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OPPRESSION THROUGH NEGLECT

**An Examination of the Assumptions and Meanings Behind Three
Social Policies Affecting Canadian Single Mothers**

by

Michelle Clarke, B.J.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

August 20, 1990

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ISBN 0-315-60511-1

The undersigned recommend to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of the thesis

"Oppression Through Neglect: An Examination of
the Assumptions and Meanings Behind Three Social
Policies Affecting Canadian Single Mothers"

submitted by Michelle Clarke, Hons. B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Using feminist theories of the family and the state and a statistical overview of the circumstances of Canadian single mothers, this thesis examines Canadian child care, social assistance and training policies to determine if they meet the needs of single mothers and to uncover the assumptions and meanings which underlie the policies. The thesis argues that current social policies fail to address the real problems of single mothers, that this failure reflects the state's ambivalence towards families which fall outside the norm of the traditional family and that the policies ultimately reinforce female dependence on males. It concludes that a feminist approach to policy-making, which deconstructs the institution of the family and reveals the assumptions influencing state action, is needed if Canadian policies are to effectively meet the needs of single mothers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisors, Monique Begin and Jill Vickers, for their guidance, advice and willingness to let a part-time student work at her own pace.

For their practical assistance with this work, I would particularly like to thank the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services and Bob Thomas.

I owe a large debt of gratitude to Sue Sullivan, for her constant support and encouragement during the years it took me to complete this work, and to Chris Gadsby, for his faith in my abilities. Very special thanks to my family who have always supported and believed in me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: TOWARDS A MEANING-ORIENTED INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

Policy-making is a selective process. Social policy, by its very nature, benefits some and ignores others. One role of policy analysis is to ask why a certain group warrants the attention of policy-makers while the needs of another are not met. Before we can answer this question, however, we must understand the unspoken and unchallenged assumptions behind social policies. These assumptions are often difficult to uncover but until we see them clearly we will never truly understand or improve Canadian social policy. This thesis is one attempt to expose the assumptions and meanings embedded in some of our social policies.

By examining the situation of Canadian single mothers, this thesis endeavours to clarify the state's attitude towards the family and women. It argues that single mothers have received insufficient attention from Canadian policy-makers because of the state's ambivalent attitude towards families that fall outside the norm. An analysis of several key policy fields which affect single mothers will reveal that this ambivalence results in policies which reinforce female dependence on males.

The thesis is based on three related hypotheses:

1. Single mothers are a growing part of our society and represent a family form which must be accepted as a Canadian reality. Currently, the majority of these women, and their children, experience income and support problems which are different than those of other population groups.

2. At present, the Canadian state, through its social policies, is attempting to ignore, minimize or distort the problems of single mothers. The assumptions about families which underlie many state policies contribute to the problems of single mothers.

3. The Canadian state could, and should, establish a series of related policy measures aimed at helping single-mother families. The adoption of a feminist approach to policy-making, based on a deconstruction of the ideas and assumptions which underlie state policy, would improve the policy process and assist these families.

SUBJECT RATIONALE

I am convinced that the circumstances of single mothers warrant attention. It is alarming to discover that women and children on their own seem doomed to lives of penury and want. The rising numbers of single mothers make this a matter of urgency. As we shall see in this thesis, single mothers and

their children often live in poverty and lack basic social supports. Canada will soon have to come to grips with this growing loss of human potential but, as yet, little attempt has been made to understand or address the problems of single mothers. Although some analysts have looked at certain aspects of these women's lives (e.g. social support for one-parent families¹) few wide-ranging examinations of the relationship between single mothers and Canadian social policy have been undertaken. As well, there has been little effort to analyse how state assumptions about the nature of families and women influence policies affecting Canadian single mothers.

In my studies, I have come across books, reports and articles which discuss the effects of specific policies on women, including single mothers. For example, The Report of the Task Force on Child Care (the Cooke Report) includes information on the problems single mothers encounter with child care policy.² Transitions, the report of Ontario's Social Assistance Review Committee, examines the difficulties of Ontario single mothers on social assistance.³ And reports from the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) often discuss the problems single mothers experience in dealing with training programs.⁴ While each of these documents provides a comprehensive analysis of one policy field, not one of them strays beyond that field to any great

extent. Nor do these reports focus solely on single mothers. Therefore, they do not provide much information on the cumulative effect of Canadian policy on single mothers.

There are articles which focus completely on single mothers but remain inside the boundaries of one policy field. An example of this is Leon Musynski's "Better Help for Single Parents" which examines innovative methods of helping single mothers on social assistance.⁵ It would seem, however, that no one has yet produced a document which analyses several Canadian policy fields affecting single mothers in an attempt to understand the meanings and assumptions embedded in those policies. The only work I have found which comes close is a six-page article in Today's Parent called "Flying Solo." This article argues that many of the problems single parents face are due to society's reluctance to accept them as a legitimate family form.⁶ Such an article is not, of course, intended to provide a detailed analysis of various policies and their meanings.

The reports mentioned above are quite useful and will be consulted extensively in the remainder of this thesis. The facts and figures they provide contribute to our understanding of the realities of the lives of single mothers. What is missing, however, is an analysis of why Canada has instituted the policies it has. What are the assumptions which underlie

Canadian policies affecting single mothers? What are the real effects of those assumptions on the lives of single mothers? The answers to these questions are important to our understanding of social policy. Nancy Fraser, in an article called "Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation," calls on feminists to implement "a meaning-oriented sort of inquiry" into state policies. She says such inquiries would "make explicit the social meanings embedded within welfare programs, meanings which tend otherwise simply to go without saying."⁷ This "meaning-oriented inquiry" has so far been rare in Canadian examinations of the situations of single mothers. But we will never be able to exert a substantial influence on state policies if we do not possess a clear understanding of the assumptions which underlie such policies. Such an effort would be like attempting to unlock a door without even knowing what the key looked like. If we truly want to improve the lives of single mothers, we will need a clear, lucid understanding of the real implications of the policies which affect them. Only then will we be able to uncover the errors in policy-making, understand the reasons why certain programs do not work and institute policies which meet the needs of Canadian single mothers.

This thesis is an attempt to fill some of the gaps in the current analyses of Canadian social policies affecting single

mothers. It will differ from previous work in two related ways. By examining three policy fields -- child care, social assistance and training -- it will attempt to provide an integrated, extensive examination of key policies affecting the lives of single mothers. Working from that analysis, it will attempt a "meaning-oriented inquiry." It will endeavour to determine the assumptions, purposes and meanings buried in those policy fields and their effects on the lives of single mothers and their children.

METHODOLOGY

To research this thesis, I consulted a variety of sources. These included the many theoretical books and articles discussed in the next chapter, along with a wide range of government policy documents in the fields of child care, social assistance and training. To attain an understanding of the criticisms of government policy, I studied the research reports and policy statements of a variety of non-governmental organizations working in those areas, as well as the analyses of several academics examining Canadian social policy. The factual information on the situations of single mothers was gleaned from a number of statistical reports.

To get a first-hand account of the lives of some Canadian single mothers, I spent several hours conducting a group

interview with five single mothers at the Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services. The women discussed the problems they face every day and the policies they would like to see implemented to alleviate some of these difficulties. This interview could not be interpreted as a rigorous survey of the opinions of single mothers. It was useful, however, in providing me with a general indication of the concerns of single mothers and a much better understanding of the barriers which confront them as they try to raise children alone.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis contains a great deal of information and analysis relating to feminist theory, Canadian single mothers, and child care, social assistance and training policies. In an attempt to impose order and coherence on the material, I have organized it in the following manner:

In the first chapter, I briefly introduce the subject and explain why I chose it, what I hope to accomplish and how I researched it. Three related hypotheses are put forward to be discussed and proven in the rest of the thesis.

Chapter two presents the theoretical framework for the thesis. A variety of feminist theories of the family and the state are reviewed to support my hypotheses that the Canadian state and its perception of the family create structural

barriers for women and, more particularly, for single mothers, and that a feminist approach to policy-making would better serve these women. I have chosen to base my analyses on feminist theories because feminists have produced a great deal of ground-breaking work which effectively deconstructs the family and the state. Such work is an invaluable tool for uncovering the ideas and assumptions behind state policies.

In chapter three, I present statistical data on the situation of Canadian single mothers in order to establish that they are a growing population group which must be accepted as a permanent part of Canadian society. The implications of this are discussed. Statistics, as well as some American theoretical work, are used to argue that single mothers face problems which are different than those of other population groups.

Chapter four examines Canadian child care, social assistance and training policies. The policies are described and the critiques of a number of analysts are provided to prove the contention that these policies do not meet the real needs of single mothers.

Using the theoretical framework and policy critiques outlined earlier, chapter five contains my own analyses of the three policy fields and the assumptions and meanings which

underlie them, as well as my reasons for concluding that the hypotheses presented in the first chapter are correct.

In the final chapter, I briefly summarize my conclusions, outline additional research which I feel should be done in this area and call for further "meaning-oriented inquiries" into Canadian social policies.

CONCLUSION

This brief chapter has served solely to introduce the reader to the subject matter and scope of the thesis. The substantive work which follows is intended to provide convincing evidence of the importance and relevance of the subject and the accuracy of the hypotheses. It is hoped that by the time the reader reaches the final page, the situations of Canadian single mothers, the disadvantages that they face and the role social policy plays in their lives will be clear. The potential for improving the lives of these women and their children through a feminist approach to policy-making should also be manifest.

ENDNOTES

1. Maureen Baker, Social Support for One-Parent Families (Ottawa: Library of Parliament, October, 1988)
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3. Social Assistance Review Committee, Transitions (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1988)
4. Avebury Research and Consulting Limited, Decade of Promise: An Assessment of Canadian Women's Status in Education, Training and Employment, 1976-1985 (Toronto: Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1986)

Susan Wismer, Women's Education and Training in Canada: A Policy Analysis (Toronto: Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, 1988)
5. Leon Musynski, "Better Help for Single Parents" in Policy Options Politiques, April, 1988, p.p. 23-26.
6. Stephen Dale, "Flying Solo" in Today's Parent, Volume 4, Number 1, January, 1987, p.p. 16-21.
7. Nancy Fraser, "Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation" in Hypatia, Volume 2, Number 1, Winter, 1987, p. 105.

CHAPTER TWO

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

It is my contention that the traditional, heterosexual, two-parent family is a privileged institution within our society and that single mothers suffer greatly because they live outside that institution. The Canadian state is a key player in bolstering the traditional family and discouraging alternatives. It is for this reason that Canadian social policy does little to address the real needs of single mothers.

Before proceeding, I think it is necessary to provide definitions for some of the terms used above. By the traditional family, I mean the adult male/adult female/children unit which constitutes the pervasive and normative image of the family in our society. That image has, I think, undergone some alterations recently. It used to be that only the male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model was thought acceptable. I think society has, however grudgingly, come to accept the fact that the woman in such a family may be employed. But, as I will establish below, it is still assumed that she is the secondary earner and that she holds the primary responsibility for child care and housework.

Although I will frequently use the term "the family," I do not mean to imply that there is one universal family form. A diversity of living arrangements exist in the world today and has existed over time. The use of the words "the family" should be taken in the context of the thesis. What I am interested in here, and will be discussing later in this chapter, is the ideology of the heterosexual, two-parent family prevalent in society today. That ideology has helped turn the traditional family into an institution in our society. According to Mary Douglas, an institution is a "legitimized social grouping" and is seen as a "natural" part of life.

... most established institutions, if challenged, are able to rest their claims to legitimacy on their fit with the nature of the universe. A convention is institutionalized when, in reply to the question, "Why do you do it like this?" although the first answer may be framed in terms of mutual convenience, in response to further questioning the final answer refers to the way the planets are fixed in the sky or the way that plants or humans or animals naturally behave.¹

The traditional family has long been defended as "natural." It is assumed that because the woman gave birth, which is a biological and thus "natural" process, she should "naturally" be responsible for all child care duties while the man performs other tasks. Families which do not fit into this institutionalized pattern have often been deemed "unnatural" and outside the norm.

Although the term "single mother" is almost self-explanatory, I would like to provide a few more details on it. In this thesis, the phrase will be used to encompass women with a variety of experiences -- divorced, widowed and never-married mothers. As I will establish in upcoming chapters, the circumstances of these women are not always similar. Their ages, incomes and backgrounds vary considerably, making their situations very different. When statistics are gathered, however, these women are often placed in the same categories and it is sometimes hard to distinguish among them. Moreover, there are some common factors. All are women living in families which society considers to be outside the norm. As well, they are all part of a growing demographic trend -- women raising children without an adult male partner. A variety of terms have been used to describe this group -- single mothers, female single parents, female lone parents. Analysts are not always clear about what differentiates these terms, if indeed there are any differences in definition. I have chosen the term "single mother" because it seems the most clear and simple phrase to use.

It might also be useful at this point to clarify what I mean by "the state" and which part of the vast state machinery I will be examining. As Melanie Randall says, the state is a

large and complex body, made up of many competing and often contradictory forces.

The "state" is an intricate system of power limited not only to the different levels of government, but also including the bureaucracies, the military, the police force, the vast network of state-run social services, the educational system, the judiciary and the criminal justice system. Furthermore, there can be a tendency in discussing the state to ascribe to it a unity and cohesion which does not necessarily exist, in terms of its institutional structures, the formulation, implementation and regulation of state policies and programs and the performance of its functions (particularly those of capitalist accumulation and legitimation of its power.).²

Randall goes on to say that it may not be possible or useful to attempt an examination of all state structures and their functions and that feminists should focus instead on analysing specific expressions of state power and what that power means for women's lives generally and for particular groups of women.³

This practical approach makes a great deal of sense to me. Rather than attempt to analyse the effect of all state actions and institutions on single mothers, I will limit myself to an examination of state power as wielded through social policy in the areas of child care, social assistance and training. In doing this, I am clearly confining myself to the welfare state. Caroline Andrew says the welfare state refers to "the expansion of government intervention, most particularly in the fields of health, education and welfare."⁴ She adds:

... students of the welfare state agree that it refers to governments assuming responsibility for activities that were previously private, either in the sense of the private sector or the private realm.⁵

It is this area of state action which interests me -- federal and provincial policies which attempt to intervene in the lives of families. Why does the state get involved? What is it trying to accomplish? What are the assumptions, meanings and purposes motivating its interventions? We must uncover the answers to these questions in order to understand our society's attitudes towards families, women, and more particularly, single mothers.

There are other components of the state, and even other social policies, which have an impact on the lives of single mothers, e.g. taxation policies. Some state actions may even contradict the effects of the social policies examined in this thesis. As Melanie Randall says, however, an analysis of the whole state would be a difficult task to assume. Instead, I think it is possible to put forward educated inferences based on an analysis of one part of the state. That is what I will attempt to do here. This thesis is not meant to provide the definitive exploration of the state's attitudes towards women. Rather, by examining three social policy fields, I will try to uncover some of the meanings behind state actions and pinpoint some of the changes which must be made within the state before

single mothers can receive real support and assistance in Canada.

Finally, a word on the theories used in the thesis. Although I rely heavily on the analyses of socialist feminists to support my arguments, I do not limit myself to them. Nor will I use all aspects of their theory. I am drawn towards the socialist feminist framework because of its recognition of the importance of the economic system and its basis in a historical materialism. Given the thesis topic, however, I am interested in what feminists of different political opinions say about the family and the state. Consequently, this work will also include the ideas of writers not strictly classified as socialist feminists. As well, I am not interested in getting involved in the debates going on within the socialist feminist circle on a variety of subjects (e.g. the exchange value of housework, the class status of women) and can see no point in dealing with them in this thesis. Therefore, my analysis cannot be called a pure socialist feminist work. It is certainly strongly influenced by those writers but the ideas of other feminists will be introduced to support my contentions.

THEORIES OF THE FAMILY

For the purposes of this thesis, it is useful to break feminist analyses of the family into two major components: 1. the deconstruction of the family into its social, economic and ideological parts; 2. an analysis of the reasons behind the endurance of the institution of the family.

1. The Deconstruction of the Family

Many feminists have used a materialist, historical analysis to deconstruct the family. Alison Jaggar says that socialist feminists have developed a new conception of the material base of society in order to provide a more complete explanation of male dominance.⁶ These analysts have enlarged the materialist concept so that:

... it includes not only the way in which people have organized to produce and distribute the means of satisfying their need for food, shelter and clothing, but so that it also includes the way in which people have organized to produce and distribute the means of satisfying their needs for sexuality, nurturance and babies.⁷

This statement is a concise articulation of the fact that socialist feminists see sexuality and reproduction as part of our material systems. Pat and Hugh Armstrong define a materialist approach as one that posits the existence of a real material world which affects the social, political and intellectual processes in general. The way people co-operate to provide for their daily and future needs, combined with the

techniques and materials at their disposal, establish the framework within which all human activity takes place.' By pointing out that methods of organizing sexuality and reproduction differ from society to society and are linked to cultural values and needs, feminists have succeeded in proving that sexuality and reproduction are open to this approach. They can be placed alongside production and the marketplace as legitimate topics of analysis.

Not only is there a material component to reproduction, there is a history. Jaggar explains that socialist feminists have acknowledged "the historically determined and changing character of the production of people."⁹ Sexuality and reproductive processes have changed throughout the history of humanity and will continue to do so. For example, women experience reproduction differently under capitalism than they might under other economic systems. Armstrong and Armstrong state:

Women's biological capacity is a liability, rather than a strength, under the historically specific conditions of capitalism. The severity of the liability is of course a matter of historical developments and struggles in concrete social formations....¹⁰

This is not to say that there is no biological component to reproduction. There is, but that is not all there is to it. The process of reproduction is affected and altered by the society in which it takes place. Christine Delphy says:

A particular culture not only imposes a meaning on an event which, being physical, is in and of itself bereft of meanings. Society (culture) also imposes a material form through which the event is lived, or rather is moulded in a constraining way. A 'pure' childbirth does not exist, but rather childbirth in Europe, Africa, Polynesia, etc. You do not have 'a' period, the same in all situations and all countries. You have your period, different in each culture and subculture.¹¹

While sexuality and reproduction do have biological components, they are also shaped by social, material and ideological elements. The same can be said of the family. It cannot be denied that most families with children have a biological element; the mother likely gave birth to the children and someone has to care for them during their long periods of dependence. It does not necessarily follow from this, however, that the way the family is constituted is "natural." The fact that women reproduce does not mean that the family has to be structured the way it is or that women have to be limited in the other roles they can play; our society has established these limitations itself.

Working in tandem with the social component of the family is the ideological element. According to Barrie Thorne, the traditional family "has been writ large as The Family and elevated as the only desirable and legitimate family form."¹² Other family types, such as that of the single mother, fall far outside the ideological norm and are therefore viewed with trepidation, if not suspicion.

... the ideology surrounding femininity and the family locks women into their traditional role in the home. Prevailing ideas about women's lives, including the dogma of romantic love and the cult of maternalism, are so pervasive and powerful that they discourage women from exploring alternative ways of living.¹³

In other words, the traditional two-parent family has been constructed and idealized as the norm. Not only do families reproduce this ideology but they are "enmeshed in and responsive" to it, Michele Barrett says.¹⁴ Even though many families do not themselves fit the image of the traditional nuclear family they must live in a society in which that ideology is ubiquitous.

The pervasiveness of this ideology is something against which single mothers must constantly battle. As Monica Boyd says, the imagery of the traditional family "affects alternative family structures and the women in them."¹⁵ Everything else is less than perfect. One single mother told me that there is "an unconscious assumption that if you don't belong to a man, you don't deserve attention....if you are a single mom, you goofed somehow."¹⁶ The ideology of the "normal" family pervades Canadian public policy and poses many dangers for other families. Consider this observation from Nancy Mandel:

There have always been multiple forms of the family, although ideologically we maintain this myth that the traditional family is the norm. And we have to recognize that, because if we go around with this

image that everybody should get married and stay married and have one or two children if they want to be normal Canadians, then we put all our money and tax proposals and child care legislation into propping up that kind of family and not into propping up other kinds of families.¹⁷

As this thesis will establish, this "propping up" of one kind of family is one of the consequences of current social policy.

