

Social Welfare and Social Work Education In Canada: Slipping to the Right



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August 13, 2007

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Abstract

Internationally, Canadians struggle with their national identity. Canadians proclaim that they are **not** Americans and like to boast that they have more in common with Sweden with its snowy winters and extensive social programmes. This article outlines some of the historical developments of social welfare in Canada and examines some of the recent trends at dismantling the programmes. In the neo-conservative state, efforts towards “globalization” and “free trade” with the United States have attacked Canada’s social safety net, marginalizing and suppressing the poor. However, in spite of the current trends, Canadians have maintained its humanitarian philosophy and resisted the “Americanization” of its social programmes. Some of this resistance has been successful but as in many other countries much of it has failed.

Introduction

At home, Canadians do not think about it but when travelling abroad, Canadians struggle with their national identity. Who are Canadians? Canadians are quick to argue that they are **not** Americans, their big cousins to the south and are more than ice hockey and maple syrup. Canadians like to boast that they have more in common with Sweden and its hardy Volvos, snowy winters and extensive social programmes which may or not be true. This article gives a brief introduction to Canada and its struggle with identity. It outlines some of the historical developments of social welfare in Canada and examines some of the recent trends at dismantling the programmes. In the neo-conservative state, efforts towards “globalization” and “free trade” with the United States have attacked Canada’s social safety net, marginalizing and suppressing the poor. The paper provides some comparative social welfare percentages between Canada, some selective EU, Scandinavian and other developed countries. Canadians have maintained its humanitarian philosophy and resisted the “Americanization” of its social programmes. Some of this resistance has been successful but as in many other countries much of it has failed as Canadian social welfare programmes have slipped towards the right.

Canada: Identity in Crisis

When Europeans are stopped on the street and asked what they think of when they think of Canada, they often comment on the rugged mountains, majestic wilderness and abundant wildlife. They think of ice hockey and maple syrup. Politically, they might think of our peacekeeping missions but not much else. A recent advertising campaign for a major beer company played on the Canadian stereo-type with a rugged “lumber jack” image. When Canadians travel abroad, they are usually mistake for being American. This is worse than asking a Swede if she is a natural blond!

Canada is young nation of close to 33 million residents and its history is inexplicitly related to the United States. Living next to this powerful and self-centred nation, Canadians struggle with a love-hate relationship. We hate to love them but do love them and we love to hate them. Next to ice hockey, American bashing is Canada's favourite sport. We are obsessed with our southern cousins. Curiously, USA has little concern for Canadians and many Americans know little about us. Ironically, we are hurt and disturbed by this fact. A recent satirically programme has a feature called "Talking to Americans" where the interviewer asks average Americans questions about Canada and the audience enjoys their ignorance. It is my experience that most Europeans are better informed about Canada than most Americans.

In the mid-1800s, the U.S. was expanding in the west and with its military machine at its largest at the end of the civil war, a small band of four British colonies feared being absorbed by its large neighbour. In 1867, they submitted to British parliament an Act that would declare these colonies, the Dominion of Canada. Canada was created in London and in typical Canadian fashion; it negotiated its powers and divided them between the federal and provincial governments. Today there are 10 provinces and 3 territories participating in a federated dominion with a parliamentary system like Norway and the United Kingdom. Unlike Norway and perhaps, more in common with Germany, the individual provinces have extensive powers and decision making for education, health and social welfare. With no disrespect intended, Canadians are amused by Sir Sean Connery's heroic efforts to establish a Scottish parliament. Canadian provinces experience a high level of sovereignty and autonomy. For many years, we have had the legislature of the Province of Quebec seeking separation to become a separate nation! In the recent past, federal leaders declared the people of Quebec as a "nation" within confederation. The domain of social welfare is a provincial jurisdiction and infringements by the federal government in this domain are at times encouraged (when money is flowing from the feds) and discouraged when issues of power and control are involved.

