.

In ***Shifting the Paradigm: Social Knowledge and Learning for Canada's Future***, Jenson examines changes in economic and social structures that are remaking Canadian society. She identifies a certain "room to manouevre", today. Within that space lie policy choices that will have a profound effect on our future society.

Fundamental to her argument is the assertion that, "we are not hostages to the present. Nothing is already set in stone…Choices (including choices *not* to act) made now will mediate the impacts of structural change due to globalization, technology and demography…The future is, in other words, being chosen now."

Jenson reviews changes taking place in three spheres in particular: home and family; workplace and employment; and cities and urban life. She shows how our earlier premises about the line between public and private realms, the capacity of markets and families to distribute well-being, and our concepts of economic, social and political spaces are no longer appropriate. We need to adapt our assumptions to accord with new conditions. In turn, new premises will pose new policy choices, new opportunities for shaping our collective future.

You can access or download a Powerpoint version of her remarks by clicking here.

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