Many feminists, having rejected the biological, natural definition of the family, have come up with more fluid definitions. Margrit Eichler has made one of the most interesting attempts at this reconstruction:

I believe that we must start reconceptualizing families not as discrete social units with clear boundaries, but instead as complex networks with overlapping but nevertheless in most cases non-congruent sets of relationships, further complicated by potential non-congruity in various dimensions of familial interaction.¹⁸

Eichler's "dimensional approach" recognizes that families vary greatly in terms of the experiences they provide for their members, ranging from the most emotionally satisfying to the most brutal and exploitative types of interactions. The dimensional approach simply assumes that those aspects of the family which are usually presented as universal are merely dimensions of familial interaction. Thus, we can have procreative, socialization, sexual, residential, economic and emotional dimensions to family life. Interaction in any of the dimensions does not presuppose a similar level of interaction in the others. For example, a father may not live

with the rest of the family members but he could be involved in the economic or socialization dimensions of family life. Similarly, a father living at home may be highly interactive in the residential dimension but not at all in the emotional or socialization dimensions.¹⁹ This method allows us to analyse each family as an individual unit, acknowledging both its nurturing and oppressive characteristics. According to Eichler, this approach will help solve a problem prevalent in society today -- the tendency to assume that all families are made in the image of the traditional nuclear family and to either ignore or view as problems other family forms, e.g. the single-mother family.²⁰ By bringing the realities of family life into clearer focus, this analysis could prove a useful and more just base for social policy-making. It could be a method of circumventing the ideology of the traditional family and recognizing that many types of families exist.

2. The Endurance of the Institution of the Family

This leads us to the question of why the institution of the family takes the form it does in certain situations, more particularly in contemporary Canadian society, and why it continues to endure, despite the fact that family circumstances are changing dramatically. There are no easy answers to these questions and there are many complex and even contradictory factors involved. There are several points, however, which

must be considered. Mary Douglas says that institutions are founded upon analogies with nature. "To acquire legitimacy, every kind of institution needs a formula that founds its rightness in reason and in nature."²¹ The family is a prime example of this. It is based on a "natural" biological act, giving birth. From there, the idea becomes entrenched that because women give birth they must be naturally suited for other nurturing and domestic tasks. The institution of the family gains legitimacy from its links with natural reproductive abilities. Douglas also says that it takes less energy to keep an institution alive than to create a new one.²² In a sense, the institution of the family has taken on a life of its own; since we believe it to be a natural entity we rarely question it nor do we expend the energy necessary to create an alternate institution.

The institution of the family has proven to be quite useful in two important ways: it serves as a form of social control over sexuality and reproduction and it has intricate links with capitalism. Gerda Lerner in The Creation of Patriarchy makes a very persuasive case for the argument that western patriarchy is based on the control of women's reproductive powers and sexuality. She says that from "the second millenium BC forward" control over sexual behaviour, particularly the sexuality of women, has been a major means of

social control. The institution of the family, she argues, is a major tool in exerting this control.²³

The interesting question is why, for so many centuries, it has been thought necessary to control women's sexuality. Mary O'Brien puts forward an intriguing philosophical explanation in her book The Politics of Reproduction. She says that men are attempting to compensate for the fact that they are alienated from the whole reproductive process at the moment of conception. Although women are alienated from the reproductive process at the moment of giving birth, they mediate that alienation through their labour. Thus, women and men have a different reproductive consciousness.

O'Brien says that appropriation of the child, or assertion of paternity, is one way in which men have mediated their alienation from the seed. This method, however, needs the co-operation of other men. It is a political concept because it is an assertion of a right and demands a social support system, i.e. patriarchy. This support system includes a number of institutions, marriage being one. But marriage by itself does not solve the uncertainty of paternity, O'Brien says. The exclusive right to a particular woman must be buttressed by the physical separation of that woman from men other than her husband. Hence, the private realm is created.

As O'Brien points out, appropriation does not have to lead to patriarchy. Men could claim paternity for children without dominating women. But that is not their motive. In appropriating the child, the man also wishes to appropriate the continuing reproductive labour of the woman. He claims ownership of the woman's reproductive labour in an attempt to control the process from which he is barred.

A huge and oppressive structure of law and custom and ideology is erected by the brotherhood of Man to affirm and protect their potency, and it is a structure which must be actively maintained, because at the heart of male potency lies the intransigent reality of estrangement and uncertainty.²⁴

O'Brien offers an original and extremely interesting philosophical theory to explain the continuing attempts to control female sexuality and reproduction. As she points out, reproduction and sexuality have a material base, as does the family. Other feminists have concentrated on those material realities to offer more economic explanations for the continuing subordination of women through the family.

Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison say that human reproduction can be situated in the same context as the relations of production and that the perpetuation of these structures is:

... primarily determined by the need to control woman's procreative capacity and her sexuality, in connection with heirs on the one hand and the efficient reproduction of the next generation of labour power on the other.²⁵

Many feminists have pointed out that the nuclear family, and the ideology which promotes it, play a very important role in capitalism. The traditional family provides a relatively inexpensive means of keeping the worker physically and emotionally sustained, creates small pockets of consumerism, transmits ideology and class from generation to generation and leaves women to form a cheap reserve army of labour.²⁶ Rayna Rapp says that the family is a "socially necessary illusion which simultaneously expresses and masks recruitment to relations of production, reproduction and consumption."²⁷ According to Dorothy Smith, the family is a "rest, refuelling and socializing centre for the breadwinner."²⁸ Clair (Vickery) Brown maintains that:

... the functioning of the home economy must be taken for granted in order to ensure reproduction and to free part of the adult population for work activities outside the home. Even the threat of a disruption of basic housework services affects the smooth functioning of the society and the market economy.²⁹

And Barrett and McIntosh note that the growth of small households has been an "ideal ally" in the capitalist attempt to sustain and increase consumption.³⁰

Of course, the situation is not as clear-cut as these comments may make it seem. Many analysts have pointed out that there are tensions between the family and capitalism as more and more women are drawn into the work place and that

alternatives to the traditional family might serve capitalism well. As yet, however, these alternatives have not found a comfortable niche within the system. Zillah Eisenstein says in The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism that there is an uneasy alliance between the marketplace and the ideology of the traditional family. The potential exists to bring this relationship to a breaking point but, as yet, it continues to maintain itself.³¹

One of the fundamental constituents of the traditional family, and an important aspect of its enduring relationship with capitalism, is the gender-based division of labour within the home. It is assumed that the man will earn most of the money while the woman handles household work. This division has been very important in the continuing subordination of women, as the rather heated domestic labour debate of the 1970s made clear. Although that debate was overly theoretical and often obtuse, it did, as Bonnie Fox points out, make several important contributions to feminist analysis. It highlighted the importance of women's work in the household and the fact that such work has been consistently devalued by society and the state. It discussed the relationship of work done in the home to the capitalist system and it established that "women are in a different material position than men, have different interests, and thus need autonomous political organization."³²

The state's reluctance to acknowledge the value of domestic labour, and the division that took place within even the Canadian feminist movement over the wages for housework issue in the late 1970s, indicate the general societal reluctance to acknowledge that women's work in the home is valuable.³³

The devaluing of women's work appears to be so firmly entrenched that it continues when a woman enters the labour force. Feminists contend that not only are women still responsible for most of the housework and child care when they take a job outside the home but they are also discriminated against because familial ideology devalues their contribution to the marketplace. The assumption that most women have husbands to support them means that they earn less money than men, while the belief that they are naturally suited to nurturing work means that they often end up in jobs which resemble their wife and mother roles, e.g. nursing, teaching.³⁴ These assumptions cause enormous difficulties for the single mother who has no husband to fall back on but who must accept wages based on the supposition that she does. Monica Boyd describes the precarious situation single mothers face in the Canadian labour force:

The assumption that families consist of male breadwinners and wives who are economically dependent on husband-generated income also affects alternative family forms and the women in them. Lower incomes for women in the labour force reflect the past argument that women need less because they

are supported by male wage-earners in the family. The recent growth in female lone-parent families raises considerable concern inasmuch as a second wage-earner is less likely to exist...³⁵

Not only does the myth of the monolithic family interfere with the ability of women to function in the labour force but it masks the differences between various families. Many feminists point out that the experience of family differs according to where the members stand in relation to the mode of production and that the family itself is an instrument of class placement. Barrett and McIntosh say it "is a class institution and gives us all our initial class position."³⁶ By doing so, it establishes disparities among families, although the differences are often hidden in the myth of the monolithic family. The family "creates and recreates the very divisions it is often thought to ameliorate."³⁷ As Rayna Rapp says, families mean different things by class, and by gender as well, because classes are in different material relations to one another. She adds that:

Our notions of family absorb the conflicts, contradictions and tensions actually generated by those material, class-structured relations that households hold to resources in advanced capitalism. "Family," as we understand (and misunderstand) the term, is conditioned by the exigencies of household formation, and serves as a shock absorber to keep households functioning.³⁸

Thus, our family experience may be molded by the class we are born in but it also serves to buffer the conflicts endemic in

the class system. Again, this acts against the interests of single mothers whose disadvantaged position in relation to the marketplace and the traditional family is hidden and overwhelmed by the institution of the family. If we think that all families are the same, or that all "good and functional" families are the same, then we are barred from recognizing the class differences among them and our social policy does not really meet their needs.

Many feminists have also come to question the analytical and political separation of the public and private spheres and to see the relationship between the two as more dialectical than dichotomous. They point out that many families, especially those in the low-income range, are closely linked to the public sphere. In fact, the very illusion of independence may bind families even more tightly to the public, capitalist mode of production. They need the wages of the marketplace in order to uphold the image of autonomy.³⁹ Feminist analysts have pointed out that the public/private split is as much a creation of ideology as the family is.

We are now learning that this model of separate spheres distorts reality, that it is every bit as much an ideological construct as are the notions of "male" and "female" themselves. Not only do reproduction and kinship, or the family, have their own, historically determined, products, material techniques, modes of organizations and power relationships, but reproduction and kinship are

themselves integrally related to the social relations of production and the state; they reshape those relations all the time.⁴⁰

As noted above, Mary O'Brien argues that the public and private spheres were constructed by a male-dominated society to isolate women and provide men with some guarantee of paternity and control over the reproductive process.⁴¹ Eisenstein contributes to this line of thought when she argues that what is public and what is private have been defined by a male-dominated state in order to mask the interference of the state in the family and its control over women's sexuality and reproduction. She also points out that single mothers must constantly cross between the so-called public and private spheres, without the mediation of men, and that they should be well aware of the artificiality of these constructs. She adds, however, that the forced separation between public and private spheres has strength and endurance, although it is not indomitable, because it acts as means of social control and is a tool for the economic system.⁴²

Although single mothers must cross the public/private line, the false demarcation of the two contributes to their difficulties. One of the reasons the problems of single mothers are not closely examined or well understood is because such families are hidden in the "private sphere." The difficulties of single mothers are often thought to be "private

matters," which are the result of individual flaws, not the failings of social structures. If we had a clearer idea of the links between public and private, e.g. the economy and the family, the state and the family, we would be less likely to assume that the difficulties of single parents are solely the result of personal problems, such as the absence of a man. This is not meant to advocate constant state intervention in the lives of single mothers. Rather, what is needed is a recognition of the impact of public policies on private lives.

We are back where we started -- the meaning of the family and the reasons for its existence. The institution of the family is a complicated phenomenon and it would be foolhardy to attempt to give the exact reasons for its existence and endurance. I think, however, that the following points can be made. The institution of the family is a social construct, albeit containing a biological element, and it has ideological and economic components. It is a product of its history and its relationship to the male-dominated state and economic systems. The family is a useful tool in social control of sexuality and reproduction and is a support for the capitalist system. It is, of course, not a static entity and is likely to change as economic, social, ideological and even technological realities change. At this point, however, it

does not serve the interests of many women; it creates structural barriers for many of them, including single mothers.

Single mothers face a number of problems because of the institution of the family. The following are among the most serious:

a) Familial ideology means that single-mother families are defined as outside the norm. It is assumed that their problems are caused by the fact that they do not have the same make-up as "normal" families, not by society's refusal to accept and accommodate their differences. This misconception leads to the state's reluctance to provide real support to single mothers.

b) The marketplace assumes that women have husbands to support them and that they are best suited for the undervalued domestic work they are assumed to do in the home. The low wages earned by many women reflect these assumptions and destine many single mothers to lives of poverty.

c) The fact that all "functional" families are perceived as the same means that a clear picture of the realities of Canadian families never emerges. Therefore, the poverty caused by some families' disadvantaged relationship with the marketplace is masked and class problems remain cloaked.

d) The artificial separation between public and private means that the links between the two are rarely acknowledged,

that the state's attempts to control women and their families remain hidden and that there is little comprehension of the need to understand and assist all kinds of families.

As the last point implies, state policies play a role in supporting and perpetuating the institution of the traditional family and the consequent discrimination against single mothers. As I will establish below, the state's support for this institution means that the problems of single mothers continue to be either ignored or inappropriately addressed.

THEORIES OF THE STATE

Many feminists have identified the various components of the state as important in perpetuating women's subordination in contemporary society. This is not to say that there is one comprehensive feminist theory of the state. As was noted earlier, the state is a complex entity, made up of, and influenced by, many different and sometimes conflicting forces. Melanie Randall says that "we cannot, when speaking of the state in Canada or elsewhere, assume that we are referring to a monolithic bloc."⁴³

There have been a variety of feminist attempts to understand and analyse the many aspects of the state. In fact, the ambiguities and contradictions in the state's relationship with women have often been matched by ambiguities and

contradictions in feminist accounts of the state.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, a number of important points have been raised by feminists in analysing the state and, if nothing else, the growing number of feminist analyses of state institutions and policies have made clear that the state and the circumstances of women are closely intertwined.

... in order to understand the welfare state itself, it is necessary to examine the question of gender, the relations between women and the welfare state. These relations are ambiguous, perhaps even contradictory, but they are vital. Without this analysis our understanding of the welfare state is incomplete, partial and I would even go as far as to say inadequate.⁴⁵

Caroline Andrew has pointed out that even though women have often criticized various state bodies for ignoring their needs, they have also worked with the institutions and agencies of the welfare state and have had some influence on policies and programs. In fact, she says "women have been active agents in the construction of at least some parts of the Canadian welfare state."⁴⁶ A number of other Canadian analysts have reached similar conclusions, pointing out that women have worked both inside and outside state structures to create policies and programs for women. Women should not be seen as mere subjects of state policy.⁴⁷

The relationship between women and the state is, however, far from straightforward. As Andrew points out, women have tended to be involved in issues which reinforce their roles as

mothers, e.g child care, transition homes, family allowances. Although these programs do provide material assistance to many women, they also leave unchallenged the assumption that care for the family is woman's work.⁴⁸

Andrew also recognizes that the "development of the welfare state has not meant the emancipation of women."⁴⁹ This is a paradox that has concerned many feminists. A variety of theories have been put forward to help explain the fact that, despite women's involvement in state policies and programs, many structural barriers to female equality still exist. Jan Barnsley argues that state institutions tend to take on women's issues and redefine them in a manner which protects the status quo. For example, she says, wife battering has been renamed "family violence" and women's experience has thus been subsumed into a broader issue. She says this redefinition "obscures who is doing what to whom" and reframes a political issue as a social problem, thus minimizing the challenge to current societal structures.⁵⁰ Barnsley warns against conspiracy theories, however, pointing out that one shouldn't see the state and its institutions as actively devious and manipulative. Rather, because current ideology, policies and programs do not recognize the structural inequalities women face, "control of women's issues can be maintained by routine institutional practice."⁵¹

This is a point which has been well developed and explained by Catharine MacKinnon, who argues that the law, although it is viewed as objective and neutral, is based on male experiences and perceptions. The law proceeds on the basis that all who come before it are equal and therefore it does not recognize or challenge the structural inequalities faced by women.

Formally, the state is male in that objectivity is its norm. Objectivity is liberal legalism's conception of itself. It legitimates itself by reflecting its view of society, a society it helps make by so seeing it, and calling that view, and that relation, rationality. Since rationality is measured by point-of-viewlessness, what counts as reason is that which corresponds to the way things are. Practical rationality, in this approach, means that which can be done without changing anything. In this framework, the task of legal interpretation becomes "to perfect the state as mirror of society."⁵²

MacKinnon points out that society was constituted unequal before our laws were written but this reality is never acknowledged in our approach to law-making. Therefore, she says, society has no need to draft laws and policies overtly designed to perpetuate women's inequality. By assuming that such inequality does not exist and basing a "neutral, objective" law on that assumption, society effectively maintains the unequal status of women. As a consequence of this, women have only negative freedom. They are free to do

or be what they are able to do or be in the current constraints of society, but that is a passive, easily negated freedom.⁵³

MacKinnon's theory fits well with work many other feminists have done to demonstrate that the various arms of the state, although they do have a significant effect on women's lives, interact with women in a manner which is often hard to detect. Mary McIntosh says that state policy often has an indirect impact on women, through its endorsement of an unequal household system.⁵⁴ Elizabeth Wilson acknowledges that the constraints placed upon women's work in the home are less obvious than the rules and regulations of the work place but says that this makes them all the more "mystifying and insidious."⁵⁵ In the same vein, Zillah Eisenstein argues that the state has defined the public and private spheres in such a way as to mask its interference in family life.

... the state mystifies its patriarchal base by not only constructing but also manipulating the ideology describing public and private life. The state is said to be public (by definition) and therefore divorced from the private realm, which is the area of women's lives. The state can appear, through its own ideology, to be unrelated to the family as the private sphere, when in actuality this sphere is both defined and regulated in relation to the state realm.⁵⁶

Many feminists, most particularly socialist analysts, see the relationship between various state institutions and capital as central to any explanation of women's oppression. They argue that the state oppresses women and supports capital in

two related ways: it propagates the ideology of the traditional two-parent family and; it creates structural supports for the maintenance of an unequal system in which women are forced into economic dependence on men.

Elizabeth Wilson says the welfare state is "a set of ideas about society, about the family, and -- not least important - - about women."⁵⁷ Wilson's book clearly demonstrates that the power of the state helps make those ideas pervasive. The welfare state is concerned with guiding and promoting the appropriate socialization and education processes and, to do this successfully, it has had to develop a particular attitude towards the family. This attitude is that the traditional nuclear family is the best form of raising children.⁵⁸

The ideology of the traditional family has a clear effect on the lives of Canadian women, imposing a perception of what a family should look like and how its members should behave. Caroline Andrew, in referring to Canadian state policy, echoes some of Wilson's comments, saying "the services of the welfare state are useful, but at the same time these programmes impose stereotypes of behaviour. The state gives, but it also controls."⁵⁹ Social policy governing the behaviour of women on welfare is a glaring example of how the ideology of the family affects the lives of Canadian women.