Contrary to popular notions, Canadians are more urbanized than the U.S. with 78% living in cities and within 200 km of the U.S. border. Approximately 28% are of British origin, 23% French, 15% are European with 9% German (Canada Census, 2001). Four percent of the population describes themselves as "Aboriginal" and 6% are Asian. Throughout the history of Canada, foreign-born immigrants have consistently comprised 15-20% of its population and are now at 17%. However, the recent new-comers are not spread equally across the country. For example, the Toronto region has approximately 4 million people with 50% foreign born and 50% visible minority. The names of "Jones and Smith" are no longer the most common names in the Toronto phone book, now the name Singh and Lee appear more frequently. In Vancouver, a family thanksgiving dinner might include sushi and not turkey.

So the question, "what is a Canadian?" is problematic. Most Canadians would describe themselves as **not** American and would be quick to point out that Canada has a national health care system. In a strange twist, a recent national "contest" to determine the "greatest Canadian" chose a diminutive Baptist minister from the west who is credited in creating our national health care in 1968. The man's name was Tommy Douglas who had an active career in provincial and federal politics. For more than a decade, he was the leader of the left of centre, New Democratic Party and remained highly respected and regarded by all, even to this day. When asked, Canadians are guilty of falling back on stereo-typing even though many have never seen the Rocky Mountains nor tasted maple syrup. It is intriguing to realize that the Canadian identity is partially found in a progressive health and social welfare policies.

The Development of Social Work and Social Welfare

The historical development of social work and social welfare parallel the developments in the U.S.A. and the U.K. With the dramatic socio-economic changes of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalistic enterprises, systematic charity and philanthropy emerged. It can be

divided into three phases that are briefly described below: The Era of Moral Reform; The Era of Social Reform; and the Era of Applied Social Science (Hick, 2006). This paper gives a brief summary and for a more comprehensive historical overview and current services see Chappell (2006), Graham, Swift & Delaney (2003), Hick, (2006), and Turner and Turner, (2005).

The Era of Moral Reform to 1890

Just prior to confederation in 1867 and to about 1890, private charities developed in response to the growth in urban poverty. They were mainly religious organizations that offered material relief along with morality instruction. There were two “streams” or orientations that emerged that created divergent orientations to social work. One orientation was moral and missionary in focus: to rescue lost souls and from it grew the charity organizations in the cities across Canada. Modelled after the London society, the Charity Organization Society was formed in 1869 in an effort to better organize and coordinate services to the urban poor. A clear distinction was made from the *deserving* and *undeserving* poor. The *deserving* poor were viewed as good moral persons caught in unfortunate circumstances. They were given material assistance and seldom cash. The assistance included home visits by businessmen and upper class women to teach proper behaviour and moral living. The recipients were expected to work and earn their assistance. The *undeserving* poor were often considered lazy, immoral reprobates and received nothing. There was a fear that giving assistance only created dependency and increased poverty. With experience, the visitors developed knowledge and skills that became the foundation for social “casework” (Copp, 1974; Hick, 2006).

The other orientation was concerned for the overall community and came out of the settlement house movement. As in the settlement houses of England, these homes were to reduce the separation, fear and suspicion between the economic and social classes. Upper class members would live in the homes located in urban areas of poverty with the hope that their participation in the lives of the poor would help ameliorate their conditions. Their purpose was social reform through education, recreation, and social and emotional support. By the turn of the century, settlement homes were established in most of the major cities in Canada.

The Era of Social Reform: 1891-1940

During this era, there was a shift from moral judgement and private charities to public welfare funded by government. The services were provided by trained paid workers; hence the emergence of the social work profession. The worker’s role was to assist the client in finding solutions to the problems that they were encountering. The worker used skills in gathering information and applying scientific theory on behaviour and social processes to find practical solutions. It was “scientific” and “objective” in the positivists’ traditions. In 1917, Mary Richmond published her book, *Social Diagnosis*, which spawned the development of modern casework and the social work process of data collection, assessment and intervention. Along with the impact of Freudian thought, social casework began to lose its focus on societal issues and see problems as individual “pathology” (Hick, 2006).

Concurrently, some Protestant groups developed a consciousness of social inequality and emphasized social justice through social action. This movement sought change in the present and service to humans was viewed as a service to God. It became known as social gospel. Our “greatest Canadian”, Tommy Douglas, came out of this social gospel movement of the 1930s and its depression era.

