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Overview: Devolution in Post-Multicultural Society

Michael Lanphier

The devolution of services for newcomers resettling in a host country takes its place as one of many structural changes in post-industrial societies during the 1990s. This restructuring appeared inevitable from the early 1990s in Canada and even earlier in the United States. The state as distributor of goods and services to various recipient populations has been responding to uniquely high deficits and an economy which has failed to support the level of service deliveries which the Canadian, and more generally, post-industrial population has come to expect as a customary right.

Newcomers to Canada have experienced difficulties as a result of cut-backs in government services, and their situation is exacerbated by low prospects for gainful employment. Canada has rarely known an (official) unemployment rate below nine percent since 1990, and it has reached as high as eleven percent within this decade. Unofficially, the employment rate is much higher. Many job seekers have become dispirited over futile job-searching and have "dropped out," no

longer even considering themselves a part of the employment market. Still others who may be younger and somewhat marginalized have had to move about or in desperation have taken to

the street, and likewise, remain uncounted.

Among newcomers, unemployment remains chronically high. While estimates vary, a recent study of the

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Somali community in Toronto revealed unemployment among eligible males to be in the order of 50 percent (Opoku-Dapaah 1995). Newcomers are experiencing, in even more acute fashion, the desolation of state services slipping away at the same moment that gainful employment in society remains a distant dream.

An Organizational Question

The papers summarized in this issue propose to examine two important features of the changing pattern of the organization of settlement services to newcomers: the new conservatism as (non-)ideology governing allocations; and secondly, the funding crisis: challenge for "renewal" of settlement mandates. While these two currents are linked causally, they are separable analytically, and they differ in their

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implications for the outcomes of patterning of service deliveries to newcomers.

Because of the massive size of governments in Western societies, and notably in Canada, government budgets and spending are conspicuous elements of the public economy, elements which public opinion contends to have grown beyond popular or administrative control. Considerable concern has been expressed, for example, that interest expended to service the debt at the federal level in Canada amounts to one quarter of the total indebtedness of the state. By implication, taxes and government assets should be redeployed to debt reduction with commensurate cutbacks in expenditures on goods and services.

Simultaneously, reframing the role of government and public spending has aroused everyday curiosity as well as given support to more formal affirmation of a new wave of conservatism.

Inability of governments to extend their influence through the purse has become mixed with normative statements about the undesirability and inappropriateness of government subsidies. Principles of welfare-state funding which have guided governance since World War II, now appear problematic if not altogether misguided. Institutions engendered by that very welfare system are now prescribed to seek independence not only in mandate but in financing.

At the popular level, tax-protest meetings throughout Canada in the early and mid-1990s signified only the grassroots aspect of a phenomenon which has seized public consciousness and irreversibly set an agenda for politicians and their governmental administrations. These protests have affected both working- and middle-class life

situations, so that they have come to resemble a social movement. No politician may remain immune to such protestations, nor can civil servants long hide behind an administrative shield for protection (*Maclean's*, 13 February, 1995).

There is no single expenditure responsible for governmental indebtedness. Expenditures on social welfare rise to prominence both because of their massive size in the aggregate and because of the absence of a material product associated with the expenditure for which government might have contracted. Welfare expenditures appear easier to cut: those who receive them tend to have lower social status and lack networks and resources through which they might dissuade politicians from their course of reduction. Especially in short-term political exercises, a cut in welfare expenditures appears to yield a quick saving to the

public purse, whatever the consequences to former recipients.

Increasingly, consequential cuts in welfare and social-service expenditures have become the primary choice for politicians who depend on popular support during electoral campaigns or in the early months of their administrations. It is significant that two Canadian premiers elected in the mid-1990s, Ralph Klein of Alberta and Mike Harris of Ontario, both announced and effected critical budgetary reductions early in their respective administrations. The magnitude of these budgetary reductions amazed not only the general public but the conservative economic planners as well (*Maclean's*, 13 February and 31 July, 1995).

Explanations of cuts in welfare expenditures find their sources both in the global system of which Canada forms an integral part as well as in the domestic political economy particular to Canada. This linkage does not happen as a chance "historical accident" but occurs as an outcome of important late 20th century societal developments.

It is impossible to trace minutely the sequencing of events responsible for the present situation. Nevertheless, we signal two important social currents, the new conservatism and the administrative funding crisis that have had a pervasive impact in steering political and administrative events in post-industrial societies into an apparently irreversible course, at least in the short to medium-term. To these currents is added yet another dimension, particular to Canada: the decline of multiculturalism as a social ethic and the emergence of an era characterized as "post-multiculturalism." These currents are introduced below very briefly.