A large part of the state's support of sexual inequality has been at the level of ideology. But ideology has a material base; the ideology of male supremacy has had a tangible impact on shaping the everyday practices and circumstances of women's lives. For example, the only recently rescinded "spouse in the house" rule which denied a woman her welfare benefits if she was in a sexual relation with a man clearly indicates not only the state's regulation of women's sexual lives, but also its ideological commitment to upholding a male dominated family form and keeping women and their children financially dependent on men.⁶⁰

An integral part of the ideology of the traditional family is the propagation of the gender-based division of labour. State policies assume a certain kind of family, one in which the woman is responsible for all the domestic work and dependent on the man for economic support. This point has been made over and over again in feminist critiques of the state. Melanie Randall, for example, has pointed out that the Canadian state has thus far refused to pay pensions to women who have spent their lives working at home, has underpaid women in the public sector and has entrenched in law men's superior property and inheritance rights. The state, she says, is promoting and maintaining the patriarchal family and the economic dependence of women on men.⁶¹

This arrangement is very convenient to capital. As was noted in the earlier section on the family, the traditional family provides a relatively inexpensive means of sustaining the worker, maintains widespread consumerism, transmits

ideology and class and leaves women to make up a cheap reserve army of labour. Many analysts have concluded that, despite policies and programs which improve the lives of women, the underlying aim of state action is still to ensure that these benefits continue to accrue to capital.

In the short run, state policies may appear to act for disenfranchised groups, but in the long run, legislation is designed to maintain existing class relations and aid profit-making.⁶²

I must point out, however, that I agree with analysts such as Melanie Randall who say that state actions to control women cannot be explained solely in terms of capital accumulation. The work of Mary O'Brien and Gerda Lerner, examined earlier in this chapter, points to society's continuing attempts to control women's sexuality and reproduction. State policies and legislation have also been used in that struggle.

By upholding heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage as the only recognized family form (through law, social policy, the provision of welfare benefits, through the persecution of women who refuse to live in the confines of heterosexuality - - by, for example, seizing custody of lesbians' children and, more currently, through failing to recognize alternative family forms and withholding family benefits, taxation exemptions, and other legal rights granted to heterosexuals, from lesbian and gay couples), and by controlling and regulating women's access to reproductive technologies like birth control and abortion, the state has itself controlled and collaborated in men's control of women's sexuality.⁶³

In summary, many feminist analyses describe the modern western welfare state as being intimately involved in social

control and the sustenance of capitalism, partially through the institution of the family. Although feminist theories recognize the many contradictory forces acting on and within the state, they conclude that the end result is the control and subordination of women. Many feminists accuse state institutions and policies of:

a) Appearing to address the problems of women, while actually reinforcing the status quo and failing to recognize the real structural barriers to female equality;

b) Implementing policies to control women's sexuality and reproductive choices;

c) Isolating women in an artificial private sphere which masks government interference in their lives;

d) Propagating a family ideology which assumes that there will be two parents and a traditional sexual division of labour;

e) Using that ideology to support capitalism.

Some feminists have come to the further conclusion that the state is actually involved with two separate forces -- capitalism and patriarchy. Many of these analysts, Zillah Eisenstein for example, posit a dual systems theory in which capitalism and patriarchy are linked but autonomous forces. Without going into too much detail on the discussions around this issue, I would like to make clear that I find this a

fruitless debate. I think we should adopt as fluid a theory of the state as we do of the family. If we think of families as "complex networks with overlapping but nevertheless in most cases non-congruent sets of relationships"⁶⁴ why can we not think of the state in similar terms? It is my belief that many forces work on the Canadian state at any point in time. Sometimes the forces are advocating a more capitalist than patriarchal approach; sometimes the opposite is true; at times the forces are combined to pressure for the same thing. The point is not to figure out whether capitalism and patriarchy are linked or autonomous. The point is to recognize that they are both part of the complex network of pressures on the state. When we become more astute at spotting the various veins which are part of the state body, we will be better able to understand the real reasons behind state policies and programs. It is at that point that we may be able to make some real changes in the situations of Canadian single mothers.

Despite their many criticisms of the state, not all feminists have given up on state action as a possible mechanism for assisting women. Jill Vickers, for example, talks about the importance of a "doubled vision." Feminists must continue to work actively in their own organizations, drawing upon their own political culture and beliefs, while also becoming involved in the mainstream political system. As she says:

... we know that the formal politics of the state affect the quality of our lives and of our communities. We know we must maintain our doubled vision, finding ways to participate without giving up our commitments to the politics of getting things done. We also know that we can only preserve the values of women's political culture if we "stick together" as women and support one another in our efforts to transform as we participate.⁶⁵

Jan Barnsley seems to agree with this analysis. Barnsley acknowledges that there are many dangers inherent in working with state institutions. Feminists may internalize the state's limits and define their demands in terms of what they think the state will accept. They may overestimate limited successes or underestimate success as useless. Feminists must, however, respond to these challenges, Barnsley says. They have to develop their own analyses of the state, based on women's experiences, and continue to take advantage of opportunities for reform, while still keeping in mind the long-term struggle against structural inequalities. If feminists refuse to interact with state institutions, Barnsley says, they will "abandon women whose lives are directly and daily affected by the power of the state and who are simply in no position to ignore it."⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

Single mothers are currently facing serious problems which Canadian social policies either ignore, minimize or distort. I have attempted in this chapter to begin the process of explaining why this is so. The institution of the family prevents Canadian society from truly recognizing and supporting alternative family forms. It is time policy-makers and analysts began using a feminist critique to deconstruct the ideologies and myths which influence state policies. This would allow a more accurate understanding of the families which make up our society, the pressures on them and their relationships to the state and the economic system. Although some may say that a complete restructuring of society, government and the economy is necessary to truly help Canadian single mothers, I will argue in the coming chapters that a feminist approach to social policy would at least assist us to better recognize the circumstances of single mothers and to implement policy measures which would more accurately meet their needs.

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CHAPTER THREE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE STATISTICS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Single motherhood is not a fad or a fleeting phenomenon. The numbers are steadily increasing and most analysts maintain that the growth will continue. Many explanations have been offered for this. Liberalized divorce laws, increasing labour force opportunities for women, the tendency for unmarried women to keep their children and the feminist movement are just some of the reasons given for the increase in the numbers of single mothers.¹

Despite the growth in numbers and the predictions of continued increase, the circumstances of these women are not improving. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, the institution of the traditional family is strongly linked with our economic and political systems. As a result, single mothers face very particular problems and disadvantages in Canadian society. They live outside the norm of the two-parent family in a society which assumes a husband-wife-child unit; the structures set up to meet the needs of that traditional family rarely assist them. They are women trying to support families in a labour market which assumes that working mothers are secondary earners. Consequently, they and their children

usually live in poverty and encounter all the hardships that low income brings.

These structural problems must be addressed, if not for humanitarian reasons then because of the need for contributing, productive citizens. Canadian policy-makers must recognize that single-mother families are a legitimate family form and change their attitudes, programs and policies accordingly. For society, the consequences of refusing to make these changes are grave.

This is not meant to indicate that single mothers are a homogeneous group. In fact, the differences among them are often great. It is possible, however, to generalize about the overall needs of this group and to implement policies to meet those needs.

Nor is any of this to imply that single mothers themselves are a "problem." It is not these women who are the problem, it is the fact that the structures we have created are not flexible enough to deal with a variety of family forms. As Benjamin Schlesinger says:

It would be a disaster if we should seem to endorse any notion that the one-parent family is an oddity, that it presents a special problem per se, or that members of one-parent families constitute a group to be looked down upon. But we must examine the problems these families do have if we are to assist those in difficulty.²

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

In order to accurately understand the situation of single mothers, it is necessary to comprehend the general circumstances of their lives. In this way, we can develop a better idea of their real needs and how best to meet them. The following statistical profile is an attempt to fill in some of the details of the lives of single mothers. Although statistics can never tell the whole story, they can provide us with a basis for policy analysis and formulation.

The numbers of single-parent families in Canada are steadily growing. Between 1966 and 1986, the numbers of single-parent families headed by either a man or a woman rose 130 per cent, while husband-wife families increased by 42 per cent. By 1986, families headed by single parents represented 13 per cent of all families.³

Most single parents are women. In 1986, more than 700,000 single-parent families, or 82 per cent of the total, were headed by women. In the same year, there were only 151,745 single fathers in Canada.⁴

The last time that single-parent families formed such a large part of the population was during the 1930s. The reasons were quite different then, however. Three-quarters of single parents in 1931 and 1941 were widowed.⁵ By 1986, over half (57 per cent) of single mothers were either separated or

divorced. The percentage of widows was down to 28 per cent in 1986, as compared to about two-thirds in 1951. The proportion of single mothers who have never married has also risen substantially. Never-married women made up 15 per cent of all single mothers in 1986, up from 1 per cent in 1951.⁶ The change in the demographic make-up of single mothers has important implications. Whereas there has long been a limited social safety net for widows, not as much attention has been paid to divorced, separated or never-married mothers.⁷ For example, the first piece of effective legislation for unmarried parents and their children was enacted in 1921. The Children of Unmarried Parents Act focused on assisting the unmarried mother to provide for her child and required the father to contribute to the cost of his child's care. Previous to this, unwed mothers had no rights and were entitled to few services.⁸

Canada's single-parent families tend to be younger today than in previous years. According to the Special Committee on Child Care (Martin Committee), between 1951 and 1981 the percentage of single-parent families headed by someone under 35 doubled, from 14 per cent to 28 per cent.⁹ In 1986, three-quarters of those who had never married were younger than 35; separated and divorced single mothers tended to be in their thirties and forties.¹⁰

This means many years of raising children alone. The Task Force on Child Care (Cooke Task Force) reported that in 1980 less than half of the women divorced at ages under 35 eventually remarried. It concluded that:

... a mother who becomes a single parent while her children are still young is increasingly likely to have the sole responsibility for raising them during their formative years.¹¹

The percentage of children under the age of 25 living in single-parent families also increased substantially in the past two decades. In 1986, about 1.2 million children, or more than 14 per cent of all children in Canada, lived in single-parent families. In 1966, fewer than 7 per cent of Canadian children lived in lone-parent families.¹²

The numbers of children living in single-parent families is rising more rapidly than it is for two-parent families. During the 1971 to 1981 decade, there was a decrease of about 9 per cent in the numbers and proportion of children under the age of 18 living in two-parent families. The opposite occurred in single-parent families. In both numerical and percentage terms, there was an increase of about 13 per cent in children under 18 years.¹³

There are also some differences in the backgrounds of single mothers and married women. According to Statistics Canada's 1984 Family History Survey, single mothers tended to have entered their first marital or common-law union at a

younger age than wives: 28 per cent of single mothers did so before they were 19, compared with 24 per cent of wives. This difference was very noticeable among young women, specifically those aged between 20 and 24 at the time of the survey. Of those, 80 per cent of single mothers had been in a union before they were 19, compared with 53 per cent of wives. As well, more single mothers than wives entered a marital or common-law union around the time they had their children. More than a quarter (26 per cent) of single mothers gave birth before or during the year they entered the union, compared with 16 per cent of wives.¹⁴

Single mothers tend to have less formal education than wives. Just 24 per cent of single mothers had at least some post-secondary training; the figure for married women was 31 per cent.¹⁵

In contrast to this, more single mothers than wives were in the labour force. The 1984 labour force participation rate among women aged 18 to 24 was 45 per cent for single mothers and 37 per cent for wives. Labour force participation was greatest for both groups among those aged 40 to 44 but the 83 per cent participation rate for single mothers was greater than the 64 per cent rate for married women.¹⁶

A higher percentage of single mothers than wives only began working after the birth of the first child. Of those

women who had ever worked, 30 per cent of single parents and 17 per cent of wives started working after they first gave birth. Single mothers were also more likely than wives to work continuously once in the labour force.¹⁷

The overall labour force participation rate of single mothers is high but many of them are still living in poverty. The National Council of Welfare reports that single-mother families have five times the risk of poverty of two-parent families.¹⁸ In 1986, single-mother families had an average income of just over \$17,000, compared with over \$44,000 for husband-wife families with children.¹⁹ There are also important differences between the sources of income of single-mother families and husband-wife families with children. Earnings made up only 64 per cent of the total income of single-mother families in 1985, compared with 87 per cent for husband-wife families. Government assistance, including family and youth allowances, unemployment insurance, social assistance and pension benefits, made up almost one-quarter of the total income of single-mother families. By contrast, government transfers accounted for only 7 per cent of the income of husband-wife families with children.²⁰

Single mothers are also much poorer than single fathers. According to the National Council of Welfare, in 1986 over 30 per cent more single mothers than single fathers lived in

poverty.²¹ Six in ten children being raised by a single mother are poor.²² (Note: The NCOW uses a slightly different definition of single mother than some of the other analysts quoted here and so the figures are not always comparable.)

The news is not totally bleak, however. Family poverty has subsided somewhat since the recession-ridden mid-1980s. Poverty among single mothers peaked in 1985 at 60 per cent and declined to 56 per cent in 1986. The poverty rates of single fathers and couples with children also fell significantly during this time.²³ But despite the fact that some single mothers are climbing out of poverty, the average income of this group is not improving. In fact, it has declined somewhat, from \$18,329 in 1980 to \$17,353 in 1986. At the same time, the average income of single parents as a percentage of the income of two-parent families has also decreased from 41.1 per cent to 38.6 per cent.²⁴ Clearly, while some single mothers have managed to escape poverty, the rest are just getting poorer.

One of the reasons for this poverty is the high rate of default on child support payments by ex-husbands. An estimated 50 to 85 per cent of maintenance orders are in default.²⁵ For example, in Ontario in 1987, 85 per cent of family-support orders were in default to some degree.²⁶ When made, support payments tend to be meager. Estimates range from less than 20 to 30 per cent of the maintenance debtor's income.²⁷

The poverty of single mothers leads to a host of other problems. Single mothers often have less stable housing conditions than men. They usually rent their homes, as compared to two-parent families who own. In 1986, 30 per cent of single-mother families were living in single-detached houses; the figure for other families with children was 66 per cent. As well, 72 per cent of single mothers were renters, compared with 27 per cent of other families.²⁸ Of note is the fact that, of all single mothers, those who were renters in 1981 had only slightly more than half the average income of those who were owners. In addition, just under one-half of these single-mother families spent 35 per cent or more of their income on shelter. In fact, close to 33 per cent spent 50 per cent or more on housing costs.²⁹ Single mothers also have the highest rate of dwellings in poor condition (32.1 per cent in 1981).³⁰ Over 20 per cent of the people living in social housing in 1981 were single mothers. Only .7 per cent were single fathers.³¹

Lower incomes mean that a greater percentage of money is spent on necessities. One 1984 survey of 17 Canadian cities found single-mother families spent almost half (48 per cent) of their before-tax income on basic necessities such as food, housing and household operations. Such expenditures accounted for just over a third (34 per cent) of the pre-tax income of

two-parent families.³² Single mothers are less likely than other families with children to have a variety of time-saving appliances. Only 40 per cent of single-mother households, compared with 70 per cent of other family households, had a freezer. The proportions with a dishwasher were 24 per cent for single-mother families and 50 per cent for other families.³³ In 1984, 55 per cent of single-mother families had a car; the corresponding figure for other families with children was 86 per cent.³⁴

Based on these figures, this brief description of single mothers seems apt:

Typically, the majority are either separated or divorced women who entered unions and started childbearing at relatively young ages. They also tend to have less education, but are more likely to be in the labour force than are wives. Thus, lone-parent mothers must raise children while facing a double disadvantage; they lack support from a spouse, yet have fewer job skills by which to gain an income appropriate to the task.³⁵

It should be added that they are poor, often live in inadequate housing, receive very little support from the fathers of their children, spend most of their money on housing and other necessities and have few "luxuries" such as cars, freezers or dishwashers.

The result of all this is a hard, discouraging, degrading way of life. The words of one single mother capture some of this:

It seems like all I ever think about is where I'm going to get money for something or other. I can't take my kids anywhere because everywhere you go it costs money. My kids and I both need clothes and I can't afford them. They are turning my apartments into condos and selling them and I can't find any affordable housing.³⁶

TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysts have identified a number of reasons for the growing number of single-mother families. One of these is an increase in the rate of divorce as a consequence of the more liberalized divorce law passed in Canada in 1968. As noted above, 3 per cent of single mothers were divorced in 1951; 30 per cent were divorced in 1986.³⁷ Based on current trends, it is predicted that more than one in three marriages is likely to end in divorce. Divorces in Canada are clustered within the 25 to 44 age group, so many of the families affected have at least one dependent child.³⁸

Easier access to divorce may not be the only reason for this increase. American research indicates that improved economic opportunities for women outside marriage are also a factor. The higher a wife's earnings, other things being equal, the more likely it is that a couple will separate. Although Canadian women suffer discrimination and low wages in the labour market, they can find work. Taking a chance in a

discriminatory, low-paying wage market may be preferable to staying in an unhappy marriage.

We suspect that changing attitudes about women's roles and the fact that more married women are participating in the labor market have combined to create new tensions within marriage while simultaneously decreasing the social and economic constraints which once bound many women to relatively unsatisfactory marriages.³⁹

Although divorce rates remain high, the rate of remarriage is slowing down. In 1970, 48 per cent of the divorces involving women aged 20-24 were "recovered" by the remarriage of divorced women in the same age group. By 1980, this proportion had gone down to 36 per cent and less than half of the women divorcing at ages under 35 eventually remarried.⁴⁰ As Statistics Canada has pointed out, remarriage depends on age, sex and the presence and number of dependent children living with a divorced parent. Single mothers are less likely to remarry than their divorced spouses because they usually have custody of their children.⁴¹

Another factor contributing to the rise in the number of single mothers is the increase in the number of never-married women having, and keeping, children.

The more "liberated" life-styles and living arrangements that emerged during the 1960s in Canada, such as never-married mothers choosing to keep and rear their children, have persisted. Furthermore, the relevant vital statistics reveal that these days, never-married lone parents are not simply unmarried "teen-age" mothers. Despite improvements in contraceptive technology, a certain

number of babies are still born out of wedlock. However, the number put up for adoption have been steadily declining in the largest provinces. This is undoubtedly because never-married women in the ages 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34 are not only bearing children, but apparently are voluntarily choosing to rear them outside of wedlock.⁴²

Never-married women made up 15 per cent of all single mothers in 1986, up from 1 per cent in 1951. And, as noted above, not all of these single mothers were teenagers. The number of older single mothers is increasing. Approximately three-quarters of the unwed mothers giving birth in 1985 were over twenty years of age. Teenage single motherhood declined from the 1970s to the 1980s.⁴³

These trends indicate a continuing growth in the numbers of single-mother families. There is little evidence that divorce rates will decline dramatically in the near future or that remarriage rates will skyrocket. Perhaps the number of children born out of wedlock will decrease slightly because of the increase in safe sex practices. However, low fertility rates and the availability of contraception have not had much effect on the number of babies born out of wedlock thus far. Although women are having fewer babies, they appear to be raising them alone more often. Based on current trends, it is likely that the proportion of single-mother families in the population will, at the least, remain steady. Most analysts predict an increase.

A report presented at a 1987 conference of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) said that the demographic indicators suggest a continuing rise in the number of one-parent families headed by divorced and separated women in most OECD countries.⁴⁴ Speaking specifically of Canada, Deborah Abowitz says:

The most obvious conclusion is that if present demographic trends in divorce and family and household formation continue, the proportion of female-headed families and of female lone-parent families will continue to grow at dramatic rates. If the trends in income differentials and dependence on transfer payments among women continue, the proportion of women with dependent children who can be characterized as low income will continue to increase through the 1980s.⁴⁵

While Abowitz and a number of analysts foresee problems for these families in terms of low income and limited opportunities, it must be mentioned that there is some optimism about the future of single mothers and their children. Bob Whitehurst talks about an "inevitable broadening of our concept of a 'normal' life-style and ... a greater tolerance of variety."⁴⁶ He goes on to say:

Since the numbers of children from unconventional situations will increase, it is also likely that we will see expanded services to meet the needs of parents who do not have nuclear family relationships to provide support for them and their children.⁴⁷

As the above statistical overview demonstrates, however, there is more cause for concern than rejoicing. The situation

of many of these women is dire. So are the implications for Canadian society of a growing number of poor families.

