STANLEY LASH AWARD

2006 Recipient

Katherine Sparkes
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFLAME THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

saturday, september 23, 2006

GAI - Guaranteed Annual Integrity for Low-Income Canadian Families

Last Saturday’s Star featured the story of Maheswary Puvaneswaran, a mother of two small boys who immigrated to Canada over 13 years ago. Although Puvaneswaran was a school teacher in her native Sri Lanka, here in Canada she holds two jobs and can barely afford the essentials of life for herself and her two young boys. Puvaneswaran is paid $8.50 an hour for her work as a cleaner. Her monthly income is approximately $1,150, the rent for the one bedroom apartment in which her and her boys live is $849, leaving her with $300 to pay for food, clothing, transportation and other essentials for her and her sons. Her sons spend most nights sleeping at a neighbour’s house while she works.

Puvaneswaran’s story brings to the fore questions not only about the support provided to immigrant families to ensure their success in Canada, but more broadly about any Canadian who, despite often incredible obstacles, eagerly participates in the workforce and yet at the end of the day cannot meet the basic needs of his or her family. While most Canadians would readily agree that a working family should not live in poverty, federal policy to date has not exemplified this belief. And yet it could.

A Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) would enable Maheswary Puvaneswaran and thousands of other members of Canada’s working poor to make the leap from social assistance to the workforce, subsidize low-paying and often unstable work and allow those who cannot maintain full-time paid income (because of disability, single parenthood or other circumstances) to participate in the workforce to the extent they are able. Although there are different concepts of the GAI, the premise is a basic income provided on a continuing basis, which may vary according to household configuration, age and other

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregati...
Peter MacKay and Neil French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
sources of income. GAI has two typical forms: 1) negative income tax (NIT) and 2) universal demogrant (UD). NIT is paid by a government to persons or households below a certain income level. UD is a payment made by government to all persons, regardless of income, thus providing a benefit to individuals at all income levels; this GAI mechanism is generally much costlier. Either way, the idea is to provide a wage supplement to ensure all working adults are able to achieve a certain basic standard of living.

The wage supplement is hardly a new idea. The US implemented the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in 1975. EITC is a refundable federal income tax credit for low-income working individuals and families. More than 18 million taxpayers took advantage of the EITC in 2000, totalling about $30 billion in claims. A large proportion of these funds (67%) were provided as direct payments to families. Similar policies exist in the UK. Here in Canada, Saskatchewan and Quebec have implemented wage supplement programs. In 1995, as Minister of Human Resources Development, Lloyd Axworthy endorsed the adoption of a wage supplement by the Federal Government. Earlier this year, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a report endorsing wage supplements as one means of assistance for Canada’s working poor. A similar report published by the Toronto City Summit Alliance Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults (MISWAA) in May 2006 offered a similar endorsement. Members of the Task Force include leaders from the GTA’s business, labour, government and non-governmental communities.

So are wage supplements the way to end what is too often a perpetual cycle of poverty for Canada’s working poor?

A wage supplement is not without challenges. Would the creation of new low-paying jobs in Canada be stimulated by what may be viewed as a subsidy to low paying employers? Would such a policy prevent the labour movement from making gains in wages? In the design of the taxation scheme, we must consider ways to prevent individual members of a family from having their earnings disproportionately taxed. For example, if a guarantee is set for a family, will adult members of the family who earn beyond the break-even income level have their wages unduly taxed? Such a policy may disproportionately tax female and adult children members of a family who may be secondary income earners. Would the establishment of a wage supplement take money away from other social services?

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives’ report and the Toronto Alliance Task Force suggest that a wage supplement must be combined with access to child care, an improved and more accessible EI system, affordable housing, health benefits for those who are transitioning off of social assistance, employment training support, collective action in low-paying workplaces to obtain better pay and working conditions from employees and regular review and revision of the minimum wage.

In their 2005 Economic and Fiscal Update the Liberal government promised to establish a working income tax benefit (WITB) for low income Canadians by 2008. In May 2006, the Conservatives introduced their first budget, which replaced (at least temporarily) the WITB with a universal employment tax credit of $250 for all Canadians in 2006 and $1,000 thereafter. The Conservatives

Ethnic Enclaves...

GAI - Guaranteed Annual Integrity for Low-Income C...
said that the working income tax credit was still being considered for the future.

As the Conservatives consider the implementation of a wage supplement, thousands of Canadians like Maheswary Puvaneswaran will continue to make valuable contributions to Canada’s economy that do not provide them with adequate remuneration to provide for the basic needs of their families.

References:


posted by katherine at saturday, september 23, 2006

2 comments:

tim spence donegani said...

I think your comments about GIA are really insightful, thank you for bringing them to the fore. The argument that GIA would subsidize low paying or unstable work I find theoretically untenable. I think that the assertion rests on an assumption that employers will pay their employees the least they can in order for them to survive (please correct me if I’m wrong). Although Marx your agree with this statement in terms of keeping the wage only so high as to reproduce that portion of the productive process it ignores the casual, and hence replaceable nature of low paying (read low skill) jobs. There is a disconnect between individual firm’s employment decisions and the broader market and legislative forces which shape the wage for rather homogeneous low skilled labour. A subsidizing argument against GIA must assume the large scale collusion of employers. This is not practical where there is, empirically I think, evidence of a competitive market for both buyers and sellers of low skilled labour. This point also speaks to the future of labour movements of low skilled jobs where small firms represent a large proportion of the economy and collective action though general strikes don’t seem imminent in Canada. GIA may be the best way to combat polarizing contemporary developed economies.

NB I use the term low skilled in terms of those required for the job and not the often untapped skills of immigrants.

- Tim Spence Donegani

PS I wasn’t able to post a comment without signing up to blogspot

9:56 PM
katherine said...