Era of Applied Social Science: 1941-Present

During the Second World War, the Canadian government became an active player in the country’s economy and they recognized their role in ensuring a well-run economy. Social services had a role in the active economy by reducing the problems of recession, industrialization and urbanization. Social welfare could stimulate the economy through consumption and reduce recession and unemployment. Keynesian economics reigned supreme. Interestingly, John

Kenneth Galbraith was born in Canada and was a Canadian citizen. In 1946, the Family Allowance was introduced to assist women leaving the workforce and ensure high spending and consumption. This major national programme was quietly created and implemented with the support of both business and labour (Durst, 1999, 2005). Soon after, Old Age security, Unemployment Insurance and benefits to persons with disabilities were implemented. One of the most dramatic programmes was the Canada Assistance Plan of 1966. The federal government stepped into the legislative mandate of the provinces and into a host of social programmes by offering a 50/50 split in costs of income security programmes. Under general and broad guidelines, each of the provinces could develop and implement their own programmes and the federal government would cover half of the financial costs. Social assistance or “welfare” was heavily funded by both the provincial and federal governments and now was a major publicly funded and administered programme. It was no longer the domain of private charities and philanthropists. Programmes in child welfare, child care and persons with disabilities rapidly expanded in size and sophistication.

By the mid-seventies, Canada had become a modern “welfare state” with an expansive and comprehensive “safety net”. The number of identified social workers rose from 3,495 in 1951 to 30,535 in 1971 and now is 86,000 (Hick, 2006, p. 59). Approximately, 44% of social workers had training in related discipline like sociology, psychology or education. Among those identifying themselves as social worker, 4.6% were Aboriginal and 7.4% as visible minority; 5.0% reported having a disability, which impeded their ability to do their work (Westhues, Lafrance, & Schmidt, 2001). With the introduction of provincial legislation, the term *social worker* is restricted to individuals who have graduated with a social work degree from an accredited programme. Like other professions in Canada, the registration of social workers is under the domain of the various provincial associations.

The Current Issues in Social Welfare and Social Work Education

Social work practice in Canada has been shaped by, and is a reflection of, the culture of the country (Johnson, McClelland, & Austin, 1998). Canada is a diverse, pluralistic, and ever changing society that encompasses many values, beliefs and perspectives of human well being.

Social work education at the university level has existed in Canada since 1914 with the establishment of the Department of Social Services at the University of Toronto (Irving, 1992). In Montreal, McGill University started its programme in 1918. There are now 35 schools at the university level, offering 32 BSW programmes, 28 MSW programmes and 8 Ph.D. programmes with 10 programmes in French (CASSW, 2007). At the college level, there are 46 schools, offering 69 programmes (Strategic Human Resource Analysis of Social Workers in Canada, 2000). Most of the BSW programmes were created in the 1970s during a time of rapid expansion of Canadian universities with an effort to make education more accessible. As part of the accreditation standards, these BSW programmes are generalist in nature preparing the student to a wide range of practice domains. Until the proliferation of BSW programmes, social work education was predominately at the Master degree level. Up until the 1980s, to be a “social worker” meant having a MSW.

In the Canadian north, the University of Regina “dominates”. Through the university, the Yukon College located in Whitehorse, Yukon, offers a diploma in social work that with additional university credits allows the student to complete a nationally accredited Bachelor of Social Work. The programme graduates about 12 social workers per year and over 85% of them find permanent social work employment within a year of graduation. The programme is considered bi-cultural in the sense that it attempts to incorporate the orientations and values of traditional First Nations culture with the dominant cultural values of Euro-Canadian society. It was viewed as important that the social workers could function effectively in both worlds.

Respected Aboriginal Elder, Roddy Blackjack, simply said, “We must walk side by side for the future” (Senkpiel, 1997, p.30). Unfortunately, at this time, this is the only degree granting programme north of the 60th parallel in Canada. The partnership continues to this day.

Unique in Canada is the First Nations University partnership with the University of Regina. First Nations University offers a nationally accredited Bachelor of Indian Social Work degree. It is not “bi-cultural” and offers social work education and training from the First Nations or Aboriginal perspective.