The most obvious problem is that more and more children are growing up in poverty. The consequences of this have been well documented. Children of the poor suffer from a range of ill effects, not the least of which are more health and educational problems than other children. For example, infant mortality rates among poor children are twice as high as national averages, deaths from infectious diseases are 2.5 times more common and accidental deaths are twice as common.⁴⁸ As well, twice as many children of the poor fall behind in education by the age of 15, compared with non-poor children.⁴⁹ Although there is some debate about whether the problems of the children of single mothers are caused by the absence of one parent or low income, there is little dispute about the unnecessary suffering of these children. Trapped in the circle of poverty, they end up leading disadvantaged, alienated lives.

By permitting children to grow up in poverty we are not only sentencing them to often unfulfilling lives of ill-health, led on the fringes of an affluent society, we are limiting our own potential as a country. The same can be said of the women involved. A growing number of poor women is not only inhumane in our prosperous country, it is a waste of human potential. As the number of single mothers grow, we will see more and more

of our citizenry trapped in the hardship of poverty, dependent on a demoralizing social assistance system. If we continue to ignore them, Canada itself will pay the price in forfeited creativity and productivity.

THE ROOTS OF POVERTY

In order to confront and ameliorate this situation, we have to acknowledge the real difficulties and needs of single mothers. The statistical profile clearly indicates that the major problem facing single mothers is poverty. What Canadian society has yet to fully face are the reasons for that poverty. Single mothers are poor because they live in a patriarchal society which has constructed barriers to their full participation in the system of male-dominated capitalism. Their poverty is the root cause of their inability to function as well as two-parent or single-father families. Their poverty contributes to all the other problems they experience. Their poverty is different than male poverty.

As American authors Diana Pearce, the originator of the phrase "the feminization of poverty," and Harriette McAdoo explain, women may be poor for some of the same reasons as men but few men become poor because of "female" causes.

Men generally do not become poor because of divorce, sex-role socialization, sexism or, of course, pregnancy. Indeed, some may lift themselves out of poverty by the same means that plunge women into it:

The same divorce that frees a man from the financial burdens of a family may result in poverty for his ex-wife and children.⁵⁰

Pearce and McAdoo go on to say that poverty among women can be traced back to two sources: 1. the fact that women continue to carry the major burden for childrearing; and 2. the limited opportunities available to women in the labour market.⁵¹ That is, a patriarchal society with distinct and unequal sex roles and a male-dominated economic system are at the root of the problem.

The major barrier is a work force which is often based on the sexual division of labour in the traditional home and where women earn so much less than men. Pearce and McAdoo say that even a full-time job will not provide the same escape from poverty that it provides for men and that if wives and single mothers were paid the wages that similarly qualified men earn, about half of the families now living in poverty would not be poor.⁵² The labour market is still operating under the assumption that women are temporary, secondary workers whose primary responsibilities are looking after their children and husbands.

... many aspects of the nineteenth century ideals of womanhood continue to characterize the reality of contemporary family life. Employed women are still paid less than their male counterparts, and they remain fully responsible for most duties within the home.⁵³

In other words, the fact that women bear children determines their treatment in the work force. This is a prime example of one social construct influencing another. We have created a family structure in which the women have primary care of children and we use that structure to reinforce a labour market in which women can be paid less because child care is considered their first responsibility and they are perceived as being less committed to the labour force than men.

Although these are American figures and theories, researchers point to a similar situation in Canada. Consider the following facts:

-- In 1967, Statistics Canada found that women earned, on the average, only 58.4 per cent of what men earned. In 1986, women's earnings were 66 per cent of men's. At that rate, the gap will be closed in another 79 years.⁵⁴

-- Controlling for such factors as educational credentials, labour force experience, years in labour force, full-time and part-time status, occupational status, ethnic group identity and social class location accounts for no more than two-thirds of the difference in male-female earnings.⁵⁵

-- In 1986, women with a grade eight education or less earned 56.9 per cent of what men with that level of education earned. Women who had university degrees or other post-secondary credentials earned 69.7 per cent of what men in that category

received. In other words, men with grade eight education or less were paid 82.4 per cent of what women with university degrees earned.⁵⁶

-- In many cases (or at least more often than for men), women have been able to enter the labour market in greater numbers by choosing occupations that are "loosing steam" with respect to either demand, job content or salary level.⁵⁷

It is true that women's education rates have increased but this has not had a great effect on their labour market success. Given equal qualifications and equivalent duties, men are often better paid than women. Among university graduates there is a gap of 10 per cent in favour of men; the gap is 20 per cent among college graduates. In 1980, a woman with a university natural sciences degree, working full time, made 70 per cent of the earnings of a man with the same education.⁵⁸ The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women summarizes it this way:

... women with the highest levels of education -- university graduates -- are still more likely to be unemployed than male graduates ... and the earnings gap persists. Women generally make considerably less money than men with the same qualifications. Although women have made significant progress in entering formerly male-dominated fields at both the undergraduate and graduate levels of universities, there have so far been few corresponding changes in women's share of related occupations. This may well be because although the percentage increase of women enrolled in fields such as engineering or math and physics is significant, the actual numbers are not.⁵⁹

It seems that the barriers against women in the labour force are difficult to break down, even with increased educational opportunities. It may be that attitudes about women's abilities, financial needs, skills and commitment to the labour force are still so entrenched that education can not lift women to the same wage levels as men.

Deborah Abowitz has researched the feminization of poverty in Canada. She points to three related demographic and socioeconomic trends. First, as more and more women are heading their own families and living independently, they often have custody and responsibility for dependent children. Second, women usually earn less than two-thirds of the salaries of their male counterparts in the Canadian labour market and, overall, female-headed families have about half the income of male-headed families. Finally, social assistance programs provide inadequate levels of financial support for female-headed families.⁶⁰

Abowitz's research indicates that gender is stronger than either class or ethnicity in determining income in Canada and that in this country, as in the United States, a full-time job will not necessarily alleviate poverty among women.⁶¹ An indicator of the severity of these labour market problems for women is the fact that it is so hard for them to work out of poverty.⁶² Weiss found that women's incomes dropped greatly

after marriage break-up and remained close to the new low level during the five years he was observing single-mother families. He maintains that the critical difference between the married poor with children and single parents is that, on average, the married poor move out of poverty, the single-parent poor do not.⁶³ On a similar note, Duncan and Rodgers found that:

... the average economic status of a divorced or separated woman and her children does not improve with time following the marital disruption unless there is a remarriage or reconciliation. ... the economic well-being of mothers and children is strikingly dependent on marriage and remarriage.⁶⁴

RELATED PROBLEMS

Poverty is the major problem facing single mothers; its structural roots must be acknowledged and dealt with before Canada can truly support and assist these women and their children. As the statistical profile indicates, however, poverty leads to numerous other difficulties which must also be addressed by policy-makers.

As many single mothers must work, or are in search of employment, safe, affordable, high-quality child care is an obvious necessity. According to the OECD Secretariat:

The availability and cost of child care is of obvious interest to all families with children, but access to child-care is essential for mothers who work and whose children are not old enough to be left alone. For lone-mothers who face both unshared financial and parental responsibilities, the availability of affordable child-care facilities may

be imperative in order to meet existing obligations.⁶⁵

Related to this, is the need for financial and social support for single mothers who wish to stay at home to raise their own children. A comprehensive child care system would offer real choices to mothers -- they would be able to go to work knowing that their children were in high-quality child care arrangements or they could choose to do the socially important job of raising their children themselves, without the fear of living in abject poverty.

Another clear need is housing. Many single parents spend a large percentage of their income on housing and even then their dwellings are in poor repair. Many do not have cars so centrally-located, affordable, adequate housing, suitable for children, is needed.

As we saw in the statistical overview, many single mothers are younger than married mothers, have less formal education and only began working after the birth of their first child. Therefore, they are likely to lack both employment skills and experience. There is an obvious need for training programs which take into account the backgrounds and current circumstances of these women, as well as the realities they face in a discriminatory labour force.

In addition, there are all the intangible problems experienced by single mothers: social isolation, low self-

esteem and high stress levels.⁶⁶ Most of these can only be met by the community and require fundamental changes in our attitudes to this alternate family form.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the statistical overview provided in this chapter that single mothers and their children have a number of pressing needs; financial support, child care, training and employment opportunities are among the more obvious. What is needed even more urgently, however, is a realistic appraisal by Canadian policy-makers of the circumstances of single mothers and action to combat some of the structural barriers which trap these women in poverty.

As was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, single mothers are in a double bind. They are raising children alone in a society which assumes that all families contain a mother and a father. They are struggling to support their families financially in a labour force which assumes that women are secondary earners. Any policy which hopes to assist single mothers must be based on an understanding of this bind. It is not enough to just provide a training program. That program must recognize and attempt to address the structural barriers faced by women in the labour force. It is not enough to ensure that a "safety net" of social assistance exists. Welfare

programs must be based on a realization that single mothers are responsible for their children, the children of our future, and that they are at a disadvantage in the labour market. And there is little sense in offering any of these programs if you do not provide an affordable, flexible, high-quality child care system so that single mothers can either leave their children with caregivers and work or train without the high level of anxiety caused by poor child care arrangements or stay at home and raise their children themselves. In other words, Canada's single mothers need comprehensive social policies which work together, which are based on a realistic assessment of their circumstances, and which attempt to overcome the systemic discrimination which all women face.

We shall see in the upcoming chapters that Canadian policy-makers have so far failed to meet this challenge. The economic well-being of women and children remains dependent on marriage and remarriage. Canadian policies have done little to break this cycle of female dependence on males; they do not address the structural barriers which keep women dependent on men. At present, the best way for a Canadian woman to live a relatively prosperous life is to become part of the institution of the traditional, heterosexual, two-parent family. The most effective way for Canadian single mothers to work their way out of poverty is to marry or remarry.

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CHAPTER FOUR

AN EXAMINATION OF CHILD CARE, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND TRAINING POLICIES

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter painted a bleak picture of the lives of many Canadian single mothers and attempted to outline some of the policy needs of this group. In this chapter, I will examine three policy fields -- child care, social assistance and training -- in order to assess their effectiveness in meeting those needs.

There are, of course, many other policies which have an impact on single-mother families; the choice of three was difficult. I could, for example, have also included housing policy, taxation measures and/or the federal child benefits package. Although this examination is meant to be comprehensive, it is not intended to be exhaustive. Some limitations had to be set in order to remain focussed and avoid a tedious and unwieldy analysis. I chose child care, social assistance and training because I felt they were extremely important to the lives of many single mothers. As we saw in the statistical profile, many single mothers are poor, lack education and are either on social assistance or earning poverty-level wages. If they are to attempt to climb out of this trap by succeeding in the labour market, they need

training and access to non-parental child care. Conversely, if they are to care for their children full-time, they need the parental support provisions that a comprehensive child care system could provide. Either way, their lives will likely be difficult. They face numerous obstacles as women trying to raise children alone and/or attempting to succeed in a discriminatory labour force. Given these difficulties, we must maintain a safety net to assist single mothers who run up against society's structural barriers and fall into social assistance.

This chapter will present the facts about the three policy fields and the comments of authorities who have studied them. Each section will begin with a fairly detailed description of the policy, followed by the critiques. My own analysis of the meanings and assumptions underlying the policies will follow in the next chapter.

CHILD CARE

1. Introduction

Child care is one of the most crucial issues facing single mothers. In the absence of good, or even any, non-parental child care, many single mothers are unable to train for or enter the labour force and cannot even attempt to break out of the cycle of poverty which traps them. Similarly, without

societal support for their roles as mothers, they may not have the resources to stay at home and care for their own children.

This point has been made over and over again by many analysts. The need for child care services for single mothers has been well established in the last decade. In fact, child care policy may be one of the most studied and analysed of Canadian issues. Many commissions and committees have delved into the subject; between 1969 and 1987 ten reports examined child care from different perspectives.¹

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 and the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment in 1984, responding to the changing roles of women in society, approached child care from the perspective of improving the opportunities for women to enter and advance in the labour force. The Commission on Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children (1969) focussed on the needs of disabled children. The Special Committee on Participation of Visible Minorities in Canadian Society (1983) stressed the need for child care which is sensitive to multicultural realities and the Special Committee on Indian Self-Government in Canada (1983) proposed that native people have jurisdiction over their own child care policies. The Canadian Commission for the International Year of the Child (1979) devoted a chapter of its report to the issue of child care, written from a child development

perspective, and the Task Force on Child Care (Cooke Task Force) presented a comprehensive analysis of non-parental child care arrangements and parental leave policies. As well, three committees of the House of Commons have examined child care issues. The Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs (1985) studied maternity benefits; the Report on Child and Elderly Benefits (1985), prepared by the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs, reviewed all the benefits provided to families with children and the Special Committee on Child Care (1987) examined the needs of children being cared for inside and outside of the family. Yet, as we shall see in this section, Canadian child care services and policies are not much better today than they were when the first commission was formed.²

Space does not permit me to examine all ten reports in this chapter. Instead, I will concentrate on the report of the Cooke Task Force on Child Care as it contains the most comprehensive analysis of the child care system in this country. In addition, I will briefly outline the report of the Special Committee on Child Care because it is the most recent example of Parliamentary thinking on the subject.

Before proceeding, however, I would like to provide a brief definition of child care. In my opinion, child care is a comprehensive term. It does not apply solely to day care

which is provided at a centre from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. It includes family home care, in which several children are looked after in someone's home, before school and after school programs, part-time and shift arrangements and work place care. It should also include measures to help parents stay at home and look after their own children, and support services for those caring for children, e.g. parent-child resource centres, parenting classes and toy lending libraries.³

2. Cooke Task Force on Child Care

The Task Force on Child Care, chaired by Dr. Katie Cooke, was appointed in May, 1984 by the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and reported in March, 1986.⁴ In its final report, the Task Force emphasized the dramatic changes that had taken place in Canadian families, including the rise in the number of single-parent families and the increasing number of mothers in the labour force.⁵ The members of the Task Force criticized Canadian policy-makers for failing to reflect those changes in programs and policies.

But even today, policy makers still tend to think in terms of the "traditional family," testing the impact of policy proposals on the husband-wife family in which the wife does not work outside the home.⁶

2a. Accessibility and Quality

The Cooke Report contained scathing criticisms of the Canadian child care system. According to the Task Force, in

1984 licensed spaces in centres and family homes provided a total of 172,000 spaces but an estimated two million children aged 0-12 years had parents who worked or studied at least 20 hours each week.⁷ The Cooke Report pointed out that this forced many parents to put their children in unlicensed care; it estimated that over 80 per cent of children receiving non-parental care were in unlicensed care. (This ranges from care provided in the child's home by a relative to care given in a stranger's home.)⁸ According to the Task Force, the care provided in unlicensed settings runs the gamut from "very good to extremely poor."

At its best, unlicensed private care can provide individual attention in a home atmosphere, often in the child's own neighbourhood. Unlicensed caregivers may offer flexibility for parents who work shifts or extended hours. ... The major disadvantage of unlicensed care is that it is not subject to even minimal standards; there is no system of quality control upon which parents can rely. Parents must trust their own judgement about the appropriateness and quality of unlicensed care, and they have little opportunity to monitor the quality of care their child is receiving during the day.⁹

While acknowledging that there is often no guarantee of quality in licensed care, Task Force members pointed to the greater problems with unlicensed settings. "Full responsibility for regulation, monitoring and supervision of this form of care falls upon the parents using these services."¹⁰

Even in licensed care, The Task Force found that the quality of services was very uneven across the country, depending on such things as provincial licensing requirements, training of staff and program design and funding.¹¹ What care there is is often inflexible and not suited to the needs of many children and parents. For instance, there is little child care for children of shift workers or parents who are at home but need respite care. This has a particularly severe impact on single mothers who have no mate to fall back on for help.

Single parents with young children who work extended hours were found in the Task Force survey to be particularly unhappy and concerned about the lack of flexibility in child care centre hours. One parent who works until 6 p.m. showed the interviewer a written notice she had received from her child care centre informing her of a new policy: the centre would close at 5:30 p.m. sharp, and police would be called at that time to pick up any children who were left. At the time of the interview, she was actively looking for a sitter.¹²

As a result of all this, parents end up using care with which they are not satisfied. The Task Force found that a significant gap existed between stated preferences and patterns of behaviour. In general, less than half the parents surveyed were found to be using their most preferred arrangement.¹³

At least one parent who wrote to the Task Force made the case that the absence of quality non-parental care reflected society's belief that mothers should be at home looking after their children.

My anger is not for the babysitter but for our society which apparently insists that if parents (Mothers!) cannot, or will not, stay home to look after their young children, they'll just have to put up with totally inadequate alternatives.¹⁴

2b. Costs

The prohibitive costs of child care were also attacked in the Cooke Report. A survey conducted for the Task Force indicated that in 1984 a couple with two children -- an infant and a three-year-old -- could expect to pay approximately \$6,970 for full-day licensed child care (\$4,800 for informal care). The Report pointed out that these expenditures represented 21 per cent of disposable income for a family earning the 1984 average income for two-earner families of \$43,000 (14 per cent if informal care is used).¹⁵ This leads to a situation where only the rich, or the poor who receive subsidies, can use licensed care. The middle class must resort to unlicensed care, as must any low-income mother who manages to eventually improve her financial circumstances. A single mother trying to climb out of poverty by obtaining a job which pays adequately may actually end up in a worse financial situation because of high child care costs. In the words of one day care director: "In the last five years I've had single parents turning down promotions because if they made a little bit more, they would no longer qualify for the subsidy."¹⁶

2c. Parental Leave Provisions

Experts agree that a comprehensive child care system should contain not only high-quality spaces but adequate and flexible parental leave provisions to allow parents time to care for their children. Parental leave is crucial for low-income single mothers who cannot afford to stay at home with their children unless they have some form of financial support.

The Cooke Task Force pointed out that Canadian parental leave benefits, provided under the Unemployment Insurance Act, are not as well developed as those in place in most other industrialized countries.¹⁷ Problems include:

-- Mothers must work 20 weeks in the preceding year to qualify for maternity benefits, even in regions of high unemployment where workers need only 10 to 14 weeks to qualify for regular benefits.¹⁸

-- The financial benefits are low -- 60 per cent of a worker's usual wage up to a maximum weekly wage. The average benefit is actually even lower because each claimant must go through a two-week waiting period without benefits. So, for example, all maternity leave claimants who earned \$23,920 or less in 1985 received replacement income equal to 53 per cent of their regular earnings for the 17 weeks of leave.¹⁹

-- For claimants of regular benefits, the two-week waiting period serves as an incentive to begin a search for work

immediately. This is not, however, a logical time for pregnant women to seek employment, nor are they likely to have undertaken pregnancy or adoption of a child simply to collect UI benefits. It is inappropriate to withhold benefits from expectant mothers on this basis.²⁰

-- The leave period of 17 weeks is insufficient to meet the needs of new parents and their children. During this period, the mother needs time to recuperate from the birth and adjust to her new role.²¹

Again, mothers who wrote to the Task Force saw the flaws in the parental leave provisions as a reflection of society's attitudes towards women.

Why can't we get our full salary during maternity leave? After all, women are still the ones having children. We are penalized in terms of money and promotions because we were made to bring children into the world. The laws might be different if men could give birth.²²

2d. Funding Mechanisms

The Task Force had some harsh words for the federal Government's two instruments for funding child care -- the Canada Assistance Plan and the Child Care Expense Deduction.