Hi Tim,

Thanks for your comment. While GIA may not encourage the creation of new low-pay jobs (I can't find any evidence to ascert this notion), I think it would undermine attempts made by the labour movement to encourage low-skill, low-wage employers to pay adequate living wages. I don't think the competition for sellers of low-skilled labour is fierce enough to drive up wages - if it was, there wouldn't be some 600,000 low-income workers in Canada. I guess my point is that while a GAI wouldn't encourage new low-skilled labour, it certainly wouldn't do anything to encourage employers to pay living wages.

On an unrelated note: in the 1970s, Manitoba in partnership with the Government of Canada ran a pilot GAI program - Mincome.

Results of the program pointed to a couple of interesting conclusions:
1) slight decrease in worker productivity: 1% or men, 3% wives and 5% for unmarried women [I would be interested in looking at the % of those unmarried women who were also mothers and whether or not the supplement might have allowed them to work less and take care of children]

2) More interesting still (and found in similar US examples): a moderate increase in marital dissolution. That is when couples were no longer compelled to stay together by economic reasons, GAI provided the financial independence required to separate.

12:46 PM

Post a Comment

links to this post:
Create a Link

<< Home
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFRAILM THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

monday, october 09, 2006

Lower Integration in Little Italy?

Ethnic Enclaves and Immigrant Integration in Canada

Last year, I traveled to South Africa for work. At a point during my trip, I found myself explaining Canadian multiculturalism to one of my hosts. "Canada is a very diverse country," my host said. "Yes, I responded, Canada is incredibly diverse." I went on to boast about how well Canada attracts and retains new immigrants and how we've succeeded in creating an integrated, just and peaceful society while other countries (including many in Europe) are struggling with ethnic isolation and tension. I went on. "It is amazing - in Toronto, you can spend a day wondering between Chinatown, Portugal Village, and Little Italy. There are so many ethnic communities in the City, with grocery stores, cultural clubs and restaurants to support their members. He stopped me there. "With all of these separate communities, Canada does not sound so integrated."

I love Toronto's Chinatown and can easily spend a day browsing, eating dumplings at my favourite restaurant and strolling my way through Asian food marts, but I've often wondered how the tendency of immigrants to settle in areas of Toronto or other Canadian cities with high concentrations of people who share the same ethnicity or language (i.e. ethnic enclaves) affects the ability of new immigrants to successfully integrate into their new home; that is their ability to learn English, tap into professional networks, and engage in social-cultural experiences beyond the realm of their ethnic community. I've also wondered how these enclaves impact our ability as Canadians to understand and empathise with one another across cultural groups.

While each immigrant is unique in his or her aspirations and needs:

about me
Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs
got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts
A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy, Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregati...
Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
there are three factors that underlie settlement location choice: 1) port of entry into Canada 2) location of family and friends who are already settled 3) availability/location of jobs. Personal demographic characteristics such as age, education and marital status will also impact settlement choices. By settling in areas with other individuals who share language and ethnicity, immigrants benefit from economies of communication, information, consumption, and labour markets. This economy can be defined by the cost to deliver ethnic goods defined as 1) market goods such as foods, clothing, services: radio, news, entertainment, and 2) non-market goods specific such as social interactions with people of like origin. The cost to deliver these goods decreases with increased size of the ethnic group. Therefore if a new Canadian were contemplating two job offers, one paying more than the other but located in an area of lower ethnic concentration, he or she would factor the costs of ethnic goods into his decision. He or she would likely reject the higher paying job in an area of lower ethnic concentration if the difference in pay would not compensate for the higher cost of ethnic goods that he or she would incur. [Think of ethnic goods theory in terms of the potential success of efforts made by small or medium-size Canadian municipalities to attract new immigrants]. We would therefore find lower average wages in ethnic enclaves than in ethnic populations located elsewhere.

In their study of American immigrants, Chiswick and Miller (2005) found that immigrants who lived in areas of higher ethnic concentration had a lower level of English language proficiency because of reduced exposure to English, lower economic incentive to master the language (individuals who live in ethnic enclaves often do so because they can find work in their preferred language) and lower linguistic efficiency (i.e. the ability to learn language). After controlling for the immigrants abilities in his or her preferred language, they found that poorer English language skills resulted in lower earnings for immigrants living in enclaves. It is important to note that those immigrants who choose to live in areas of lower concentration are also likely to have higher levels of post-secondary education than those who live in enclaves. Other studies have found lower birth rates amongst women living in ethnic enclaves than those living outside. Undoubtedly, ethnic enclaves present both opportunities and challenges to the successful integration of new Canadians but they also have impacts on the broader community.

Ethnic enclaves may promote discrimination and prejudice. Citizens outside of the ethnic group may feel alienated or excluded by the insularity of the enclave. Such tensions came to the fore a few years ago in Richmond BC, where over 54% of the population are foreign-born Canadians. Two American tourists prompted a debate on language and integration when they complained of not being able to get service in English or find English-language signs on businesses. In response, Richmond's intercultural advisory
committee undertook community consultations on the matter and after an extensive dialogue concluded that every business in the City should have signage in English. According to committee member Shashi Assananda "Heritage languages are okay because we want to encourage people to keep their language, but at the same time using English. For integration purposes . . . that would work better." I think all Canadians benefit from the cultural, educational, social and economic opportunities that ethnic enclaves offer; however it is important that we identify elements of insularity and try to mitigate them to promote intercultural interaction and understanding, as the Richmond advisory committee did.

