A Time for New Paradigms, New Choices

November 16, 2001 – The Director of CPRN's Family Network, Jane Jenson, has written a new paper that helps re-frame future policy choices to take into account fundamental changes in the social, cultural and economic environment over the past decade or more.

Her paper, "Shifting the Paradigm: Knowledge and Learning for Canada's Future", was prepared for the Policy Research Initiative's "Futures Forum" at Montebello, Quebec, earlier this month.

Jenson argues that Canada and its citizens face a situation, today, fundamentally different from the one they knew in the "country-building" period after the Second World War and in the years dominated by neo-liberalism and fiscal austerity that came next. The widely held assumptions that shaped the post-war social contract have more recently crumbled in the face of new technologies and changes in social structures. We are now at a moment of "paradigm shift".

Underlying Jenson's argument is the assertion that "we are not hostages to the present. Nothing is already set in stone….Choices made now (including choices not to act) will mediate the impacts of structural change due to globalization, technology and demography…The future is, in other words, being chosen now." She examines the changes that are remaking Canadian society and identifies a certain "room for manoeuvre" within which lie policy choices that can have a determining effect on our future society.

Jenson reviews change in three spheres in particular: home and family; workplace and employment; and cities and urban life. She shows how our former premises, about the line between public and private realms, about the capacity of families and markets to distribute well-being, and about economic, social and political spaces, are no longer appropriate. We must 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 copy of her paper by clicking here.

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