Child care actually falls under provincial/ territorial jurisdiction so those governments play the lead role in developing programs. The federal Government participates in provincial and territorial programs for low-income families through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Under CAP, the

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
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STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

federal Government matches certain provincial and territorial expenditures on child care for low-income families.²³

Although the Task Force praised the fact that funding under CAP was open-ended (e.g. there is no stated limit on how much funding the federal Government will match), it maintained that a vehicle designed to help the poor could not be used to develop a comprehensive, universal child care system.²⁴

At the time the Cooke Report was released, the Child Care Expense Deduction permitted taxpayers to claim a deduction from taxable income of up to \$2,000 for child care expenses incurred for each child under 14 years of age. A maximum deduction of \$8,000 was allowed for each family and total deductions could not exceed two-thirds of the claimant's earned income.²⁵

The Task Force criticized the Exemption as a regressive measure; you have to have taxable income to benefit from it and the value of the deduction is greater for high-income earners than for low-income earners. "The premise of the deduction seems to be that a person's need for it rises proportionally with income."²⁶ As well, it noted that many families don't claim the Exemption, often because they don't get receipts from unlicensed care givers.²⁷

2e. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Task Force concluded that the total government spending on child care was inadequate. It pointed out that

spending totalled \$542 million in 1984-85 when there were 4.7 million children under 13 in Canada, two million of whom had parents who worked or studied a substantial part of each week. Thus, the government contribution amounted to only \$116 for each child under 13 years of age.²⁸ The Task Force went on to recommend that the federal, provincial and territorial governments develop "complementary systems of child care and parental leave that are as comprehensive, accessible and competent as our systems of health care and education."²⁹ It said such a system should contain a variety of services, including group care in licensed centres, supervised family home care, evening, overnight and weekend services, work place child care, respite and drop-in care, emergency services for times of illness, primary prevention programs, resource centres for parents and care providers and information and referral services.³⁰ It strongly recommended that financing for the new system not take the form of tax relief. "... tax measures, in whatever form, cannot provide the basis for development of a child care system." It added, however, that the Child Care Expense Deduction should remain intact while the system was being developed.³¹

The Task Force members argued that a good child care system was a matter of "compelling national interest" and recommended that the federal Government take the lead in

initiating it by sharing a substantial portion of the cost through a new child care act which would replace the child care provisions of CAP.³² It went on to recommend short-, medium-, and long-term measures which involved generous operating and capital grants to licensed centres, as well as major reform to the parental leave system.³³ The annual price tag was estimated to be about \$7 billion.³⁴

3. Special Committee on Child Care

Before the Cooke Task Force even presented its report, the Conservative Government appointed another Committee to study the subject. Unlike the Task Force, this Committee was asked to examine the needs of children in parental care, as well as non-parental arrangements. Many groups questioned the need for such an undertaking when the issue had already been studied many times; they speculated that the Government did not want to depend on the recommendations of the Cooke Task Force because it had been appointed by a Liberal Government and would likely be calling on the Conservative Government to commit a large amount of money to child care. Despite the fact that nine committees had already studied the issue and there was a great deal of consensus among child care advocates on what was needed, the Honourable Jake Epp, then Minister of National Health and Welfare, offered the following explanation for the new Committee:

There is no agreement among Canadians about what should be done to meet the changing needs of families and children with respect to child care. Accordingly, this Parliamentary inquiry will offer an important opportunity to examine the issue of child care with a view to pursuing a national consensus.³⁵

The Special Committee on Child Care was made up of Members of Parliament and chaired by Progressive Conservative Shirley Martin. Its criticisms of the child care system echoed many of the concerns of the Cooke Task Force but its recommendations were much less broad and did not call for the level of state involvement advocated by the Cooke Report. The Special Committee recommended that the federal Government "support" the roles of others, such as parents, employers and provincial and territorial governments. In describing the federal role in child care policy, it used such words as "share, encourage, and support" but rarely "lead."³⁶ One manifestation of the Committee's reluctance to fully involve the federal Government in child care policy was that, instead of supporting the Cooke Task Force's wide-ranging recommendations, the Committee leaned heavily on the tax system. It recommended that a Child Care Expense Credit (for up to 30 per cent of expenses) replace the Child Care Expense Deduction and that an alternative refundable Child Tax Credit (starting at \$200 for the first child and declining to \$50 for the third and all subsequent children) be

established to provide financial recognition to those families in which a spouse remains at home.³⁷

The Committee also recommended establishing a Family and Child Care Act which would provide operating and capital grants. These were less generous than those recommended by the Cooke Task Force.³⁸ Finally, it recommended measures to reform the maternity leave system.³⁹

The Liberal and New Democrat members of the Committee issued dissenting reports. Both parties criticized the official Committee report, saying that it depended too much on tax measures when it should have emphasized capital and start-up grants for new facilities and that it did not contain the strong recommendations for change needed to develop a system of universal accessibility. They put forward their own proposals. The New Democrats recommended the long-term goal of a system of full public funding, with the elimination of parent fees, CAP subsidies and child care tax provisions. Maternity and parental leave benefits would be increased up to 95 per cent of salary and the benefit period would be extended to 41 weeks. The Liberals recommended a new national child care act to replace CAP as the funding mechanism. Child care fees would be based on the ability of parents to pay. Parental leave would be extended to 26 weeks and raised to at least 70 per cent of salary.⁴⁰

4. Government Initiatives

The Government did take some action following the publication of the Martin report. In 1987, it introduced its National Strategy on Child Care. The Strategy promised the following measures:

1. The enrichment of the Child Care Expense Deduction to \$4,000 from \$2,000 for a child aged 6 and under, and the removal of the \$8,000 limit on the Deduction.

2. The increase of the refundable Child Tax Credit by \$200.

3. The creation of the \$100 million Child Care Special Initiatives Fund for innovative research, development and public awareness programs.

4. The creation of the Canada Child Care Act to replace the CAP provisions. The new Act would cost-share operating grants for non-profit and commercial centres, enrich cost-sharing for provincial capital expenditures on non-profit child care during a seven-year period and create 200,000 new spaces over seven years.

It was estimated that the Strategy would cost the federal Government \$5.4 billion during the first seven development years (\$2.3 for the tax measures, \$100 million for the Fund and \$3 billion for the Act. The price tag for the Act later went up to \$4 billion at the urging of Ontario.) The system was

expected to cost the federal Government \$1 billion per year after the first seven years.⁴¹ In April 1989, the Government also announced changes to the parental leave system. It promised to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act to add ten weeks of parental benefits, available to natural or adoptive parents. Either the mother or the father would be able to use the benefits or they could be shared between them.⁴²

The Honourable Jake Epp, the Minister responsible for the Canada Child Care Act, told the legislative committee studying it that the proposed legislation was "a major milestone in the history of social policy in Canada and ... a major step forward for Canada."⁴³ In response to questions from the Committee, he spoke about the benefits of the bill to families in poverty, especially single parents.

... about single-parent families, if one looks at poverty today it is in those families and among the children of those families where poverty is increasing most rapidly. The proposed child care legislation provides what I believe are additional spaces so that these women can have access to more spaces, subsidized, non-profit, which will make it more affordable. Secondly, we topped that up with an increased child care tax credit. ... I believe the child care legislation has been made as flexible as possible to meet their child care needs. But that does not obviate the need for other programs as well.⁴⁴

5. Reaction

Most analysts disagreed with Minister Epp's glowing assessment of government action. Condemnation of the National

Strategy and the Bill was almost unanimous among child care advocates and other social policy analysts. For example, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) had this to say:

... the long-awaited response of the federal government as expressed in the National Strategy on Child Care is a piecemeal and ineffective approach which demonstrates little commitment to the well-being of Canadian children.⁴⁵

Criticisms of the Strategy and Bill C-144 touched on various issues. The following are just a few of the points made.

5a. Spaces

Many advocates pointed out that the 200,000 new spaces were insufficient to meet the need. The Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA) said that the 200,000 target would mean that only one in four children who needed child care would get it. It added that the money allocated would probably not create the promised 200,000 spaces.⁴⁶ The National Council of Welfare agreed with the CDCAA on this issue, maintaining that the real need was for 750,000 new spaces.⁴⁷

5b. Limited Funding

Advocates were quick to point out that under CAP child care funding had no ceiling, whereas Bill C-144 limited the amount of money which could be allocated to child care. According to CRIAOW, the federal CAP expenditures on low-income subsidies over the seven-year development period could have

equalled or even exceeded the \$4 billion which was allocated in the National Strategy.⁴⁸

The National Council of Welfare estimated that the federal Government would actually spend \$8 billion during the seven-year development period. It said, however, that the money allocated under the Strategy should not be considered new funding as an estimated \$1.4 billion of the \$8 billion total would have been spent anyway on the Child Care Expense Deduction. Moreover, it said, the federal Government would have spent about \$2.6 billion over the next seven years on cost-sharing provincial and territorial child care programs under CAP. All in all, \$4 billion in federal child care spending from 1988 to 1994 would be old money and \$4 billion would be new money.⁴⁹

We believe ceilings would be a serious problem in the long run, if not sooner. Provinces and territories might be reluctant to encourage the expansion of child care services for fear they could get stuck with more than 50 percent of the cost in the foreseeable future. Presumably, once the federal government reached its spending ceiling in any given year, provinces and territories would be on their own for any additional costs that might arise.⁵⁰

Minister Epp, however, had a great deal to say in refutation of these criticisms. He said that the federal Government would spend an average of \$570 million per year towards the support of provincial child care systems over the next seven years and that this represented a 400 per cent

increase over the \$160 million per year it was currently spending under CAP. He added that the provinces would be contributing \$4 billion of their own money and that the total federal-provincial contribution was "equal today to the entire expenditures out of the Canada Assistance Plan, both federal and provincial."⁵¹

In response to claims that the Government would have created more than 200,000 new spaces under CAP anyway, the Minister replied that the growth in spaces had been erratic in the past and that it was difficult to estimate how many spaces would have been created without the Strategy.⁵²

5c. Tax Measures

Despite the recommendation by the Cocke Task Force that tax measures be avoided, the Government made them a sizeable component of its National Strategy and actually increased the Exemption. This led to a barrage of criticism from the child care community.

Tax relief to families is neither an effective child care strategy nor a judicious use of public money. While these tax measures may put a little extra money in the pockets of Canadian families, they do nothing to create child care spaces, nothing to improve the quality of care and nothing to enhance parental choice. The vast majority of Canadian families are already forced to rely on informal child care, much of which is inadequate and potentially damaging to children. The solution to this problem lies in the creation of an adequate number of accessible, affordable, good quality child care spaces, not in giving money directly to parents.⁵³

Critics pointed out that the Tax Credit would provide such minimal financial help that it would be "meaningless in terms of income support" while the Exemption was regressive.⁵⁴

The amount of money allocated to the tax measures also outraged many observers. CRIAW noted that money set aside for tax measures represented 56 per cent of projected federal spending on child care -- "an expensive measure indeed given its minimal impact on our child care system."⁵⁵

5d. Lack of Standards

Although advocates recognized that child care was a matter of provincial jurisdiction, they still felt that standards, or at least objectives, could be imposed on the provinces in return for federal funding. They recommended that such items as child/staff ratios, staff training, accessibility, affordability and even fire and safety regulations be outlined in the Act.⁵⁶ According to the Minister:

Such criticism misunderstands the fundamental role of standards. It ignores the powers of provincial governments and it ignores the history of federal initiatives in areas of provincial jurisdiction. ... What possible standard appropriate for Toronto would make equal sense to a remote village somewhere else in Canada? Implementing standards to ensure quality of care in a large city may well leave large parts of the country without the capacity of providing child care services at all. This is the reality of Canada and we must accept that.⁵⁷

The Minister did, however, acknowledge the importance of standards regarding such items as child-staff ratios and staff

qualifications and said that they would be part of the negotiating process with the provinces.⁵⁸

5e. Commercial Centres

The cost-sharing of operating grants to commercial centres was also a point of contention. Many groups maintained that the quality of care provided in commercial centres is not as high as that in non-profit centres. Citing Canadian research, the CDCAA said that, based on such criteria as staff/child ratios, staff training, staff turnover, wages and working conditions, health and safety and significant parental involvement, non-profit centres have the better record.⁵⁹ CRIAW argued that "research clearly demonstrates that, on the whole, the for-profit sector offers inferior care compared to the non-profit sector."⁶⁰ The National Council of Welfare supported this argument, saying:

We do not believe the profit motive should be a dominant or long-term feature of child care in Canada. Profits are made by keeping costs down -- paying low salaries to care-givers, raising child-staff ratios or compromising health, safety or nutritional standards -- all of which hurt children. Non-profit care directed by a community-controlled board of directors is the best way to make sure parents determine what kind of care their children receive.⁶¹

The fear was expressed that this component of the Strategy would open the door to the American day care chains.⁶² It should be noted that the Cooke report recommended funding for

commercial centres in the medium term until a complete public child care system was in place.

5f. Parental Leave

Although there was praise for the addition of ten weeks of paid leave and the inclusion of fathers in benefits, advocates still expressed concern about the parental leave system. They pointed out that the adoptive parents would actually lose five weeks of benefits because of the amendments, that the 20-week eligibility period was still too long for parents in areas of high regional unemployment, that the two-week waiting period should be eliminated and that 60 per cent of income did not provide a sufficient level of benefits for parents at home looking after infants.⁶³

Feminists and advocates for children have long maintained that parents should be able to spend more time at home with their children than is currently possible under the Unemployment Insurance Act. Although feminists have been divided about whether women should be paid for housework, there has been some agreement that mothers should receive financial support for the socially useful work of caring for children. In 1977, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women called for a flat-rate tax credit which would be available to all mothers, "because it is only when child care benefits are substantially increased and made available to homemakers that

mothers of young children will have the choice of working inside or outside their home."⁶⁴ In 1978, the Quebec Status of Women Council recommended that all parents be given an "availability allowance" to cover at least part, and eventually all, of their child care costs. Parents who stay home would get this money to compensate for their lost wages, while working parents could use it to buy child care.⁶⁵ More recently, Margrit Eichler has recommended a voucher system. These vouchers would be based on the premise that child care is a full-time job of 40 hours a week. They would be sent to all mothers and could be handed on to the care givers or retained by the mother as a wage replacement.⁶⁶ These recommendations were not, however, acted upon in the National Strategy. According to many groups, the Strategy did little to help either the working mother or the mother at home.

5g. A Mixed System

One should not get the impression from this overview of reaction to the government initiatives that child care advocates inflexibly recommended only one kind of child care system. Rather, most of them agreed with the Cooke Task Force's recommendation of a mixed system containing a variety of services. For example, the CDCAA called for a range of services, including full- and part-time group programs, programs for school-aged children, supervised family day care

and supplementary services such as resource centres for parents, emergency relief, sick child care and toy lending libraries.⁶⁷ Similarly, the Vanier Institute called for a system of "non-compulsory supplemental child care arrangements," including in-home care, centre care, work place care and cooperative care.⁶⁸ Many groups also called for involvement and funding from a variety of sources, e.g. federal, provincial and municipal governments, businesses, parents, and the voluntary sector.⁶⁹

6. The Current Situation

When the 1988 election was called, the Canada Child Care Act died on the order paper. The tax measures and the Initiatives Fund were the only parts of the National Strategy to be implemented. The amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act are currently being held up by the Senate. The Government has promised to reintroduce a child care policy; it has not said if it will differ from the Strategy.

Despite all the activity of the past decade, Canada's child care services have not improved much. A report released in December, 1988 by the National Council of Welfare revealed that the federal and provincial governments spent just over \$682 million on child care in the 1987-87 fiscal year -- what the Council calls "a modest amount of public funding." The report indicates that the federal Government is spending about

\$363 million; \$170 million of that goes into the Child Care Expense Deduction.⁷⁰ Consequently, the critical shortage of spaces continues.

Ironically, most families with low incomes who qualify for subsidized child care under the existing system do not in fact get the service to which they are entitled. One major reason for this is there are just not enough licensed spaces available; in order to receive a subsidy, parents must find a licensed space. The problem is that government funding concentrates on subsidizing parents and not on creating the spaces their children need.⁷¹

According to the CDCAA, in 1987 there were 3,033,562 children with working mothers and 243,555 spaces in licensed centres. Only eight per cent of the children with mothers in the labour force were served by licensed centres. The Association also estimated that a child care space cost between \$2,000 and \$8,000 a year, depending on the age of the child. The younger the child, the higher the cost.⁷²

Mothers continue to struggle with the child care problem. A report released by Statistics Canada in 1988 found that 60 per cent of mothers with children under age 16 held paying jobs and that 88,000 mothers wanted a paying job but were not actively searching for one. The latter figure included 21,000 women who were not looking for jobs because of family and personal responsibilities. The economist who analysed the data concluded that, as 80 per cent of these women had pre-school children, child care problems were hindering their labour force

participation. "The impediments faced by women wanting a job but who are not looking for work due to child-care demands appear to be particularly acute."⁷³

It bears repeating that single mothers suffer greatly from the continuing shortage of affordable, high-quality child care and the Government's failure to act to correct the situation. As the National Council of Welfare says:

The lack of adequate child care is a major obstacle to single mothers on social assistance, preventing them from returning to the work force or taking the training or upgrading courses they need to get a job.⁷⁴

In fact, it is a major problem for many single mothers, whether on social assistance or not, because of their low incomes and the fact that they do not have partners to share the parenting burden.

In the next chapter, I will present possible explanations for the Government's inaction on the child care problem. I would, however, like to end this section by pointing out that many analysts attribute this lack of action to the Government's difficulty in recognizing and dealing with family forms which fall outside the institution of the heterosexual, two-parent family.

The individual, personal battles which some single parents still face are one way in which today's transformed family comes into conflict with the tradition-bound culture around it. That conflict is also being waged institutionally, with campaigns for more daycare, more flexible work arrangements, and

generally better social provisions. ... the whole malaise ... stems from the die-hard assumption that the single parent family is somehow a "deviant" social entity.⁷⁵

SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

1. Introduction

Canada's social safety net is of great importance to single mothers. Government transfers, including social assistance, made up almost one-quarter of the total income of single-mother families in 1985.⁷⁶ In Ontario, one-third of the province's female-headed families require social assistance.⁷⁷ In this section, I will attempt to determine how well the social assistance system is meeting the needs of the women who depend on it.

2. Canada Assistance Plan

As with child care, the Canada Assistance Plan plays an important role in the provision of social assistance.⁷⁸ Under CAP, the federal and provincial governments share equally the costs of such basic items as food, shelter, clothing, utilities and household supplies. Special needs such as dental care or prosthetic equipment are also subsidized in this manner. The federal Government shares the financing but the provinces are responsible for the design and administration of the programs.⁷⁹

The provincial and territorial welfare systems vary quite a bit across the country.⁸⁰ It is not possible in this thesis

to examine all Canadian welfare programs. As Ontario is the largest province and has just gone through an extensive review of its social assistance system, I will confine myself to an examination of its programs.

3. The Ontario Social Assistance System

Ontario is one of only three provinces to have a two-tier system (Manitoba and Nova Scotia are the other two). Municipal governments are primarily responsible for assisting employable individuals who are assumed to need short-term assistance. This is the General Welfare Assistance program (GWA). The provincial Government provides income support to persons considered unable to work and therefore in need of long-term assistance. This is the Family Benefits Assistance program (FBA). The rules regarding eligibility for welfare and the rates of assistance are provincially set.⁸¹

Eight municipalities in the province have integrated the administration of the provincial and municipal welfare programs for single parents. This means that municipal welfare workers can recommend that certain categories of single parents receive Family Benefits. Prior to integration, unwed or "deserted" single parents had to be on municipal assistance for three months before they could be transferred onto the long-term program. This waiting period was based on the assumption that many single mothers would experience a change in marital

status, e.g. would remarry and gain a breadwinner.⁸² In the municipalities which are not part of the experimental integration, single mothers still have to wait three months before they qualify for Family Benefits.