Ethnic enclaves serve an important role in the preserving elements of ethnic culture, including language, lifestyle, customs and social networks. However, they reduce opportunities for new immigrants to interact with individuals outside of their ethnic group, resulting in slower acquisition of English language skills and subsequently lower earnings than immigrants who choose to live in areas of lower ethnic concentration. Moreover, while the vibrancy of ethnic enclaves enhances a city by providing cultural, educational and social opportunities for individuals outside of the ethnic group, the insularity of the enclave may also create feelings of discrimination and exclusion. As Chiswick and Miller point out, we could adjust our immigration policy to attract new immigrants who are less likely to live in an enclave i.e. those who are highly educated, have significant pre-immigration exposure to English and are from a country that is closer in culture to Canada. However, such a shift in policy would likely exclude many would-be successful immigrants who do not meet such criteria and in particular, a focus on recruitment from areas of cultural similarity to Canada would be a regression to the days when Canada’s policy focused on attracting European migrants – a system that is simply neither desirable nor sustainable when the vast majority of Canada’s immigrants are coming from Asia (China, India, Philippines, Pakistan and other countries). We would be better to allow the great integration tool that is the public school system to work its magic. It is because we have a decent public school system that so few Canadian children attend private schools and because of this, children of all socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities learn the same history, values and language. Thus by the second generation of Canadians, the factors that lead to settlement in ethnic enclaves are significantly diminished. In addition, innovative programs and policies can encourage Canadians to interact with and better understand one another. Toronto’s community festivals are an excellent example. So too are some innovative recreational programs like Halifax’s All Women recreational swims (which enable Muslim women who are not permitted to swim with men, to participate in recreational swims with other members of the community).


posted by katherine at monday, october 09, 2006

1 comments:

anonymous said...
You boasted, Canada retains a lot of its immigrants. But facts don't support your claims.

As been proven, Canadians lie about their country a lot or have no idea what is really happening.

For more information, ma'am, may I refer you to www.notcanada.com and its links.

You may also go through its news items to learn more about what is happening in your country.

Thank you.
5:56 PM

Post a Comment

links to this post:
Create a Link

<< Home
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFAMBLE THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

monday, october 23, 2006

Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones in the doghouse

Like others, I can't believe Peter MacKay's boorish comment about Belinda Stronach dominated last week's national headlines.

But I do think it is important to look at the context in which his comments were made. With just 64 women in Parliament -- 20.7% of MPs - Canada ranks 42nd in the world among democracies in terms of women's representation in the national legislature, after Pakistan and Portugal. While we cannot equality by numbers alone, it seems that wheresover we look across Canada's political and economic landscape we see women missing from key leadership positions. While the numbers are concerning enough, more so is the lack of representation of women's issues and a broader ignorance of the role of gender in decision-making at all levels.

Let's start with the numbers. A friend of mine argues that the inequalities we see in the representation of women amongst CEOs of fortune 500 companies (10 women in 2006) are due to the historic imbalance in the talent pool (i.e. fewer women graduated from MBA programs in the 70s and 80s than). My friends argues that as women surpass men in undergraduate enrolment, the number of women in leadership positions will grow as their representation in the talent pool grows.

This would be true if the only obstacle to women's participation in the economic system was their ability and willingness to compete, but this is not the case. Two court settlements earlier this year prove that even when women are competing against men in equal

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy, Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregati...
Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
numbers, they may receive unequal treatment solely because of their sex.

In May, a lengthy battle between Bell Canada and 5,000 mainly female employees ended in a $100 million settlement. Bell agreed to pay each employee for back wages and pain and suffering. For years female-dominated jobs were lower paid ($2-5 less than their male counterparts) endured during years. Well into the 1990’s Bell’s female dominated positions were paying $2-5 less than their male counterparts. In 2002, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that employees in female-dominated occupations were paid discriminatory wages based on their sex. Earlier in the year, female health care professionals in Quebec won a settlement from the Provincial Government on similar grounds.

These women and their union fought for over a decade. Undoubtedly, countless others do not have the time, resources or energy to pursue such a fight. We should ask ourselves why such attitudes persist. Why do the political, psychological, emotional and even physical barriers to the full participation of women in our economic and political systems persist? What are we, as a society missing out on because of these barriers.

Economic competitiveness for one. Studies have connected corporate performance with gender diversity amongst the top ranks of a company. A study sponsored by BMO Financial Group found that companies with the highest representation of women on their senior ranks had a 35% higher return on equity and a 34% higher return to shareholders than companies with the lowest women’s representation. Despite or perhaps because of they are often excluded from the senior ranks of corporations, Canadian women are exercising their entrepreneurial skills in increasing numbers. There are now 800,000 women business owners in Canada and the number of women-owned businesses is growing 60 percent faster than those run by men. When the system won’t work with them, women are willing to create a role for themselves in which they can direct and exercise their talents. These small businesses are a key driver of the Canadian economy.

I won’t offer up any solutions to ensuring equitable and open access for men and women to Canada’s political and economic systems – the challenges are persistent (thirty years later the double work day can now be managed with a Blackberry), but I can say that the import thing is to continually bring these issues to the fore. Too often we pander to the matter of gender barriers with sentiments such as “in time we will see” or “we’ve achieved institutionalized equality”. We point to legislation that prevents discrimination as a means to an end. But the more sinister barriers are subversive. When all the legislative and formal institutional barriers are broken down, we can point and say “look, you should be able to take your place, there are no barriers”. But it is the underlying and generally
hidden attitudes, preconceptions and biases that present the largest and most resistant obstacles. MacKay's fault, like Neil French's, was exposing these attitudes.

True in the heat of debate in the House of Commons, our representatives are wont to throw an occasional barb across the floor and truer still that these barbs may often be personal and deeply regrettable later. However, when these insults are gender-specific they are only honest manifestations of the prevailing and too often hidden barriers that still exist towards the full participation of women in our political and economic systems.