The professional body, the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), was founded in 1926. It is mandated to provide national leadership for the profession, providing support to provincial territorial association, encouraging and assisting the development of professional standards, conducting research, and disseminating information about current social issues. The Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW) was founded in 1948. It is an association of social work educators, which is responsible for the accreditation of social work programmes at the university level and dissemination of information about social work education in Canada. This structure is different than Australia where the professional association accredits the educational institutions. Historically, there have been both tensions and agreements between the two bodies.

Kendall (2000) asserted that the progress of social work in Canada in the present century has come through the steady work of educators and practitioners to foster values, build knowledge and develop skills fundamental to a profession that combines compassion with competence in multiple relationships with troubled individuals and constructive action on social problems. Taking this into consideration, social work practice in Canada continues to strengthen its professional competence.

A major threat to the social work profession in Canada has been the current wave of neo-conservatism and its onslaught on social welfare services. Global trends toward market-driven philosophies that promote a disregard for the weaker members of society can only conflict with social work principles that promote notions of dignity and respect for individuals as fundamental societal values (Teeple, 1995). Historically, Canadian public social service agencies have addressed the various economic and social concerns in society. Moreover, Canada's social programmes and policies are typically characterized by a federal vision of intervention. Since the 1980s, the federal government has promoted the concept of privatization and sought an end to universal social programmes. Canada, like other welfare states, has experienced serious attacks on the principles of redistribution and the provision of health and social services. As the federal government's role in the provision of human services declined, the provincial department and communities saw an increase in their responsibilities. In addition to changes in federal and provincial programmes and funding arrangements, public attitudes and thinking about welfare have also changed (Stephenson, 2000; Pederson, 2003). “Welfare has shifted from being a programme of “entitlement” designed to help fight poverty, to a temporary support intended to promote individual self-sufficiency through labour force attachment strategies” (Canada, 2000, p.2).

Social work has met rapidly increasing demands for services while faced with significant reductions in human and fiscal resources. Client needs have become increasingly complex as poverty and unemployment increased dramatically. Reports of family violence, child neglect and substance abuse continue to escalate. Deficit and debt reduction are the most urgent and critical policy objectives of the neo-conservative government, leading them to reduce public spending.

The neo-conservative assumption that community groups and churches should assume greater responsibility for needs previously met by government has seriously affected social services

programmes and those they serve. Food banks, for example, have become ubiquitous as public assistance programme implemented restricted eligibility requirements and reduced benefit levels to discourage reliance on the public purse. Social housing programmes have been eliminated, forcing low-income families to find adequate housing at market prices. These policies have led to the further marginalization of families and enormous challenges to the social work profession.

Globally, as social work embarks on its second century of services, the profession must focus on applying its considerable knowledge and its many decades of skilled experience in the helping field. It needs to coordinate like-minded organizations to ameliorate the myriad of social problems, old and new, that continue to plague the world (Kendall, 2000). The practice of social work in the world today is far more complex and challenging than it was in the past. The rapidly changing world continues to place tremendous stress on individuals and families. To meet the increasing demand for services, the field of social work continues to evolve and change with the changing context and conditions.

In Canada, the pervasiveness of neo-conservative ideology has exacerbated the issue of a lack of social work identity within the profession. Social workers increasingly find their work reflecting responsibility for social control rather than for social change. It is now time for experienced social work professionals to put forth innovative and humane programme options for consideration by policy makers. Social workers need to exercise their advocacy responsibility for social justice to deal with the negative outcomes of the changes and the results inflicted on the more vulnerable members of society. Social workers in Canada work in numerous sectors and domains of health, education, and social services programmes. They are well positioned to translate private troubles into public issues.

Social work in Canada is characterized by a number of strengths such as having a holistic practice orientation, a generalist approach to practices, good linkage between theory and practice, a high cultural relevance and high quality of social work education. Its social work programmes have regional and other variations but there is considerable agreement in content across all schools of social work in Canada. It also has certain weaknesses such as a lack of professional identity, diffuse knowledge base of the profession, conflict between the values of social action and social control, low ability to promote the profession and eroding leadership in social services in a number of settings. These features have important implications for the future of social work in Canada (Stephenson, 2000). The response requires a strategic approach, which include a clear statement of social work's mission in society, the creation of an improved public image and educational experience that better prepare social workers to work in a rapidly changing societal environment.