In this chapter, I will concentrate on Family Benefits Assistance as that is the social assistance program most utilized by single mothers. FBA includes such things as an allowance for basic needs, a shelter subsidy for those with high shelter costs, subsidized health insurance under the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), basic dental care for dependent children and emergency dental aid for parents, an annual back-to-school allowance for dependent children, and an annual winter clothing benefit for dependent children.⁸³

If a single parent is separated, deserted or divorced and the spouse is not providing financial support, that person is expected to make some attempt to get support payments before she or he can qualify for Family Benefits. This can be done with the help of ministry parental support workers privately, or by making an application in court under the Family Law Act. As well, unwed mothers are expected to make "reasonable efforts" to get financial support from the child's father.⁸⁴

Until recently, Family Benefits recipients who began a full-time job could get help through the Work Incentive Program (WIN). The recipients were eligible for long-term income

supplements and health benefits such as subsidized OHIP, prescriptions and dental care for themselves and their families. They also received once-only payments of \$250 to assist with the start-up costs of full-time employment and they were guaranteed a rapid reinstatement of FBA benefits without the usual waiting period if employment was terminated.⁸⁵

Anyone who is refused benefits, whose benefits are reduced or stopped or who disagrees with the approved level of allowance may appeal.⁸⁶

There are two optional forms of aid which municipalities may provide. The first is supplementary aid which helps recipients of Family Benefits pay for extraordinary needs such as excessive shelter costs. The second, special assistance, is extra financial aid for families whose budgetary requirements exceed their income by reason of financial hardship.⁸⁷

4. Single Mothers on Social Assistance

Many single mothers rely on FBA to meet their needs and those of their families. Between 1976 and 1984, Ontario experienced a 40 per cent growth in the number of single mothers in the population; approximately one-third of those women rely on Family Benefits at any one time. Single mothers accounted for 42 per cent of those entering the caseload for the first time in 1975 but by 1986 their share had increased

to 48 per cent. In actual numbers this means that, in 1975, 10,600 single mothers entered the FBA program, and in 1986, 13,100 did so.⁸⁸

A study done for the Ontario Social Assistance Review Committee determined that most single mothers use FBA to ease them through a transitional period in their lives. That is, they don't remain on it for extended periods of time. According to this study, conducted by Patricia Evans, approximately one-quarter of the single mothers who entered FBA in 1975, 1977, 1979 or 1981 left within one year, while the majority remained on the caseload for a period of three years or less. Less than one-quarter of the 1975 and 1977 cohorts were dependent upon FBA for extended periods of more than six years.⁸⁹

The same study did find, however, that the longer you were on social assistance the more your likelihood of long-term dependence increased. Within the first three years in the "life" of the cohort, nearly half (47 per cent) of the single mothers left the caseload; during the next three years only an additional 15 per cent exited. The author points out that:

This pattern of declining closing rates is a well documented feature of social assistance caseloads. It is frequently explained in terms of the "settling-in" hypothesis which suggests that the longer an individual has been on social assistance, the less likely he/she is to leave the caseload. ... If an individual's self-esteem and sense of autonomy diminish with the duration on social assistance,

time on FBA will operate as an additional barrier to financial independence. This may suggest the need for greater programme efforts to reach out to likely long-term recipients in the early stages of their FBA stay.⁹⁰

Evans also discovered that single mothers have a high rate of return to FBA. Single mothers are more than twice as likely to return to the caseload than the disabled (27 per cent versus 13 per cent.) More than one single mother in four returns to social assistance.⁹¹

Single mothers on FBA often work outside the home. Nearly one in five of those entering FBA in 1981 (19.5 per cent) reported earnings during their first year on the program. (This represents a doubling in the labour force participation of single mothers on FBA between 1975 and 1981.) Over a three-years period, nearly one in three (32 per cent) reported some earnings.⁹²

Evans also found, however, that earnings in the first year are not related to an early departure from FBA. She quotes another author who said: "Partial or low-wage employment is not necessarily a stepping-stone to self-sufficiency, but is compatible with long-term dependence on welfare."⁹³ Evans points out that, given the low-wage labour market, part-time employment which cushions the impact of low benefit levels may represent the best option for many single mothers on social assistance.⁹⁴

5. The Social Assistance Review Committee

The Ontario social assistance system has been under particular scrutiny recently because of the Social Assistance Review Committee (SARC). In this section, some of the Committee's critiques of the provincial welfare programs will be presented, occasionally augmented by comments from other analysts. The SARC report did lead to some reforms in the Ontario system which will be examined at the end of this section.

5a. Complexity and Fragmentation

The Social Assistance Review Committee started from the premise that society has a responsibility to help its members in their development. It judged the current system as unsuccessful in meeting that goal. Social assistance was described as a "system whose policies and objectives are unstated, often multiple, and often conflicting."⁹⁵ Complexity and fragmentation were highlighted as serious problems.

The current system is not readily accessible. The division of responsibilities between the provincial and municipal governments compounds its complexity and ensures delay and confusion for many applicants. The high level of unstructured discretion means that accessibility has different meanings in different parts of Ontario.... Little understandable information about this very complex system is provided to the public.⁹⁶

The Committee pointed out that the system was a complicated and intimidating maze of programs. This point was

repeated to me by several single mothers.

Right now, you have to see so many people -- one for day care, one for housing, one for welfare. All of these appointments are at a place which keeps you waiting. It's all time expended and if the woman is trying to get back into the work force, it's not convenient."

To be fair, part of the problem with Ontario's system stems from the way in which social assistance policy has been developed across the country. As the National Council of Welfare points out, the system we have today evolved from a series of individual pieces of legislation which were adopted over a 30-year period. Years of incremental change have led to program stacking and programs which negate or contradict each other."

5b. Benefit Levels

The low Ontario benefits rates are a cause for concern to many analysts. According to the National Council of Welfare, the real value of Ontario benefits has been on a roller coaster ride, due to the erosion caused by inflation. In 1970, social assistance benefits and the federal Family Allowance came to \$2,324 which amounts to \$7,494 in 1986 dollars. Welfare incomes fell to \$7,214 in 1972, rose to \$8,783 by 1975, but dropped substantially during the remainder of the decade to reach \$7,631 in 1980. Since 1980, inflation has come down and the Ontario government has significantly improved its welfare rates each year. In 1986, the single-parent family's total

income from the Ontario and federal benefits came to \$9,747, the highest level since 1970. This was still far below the average family income.⁹⁹ In fact, all social assistance recipients have incomes below any of the commonly used definitions of the poverty line. Some have incomes that are 50 per cent below the poverty line.¹⁰⁰

Many analysts have criticized the method of establishing benefit rates. The Social Assistance Review Committee complained that, "the current system is completely devoid of any clear, logical, or consistent rationale for setting benefit levels."¹⁰¹ The complexity of the system contributes to this problem. There are 22 categories of eligibility, numerous sub-categories, and a number of factors that create further distinction within categories. A single mother with one child may receive any one of 36 different rates. The Committee pointed out that Ontario's categorical structure "reflects value-laden judgements about recipients and contributes significantly to the stigmatization of those deemed 'less worthy.'"¹⁰²

5c. Work Disincentives

There has long been a debate about whether increasing benefits would make welfare more attractive than employment in the eyes of recipients. Many arguments for low benefits have been based on the rationale that if governments provide

generous social assistance, recipients will be reluctant to work.¹⁰³ The Social Assistance Review Committee adamantly disagreed with this assumption.

We strongly reject the argument that the "spur of poverty" is still essential in the drive to self-sufficiency. ... the payment of insufficient benefits is profoundly counter-productive to transition, causing the recipient's energies to be consumed by a perilous struggle to survive.¹⁰⁴

And, as many analysts have pointed out, the argument for keeping benefits low so that people will be forced to work assumes that single mothers caring for their children at home are not working.

The system also has the implication of treating motherhood as unimportant, unskilled and worthy of only low pay. One rationale for maintaining women on this poverty level existence in fact undermines the idea that motherhood is considered work. Governments throughout Canada argue that they must keep provincial social assistance rates close to the minimum wage level in the province in order to provide an incentive to work. This counter-conception of wage labour and not motherhood as being work is fostered by other government "policies" which encourage "welfare mothers" to accept full-time employment outside the home at low salaries in a society with inadequate day care facilities.¹⁰⁵

The single mothers I spoke to agreed with this analysis, saying:

You are not allowed to be a parent, because you are a single parent. What you are doing is not valuable. They are shoving programs at you. Programs should be gradual. Everyone is telling you you should raise your children but you should also work. They are coming at you from all sides.¹⁰⁶

For those people who want to work, the system has long contained a number of built-in disincentives. Problems noted at the time the SARC report was released included:

-- The regulation that single mothers on social assistance were not allowed to work more than 120 hours per month. Violating this rule resulted in a loss of all benefits. This effectively discouraged single mothers from seeking part-time jobs that might lead to full-time employment.

-- The fact that recipients could keep only a small amount of income from employment before they lost benefits. Earnings above a certain level, depending on the recipient, were subject to a 100 per cent recovery rate.

-- The loss of in-kind benefits such as dental care, prescriptions or eyeglasses for recipients and their children.

-- For parents who do not receive subsidized child care, the direct costs of child care can be substantial and a tremendous disincentive to work. These costs were not covered by the exemption.¹⁰⁷

The Committee acknowledged that the WIN program did attempt to eliminate some of the work disincentives. It concluded, however, that "WIN has not lived up to its expectations." It pointed out that the number of participants has grown very slowly, to about 2,600 in 1984. This is a small proportion of the potential target group.¹⁰⁸

5d. Lack of Support Services

One of the criticisms of the current system is that it provides a narrow form of support, limited to financial assistance. Many have called for expanded support systems.¹⁰⁹

One of the most needed supports, as we have seen in the previous section, is child care. The Social Assistance Review Committee said that, "the lack of child care is one of the greatest barriers to self-reliance facing sole-support parents."¹¹⁰

The Committee also pointed out that the system places many demands on recipients without providing them with the support needed to meet those requirements. For example, it demands a number of job searches, but there is no reciprocal obligation that recipients be assisted in learning how to conduct such searches effectively.¹¹¹

The need to provide temporary assistance to recipients beginning a job who have little experience with paid employment was also noted. The Committee pointed to the positive aspects of "supported employment" systems in which new, inexperienced employees are matched with seasoned workers. The new workers are thus provided with on-the-job work experience with very close personal supervision and support. Gradually, the new employee's responsibility increases and the supervision and support provided by the experienced worker decreases. Recent

American studies have found supported employment programs effective for women with histories of long-term welfare dependence.¹¹²

5e. Lack of Fairness

Ontario's social assistance system has been severely criticized for denying basic fairness and justice to recipients.

The current social assistance system regularly denies the protections afforded by the rules of fundamental justice, as well as the equality of treatment that the Charter and other laws require. This denial is unacceptable. Inequality is embedded in many of the rules that apply to social assistance. Rules and procedures also violate basic notions of fairness and due process; many decisions involving basic needs cannot be appealed, and recipients are not given notice of or reasons for decisions of major import. Existing appeal procedures are fundamentally flawed; recipients are denied access to information that forms the basis of decisions made about them; and highly intrusive measures are adopted in the effort to eliminate abuse of the system.¹¹³

The Social Assistance Review Committee pointed out that few efforts are made to encourage recipients to request their files or inform them of their right to information. It also criticized the high degree of decision-making discretion granted to municipal welfare workers.¹¹⁴

The Social Assistance Review Board, which handles appeals from recipients, was condemned by the Committee because of procedural problems, the content of decisions and the lack of

impartiality. "The procedures of the board fall far short of those required in light of the serious decisions it makes."¹¹⁵

These problems have often been pinpointed as contributing to the stigmatization of welfare. The fact that few people on welfare have information on how the decisions regarding them are made contributes to the impression that they do not deserve respect.¹¹⁶

It is considered shameful to be on welfare, and the system is explicitly or implicitly designed and administered to reinforce the idea that to be a welfare recipient is to be an inferior class of citizen.¹¹⁷

5f. The Two-Tier System

Ontario's two-tier system has been criticized by many and was judged to be unnecessary by SARC. The Committee maintained that the system causes confusion for clients and is administratively inefficient. It added that a system with upper and lower tiers reinforces differing treatment and stigmatization of recipients at the municipal level.¹¹⁸

The lack of direction from the province was pinpointed as a problem. The Committee noted that there was a "bewildering assortment of rules, directives and policy guidelines issued by the province in various forms" but that these did not cover such important points as eligibility criteria and required procedures. Those directives that were clear were often poorly monitored and enforced.¹¹⁹

The Committee complained about the lack of provincial minimum standards for GWA and FBA programs on such issues as caseload size, staff training requirements and office design. It pointed out that this led to wide variation in the way assistance is provided at the municipal level.¹²⁰

One of the most serious charges laid by the Committee was that the funding arrangements for social assistance create disincentives to effective administration of the program and actually act as incentives to keep people dependent upon assistance. The following details give credence to that claim.

Municipalities receive 80% of the cost of most GWA allowances and benefits from senior levels of government under the regular cost-sharing ratio. However, only 50% of eligible municipal expenses for administering and monitoring these cases is reimbursed. This cost-sharing discrepancy discourages municipalities from providing adequate staff resources to ensure that clients receive the support services and counselling they need to help them obtain employment and regain their independence.¹²¹

The funding arrangements for Special Assistance and Supplementary Aid were also criticized. Because these items are not mandatory, some municipalities refuse to pay for them at all, creating hardship in those areas and inconsistency across the province. But even in the municipalities which do pay for these additional expenses there are often serious inequities. Municipal welfare administrators may prefer

providing Supplementary Aid to FBA clients because of the more favourable cost-sharing arrangements.¹²²

5g. Problems of Single Mothers

Single mothers face unique problems in dealing with the social assistance system. Most programs for single mothers were designed for widows and divorced or unwed mothers do not receive sufficient assistance. As one background paper for the Social Assistance Review Committee put it:

Historically, social assistance for female-headed families was designed to respond to the needs of widows with children. The growth of other programs such as survivors benefits has left this group relatively well protected compared to other mother-led families.¹²³

While society has helped cushion the hardship of single parenthood for widows, the vulnerability to poverty of separated, divorced or never-married mothers and their children has remained the same or even worsened.¹²⁴

The system fails to recognise, in many cases, the problems single mothers experience with regard to support payments from the fathers of their children. SARC criticized the Ontario policy as being unclear regarding the circumstances under which a recipient should seek support. Some abused spouses and unwed parents may be excused from suing but the practice varies widely across the province.¹²⁵ The Committee pointed out that although the Ministry of Community and Social Services can apply for support if it is providing social assistance, as a

general rule it does not do so and the woman is forced to initiate the proceedings.¹²⁶

... the lack of integration between the public and private support systems, and the failure of each to recognize the problems that women in particular face as they attempt to deal with the other, have often resulted in confusion and serious financial hardship.¹²⁷

Single mothers must also deal with the tendency for the courts to award less support to women who are on social assistance, on the basis that the money is going to the government, not the recipient. This ignores the fact that the mother will need the money when she leaves the social assistance system.¹²⁸

The Committee pointed out that special problems face the abused woman who is expected to seek support from her abuser. It acknowledged the trauma and potential danger in this situation and recommended that the woman be free to decide whether support should be sought. The Committee added, however, that it was wrong to allow a spouse to profit from abusive behaviours by being relieved of the obligation to pay support. It suggested that the abused woman be given the option of having the government apply for support. At the same time, the government could provide her with the resources needed to protect and assist her through the court process, e.g. good representation by people skilled in representing

abused spouses and access to services such as transition houses.¹²⁹

5h. Working Poor

Single mothers who are not on social assistance often experience as much, if not more, financial difficulty than those who receive FBA. The current system provides no assistance to women who are working full-time but living in poverty -- members of the working poor.¹³⁰

The rules regarding income and hours of work on social assistance mean that many members of the working poor do not qualify for the benefits. And when they are eligible, e.g. for municipal special assistance, they are often unaware of the program or it is not available in their area because it is optional.¹³¹ The working poor suffer because of the state's assumption that a person in the labour force is provided with sufficient income.

The working poor typically receive no aid because the Canadian social assistance system assumes a clear-cut dichotomy between those who cannot or should not work (the aged, the blind, the disabled, women with small children, and so on) and those deemed able-bodied and, therefore, employable. Those capable of working are expected to meet their needs through employment; consequently only the unemployables are considered worthy of public support.¹³²

6. Government Action

In May, 1989, the Ontario Government made a number of changes to its social assistance system, based on the SARC

recommendations. The rate of assistance increased 6 per cent, \$54 million was provided for higher social assistance rates for children and the structure of payments to cover children was simplified. The rule that single parents could not work more than 120 hours a month was abolished and maximum monthly earnings were raised from \$140 to \$175. Child care expenses were deducted from that exemption and recipients were allowed to retain 20 per cent of their net earning beyond the \$175 basic exemption. A higher "buffer zone" was also introduced to enable recipients to retain health benefits when their incomes rise above a certain level.¹³³ In other words, most of the work disincentives were removed in an attempt to encourage recipients to participate in the labour force. These measures, called STEP (Supports To Employment Program) replaced the WIN program.

As well, the Government announced that the appeal process would be improved. Prior to a formal appeal to the Social Assistance Review Board, an internal review will be conducted by someone who is neither involved in the disputed decision nor supervising the person who made it. The client will be permitted to bring an advocate to the review and will have access to the full file.¹³⁴

The Ontario Government has also set up a task force to provide advice on possible legislation to deal with many of

the other SARC recommendations, e.g. the elimination of the two-tier system and a new rate-setting procedure.

The Ontario Government should be applauded for its efforts in this area. The reforms have been viewed quite favourably by most social policy analysts, although some have pointed out that the welfare rates did not increase as much as the Social Assistance Review Committee recommended.¹³⁵ Critics also noted that, although the Ontario Government implemented the first-stage recommendations of the SARC Report, it did not commit itself to the sweeping reforms called for by the Committee. A number of important SARC recommendations have not yet been implemented by the Ontario Government. They include the following:

- Sole-support parents receiving social assistance who participate in activities designed to increase their capacity for self-reliance should be guaranteed access to subsidized child care.
- A joint municipal-provincial committee on training should be established immediately to develop a comprehensive training program for supervisors, field workers and clerical staff.
- In the short to medium term, the number of social assistance categories should be reduced to three.
- All income above the level of allowable exemptions should be subject to a tax-back rate of 66.66 per cent for all

recipients. (Under the reforms, the tax-back rate for earned income above the allowable exemptions is 80 per cent.)

-- The provincial Government should begin negotiations with the federal Government to design and implement a comprehensive program of income supplementation to top up the wages of low-income workers.

-- A revamped and restructured Work Incentive Program (WIN) should serve as the foundation for Ontario's income supplementation program.

-- The provincial and federal benefits for children should be rationalized into one children's benefit, income-tested and delivered through the income tax system as a refundable tax credit. A maximum of \$3,300 per child per year could be available to any family with an income of \$15,000 or under. For those with earnings above \$15,000, the children's benefit would be reduced by an amount equivalent to 25 per cent of the additional earnings.

-- Existing laws regarding private support obligations should be reviewed to assess their impact on families. Lawyers and judges should be educated about the interrelationship between private and public support systems and about the importance of support awards to women and children who receive social assistance.¹³⁶

Clearly, a number of problems remain to be addressed. The complicated and confused two-tier system will continue until new legislation is introduced; there are still no clear legislative requirements for setting the welfare rates, so there is no guarantee that they will not be eroded by inflation; the problems of the working poor continue to be ignored; new training policies for welfare workers have not been implemented; the confusion around private support payments persists.