And until each of us is willing to tackle these persistent attitudes, we're all in the doghouse together.

posted by katherine at Monday, October 23, 2006

2 comments:
berlynn said...
Good post. I challenge, however, your assertion that thirty years later the double work day can now be managed with a Blackberry. I really don't know how a Blackberry can cuddle a sick child.
11:05 PM

katherine said...
Thanks for your comment berlynn.
You're right - a Blackberry is no substitute for a parent. To the contrary, these devices seem to allow our professional lives to further intrude on our personal and leave even less time for what I think is the most important job of all - parenting. Between making dinner, helping with homework (admittedly I can't speak authoritatively on the subject of parenting) and trying to find some time for our partners, we're now expected to respond to the buzz. I sometimes wonder what the so-called communications revolution has really done for women (or men) for that matter.
10:03 AM

Post a Comment

links to this post:
Create a Link

<< Home
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFAME THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

sunday, november 05, 2006

Residential diversity: challenging class segregation in the 21st century

Last week I had the opportunity to attend a lecture on new urbanism by Dr. Jill Grant who has studied the principles and attendant results of the modern planner's obsession in detail. Unsurprising to anyone who has ever visited a development constructed in the style, Dr. Grant concludes that new urbanism has done little if anything to improve the socio-economic diversity of residential developments. New urbanist communities are almost exclusively middle-class with limited if any non-market housing. This despite the expressed goal of the Congress for New Urbanism that the movement "promotes the end of segregation between the rich and poor."

The Friday before last I attended a question and answer period for the City of Kingston's mayoral candidates. During the event a member of Queen's faculty stood up and outlined a new research project that she was working on which looks at economic polarization in Canadian cities. Kingston it seems has a big problem with income disparity. This disparity is easily mapped: central Kingston near the University is in the gravy, while areas north of the city aren't doing so well.

Class segregation is not a new phenomenon. In 1969, urban theorist and MIT faculty member Herbert Gans wrote about the public dismay within the mixed communities endorsed by planners: "Nor do most people access the planner's ideal of the balanced community, in which people from diverse incomes and backgrounds are thrown together in order to mutually enrich their lives by their diversity...most people want to have neighbours who are sufficiently like them in class and age to share their interests: this is what

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pi...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregati...
Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
creates much of the vital and positive social life of the suburbs."
Kingston's problem isn't new either. A study by Harris (1984)
confirms observation residential segregation by income in Kingston
from 1961 to 1976 along the same geographic lines that segregation
persists today[1].

Urban planners have struggled to create residential neighbourhoods
that integrate people of different socio-economic backgrounds, but
the results of these efforts appear to be at best mixed and sporadic.
A 1999 study of stable, socio-economically diverse American
neighbourhoods by Nyden et al., found that diverse neighbourhoods
in the US where created by one of two processes, either A) those
that deliberately set out to become diverse in the light of 1960s civil
rights movement or B) those that did not actively seek diversity but
that happened to become diverse as the result of other factors
(shifts in migration, employments, etc.)[2]. Neighbourhoods formed
through process A did so with the guidance of an array of
organizations, social networks and institutions that focused directly
on the issue of diversity and which supported and nurtured the
integration of newcomers. Those neighbourhoods formed through
process B, share two characteristics: 1) these neighbourhoods
valued diversity and identity that diversity gave their neighbourhood
and 2) these neighbourhoods succeeded in addressing the other
issues that faced them i.e. safety, education, investment, economic
development.

We as planners are unquestionably charged with creating equity in
housing choice and access in our communities, and by this equity,
we most certainly create the conditions for socio-economic diversity.
But, are we forcing upon people something that they do necessarily
want? Is the planners' role to reflect or refract public sentiment in
land use planning policy?

New urbanism accepts with little questioning the ideal of community
as its philosophical foundation and its followers hold true to a belief
that by planting diverse residents together in well-designed
neighbourhoods, communities can be developed[3]. But the very
idea of community as unit of social cohesion may be flawed. As Iris
Young argued in her 1990 book *Justice and the Politics of Difference
"the ideal of community denies and represses social difference and
operates to exclude those with whom the group does not identify..."

Merely sticking people of different socio-economic realities into
nice-looking homes adjacent to one another will not enable them
empathize with one another, nor will it do anything to raise the ships
of those in the smaller homes. That said, we know that spatial
segregation is the rot of empathy and that mutual understanding of
and support for one another depends on regular interaction, so the
planner must take some action.

The role of the planner is to create those conditions of economic
development, migration and safety, which promote the creation of
diverse communities and to forward urban design strategies that
emphasize participatory, inclusive process and which prescribe physical outcomes that allow and encourage diversity. We can work to remove the institutional, legislative and economic barriers of exclusion, but we should not kid others and ourselves by pretending that these obstacles can be designed away by changes in our urban form. Has our profession really learned nothing about the merits of physical determinism since the days of Daniel Burnham?


posted by katherine at sunday, november 05, 2006

3 comments:
n. christopher edey said...

Interesting.

Perhaps instead of allocating its scarce resources to playing social engineer and devising ever more clever ways of stuffing the square peg into the round hole, municipalities should accept the fact that people of similar means will cluster together, and instead focus on the things it can directly control (e.g. the public realm, streets, parks, sidewalks, public transit) and ensure that they are both of a high quality in both upper and lower income areas. In the case of public transit, perhaps lower income areas should be more clearly delineated and then over-served, since they tend to ride transity more often that upper income earners. Also, instead of operating large and expensive (and easily identified and stigmatized) public housing complexes. Municipalities should instead simply purchase scattered units of market housing here and there (with access to transit lines of course) and then rent it directly at subsidized rates to those in need, or offer a rent-to-own sort of agreements.

Just a few thoughts.

8:09 PM

tim spence donegani said...

I largely agree with most of what has been posted on this topic. I think that planning for income diversity in neighborhoods ought to end at a dispersion of social housing. Clustering the lowest income people together had disastrous consequences in 50s era public housing. Whereas it could be designed differently and with varied
housing options the results might be better, I think it's just to risky to try again on a large scale. Economies of scale in social/public housing, for better or for worse, are a thing of the past. With respect to Christopher Eyde's comment: subsidizing existing market housing does the best job at dispersing low income residents but it will put upward pressure on a tight housing market (the prevailing situation where the housing affordability problem is most acute) and push the affordability problem up the income scale to the "don't quite qualify" mid-low income residents.

5:42 PM

katherine said...

