Canadian Social Policy in Transition

November 3, 2000 – As any observer of the current federal election campaign will know, all parties are portraying the choices confronting voters as fundamental in terms of their implications for the kind of society we will have in future. Hasn't it always been thus? Of course.

Still, behind the rhetoric, there is perhaps more to the claim this time around. We have moved from a decade or more of fiscally imposed choices between evils, to an era of possibilities. There is reason for optimism. True, federal budget surpluses were on the horizon in 1997, but today, with a strong economy, they are an overwhelming reality.

Canadian federalism is also in flux. The implications for the new surplus era of Ottawa's unilateral imposition of the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST) in 1995 are still being worked out. What is clear, however, is that a return to the past is not an option. There has been a shift in the balance of power in the federation. Many of the institutional implications of that shift remain in the future.

We also have an additional three and a half years of experience under our belts with global economic integration and the phenomenal expansion in information and communication technologies. Policymakers are more focussed than ever on the issue of convergence and on our "degrees of freedom" to maintain distinct Canadian social, cultural and environmental policies and programs.

Our social policies have been a key ingredient of what has defined us as Canadians. Today, we face choices that will define us in future. So, what should guide us in developing our social policy for this changed and changing domestic and international environment?

That is the question CPRN's President, Judith Maxwell, addressed in a speech to the Annual Meeting of the Jewish Family Services of Ottawa-Carleton, last Monday.

You can access a copy of her PowerPoint presentation by clicking here.

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