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The new politics of community-based governance requires a fundamental shift in the nature and character of the administrative bureaucracy

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Abstract

The politics of social policy played out in the era of globalization has profoundly altered the relationship between Canadian citizens and their governments. This change in relations, among other things, is marked by a turn to the "community" as a resource in solving social problems. Critics of this movement, however, express the view that the strategic application of community as a central social policy tactic seems to be less about inventing a new social architecture for Canada and more about a shift of government responsibility to the individual away from society as a whole through state institutions. For child welfare services, this expanded role of community is fraught with uncertainty, contradictions, and complexities for both human services professionals and for the children and families in receipt of services.
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1. Introduction

Over the last 10 years, a profound change has taken place in the relationship between Canadian citizens and their governments. The present-day politics of social policy played

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out against the backdrop of a rising global economy has fundamentally transformed the role of government as the primary provider of social care and public welfare in Canadian society. This change in relations is marked by the drastic downsizing of civil services around the world, the mounting deregulation of the public and private sectors, political emphasis on tax cuts and balanced budgets, the retreat of government from the provision of public services, the radical realignment of social and state institutions, and a turn to the *community* as a resource in solving social problems (Mullaly, 1994, 1997; Panitch, 1994; Silver & Arrighi, 2001; Slava, 1996).

Director of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University Keith Banting (1995) describes the impact of a globalized world this way:

> Globalization and the associated technological and economic restructuring have transformed the politics of the welfare state in the West. Domestic and international policy can no longer be separated, and the future of social protection can no longer be contemplated except in a global context. The pressures on the welfare state are intense. There has been a strong convergence in the problems facing Western governments, and the politics of restructuring generates a similar agenda in most countries. (p. 36)

While a number of writers present a different view of the relationship between economic constraints and political agency in relation to welfare states (Burgoon, 2001; Doremus, Keller, Pauly, & Reich, 1999; Hirst & Thompson, 1999), most analysts agree that globalization is associated with new or deepened patterns of inequality between regions, between countries, and between and within different groups of people (Bryan, 1994; Watson, 1998; Kapstein, 2000; Sassen, 1998). In a report entitled *The Challenge of Slums* (UN-Habitat, 2003) released in October 2003, the United Nations' Human Settlement Programme broke with traditional U.N. circumspection and self censorship by stating:

> The primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality, and weakened urban elites in their efforts to use cities as engines of growth. (p. 6)

From a Canadian perspective, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) reported that a decade and more of shredding the social safety net to deliver billions of dollars of tax cuts to the rich and corporations is anything but a "rising tide" lifting all boats. Rather, an analysis of the 2001 census by CCSD (2003) suggest that only the "yachts are rising". The report concludes:

> Canadian society is becoming increasingly polarized. The richest 10% of our population has seen its income grow by a whopping 14% while the bottom 10% has seen only a slight increase of less than 1%. Moreover the income of many working families has actually declined! (p. 1)

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