The New Conservatism

It may be premature to speak of new conservative ideology. We have witnessed systematic practices, in Canada and elsewhere, of governmental "reform" of wide-ranging curtailment and change in patterns of services funded by government among nearly

Linda Bolmes Memorial Tribute: Remembering Linda Holmes

Gerlud Neuwirth

Linda Holmes 1949-1996

It is with deep sadness that we have to inform our readers that Linda Holmes passed away on December 10, 1996 after a long battle with cancer.

A social worker by profession, Linda joined the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission in September, 1982. She moved into the Settlement Branch, January, 1985, where she held various positions, including Director of Settlement. Linda's contributions have made a lasting impact on the evolution of newcomer settlement and integration services. She initiated the FOST program and was instrumental in developing LINC-Overseas and the orientation materials for newcomers which are distributed overseas and in Canada. Linda realized the importance of NGOs in assisting newcomer settlement and integration and was particularly supportive of smaller organizations. Linda loved her work in settlement, devoting to it energy and time, well beyond her official obligations. Linda only slowed down slightly at the onset of her illness and during her treatments. She became a special advisor to the Director General of Settlement and helped establish the 3/9 sponsorship program for refugees from the former Yugoslavia in response to UNCHR's appeal for additional resettlement. In her final position with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Linda worked on the revitalization of private sponsorship.

Those of us who have been privileged to know Linda personally will always remember her for her forthright advice, her inner strength, her kindness and her sense of humour.

Credit: This tribute to Linda Holmes has been reprinted with permission from INSCAN 10, no. 3 (Winter 1997): 1.

all governments of the day. These curtailments may often be the result of one government copying another's practice without articulating position papers or even providing much advance notice. Alternatively, an "ideological statement," so to speak, may eventuate as part of a political campaign. The new ideology, however, may reduce to

point holds especially for NGOs mandated to serve those who are not yet well integrated in the host society and who may be seeking access to goods and services enjoyed by the established population. These organizations now find their mandates are in question. Their income-generating abilities, never known to provide more

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a slogan which appears deceptively easy to understand and is short enough to dominate even the shortest "sound byte" on newscasts.

It may be argued that we are nearing a new mode of relationship between state and populace, replete with a new division of rights and responsibilities. This *laissez-faire* mode places the onus for support on individual and family units, with minimal or limited assistance through organizational interventions. In this modality, the role of government should be directed increasingly to the assurance of a certain minimal level of public expenditure for institutions which are not supported through private enterprise, individual or organizational. Individuals maximise their own personal or familial gain, regardless of the interests of others or of the state. Failure to succeed thus eventuates from insufficient individual initiative or motivation. Concerns relating to structural inequalities of individuals in contemporary society appear irrelevant or do not get represented at all.

It appears equally obvious in a *laissez-faire* mode that self becomes increasingly attenuated from others in an interpersonal social sense. While responsibility for maintenance and integrity of self is embodied in this new form of conservatism, the importance of assistance of others in different social circumstances and in more distant social or spatial regions diminishes.

Correspondingly, implications abound for client-serving non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This

than a group-solidarity function, become key to survival in the face of declining governmental subsidy.

The Funding Crisis

For the funding crisis, the very practical exigencies of financing services, most of which are linked to personnel costs, appear of first moment to those directly involved in front-line settlement services or in the allocation for same. The pressure stems from two major sources. Above all, governments are subject to extensive budgetary reduction. Their departments are forced to cut back or to eliminate direct service deliveries altogether. Indirectly, service deliveries are even more threatened by curtailment because of withdrawal of governmental funding programs which subsidise service deliveries through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The second source may be even further endangered in terms of core funding or other support which NGOs receive from their parent organizations: churches or other benevolent organizations.

While a certain portion of the funding curtailment now appears as a *fait accompli*, implications from these pervasive changes remain to be considered in detail. The spectre of a slow death warrant or a challenge for "renewal" probably represents oscillating alternatives to those persons directly involved in service deliveries or their management. In any event, the sheer quantity of cutbacks has assured a *qualitative* change in the organization of settlement services to newcomers.