The schools of social work should rethink their curriculum with a view to ensuring that social workers have the skills necessary to adequately respond to the increasing requirement of practice, arising from the multiple problems encountered by the people with whom the workers work. Social work education should consider including training to develop managerial competence in social workers to stem the erosion of social workers' leadership in the social services. It should better prepare graduates for social advocacy. Schools of social work should look into ways which attract greater number of Aboriginal, visible minority and multicultural social workers to the profession.

Basically, value commitments and ethical principles are at the core of social work as a profession. And there is a global commonality of values. Social work in every country stands for respect for the worth and dignity of all people. Social work shares a concern for vulnerable groups with particular attention to the poor and identifies efforts to end discrimination and move toward equal treatment for all as professional goals. Therefore, the commitment to social reform and change is a universal value of the profession. Values differences are most likely

found between communally oriented societies like Aboriginal cultures and the individualistic-oriented Western societies from which Canada is among.

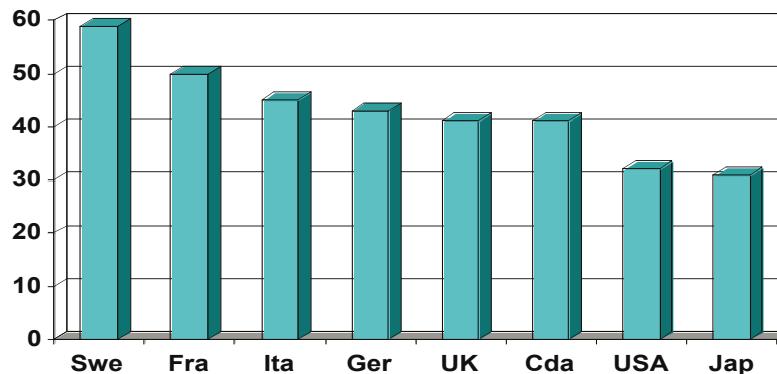
“A curriculum is not built in the sense that a building is constructed and the task finished. A curriculum is developed but never finished” (Council on Social Work Education, 1960 p.1). Schools of social work should rethink their curriculum with a view to ensuring that social workers have the skills necessary to adequately respond to the increasing requirements of practice, arising from the multiple problems encountered by the people with whom they serve. They should strengthen their possibilities to provide continuing education opportunities to maintain the currency of social worker’s skills and knowledge after graduation.

International Comparisons on Social Welfare

Individual comparisons between countries can be helpful but also cumbersome. Because social welfare programmes can differ greatly, often, it is like comparing “apples with oranges.” However, it does raise some interesting trends and patterns worthy of discussion. Gosta Esping-Anderson’s (1988) categorized welfare states into three “clusters” using three essential criteria: “the quality of social rights; social stratification; and the relation of the state, market and family” (Lightman, 2003 p.25). Countries that emphasize universalistic values in social welfare are considered *Social Democratic* and include Norway, Sweden and possibly Denmark and Finland. Countries with a work-orientation with individualistic values include Austria, France, Germany, and Italy; they are labelled *Corporate*. The United States and Australia are classified as *Liberal* and based upon market values. In recent years, Canada has shifted from more of a Social Democratic orientation and deeper into the *Liberal* category as it embraces social welfare reforms more in keeping with the United States of America.