The impact of these problems on single mothers can be devastating. While it is useful to remove the work disincentives from the system, such action will have little effect if the underlying problems are not addressed. Until the state recognizes that single mothers, both on and off social assistance, need adequate incomes, fair and understandable treatment and real assistance in overcoming the structural barriers that face them in the labour force, we will make little progress in helping these families. As the Social Assistance Review Committee says, piecemeal reform will not solve the problems that face our society.

Our review gave us a new understanding of the debilitating impact that poverty has upon those who experience it. Most disturbing to us was the number of people who appeared trapped in dependence upon the social assistance system. As a society, we still tend to exclude the vulnerable while rewarding

the successful. It is not enough to improve social assistance in order to move its recipients closer to some poverty line. The rules and behaviours of society that lead to this marginalization must be addressed. This requires major reform of the social assistance system.¹³⁷

TRAINING

1. Introduction

We have seen that social assistance provides single mothers with very little support and security. They and their children live in poverty, dependent on a demeaning, stigmatizing system. Paid employment would be one possible means of escaping this demoralizing situation. But as the statistical overview indicated, many of these women are not highly skilled. Training thus becomes very important.

Both the federal and provincial governments are active in Canadian training policy and programming. Both levels of government have established a variety of training programs over the years. I will, however, concentrate on the federal initiatives. The objective of this section is not to detail everything each government is doing in the training field. Rather, it is to discover the effects of training policy on single mothers. An examination of federal programming should assist in meeting that objective. My own examination of Ontario training programs has convinced me that an analysis of

both federal and provincial programs would only prove repetitive.

2. Canadian Jobs Strategy

Canadian Jobs Strategy (CJS) is the federal training initiative established by the Progressive Conservative Government in 1985. It is administered by Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC). Women are one of the target groups. The others are native people, disabled persons and visible minorities. The CJS focuses on using the private sector to provide work experience and training opportunities.¹³⁸

The CJS has six programs:

2a. The Job Entry Program is intended to help young people, women and the severely employment disadvantaged make the transition into the labour market. The Re-entry option of the program will be examined here as it is targeted at women who are attempting to get back into the labour force and is therefore pertinent to the situation of many single mothers.¹³⁹

When the Re-entry option was first introduced, eligibility was restricted to women out of the labour force or unemployed for three years. This led to complaints that the program was ignoring the problems of women working in low-paying jobs or those who had done so in the past three years. As a result of those criticisms, the eligibility requirement was eliminated.¹⁴⁰ The program is now open to all women having difficulty making

a successful transition to the labour market due to lack of adequate training or work experience. Only women working more than 25 hours a week are ineligible to participate.

Job Re-entry provides up to 52 weeks of skills training and on-the-job experience. It includes basic orientation to the labour market, job search techniques and a training allowance or Unemployment Insurance benefits, whichever is greater. Dependant Care Allowances are also available.¹⁴¹

Businesses, non-profit organizations, public health and educational institutions, municipalities and band councils can act as co-ordinators. Co-ordinators design training plans, recruit and assess participants, place them with training hosts, arrange off-site training and monitor and report on their progress. Co-ordinators receive funding from Employment and Immigration Canada to cover some or all of the costs of the project. In 1987-88, 160,600 people participated in the program, at a cost of \$486.4 million.¹⁴²

2b. The Job Development Program is geared towards the longer term unemployed who are experiencing fundamental employment difficulties. It offers employers a wage subsidy, contribution to overhead and training costs and some capital costs to hire and train unemployed workers, with a combination of on-and off-the-job training for up to 52 weeks.

Individuals must have been jobless for 24 of the last 30 weeks to qualify for participation in the program, although there are some exemptions from this regulation. The emphasis is on providing funds to private sector employers but non-profit organizations, public health and education institutions, municipalities and band councils are eligible if they can provide work experiences and skills that meet local need and will make participants more employable. In 1987-88, there were 110,000 participants, at a federal cost of \$596.8 million.¹⁴³

2c. The Skill Investment program provides up to three years of assistance for employees to take full- or part-time training leave from their jobs. The Government subsidizes some of the training costs and the wages paid to employees during their leave. This program is meant for workers in jobs affected by changing technology or changing market conditions. In 1987-88, 25,600 workers upgraded their skills at a federal cost of \$65.5 million.¹⁴⁴

2d. Through the Skills Shortages program, employers can be financially assisted (i.e. wages partially paid) for up to three years for providing training to workers in skills which are in short supply. Employers provide on-the-job training to either their own employees or newly hired employees. In 1987-88, 99,800 workers were trained in new skills at a federal cost of \$234.7 million.¹⁴⁵

2e. Through the Community Futures program, support can be provided to the private sector and local community groups for the development of local employment opportunities in communities hit by acute and chronic unemployment, mass layoffs, plant closures or a depression. In 1987-88, support for training, small business development, entrepreneurship, and relocation was given to members of 177 communities at a cost of \$71.5 million.¹⁴⁶

2f. Innovations is an open-ended program providing financial assistance to individuals and groups for pilot and demonstration projects which test new solutions to labour market problems. Priority areas for receiving funding include training in new technologies, new delivery systems for learning, bridging programs to help workers enter or re-enter the work force, alternative work arrangements and more effective links between training and job creation. In 1987-88, \$36.2 million was invested in various projects.¹⁴⁷

Each of the CJS programs, except Innovations, contains an apprenticeship component. The federal Government has agreements with the provinces and territories to fund classroom training and, in some instances, on-the-job training as part of this apprenticeship initiative. EIC's contribution is largely financial while the provinces/territories are responsible for providing training and certification. The

federal Government spends \$160 million a year in support of apprenticeship. In 1988/89, 36,000 people were enrolled in provincial apprenticeship programs across Canada.¹⁴⁸

The federal and provincial governments are currently collaborating on an initiative to bring social assistance recipients into training programs. Often called the "SAR agreements" or the "four-cornered agreements," this initiative involves the federal departments of Health and Welfare and Employment and Immigration and the provincial/territorial ministries of social services and employment.

Employable social assistance recipients are referred to CJS or provincial training programs; money that the provinces would have spent for social assistance payments to recipients is diverted to these training programs. At the same time, the federal Government transfers an equal amount of money under the Canada Assistance Plan, as the federal share of the social assistance payment, to the training programs. Money a participant receives in training allowances or wages is guaranteed not to be less than what he or she would have received under social assistance. Participation is voluntary. This initiative assists 60,000 social assistance recipients a year. In 1989/90 the federal budget for the SAR agreements was \$400 million.¹⁴⁹

3. Analyses of CJS

CJS has garnered some favourable attention. Social policy analysts have noted the increased flexibility of the programs, compared to previous federal training initiatives, and the targeting of women. The Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) states:

... Re-entry Program has provided an important and much-needed focus for education for women who have been out of the work force for some time. There are some serious problems with the structure of the program.... In spite of the problems these shortcomings create, sponsors in locations across the country have found ways to make excellent use of the program.¹⁵⁰

Burt Perrin Associates (BPA), in a background paper for the Social Assistance Review Committee, noted that CJS is flexible and gives community organizations and others considerable scope to develop programs which meet the needs of the users. "There is clear evidence that CJS has made possible the development of a number of innovative training programs for social assistance recipients."¹⁵¹

SARC itself made a similar point, praising the four-cornered agreements:

The committee is greatly encouraged by the degree of collaboration and co-operation that resulted in the signing of the four-cornered agreement. In our view, this level of co-operation is not only important but essential if we are to improve the chances for social assistance recipients to enter the paid labour force. It also suggests that many improvements can result simply from reallocating existing expenditures so that we "spend smarter".¹⁵²

Nevertheless, while there is a great deal of support for CJS in principle, there are a number of practical difficulties.¹⁵³

3a. Ignoring Structural Barriers

One of the major complaints made against the federal programs is that they often do not recognize the real training needs of women. CCLOW has divided the barriers women face in training and employment into three groups: dispositional (e.g. learning styles, attitudes), situational (e.g. lack of access to child care for single mothers), and institutional (e.g. high fees, inappropriate curriculum). The Congress maintains that most training programs do not adequately address those barriers.¹⁵⁴

3ai. dispositional barriers

On the first point, the Congress argues that women often prefer different teaching and learning styles than are offered in most programs.

Relatively little research exists regarding women's preferences for how to learn. That which does exist, however, shows that women prefer a participative and collaborative approach to learning which emphasizes self-determination and the blending of intuitive with received knowledge. Most educational institutions and training programs take an approach which is competitive and insensitive to individual differences.¹⁵⁵

3a11. situational barriers

In an attempt to address situational barriers, the federal Government has made some progress in providing child care support in training programs. As CCLOW put it, the CJS provides training allowances "which are, in some circumstances, barely adequate. This is an improvement."¹⁵⁶ While in training, the parent receives \$16 per day per child for a first and second dependent, \$10 for a third and \$5 for a fourth. No additional money is given if there are more than four children in care.¹⁵⁷ These allowances clearly do not reflect the actual costs of providing child care but they have been praised because they are better than previous efforts and they are available to more trainees, i.e. part-time participants.¹⁵⁸ The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) has pointed to two additional problems related to child care. Lengthy waiting periods for training often result in the loss of child care or complicate the process of obtaining it. As well, women who receive child care allowances can't always find spaces for their children.¹⁵⁹

Other situational barriers include problems with transportation to programs, the lack of training in isolated areas and the often rigid schedules of programs which do not recognize the realities of parenting.¹⁶⁰ It must be noted that this latter problem often relates as much to the inflexibility

of the work place, where on-the-job training occurs, as it does to the Government's training programs.

3aiii. institutional barriers

The content of training programs should be based on a realistic understanding of the circumstances of the participants. CACSW noted that women who are re-entering the labour force often need bridging programs to help them make the transition from unemployment to employment successfully.

Community and non-profit organizations concerned with the treatment of disadvantaged women, especially immigrant and refugee women, in training, point out that these groups require special help to make the transition from chronic unemployment and underemployment to success in the labour market. This includes "bridging" components such as non-sexist instructors and counsellors, child care assistance, transportation assistance, support in coping with personal crisis, self-confidence building, student advocacy and life-skills instruction.¹⁶¹

Unfortunately, such bridging programs are often the victims of budget cuts. CCLOW says that one of the results of the CJS's emphasis on the private sector is that the federal Government has made major cutbacks in the support it has historically provided for college-based bridging programs designed to assist women move into training programs in non-traditional areas.¹⁶²

There are also curriculum problems. Many groups argue that women often need basic upgrading and that this is not available.¹⁶³

Job Entry/Re-entry and Job Development are specifically aimed at the undereducated, unskilled and unemployed, but provide little time for upgrading in reading, writing and math. ... training periods are too short generally, but particularly for learning basic skills which are necessary to prepare adult students for entry into employment training. ... skill training without adult basic education will severely limit women's job market possibilities....¹⁶⁴

These gaps in the programs cause particular hardships for single mothers who often lack basic education and may have been out of the work force for a lengthy period of time. CCLOW points out that single mothers are most negatively affected by the disparity between men's and women's wages because they must support their children on the low pay associated with women's traditional work. Calling this group of women the "bellwether" for the status of all women, CCLOW argues that the Government's failure to help them is a reflection of its attitude towards women.¹⁶⁵

3b. Training for Poor Jobs

Many of the women trained under CJS end up in poorly paid, low-level jobs in traditional female sectors.¹⁶⁶ An analysis of Re-entry programs sponsored under CJS funding in 1986-87 showed that 87 per cent of trainee positions were in traditional "non-high-quality" areas (e.g. clerical, sales and service), while 58 per cent of Job Development projects were classified as traditional (e.g. clerical, service, administration, product fabrication and assembly).¹⁶⁷ A large proportion of unemployed

women in 1986 (55 per cent) worked in sales, service and clerical occupations. It would appear that the Government is training women for jobs in sectors of high unemployment.¹⁶⁸

Women are greatly underrepresented in certain programs. For example, in 1986-87 the Skills Shortages program, which provides training for skills in short supply, had a target of 20 per cent participation by women; the actual rate was 8.2 per cent.¹⁶⁹ Except in hairdressing, cooking and cosmetology, women are also underrepresented in apprenticeship programs. In 1986-87, they constituted about 4 per cent of the apprentices across the country.¹⁷⁰

It has been suggested that women are being channelled into certain programs by employment counsellors. A study prepared for the Economic Council of Canada pointed out that material aimed at clients of Canada Employment Centres lays great stress on the need for a "realistic" self-assessment of one's prospects in the labour market. Women (or employment centre counsellors) might interpret "realistic" occupational choices to mean stereotypically female occupations.¹⁷¹ And, in a sense, they may be correct in that assumption. Training women in non-traditional areas does not always improve their employment and earnings potential. One American study found that women who received non-traditional training were much less likely than their male counterparts to be employed in male-dominated

occupations, and also received somewhat lower hourly wages. The authors suggested that "nontraditional training alone may not be an effective way of reducing the occupational segregation of low-income women."¹⁷² There are other good reasons why women stay away from these occupations, e.g. socialization, anticipated discrimination or harassment, less pay in some blue-collar occupations than in clerical occupations and requirements for skill investment which conflict with family responsibilities.¹⁷³ The answer does not, however, lie in avoiding non-traditional programs or occupations but in eliminating some of the barriers which make these jobs particularly difficult for women.

3c. Funding Cuts

The federal Government has been criticized from many quarters for cutting its training budget. Spending on federal training programs decreased from \$2.2 billion in 1984-85 to \$1.8 billion in 1987-88. This has led to long waiting lists, limited opportunities and a decrease in the number of women in training programs. In 1985, 12,000 fewer women were being trained than in 1977.¹⁷⁴

3d. Privatization

The decision to emphasize private sector training under CJS has been viewed with concern by many analysts. CCLOW has pointed out that what is profitable for a company may not be

in the best interests of those needing training. For example, employers may be tempted to train the more educated, experienced employees and ignore others.¹⁷⁵ As well, employer-sponsored training provides no assistance to the unemployed and is rarely available to the working poor. "These people ... risk being forgotten altogether, or having their training needs even more seriously under-resourced than is already the case."¹⁷⁶

The Congress also noted that employers tend not to train women; less than 14 per cent of women's adult education is employer-sponsored.¹⁷⁷ In fact, employers appear not to be very interested in training anyone. A recent federal Government document pointed out that there is no "culture of training" in the Canadian business community.¹⁷⁸ The Senate Sub-Committee on Training and Employment reported that while many large businesses in Canada provide training to their employees, few small and medium businesses do so.

The private sector is concerned with profit, our witnesses said. This concern does not always accommodate training that meets the broader needs of employees. Though training is an investment in future success for employers, few of them realize this -- for a variety of reasons. While some employers do not see the long-term advantage of providing training for their employees, others, particularly managers of small or medium businesses, simply do not have the means to offer training. Further, for those in the business community who "made it on their own", the idea of relying on anything other than one's own resources in order to get ahead seems foreign. The myth of the "lone

ranger" is very present in our North America business culture.¹⁷⁹

The private sector in Canada spends about \$1.4 billion on formal training -- less than half that of the United States on a per-employee basis.¹⁸⁰

CCLOW maintains that it would be naive to think that the marketplace would, by itself, generate the kind of changes necessary for female equality and that policy and training programs which are not market-driven are an essential component of a long-term program aimed at the equality of women.¹⁸¹

3e. SAR Agreements

Finally, concern has also been expressed that the SAR agreements, while a good example of federal-provincial co-operation, move dangerously close to the concept of making people work for welfare.

The federal government has stressed that the essential mandate of CAP, which is to provide for people who are not able to support themselves, will not be compromised; this is not to be "work for welfare." However, social welfare groups are concerned there is opportunity for social assistance recipients to be coerced into entering training and employment programs which do not provide them with a genuine opportunity to become self-sufficient.¹⁸²

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women has warned that single mothers might be adversely affected by these agreements if the definition of "employable" does not take into account such things as the availability of child care.¹⁸³

4. Recent Developments

In April 1989, the federal Government announced that it would be making changes to its training programs through the new Labour Force Development Strategy. Among other things, this Strategy will attempt to increase private sector training. A total of \$230 million is available in the Strategy to increase training activity in the business community.¹⁸⁴ As well, an additional \$50 million will be allocated to SAR-related programming.¹⁸⁵

The Labour Force Development Strategy will be financed by changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act. Changes include:

- Increasing the minimum period of work required to qualify for Unemployment Insurance benefits;
- Reducing the maximum duration of benefits;
- Increasing penalties for those who voluntarily quit their jobs without just cause;
- Increasing penalties for people who fraudulently collect benefits.¹⁸⁶

These measures will save \$1.3 billion -- \$800 million of that money will go to training programs and \$500 million will be allocated to improved benefits (e.g. enhanced parental leave provisions).¹⁸⁷

Reaction to the new Strategy has been predictably negative. Many groups, including the Ottawa Council for Low

Income Support Services, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the National Association of Women and the Law, have pointed out that the changes will be particularly hard on women who are already in low-paying, short-term jobs. Such women will have little choice but to remain in these jobs. If they leave or lose them, they will be dependent upon a decreased Unemployment Insurance safety net. Several groups also argued that training programs should not be funded out of Unemployment Insurance money and that such action was unconstitutional.¹⁸⁸ CACSW added that the changes will likely lead to even fewer training programs which meet the real needs of women.

The council is concerned that the diversion of UI funds to Labour Force Development Strategy job promotion programs will hinder the development of training programs that focus on redressing women's disadvantage in the labour market, because these programs will be conceived and developed as solutions to unemployment.... The council also re-emphasizes the need for a comprehensive employment strategy that takes into account women's needs as women have identified them, before embarking on fundamental changes to the unemployment insurance program or a reorientation of training strategies.¹⁸⁹

5. Conclusion

There is strong evidence to suggest that single mothers are highly motivated to succeed in training programs. Research indicates that even the most disadvantaged single mothers "have demonstrated positive post program results when provided with a range of life-skill, job search, and basic work skills

training."¹⁹⁰ It is disturbing, therefore, to realize that despite the success of women in training programs, there has been very little effort to design programs which truly meet their needs. In the next chapter, I will discuss possible reasons for this inaction. I would like to close this section, however, with CLOW's vivid description of the current situation.

Politicians and bureaucrats are aware that the world is changing and do want to do something about it. However, there is a real lack of vision concerning alternatives. As we noted earlier, structural rigidities provide some strong disincentives to the whole visioning process. The result, as one interviewee said, is that "We're moving the deck chairs around on the Titanic."¹⁹¹

CONCLUSION

This chapter has contained fairly detailed examinations of child care, social assistance and training policies. It is clear from the information and critiques which have been presented that there are serious problems in all three areas. These problems will be examined more closely in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that not one of the policy fields provides adequate support to single mothers.

Many single mothers are in great need of all three services and, in fact, do participate in the programs described in this chapter. Yet their problems continue. A large number of single mothers are still poor, dependent on social assistance or working in low-wage, dead-end jobs and scrambling to find good child care services. The statistics record very little improvement in their lives. In the next chapter, I will attempt to determine why the policies outlined here are doing so little to meet the needs of single mothers.

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CHAPTER FIVE

DIGGING FOR THE MEANINGS BEHIND THE ACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Many single mothers in Canada encounter serious difficulties providing secure, financially stable lives for themselves and their children. Canadian social policy has, thus far, failed to make substantial improvements in the circumstances of these families. While there has been some acknowledgement of the problems of single mothers in each of the policy fields outlined above, there has been a general failure to address the real difficulties these women face. That is clear. What is less obvious is why this is so and what can be done about it. These questions will be addressed in this chapter. Perhaps the best way of finding the answers is to return to the hypotheses presented in chapter one.

1. Single mothers are a growing part of our society and represent a family form which must be accepted as a Canadian reality. Currently, the majority of these women, and their children, experience income and support problems which are different than those of other population groups.

2. At present, the Canadian state, through its social policies, is attempting to ignore, minimize or distort the problems of single mothers. The assumptions about families

which underlie many state policies contribute to the problems of single mothers.

