Comparing Welfare Regimes – Canada's Provinces in International Context

Friday, November 5, 2004 – Are the differences in social welfare regimes between Canadian provinces so great that it no longer makes sense to compare Canada, as a whole, to other countries on that score? Do some provinces resemble regimes in other countries to a greater extent than they do the Canadian average?

A new study by Paul Bernard, of the Department of Sociology, Université de Montréal, and Sébastien Saint-Arnaud, of the Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, attempts to answer those questions.

In ***More of the Same? The Position of the Four Largest Canadian Provinces in the World of Welfare Regimes***, Bernard and Saint-Arnaud locate the welfare regimes of Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia among those of a group of advanced countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They compare them in terms of a wide set of indicators representing public policy, social situations and level of public participation.

The result is a measure of the differences between the provinces in terms of their similarities and differences with the various welfare regimes that characterize the OECD countries.

The authors conclude that, while at one extreme Alberta displays strong resemblances to the "ultraliberal" U.S. model, and at the other extreme Quebec resembles certain European regimes, the similarities among the provinces remain more significant – they are, first and foremost, variations on the "Canadian model".

The authors base their comparisons on data prior to 1998. They suggest that their findings represent a useful baseline against which to make new comparisons that reflect the effects of the major retrenchment in the public sector dating from the mid '90s.

You can access or download a copy of their paper by clicking here.

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