Chart 1: Government Revenue as a Share of GDP (2004)

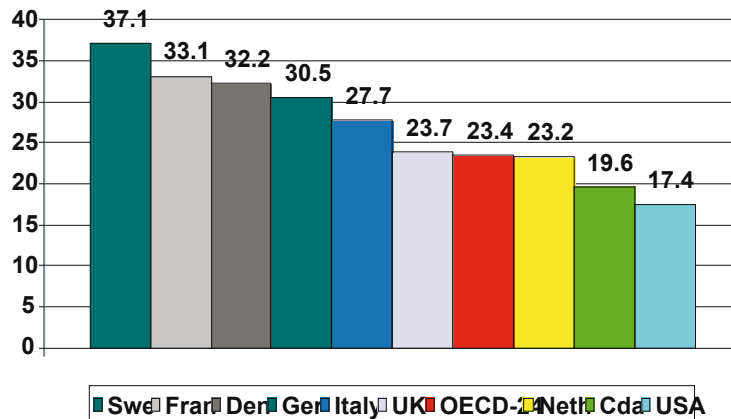


(OECD, 2005).

Chart 1 presents data on total government revenue in the form of tax and non-tax receipts as a share of GDP, Gross Domestic Product of various developed countries. Government revenue includes all forms of taxation and non-tax revenue such as fees. Canada is situated in the middle (41%) with Sweden at the highest level at approximately 59% and USA and Japan at the lowest at 32 and 31% respectively (OECD, 2005). Since 1984, Canada’s government revenue has remained fairly constant. Interestingly, although US politicians consistently pledge to lower taxes, the USA has seen a steady rise from 28.3% to 32%, mainly to finance the increased military activity. After considerable cost cutting Canada has balanced its federal budget for the past few years but still maintains a large federal debt (Lightman, 2003). In

recent years, the Canadian government has enjoyed significant budget surpluses and has had the highest annual growth in GDP of all the G-8 countries. Currently, the Canadian economy is incredibly strong and much better than the weaker US economy with its increasing deficit and costs of war.

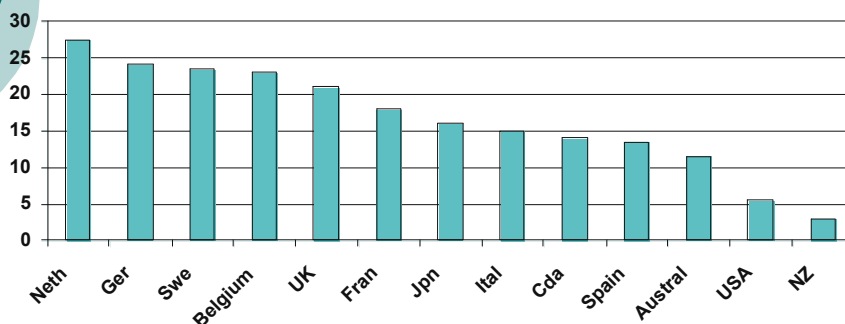
Chart 2: Social Expenditure as % of GDP, 2003



(OECD, 2007).

Chart 2 presents the social expenditure as a percentage of GDP at factor cost, 2003 on selected developed countries (OECD, 2007). Sweden provides the highest rate of social expenditure of all the countries listed at 37.1%. France is also listed well above the OECD average of 24 countries at 33.1%. Canada rates low (19.6%) and just above the Slovak Republic (19.0%) and above the USA (17.4%) (OECD, 2007). For all its wealth, Canada does not spend an lot on social programmes.

Chart 3: Per Cent of Earnings Paid in Tax, Married Single Earner, 2 Children

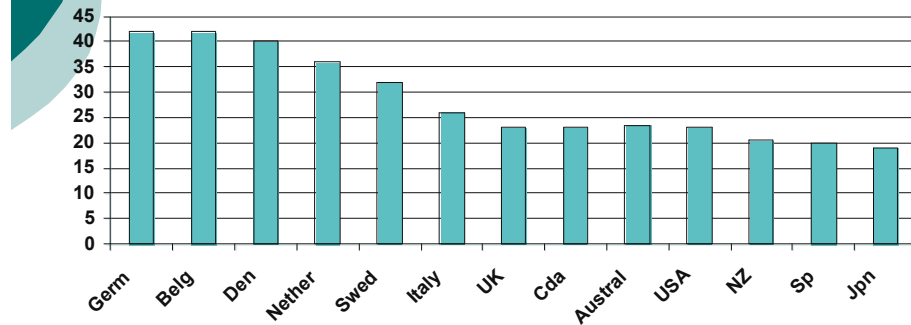


(OECD, 2006).