Tim, Christopher - thanks for your comments.

I think we would agree that the role of local government is not to displace others or compete in the market for existing affordable housing spots, but rather to create new units of affordable housing. I agree this is not done through large-scale social housing projects. I've seen some good, small-scale projects created by non-government organizations. In Kitchener ON, the Working Centre (a non-profit that gives individuals and groups access to community tools such as a job cafe, a bicycle repair centre, a community garden, a community kitchen) renovated two buildings in Kitchener's downtown to provide commercial/community space and housing. Commercial/service space on the ground floor, meeting space on the second and residential on the third. The residential space provides transitional housing for men and family units. New housing was recently created through a participatory design process in which potential tenants of the units collaborated (with the facilitation of an architect) in the establishment of principles, use and design of new units. Many participants of the process were formerly homeless and were empowered and provided new skills (public speaking, group management, etc.) through this process. The resulting spaces (res/commercial/service) have multiple social benefits for those who live/work in them or around nearby. The projects are small-scale - the Working Center manages 6 family apartments, 6 shared single houses, 2 transitional houses for refugees and 5 units of shared, transitional housing for women - but the benefits are substantial. These projects are literally community development with the community leading, participating and sharing in the benefits. There is a good article on the project in the Winter 2005 edition of the Canadian Journal of Urban Research by Vaidyanathan and Wismer.

I can't see why a municipally-run housing corporation couldn't do the same sort of housing-creation projects on the small-scale.

10:12 AM

Post a Comment

links to this post:

Create a Link
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFLAME THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

monday, november 13, 2006

Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one displaced grad student) go to the polls.

This morning I woke up wondering if I would be allowed to vote in today's municipal election with no proof of residency (it seems I haven't actually had any official mail delivered to my new and temporary home here in Kingston and I didn't sign a lease). This thought got me wondering what all those without a permanent address do on election day when they get to their local polling station and one of the polling clerks asks for a piece of i.d. It is surprisingly easy - you just take an oath that swears you live in the ward, are over 18 and eligable to vote. Simple and hassle-free. It is reassuring to know that you don't need a piece of plastic with your picture and a barcode or a permanent address to participate in democracy. I hope it was this easy for everyone who wanted to vote.

posted by katherine at monday, november 13, 2006

2 comments:

tim eponce donegani said...

I didn't have time to vote! I can't believe I just said that, I have made the excuse I routinely scoff at. Maybe the polls could stay open a little later for the people who work strange hours. I'm thinking about filing litigation against Queen's for not giving me my right to 3 consecutive hours off during polling hours.

5:50 PM

katherine said...

Tim,

Let me know how that litigation goes. I hear one student got the school to overturn their decision to ban her from graduation when she brought in lawyer Edward Greenspan. Do you have Eddie's number?

9:14 AM

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm....
Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregat...
Peter Mackay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
Ethnic Enclaves...
GAI - Guaranteed Annual Integrity for Low-Income C...

social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFRAILM THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY
I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHLESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

sunday, november 19, 2006

Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timmins
One of the things that struck me when I traveled in western Canadian cities was the visibility of aboriginal Canadians. Here in Southern Ontario, aboriginal Canadians make up only a small fraction of the population of most large cities. I think this lack of visibility causes many of us in Southern Ontario to forget about or ignore the problems that plague the First Nations.

But everyone now and again the injustices plaguing the first nations cause even the most ardent 90s'er to take notice. It was over a year ago that those o' us in Southern Ontario first heard of the headlines. Last week, it was announced that the people of Kashechewan are considering a move to relocate their reserve to land near the City of Timmins, as recommended in a report commissioned by INAC, published last month.

Reserve No. 67, established in 1905 on the shores of James Bay was intended to be a place where the Kashechewan people could maintain their traditional way of life, but like so many seemingly good intentions the Federal government has had for Canada's First Nations people, this one too ended in disaster when the government-built water treatment plant began pumping out water contaminated with E. Coli. The contaminated water left many residents sick and forced the evacuation of hundreds of the approximately 1900 residents.

Many residents of the community had expressed their dismay at its remote and poor location. While connected to the land by birth and culture, they fear the floods that come every spring and are weary of the failing infrastructure that has plagued the reserve.

The story of Kashechewan is an all-too common among Canada's First Nations. So many reserves were established in isolated, remote locations which are often ecological disparate, offering limited opportunity for people to engage in any meaningful way in their traditional lifestyles. The statistics are too well-known and equally disturbing are the conditions on many reserves and the fate of those who suffer them - high rates of unemployment, drug and alcohol use, low levels of completion of post-secondary education. There are wonderful exceptions

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl... 
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segregat... 
Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy? Ethnic Enclaves...
GAI - Guaranteed Annual Integrity for Low-Income C...

http://sociallightkingston.blogspot.com/2006/11/kashechewan-case-for-urban-reserve-in.h... 18/02/2007
to these conditions, but they are too few.

One such exception is the urban aboriginal reserve of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation that I visited in Saskatoon a few years ago. In 1988, Muskeg Lake was the first Urban Reserve in Canada to be established through Treaty Land Entitlement. The reserve is located on a 35 acre parcel of land within the City of Saskatoon. To an outsider, the businesses that dot the reserve look no different than those that surround them within the City of Saskatoon.

The land that is owned by the Crown and held-in-trust for the "use and benefit" of the First Nations. To an outsider, the busy shops and businesses found on the land look no different than those found in any other part of the City. Revenues are generated by long-term lease of the land to business tenants; these revenues are collected by the First Nations and held in trust by INAC. While the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation still accepts program funding from the federal government, they are working to build up their financial assets to become economically self-sufficient.

The City of Saskatoon and the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation have worked to establish a positive and mutually beneficial relationship. For its part, the City has made the address of aboriginal issues a key element of its Strategic Plan, recognizing the need to include First Nations people participate in and benefit from a healthy, prosperous community.