While cutbacks due to funding in traditional service deliveries remain a matter of serious concern, it is important to examine whether this *prima facie* financial contraction may bear any longer-run salutary possibilities in the challenge they present. Salutary outcomes are by no means guaranteed, of course. Every organization delivering services is forced to re-examine its fundamental mandate, however, in view of possibly re-configuring its operations. "Renewal" thus becomes more than a trite entry in the managerial lexicon: it is a challenge, forced or otherwise. Some organizations may find opportunities in the "renewal" exercise. Without obvious sources of funding support, however, such possibilities appear minimal. It remains to be seen whether the stringent cutback regime brings with it new or revised organizational formats for service deliveries.

Post-Multiculturalism

Certain features of the new conservative approach to fiscal restraint and budget cutbacks are well evidenced. In terms of social development, these phenomena appear to be a derivative of "Post-multiculturalism." This important political feature has already been signalled by the present researchers and in related publications (Adelman et al., 1994). Post-multiculturalism refers to the present era in which governments in Canada and Australia (to cite only those countries which have officially espoused multiculturalism as governmental policy) have become incapable of delivering the type of services required for a society so designated. While popular culture and official governmental pronouncements continue officially to proclaim multiculturalism as prevailing among the population, it becomes increasingly difficult to marshal evidence that governmental process indeed implements its stated policy. Neither government nor popular culture appears willing to renounce the policy of multiculturalism. Yet guiding principles of respect and support for cultural diversity have been

bypassed in favour of maintaining a social order with primacy on affairs and concerns closer to one's own home, kin and locality.

We assume that the increasing irrelevance of official multiculturalism policy as enshrined in the 1988 Canadian Parliamentary Act lies not in any determined effort to effect social change so much as the incapacity and inability of Canadian society and government to deliver on a policy which promises to be both extraordinarily expensive and complex if fully developed. The present transitional phase, we hypothesise, represents a direction, presently without any clearly articulated goal point.

Likewise as noted above, a new *distance is being created between self and other*. On the individual, or micro, level, there has appeared a resurgence in xenophobic reactions and discriminatory practices toward newcomers with occasional acts of violence. At the

and above those in other societies which may serve as their hosts or "partners." In the corporate sector, administrative authority supplants representational suffrage or popular opinion for rationale. Decisions are made with less sensitivity to "other" than to interests which represent local or organizational goals specific to the interested players. Such activities may be accountable only in a fiscal sense: in that they lead to a positive or advantageous outcome on an annual balance sheet.

Global Context

The global context impinges on our concerns in at least two important ways. Directly, global needs for resettlement are of course mediated through the several and disparate information channels which NGOs and governments characteristically use. There is no resettlement "problem" unless it is so communicated. More

actions taken in the local service organizations with which they are networked.

Given this overall *problématique*, this issue introduces the reader to the dilemmas and possible resolutions of the NGO sector and their relation to governments, parent organizations and the wider public, which are elaborated in full measure in the forthcoming book. The focus on devolution is framed within the wider perspective of the new conservatism and the global context, especially as mediated by INGO and related agencies which have a vested interest in international migration.

The papers are drawn from a workshop held at Centre for Refugee Studies at York University in 1996. The workshop "Devolution of Settlement," highlights an issue of relevance to the late 90s, with important changes in the organization of service deliveries constituting a part of the agenda of governments in Canada and beyond. Drawing together scholars, administrators and practitioners from the governmental and non-governmental organizational sector, the workshop focused upon an assessment of the organization of services during the initial stages of a devolution scenario. The drama of devolution continues. It is one which researchers and practitioners follow with consuming interest and, above all, concern. ■

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organizational level, systemic discrimination pervades our institutions, with implicit or explicit forms of favouritism toward those already established in the existing social order. Correspondingly, arrangements designed to facilitate integration of newcomers are no longer portrayed as part of the constituent mandate of responsible government.

Governments and nation-states should in any event not be singled out, however easily identifiable their activities. Both constitutionally and operationally, of course, they represent prevailing social sentiments and currents. Corporate activities, by comparison, not only reflect similar tendencies; they may well lead the way in the assertion of self-interests over

indirectly, most NGOs are linked to networks of larger institutions and international NGOs (INGO) both for information, as indicated above, and mutual support. It is often the reports of INGOs which inform Canadian NGOs of the magnitude and urgency of resettlement needs throughout the world of states in upheaval.

The INGO perspective, however, of necessity differs from that of local or national NGOs. Not only are their respective information sources different, but their constituencies have been independently developed. Yet, their view of the global situation of international migration, forced (our special focal interest) or otherwise, will not only shape their own activity but determine to a large extent the kinds of