Chart 3 presents the average percentage of earnings paid by a family of four with 1 income earners and 2 children. It is based upon the national average incomes of 1 income earner families. The chart presents the so-called “tax burden” on dual income families and includes

all forms of taxes and various social security benefits. Again Canada is situated somewhere in the middle with the France, USA and UK and above Spain and Japan. The EU and Scandinavian countries top out at 44% for Denmark (Lightman, 2003). In Canada, a family of four does not pay excess taxes in comparison to other developed nations.

Chart 4: Per Cent of Earnings Paid in Tax, Single Earner and 0 Children

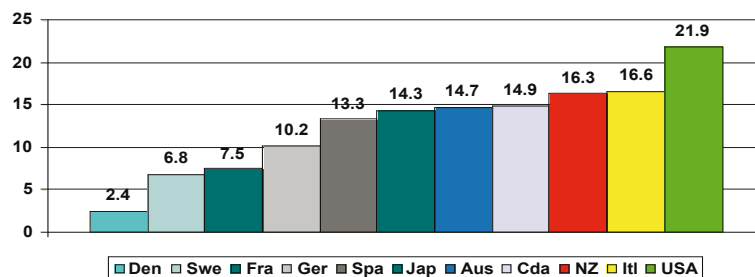


(OECD, 2006).

Chart 4 provides similar data but for a single earner with no children. Again, the pattern is almost identical to the dual earners income but slightly higher for all countries except Japan who seem to be more generous to non-dependent individuals. Germany seems to “ding” its single persons more than other countries with a 9% increase for single persons over the previous chart (Lightman, 2003).

The charts refute the argument that Canadians are over-taxed and when one compares the benefits that Canadians receive such as national health care, social services, pensions and employment insurance. Canadians are quite well off (Lightman, 2003).

Chart 5: Child Poverty Rates by Selected Country



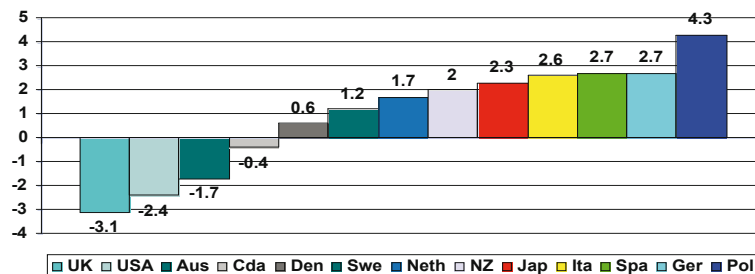
(UNICEF, 2005).

Chart 5 shows the percentage of children living in “relative” poverty, defined as households with income below 50% of the national median income. Quite embarrassing for Canadians is

our high poverty rates amongst children. With one in seven children living below the poverty line, Canadians have a rate of 14.9% (UNICEF, 2005). These statistics has been a source of shame and debate in Canada. In 1989, the Canadian parliament pledged to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000; it failed. The USA, the richest country in the world, sits at the highest child poverty rate at 21.9%. Denmark has a low of only 2.4% and Germany has 10.2%. There is much to be done and strategies to reduce or eliminate child poverty are a source of great debate. At a young age, my daughter asked about poverty and in the simple wisdom of a child, she replied, “why don’t we just give them money so that they are not poor anymore?” At an early age, she understood the concepts of social justice and income redistribution.



Chart 6: Changes in Child Poverty Rates During the 1990s, Selected Countries, Unicef, 2005

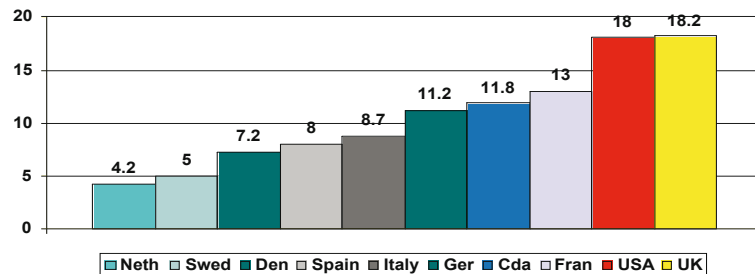


(UNICEF, 2005).