Before official Urban Reserve designation is granted by the Federal Government, an agreement had to be signed between the City and the Band regarding their mutual concerns. These agreements include issues such as: responsibility and level of land servicing, bylaw application and enforcement, and a mechanism for resolving disputes. The deal signed between Saskatoon and the Muskeg Lake Cree specifies that the Urban Reserve land use and development should be the same as if the site were not reserve land. This condition gives the First Nations the right to govern the land in their own way while ensuring compatibility and consistency with other development in the City. Urban reserves do not pay taxes, but pay a fee to the City for the provision of municipal services. The City cannot collect taxes on reserve land; thus the First Nations taxes users of its land in a manner equivalent to the amount of tax that the City would have collected in order to mitigate any tax advantage that would otherwise exist for locating on reserve land.

By most accounts the relationship is mutually beneficial to the City and the Muskeg Cree People. The City benefits:

- Financially: directly from revenue generated through services it provides to Urban Reserve developments and indirectly from taxation revenue and job creation which generates economic spin-offs
- Politically: from the positive relationships developed between the City and Saskatchewan First Nations
- Socially: the urban reserve stands as a symbol of positive contribution of first nations to the community

The Muskeg Cree benefit:
Social Matters

- Financially — by acquiring and developing lands in the City and providing increased business and employment opportunities to Aboriginal people 
  (e.g. Kocsis Transport a first-nation owned trucking business, which is a tenant of the commercial complex established on the reserve started with a staff of three in 1994. Today the thriving business has over 90 employees.
- Socially — developing an economic base that will enable them to be self-sufficient and autonomous

Saskatchewan's Municipal and First Nation's leaders have taken a leadership position in the establishment of urban reserves, while the establishment of reserves in other municipalities - Winnipeg is a prime example - have been hindered by a lack of political will and community understanding of the outcomes of the reserve process.

Urban reserves are not without critics, who generally argue that reserve-based businesses are competitively advantaged by employing Native Canadians (who do not pay income tax if working on the reserve and can thus be paid lower wages a reduction in losing take-home pay) and by a clause in the Indian Act that prevents land from lien or seizure if the Reserve fails to live up to its end of the municipal service contract. These critics present no evidence to support their arguments and a study by Western Economic Diversification was unable to determine whether the taxation benefit on an urban reserve accrues more to the employee, in the form of higher after-tax income, or to the employer, in lowering wage costs, or a combination of the two.

It would be likely be neither feasible, nor desirable to relocate all of Canada's reserves to urban areas — as mentioned, some rural reserves are thriving. But the establishment of First Nation communities in urban areas may offer new economic opportunities and greater social inclusion to many troubled, remote communities like Kashechewan. Closer proximity to the city and the visible success of First Nations owned businesses to the broader community would also break down some of the cultural isolation that reserves seem to prescribe; this would be especially beneficial in Ontario where reserves are set apart from other communities - geographically, socially, and economically. Aboriginal Canadians should be able to maintain their culture and identity, raise and educate their children in the language of their choosing and on subjects of their ancestry. But we know that with few exceptions, the existing reserve system is not structured for social, cultural or economic health. On isolated, poorly serviced and often environmentally desecrated lands, too many aboriginal peoples are forced or coerced into living a bastardized version of a traditional life. And here in Ontario, the rest of us rarely realize they do.

posted by katherine at sunday, november 19, 2006

0 comments:
Post a Comment

links to this post:
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFAME THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY
I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE'LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

wednesday, november 29, 2006

People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Planning Success

Earlier this week, I attended a seminar on Empowerment, facilitated by several of my colleagues here in the School of Urban and Regional Planning. As I listened to their thoughts on the distinctions and nuances of participation vs. empowerment, I reminisced about a project I was lucky enough to participate in during my time as an undergraduate student in Waterloo. This project, an organization called the Working Centre, is located in downtown Kitchener.

Started by an enterprising couple named Joe and Stephanie Mancini, the Working Centre is many things to many people. Its projects include a community kitchen and market that operates daily out of a local church. Here, students, volunteers, staff, community members – including those who are homeless and those who are not – interact and are generally indistinguishable from one another. Formerly homeless or at risk people may serve as volunteers or staff. The Working Centre has made its home in two beautiful old and formerly derelict buildings in the downtown core. Renovated and reincarnated, these buildings come alive each day with a store that sells goods handmade by community members in some of the many paper-making, candle-making and merry-making classes run by the Centre; a job skills centre that also houses support staff from Human Resources and Development Canada; bicycle and computer repair centres where community members can learn and ply new skills; men, women and children going to and from the affordable housing units that make up the second and third floors of the building.

In their study of leadership development of people with behaviour health disorders and housing tenancy challenges, Rowe et al. (2003) define citizenship as "a measure of the strength of individuals' connections to the rights, responsibilities, roles and resources that society offers to people through public and social institutions" Rowe et al. found that many of the institutions and organizations who purport to support increased citizenship for traditionally marginalized groups, do so inconsistently and infrequently. The Working Centre is a great exception to this observation.

The Working Centre emphasizes the development and use of Community

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario.

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I'm back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child...
People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...
Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...
Hassle-Free Democracy. Ontario (and at least one d...
Residential diversity: challenging class segreagi...
Peter MacKay and Nell French aren't the only ones...
Lower Integration in Little Italy?
Ethnic Enclaves...
GAI - Guaranteed Annual Integrity for Low-Income C...

http://socialightkingston.blogspot.com/2006/11/people-power-individual-empowerment.h... 18/02/2007
Tools – projects that benefit both users and the broader community, such as urban agriculture, a community kitchen, affordable housing, access to work. Affordable housing units share common space for community poetry reading and group meetings. Housing users participate fully in the planning, construction and management of the housing. Working Centre staff may assist users in overcoming conflict within the residential setting. At the basis of the Working Centre’s projects are the ideas of individual and community empowerment, cooperation and capacity building.

The Centre’s approach to the development of affordable housing is particularly noteworthy. In the Fall of 2003, I had the opportunity to meet a group of people who were at the time, participating in a process of consultative design of new affordable housing units that the Centre intended to construct in a renovated building in the downtown area. Facilitated by a graduate student from the University of Waterloo, this group met over a number of months to discuss their housing needs and how these needs might be met in the design and operation of this new housing. This was a dynamic and diverse group; men and women with a variety of skills and unique personal histories including several significant personal challenges. Near the end of this process, just after the group had presented their design ideas to staff and housing administrators at the Centre, I spoke with members of the group about their experience. Their responses were inspiring. Several people highlighted the self-confidence they had gained by participating in the group, including the ability to speak in public for the first time. Another individual highlighted the group cohesion that had developed in spite of different ideas for how the available space should be used (some wanted to see more family housing in the downtown core, others wanted supportive housing for single men). Participants noted that the group had helped them identify common housing needs and challenges.

In their article, Vaidyanathan and Wismer (2005) summarize the literature on housing and the state of individual autonomy over housing in North America, arguing that the freedom of poor individuals to develop their own housing, as still exists in developing countries has been eliminated in North America, where control of the housing stock is given over to institutions and the private sector. Thus there is a need to bring the individual, or “people power” back into the housing process. The Working Centre and the members of the creative housing design group, did just that.

As Vaidyanathan and Wismer note, the success of the project is in part its founding in the principles of empowerment and socially sensitive housing – the use of “alternative delivery mechanisms that have been constituted in order to address the housing needs of people not well served by more conventional approaches.” Socially sensitive housing is characterized by the use of local skills and capacities, and in maximizing the role of the user in decision-making so that “resource inputs are converted into benefits for the dweller” and moreover the local community.

In terms of citizenship, as described by Rowe et al (2003), individuals who participated in the Working Centre’s housing design process undoubtedly came away with a stronger connection to their rights and responsibilities as housing tenants; to one another as community members who share similar struggles and to the Working Centre as an organization where people can access housing, but also personal
development opportunities. On a less positive note, Vaidyanathan and Wisner note that the City of Kitchener has traditionally done little to engage marginalized groups in the housing process. By excluding these groups from the process, the City has failed to realize the individual and community benefits produced when people recognize and maximize their rights and responsibilities as tenants, neighbours and community members. In my experience, too many service providers, especially local governments fail to realize or even recognize the power of disadvantaged citizens. In fact, too often local governments spend more time trying to dispute the legitimate claim to citizenship made by these people.

posted by katherine at wednesday, november 29, 2006

3 comments:

anonymous said...
Very nice! I found a place where you can make some nice extra cash secret shopping. Just go to the site below and put in your zip to see what's available in your area. I made over $900 last month having fun! make extra money
8:38 PM

anonymous said...
The Working Centre is indeed a great organization, however I would like to point out that they are located in Kitchener, Ontario, not Kingston.
7:45 AM

katherine said...
Hi,

You're right! The Working Centre is in Kitchener. I'll make the correction. My mind seems to be focused on all things Kingston lately. I really hope to make my way to Kitchener soon - I would like to visit the Cafe that the Working Centre recently opened and I miss the Jane Bond.
8:19 PM

Post a Comment

links to this post:

Tuesday December 5, 2006
Create a Link

<< Home
social matters

"THERE WERE THOSE FEW, AND THERE WILL BE MORE, WHO REALLY LIKED PEOPLE, LOVED PEOPLE -- ALL PEOPLE. THEY WERE THE HUMAN TORCHES SETTING AFLAME THE HEARTS OF MEN SO THAT THEY PASSIONATELY Fought FOR THE RIGHTS OF THEIR FELLOW MEN, ALL MEN. THEY WERE HATED, FEARED, AND BRANDED AS RADICALS." SAUL ALINSKY

I WISH I WERE A RADICAL... NEVERTHELESS, HERE WE’LL DISCUSS ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICS

friday, december 22, 2006

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child.

Phew. I just handed in my last paper. I’ve written my last exam. Now, I’m ready to get into the holiday spirit. So I’ve put some cookies in the oven (shortbread with big hunks of Swiss chocolate in the middle), and I’m settling back with a little holiday reading. It’s red and white and all warm and fuzzy inside. A re-issue of a holiday classic? Not quite. It’s the Liberal Party of Canada Renewal Commission’s Social Policy report.

An article in the Star earlier this week suggested that the report is garnering some attention within the Liberal Party. I finally have time to read it and find out what is charming in the minds of those within Canada’s natural governing party.

The Liberal’s Social Policy task force report provides direction in three policy areas: early childhood education, low-income Canadians, vulnerable/high needs people (senior, youth at risk and people with disability). There are some interesting ideas in the report related to the latter two policy areas. Suggestions such as individual learning accounts that would allow low-income adults to pursue continued education and training to improve their economic potential, or nation-wide expansion of the Pathways to Education Program, a remarkably successful and innovative program to increase the success of at-risk and economically disadvantaged youth in secondary school with the goal of encouraging more of these children to move on to higher education. The program started in Toronto’s Regent Park area and uses mentorship, financial incentives (bus passes, scholarships) and tutors to help more kids finish school and improve their overall achievement.

The section of the report that held my attention was the bit about

about me

Katherine Sparkes
Kingston, Ontario,

Schooled in Environmental Studies, I spent two years in the NGO world working with local governments on climate change issues. Now, I’m back at school studying Urban and Regional Planning in Kingston, ON.

View my complete profile

favourite blogs

got blog if you want it
the Amazing Wonderdog
the Velvet Lounge

previous posts

A tale of a little red book, a mother and a child....

People Power: Individual Empowerment and Social Pl...

Kashechewan: the case for an urban reserve in Timm...

Hassie-Free Democracy, Ontario (and at least one d...

Residential diversity: challenging class segregati...

Peter MacKay and Nell French aren’t the only ones...