The above table presents some interesting trends on changes in the rates of national poverty in the recent decade (UNICEF, 2005). The UK and USA have successfully seen decreases in the national rates of 3.1% and 2.4% respectively while the nation of Poland has experienced significant increase in its rate (4.3%). Sadly for Canadians, they have seen almost no change in child poverty (a minor decrease of 0.4%) demonstrating the recent efforts to reduce child poverty have failed. Poverty rates are complex and are influenced by subtle interactions of government policy, economic and social change and labour market. However, the UNICEF report suggests “that poverty rates depend not only on the level of government support but on the manner of its dispensation” (UNICEF, 2005, p.5). The developed countries could lower their rates of child poverty to below 10% without significant increase in government spending. It is how the money is allocated that decreases child poverty rates.



Chart 7: Child Well -Being in Rich Countries: Average over 6 Dimensions, UNICEF, 2007



(UNICEF, 2007).

Rather than look at poverty rates, it is worth considering the rates of child well-being. UNICEF has attempted to provide another perspective on child poverty by considering the well-being of children in selected wealthy countries (UNICEF, 2007). Using indices of 6 dimensions with 40 separate indicators relevant to children's rights and lives, it considers: Material Well-Being, Health and Safety, Education, Family and Peer Relationships, Behaviours and Risks and Subjective Well-being. The above chart on well-being averages these dimensions and summarizes the ratings with the lowest rating indicating the highest level of well-being. Overall, the Netherlands rates the highest at 4.2 and the UK the lowest at 18.2. Canada is situated 12th out of 21 developed nations. It rates 2nd in the educational dimension but the low ratings in Family and Peer Relationships (18th) and 17th in Behaviours and Risks pull Canada's standings downward. Canadian children do not fair very well relative to other developed nations.

Canada is situated in similar levels in other indices of poverty. For example, the United Nation's *Human Development Index (HDI)* rated Canada as "first" 9 times from 1990-2000. In 2001, it slipped behind Norway and Australia and has not been in the top levels since. In 2006, Canada was rated as 6th in the world; however, the index only measures four indicators and since Canada has a high GDP per capita and longevity, it rates higher compared to other nations. The United Nation's *The Human Poverty Index (HPI) 2006* is a more comprehensive index and includes literacy, social inclusion and poverty levels. Using this index, Canada fairs only 8th out of 18 industrialized countries. The United States sits at 16th. It appears that generally Canadians are quite well off but there is poor income re-distribution; as a result, many citizens are not benefiting equally from Canada's wealth (Lightman, 2003).

Concluding Comments

Although it is understood that the founding nations of Canada were France, England and the First Nations people, Canadian history is inexplicitly tied to the United States of America. Much to the chagrin of many Canadians, we have conflicting ties to the UK and our cousins south of the border. Canadian social welfare developed in a parallel way to the UK and has been greatly influenced by British values of social justice and income re-distribution. Social work education in Canada has a decidedly "middle" perspective, making it unique on the international scene. Albeit a generalization, it holds many of the communitarian and social justice orientations of the European and UK schools but it has the influences of the USA which emphasizes individualism and self-sufficiency.

The international data repeatedly positions Canada “right” of the sophisticated social programmes of the Scandinavian and EU countries and left of the USA and Japan. Although Canadians like to boast that they have more in common with the hearty Scandinavian nations, we are, perhaps, positioned closer to the USA than we would like to believe. In regard to our social welfare, our identity with the Scandinavian nations is more myth than substance. Canada’s rate of child poverty (14.9%) is a source of shame amongst progressive thinkers and sadly has been accepted as “normal” for much of the population. As with social welfare in the EU and UK, Canadian programmes have come under attack with pressures to slip towards an ideologically-conservative perspective. There seems to be less understanding and sympathy towards Canada’s vulnerable peoples.

It is critical that social researchers and social work educators do not lose their fundamental values and re-affirm their traditional focus on advocacy, social justice, equity and fairness. To do otherwise will see Canadian social welfare slip further towards the “right” leaving behind the disadvantaged and marginalized and creating greater societal disparity.

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