Lower Integration in Little Italy?
early childhood education and child care, in particular a proposal for a national Best Start Partnerships program. Child care has held the attention of many Liberals as of late. What the they really, really want is a universal child care system, the kind of system that pledged $1.9 billion to build just before the last Federal election before the Conservative came to power and replaced their national dream with a paltry child care allowance.

Universal child care is hardly a new idea in Canada. The quest for universal child care has a long history at the federal level and is well-documented in an article by Rianne Mahon (2000). Briefly, the Federal government got involved in childcare during WWII, when war boom created employment shortages. The Feds were encouraged to facilitate the movement of women into the work place to fill the employment gap. They responded by establishing a cost-share agreement with the provinces to fund the costs of childcare for women working in industries deemed essential for war effort. Municipalities were called upon to administer the program administered program (sounds familiar ...). After the war, the vets returned and with them the revival of the idyllic nuclear family, with man as breadwinner and wife as caregiver. Federal child care policy took on a decidedly welfare orientation, focusing on the provision of childcare for low-income families in which both parents had to work because of financial need. Efforts made at the Federal level to promote a universal child care policy (i.e. by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in the late 1960s and 1970s and its various offshoots) were trumped by the opposition of federal bureaucrats and marched by the federal-provincial fighting of the Trudeau government and the Parti Quebecois in Quebec (Mahon, 2000).

Funny enough, it is Quebec that stands as an example of progressive child care in Canada. Since 1997, Quebec has made low-cost, high quality child care available to pre-school children ages 3-4, regardless of household income or parental employment status. In 2000, the Quebec government added a network of community-based child care and family care centres similar to those being initiated by Ontario’s Best Start program. Program.

Why after 30 years is there still such a push for a national child care program? For one, more and more parents are choosing to return to work after their children are born. Secondly, some people believe that universal day care will help encourage reproduction in a country worried by an aging population and declining birth rates. Lastly, fewer and fewer parents are opting to stay home with their young children. In 1981, 39% of women with children under the age of three were employed. In 1994, that number had risen to 56%. But why a universal program of childcare and not just child care for low income families or some economic solution that enables one parent to stay home without financial penalty? The answer is simple. High quality, universal child care provides substantial benefits for children, women, and communities.

A national day care program would have great benefits for children.
A study by Hill et al., (2002) tested the effects of high-quality centre-based child care on children who otherwise would have a) been cared for by their mother, b) received home-based care or c) engaged in some center-based care. Hill et al. found that the children who would otherwise have received maternal care or home-based care experienced greater cognitive outcomes from high-quality, center-based child care. Famed psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, initiator of the US Head Start program (this model for the Best Start program was established in 1995), whose ideas guide much of current theory and practice in early childhood education and development suggested that a child's development is shaped by his or her social environment and that modern, industrial society has diminished the constant and intimate interaction of children and adults. Bronfenbrenner believed that people are provided with a certain amount of intellectual potential by their parents, but are not limited by this genetic potential; rather this potential can be expanded with the appropriate learning conditions and teaching methods. Many studies have found a connection between income and early childhood development. The provision of universal child care can overcome economic barriers by offering all children, regardless of income, high quality care and education. A well-funded universal system would offer great investment in staff and attract professionals with more training and education with lower staff to child ratios. Albaneze (2006) suggests that attendance at good quality early childhood facilities improves potential for lifelong learning, improves academic ability, school performance in later years.

Many feminists have long argued that a lack of high-quality, affordable is an obstacle to gender equality in the workplace. Women with children lose more days of work to family responsibility than men and are more likely to end up in "mommy-track jobs" (i.e. part-time, low wage, with little chance of advancement. I have known women who missed opportunities for advancement in their careers because they were on maternity leave. During her study of the impact of $7/day child care in a small Quebec Town, several women told Patrizia Albaneze that they felt they had lost their financial independence when they left work to care for their children. Some felt they were undervalued by their partners for not contributing financially. These same women told Albaneze that the Quebec's child care program had allowed them to resume employment and provided them with a renewed sense of financial independence and status in their marital partnerships. The policy has also had benefits for single-parent families. Studies have found that single mothers with access to affordable child care experience higher employment rates and standards of living than single moms who do not have the same option.

High quality, affordable daycare can strengthen our communities. In the Quebec town, Albaneze found that $7/day child care had promoted local economic development. Mothers who wanted to work and were previously unable to justify to themselves doing so because of the cost and availability of child care, were getting jobs.
These new double income families began to buy and build new homes, increasing the tax base in the community. Their demand for childcare supported new employment opportunities in early childhood education. Families reported feeling less financial strain. Albanese also found that many young families had opted to remain in Quebec because of the child care system and its impact on their financial situation. While this might be a nod to the effectiveness of nationalist policies in Quebec, I can't help but wonder if a Canada-wide child care program would help reduce the so-called Brain Drain or aid in our efforts to attract new immigrants to the country.

Universal child care is not without challenges. For one, it is expensive. Quebec spends over $1 billion per year on its program. It is difficult to say if voters will support a high-cost (albeit high-return) child care system in the near future given other high cost priority social programs such as health care and education. Secondly, universal child care is not a quick-fix for the early childhood education and care system, many Quebec day cares still have long waiting lists. Moreover, suggestions that universal encourage the growth of families have failed to materialize in Quebec where fertility rates continue to decline. Finally, the most important value of any child care system should be choice. Moms and Dads should be able to choose whether or not they stay home or go to work.

Rianne Mahon argues that universal child care has stalled in Canada because our liberal economic model focuses on the provision of social assistance to the poor, while offering only limited public support to the rest of the population who, it is presumed will find market-based solutions to our needs. The truth of the matter is that early childhood development is not a commodity to be bought on a market. It is a building block upon which a good society is based.

Additional reading:


posted by katherine at friday, december 22, 2006

0 comments:

Post a Comment

links to this post:

Create a Link