3. The Canadian state could, and should, establish a series of related policy measures aimed at helping single-mother families. The adoption of a feminist approach to policy-making, based on a deconstruction of the ideas and assumptions which underlie state policy, would improve the policy process and assist these families.

HYPOTHESIS ONE

Hypothesis one was clearly proven in the statistical overview provided in chapter three. The percentage of lone-parent families is steadily growing (130 per cent between 1966 and 1986). Most of these families are headed by women (82 per cent of the total in 1986).¹ Social policy analysts agree that the numbers of single mothers will likely continue to rise. They cite a variety of reasons for this: liberalized divorce laws; improved economic opportunities for women outside marriage; falling remarriage rates; and the increasing numbers of older, never-married women having and keeping children. These are probably all part of more fundamental changes in Canadian society, e.g. the declining influence of religion, the decreasing tolerance of wife-battering and child abuse, the grudging acceptance of working women. Although single mothers

still face many societal barriers, it has become a little less stigmatized to be a woman raising children on her own.

Analysts also agree that the reasons for the increasing numbers of single mothers appear to be long-term trends. Unless divorce rates decline dramatically, remarriage rates rise and/or out-of-wedlock births decrease, single-mother families will remain a significant segment of Canadian society. As was mentioned in chapter three, other societal trends might point to a decline in the numbers of single mothers. These include the increase in safe sex practices, the wider availability of birth control and abortion and the low fertility rates. There has been, however, little evidence that these will affect the numbers of single mothers. The trends appear to offset one another. Although women are having fewer babies, they appear to be raising them alone more often. Based on current patterns, it is likely that the proportion of single-mother families in the population will, at least, remain steady. Most analysts predict an increase.

Many single mothers are poor (56 per cent had incomes below the poverty line in 1986) and suffer all the problems which accompany poverty.² Again, analysts predict that, unless we change societal structures and attitudes, single mothers and their children will continue to live in poverty. Until we address problems such as discrimination in the work force, the

perception that women are secondary earners, and the low levels of security provided by social policies, single-mother families will struggle to survive in poverty.³

The double bind in which single mothers find themselves makes their problems different than those of other population groups, even other women. Single fathers do not face the same kinds of structural disadvantages in the labour force. Single women without children do not have the same heavy child-rearing responsibilities and expenses. Heterosexual, two-parent families have more income possibilities and the opportunities for shared responsibilities and they are privileged by social policies and attitudes. Gay and lesbian two-parent families, although greatly discriminated against, do at least contain two adults who can share responsibilities and financial obligations and support each other.

The problems of single mothers are unique. They must raise children alone in a society which still assumes that "normal" families contain a mother and a father. They must struggle to support their children in a marketplace which assumes that women are secondary earners. The numbers indicate that more and more women are experiencing this double bind. Yet, as we have seen, little has been done to really address these difficulties.

HYPOTHESIS TWO

To understand the second hypothesis, we have to look more closely at the information presented in chapter four. It is my conclusion that the policies outlined in that chapter reflect great ambivalence about the changes taking place in Canadian families and particularly about the formation of single-mother families. Although there is a recognition that such families exist and that the numbers are increasing, there has been little real assistance for single-mother families. There has been no attempt to accept such families as a legitimate alternative to the traditional family.

The result of this ambivalence is that these policies reinforce female dependence on males. Single-mother families are perceived as deviant and much policy is based on that assumption. The policies examined in this thesis provide single mothers with a choice between poverty and marriage. As we saw in chapter three, "the economic well-being of mothers and children is strikingly dependent on marriage and remarriage."⁴ In the next section of this chapter, I will look more closely at those policies in order to better delineate the meanings and assumptions which underlie them. We will see that although Canadian social policy is often confused and contradictory, in the final analysis, it serves to reinforce

the institution of marriage and bolster the traditional two-parent family.

1. Child Care

Ten reports have examined Canadian child care problems in the last 20 years. This, in itself, is an indication of the ambivalence with which the issue is regarded by state institutions. Successive federal governments have acknowledged that the lack of child care is a problem but none have been able to adequately address the situation. Instead, the Government sets up task forces and committees to study the issue. And even then, it does not listen to the recommendations of its own committees. It is notable that Jake Epp would say "there is no agreement among Canadians about what should be done to meet the changing needs of families and children with respect to child care."⁵ Despite the barrage of fairly consistent advice he received from committees, task forces, academics and child care advocates, the Minister appeared unable to see the answer.

There are likely many pragmatic reasons for this reluctance to act on the child care issue, e.g. the complexities of federal-provincial negotiations and the expense of providing a comprehensive child care system. The Canadian Government has, however, overcome such obstacles in the past to deal with other issues, such as medicare and education. The

fact that it has been unable to do so with child care indicates that the problem is not perceived as pressing or important enough to act on yet. Since child care is a problem mainly for non-traditional families, such as those headed by single mothers, it seems fair to assume that the failure to deal with it reflects the reluctance of Canadian society and state to accept these families.

As we saw in chapter four, there are not enough child care spaces in Canada, the child care that is available is often of poor quality and inflexible, the costs are high and parental leave provisions are deficient. There is no real commitment to child care. In 1984-85, the Government contributed only \$116 for each child under 13 years of age.⁶ This situation has a number of practical implications for mothers, who still bear most of the burden of responsibility for child care. The lack of quality spaces means that if you are going to work, you have to take what you can get. The attitude seems to be that if you do not care enough about your children to stay home with them, you cannot expect other people to care about them or share responsibility for them. State policies are not designed to make it easy for mothers to work.

The high costs of child care also create problems, particularly for women on their own who are not on welfare. If a mother is on welfare, she may be able to get a subsidized

space. If not, she has to be able to afford the high fees -- something which is beyond the financial abilities of most single mothers. The current system acts as a disincentive for single mothers to leave welfare as they will lose their subsidies and have to pay much higher child care costs. Single mothers would have to earn a great deal of money to be able to afford unsubsidized child care and, as we have seen, it is very difficult for women, particularly unskilled single mothers, to obtain high-paying jobs. There is an alternative, however. Child care costs are much easier to handle if one has a spouse or partner to assist with finances. The prohibitive costs of child care are one form of subtle pressure on women to find a man to share the burden of parenting. The choice in this instance seems to be between welfare and dependence on a man.

The relegation of child care funding to the Canada Assistance Plan provides a clear message that this is an issue which is limited to the poor, those families which have been classified as in need of assistance, as "dysfunctional." If the welfare state saw child care as a mainstream issue, as an acceptable, routine need of "normal" families, it would not be funded through CAP, a mechanism so closely linked to the stigmatized social assistance system. Instead, child care would receive the same kind of funding as education or health care. The state's unwillingness to view child care in that

light indicates a reluctance to accept that many mothers work and that many families need child care. By limiting its involvement in child care to CAP, the Canadian Government is saying that only those who are having trouble succeeding in society need assistance with child care. There is no acknowledgement that the increased need for child care reflects permanent changes in our society and comes from acceptable family forms.

The heavy reliance on the tax system is another striking example of the state's failure to provide an adequate and comprehensive child care policy. Tax measures, such as credits and deductions for child care expenses, do not address the real problem. Money provided to parents, especially the small amounts currently given out, will not increase the number of spaces or improve the quality of child care. It may help parents purchase spaces but it is not enough to ensure that new spaces are created or money is available to pay staff better wages or improve their training. Only substantial funding granted directly to non-parental child care, whether it be day care centres, family home care or work place care, will do that. To truly intervene and improve the current child care system, the welfare state would have to greatly increase its funding to both non-parental child care providers and parents. It would have to be far more pro-active than it is now. By

depending on the tax system, the Government has chosen a passive, market-based, less interventionist role. It will wait for parents to find child care in the marketplace, and then it will provide some assistance. It is doing very little to actually create and support new spaces or improve quality. This strategy is yet another indication of the low priority awarded to child care and the reluctance of the Canadian welfare state to acknowledge the realities of today's families.

The provision of operating grants to commercial centres is based on a similar philosophy. Although research indicates that the quality of care in these centres is often poor, funding them is a logical part of a market-based policy. There is little recognition that the drive for profits might be antithetical to the provision of care. Because the welfare state has not yet conceded the necessity for a co-ordinated, comprehensive child care system, it can continue to introduce piecemeal measures such as this which are inconsistent with the desire to establish high-quality, accessible, affordable child care.

The gaps in our parental leave system constitute a final example of the welfare state's ambivalent attitude towards working mothers. Although recently improved, the system could be much better. Canada has made some commitments to its working parents but it has not yet been willing to take the

steps recommended by child and family advocates. A better parental leave system would be an acceptance by society of combined parenting/working roles. Instead, the state has provided an inadequate response -- a series of half-measures which fail to give women the support they need to both care for their children and retain their places in the labour force. In Canada, a woman can only stay at home and look after her children during their early years if she is rich, she has a husband who can support her or she is willing to live in poverty on the welfare system.

Related to this is the total disregard at the policy level of the feminist debate about providing wages for mothers to stay at home with their children. Other than minimal social assistance payments, the state provides little or no assistance to single mothers who want to stay home with their children for longer than the 17 weeks allowed by Unemployment Insurance. Through either the parental leave system or the tax system, the state could provide much more support to women who stay at home, acknowledging that their work is valuable to society. The failure to even address this issue is yet another manifestation of our reluctance to deal with new family forms. If women do not have men who can support them while they are at home, they will either have to live on welfare or struggle to find good non-parental care in an inadequate system.

What becomes clear in all this is that the state is still acting on the assumption that one parent should be at home to look after the children while the other works. If policy was based on the assumption that both parents may work or that there may only be one parent in a family, we would have a real child care system instead of a hodgepodge of fragmented policies. Single mothers are particularly affected by the state's lack of action on child care. They need to participate in the labour force to support their families, but in order to do so, they must leave their children to the whims of an inadequate child care system. If they want to stay at home, they must go on welfare. Many single mothers are forced to choose between dependence on the state or the stresses of a low-paying job and an inconsistent child care system. There is another choice, of course. They could settle down with a man and depend on his assistance. It is a choice between the status quo and poverty. Canada's social policies provide little evidence that the state would accept an alternative to life inside the status quo.

It is true that there are many pressures besides the ideology of the traditional family acting on the state and contributing to the lack of child care policy. Canada is a federal nation and the whole area of federal-provincial negotiations is a difficult and complex one. Nevertheless,

familial ideology plays an important role. The way this issue has been dealt with (e.g. the over-studying of the problem, the delays in introducing policy and legislation, the failure to introduce a comprehensive strategy despite the recommendations of many experts, the reluctance to intervene in the market) reveals the meanings behind the policies. Child care is an issue of most importance to non-traditional families. The hesitant, fragmented manner in which it has been handled indicates our reluctance to provide too much support to such families. The welfare state is attempting to ignore the changing family and is certainly not acting to provide real supports to it. By doing so, it is abandoning single mothers to fend for themselves in a society which is structured against them.

2. Social Assistance

This same ambivalence towards people living outside the norm is apparent in our social assistance system. Canada has established a basic safety net to help people who are struggling to survive in our society. We do not, however, want to offer too much support to people who do not fit into the patterns we have designated as "normal." As a result, we have created a very complex, fragmented welfare system, containing a myriad of intimidating rules and inconsistencies. As Ontario's Social Assistance Review Committee discovered, our

welfare system fails to meet its goal of helping the members of society to develop.⁷ The question is, what does it do?

A number of practical problems with the welfare system were outlined in chapter four. In this section, we will look more closely at those in an attempt to understand the assumptions which influence welfare policy. Social assistance benefits are so low they force the recipients to live in poverty. This is based on the same philosophy which has led to the lack of adequate child care. Canada's welfare state provides the basic minimum but under no circumstances will it encourage citizens to live outside the status quo. Women living in the poverty of welfare have few viable alternatives: they can take a low-paying, dead-end job which will not raise them out of poverty and which, as noted in chapter four, often does not eliminate dependence on social assistance; they can participate in training programs which, as we have seen, are rarely effective in improving the employment circumstances of single mothers; they can attend university, if they have the money and the prerequisite education and even then, as seen in chapter three, they will likely make less money than men in the same fields; or they can marry. The low benefits are a subtle encouragement to women to find someone else to help them, to live their lives the way "normal" people do. As we saw in chapter three, the married poor move out of poverty, the

single-parent poor do not.⁸ The pressures to marry which are placed on women through the social assistance system are not readily visible but they are real.

The welfare system rarely recognizes the realities of single mothers' lives. This is partially because, historically, the emphasis has been on assisting widows, not today's divorced or never-married single mothers. The system is not based on the actual needs of the divorced or unwed, it is built on the fading image of the traditional family and the "deserving" widow. As we saw in the last chapter, the policies regarding support payments from ex-husbands or fathers of the children are unclear and unrealistic. It is taking a long time for the system to deal with the fact that new family forms have emerged and that most of the fathers of these children are living, not dead. As well, state policies are built on such a strong separation between public and private that they cannot reconcile the public policy of social assistance with the supposedly "private" arrangements between men and women. Policy-makers apparently have difficulty making the link between the woman's dependence on social assistance and the problems she is having obtaining support from the father of her children. In other words, the welfare state is reluctant to recognize the realities of the single mother's life.

In the same vein, the social assistance system provides few of the supports today's single mothers need. Child care and programs to ease the transition from welfare to employment are just two examples of support services which are badly needed but barely recognized by the system. Although the social assistance system is supposed to be helping single mothers, the lack of basic supports such as these belie those claims. The ideology of the traditional family, upon which the system was originally based, appears to blind policy-makers to the realities of life for single-mother families. If such realities were taken seriously, the problems with support payments, child care and other aspects of life for single mothers would be addressed, just as the system originally attempted to address the realities of life for widows.

These problems are symptomatic of the ambivalence towards single mothers which underlies the whole system. The supports are not in place to assist single mothers to enter the work force, yet neither does the system provide enough financial security to allow women to stay at home and look after their children with any degree of comfort. This is very similar to the problems within the child care system. We do not have enough spaces to guarantee single mothers access to quality child care, neither do we provide them with the opportunities to look after their children themselves. While the lack of

support and encouragement for women on social assistance to join the labour force might indicate that society wants to support them in their parenting roles, the dearth of financial assistance for women at home would seem to indicate otherwise. This confusion is not, of course, unique to state policy. The whole debate within the feminist movement about wages for housework reflects the same dilemma. Is domestic work valuable enough to society to justify paying women to do it? But while some feminists seem to be afraid that providing wages for women to look after their children would reinforce the idea that child care is solely a woman's responsibility, it is my belief that welfare policies are based on the fear that providing single mothers with the financial security to stay at home would signal acceptance of this alternative family. This fear and confusion lead to the current contradictory situation where women are discouraged from both working and staying at home. The welfare state is not sure what to do with women without husbands: should they work and support their families, the traditional male role or should they stay at home with their children, the traditional female role? Again, subtle pressures are brought to bear. If you want to stay at home, the best way to do it is to find a man who can afford to support you. If you want to work, you will also need a second income to supplement your low wages. The support for women raising

children on their own is enough to make sure they do not starve to death, it is not enough to connote acceptance.

One of the greatest flaws in the social assistance system is that it provides no support for the working poor. It is assumed that those who are working do not need much financial assistance because the marketplace is functional and will provide for workers. It is also assumed that working women are secondary earners with husbands to support them. There is no recognition of the fact that many working women have families to support on their own and receive very low wages in the labour force. Again, the myths of the two-parent family and the functional marketplace serve to hide the realities of many women's lives.

The lack of fairness in the system is another example of the societal attitudes towards those outside the norm. There is no rationale for setting benefit rates. Instead, they seem to be based on a judgement of "deservedness." The fundamental rules of appeal and the right to information are often violated. A great deal of discretion is allowed to welfare workers, many of whom are poorly trained. Recipients of social assistance are treated as second-class citizens who do not deserve the respect accorded to those firmly entrenched in the status quo. This attitude contributes to the stigmatization of people on social assistance. Recipients, many of whom are

single mothers, are made to feel like failures. If you don't fit the norm, belong to a family, participate successfully in the labour market, you have failed. There is no credence given to the possibility that society may have failed these people by refusing to recognize and support alternative lifestyles.

The Ontario Government has recently "reformed" the social assistance system by removing many of the work disincentives, particularly those aimed at single mothers. Although an admirable first step, such measures do not constitute real change; they contain no recognition of the reasons why single mothers are experiencing difficulties in the first place. As we have seen, there are a number of structural barriers to the success of single mothers in the labour force. They must participate in a discriminatory work force while assuming responsibility for the care of their children. The Ontario reforms contain little awareness of such barriers. Merely removing the work disincentives perpetuates the mistaken assumptions that women only need a little encouragement to succeed in the labour force and that caring for children at home is not work. Ontario's reforms would have to be accompanied by a variety of complementary measures designed to grapple with structural inequality and provide women with genuine choices before they could have long-term effects on the lives of single mothers.

The particular problems single mothers face in our society are not alleviated by the social assistance system. The welfare state does little to provide adequate child care or improve women's job opportunities, but neither does it effectively support women at home through social assistance. Only the basics are provided through a degrading, stigmatizing, confusing system. In other words, the Canadian welfare state does not provide genuine support or acceptance for single mothers. The choice is clear -- find a man and set up a "normal" family or live a life of hardship and poverty.

3. Training Programs

Many single mothers pin their hopes on training programs to help them escape social assistance. The Ottawa Council for Low Income Support Services offered the following example to a Parliamentary Committee to illustrate the importance of training programs to single mothers:

A single mother, one child, who is presently on family benefits, is now going through a computer training program paid by CEIC. She is receiving \$100 less on this training allowance than if she was on FBA. She is sticking with it because she has hope. Will her efforts be worth it?

The odds are against her, as we saw in the last chapter. As with child care and social assistance policies, training programs reflect confusion and ambivalence and do little to address the real problems of women.

Canada's training policy has had little success in moving women out of poverty. Rather, programs appear to simply prepare women for low-level, poorly paid jobs, keeping them in the Catch-22 situation of having to choose between a dead-end job and welfare. Because Canadian training policy lacks a basic understanding of the fact that systemic discrimination in the labour force makes women's poverty different than that of men, it often recreates the inequalities of the labour force which it should be helping women overcome. As a result, we have today's situation -- women are trained for jobs which keep them trapped in poverty.

There is no acknowledgement that a patriarchal society with distinct and unequal sex roles and a male-dominated economic system are at the root of the problem. Most training programs are based on the assumption that women just need more skills to succeed in the labour force. As Pearce and McAdoo say, programs are developed to address barriers to employment often experienced by men, e.g. a lack of job search skills, experience in the labour force or job training. These programs fail to deal with the special problems women face, such as segregation, sex discrimination and sexual harassment.¹⁰

Canadian training policy could be interpreted as a subtle means of encouraging women to stay at home, out of the labour force and part of the traditional family. Even if programs are

not deliberately designed to promote such action, the result is the same. Once again, women are offered the choice between a poverty-level subsistence and life in a traditional man-woman-child unit. Training programs have not, as yet, succeeded in providing women with real options. They end up reinforcing the status quo.

The increasing privatization of training programs is part of a trend that includes the provision of government funding to commercial child care centres. Again, there is a reliance on the marketplace and a reluctance to intervene to assist women in any substantial manner. There is no recognition that market-based training is, by definition, incapable of addressing the discrimination currently inherent in the marketplace and the labour force. The myth that the marketplace is an efficient mechanism for sustaining and improving the labour force prevents the state from providing effective assistance to women.

As was the case with child care and social assistance, training policy does not reflect the realities of life for single mothers. The lack of support services, such as child care, and the rigid schedules often make the participation of single mothers difficult. Similarly, training policy contains little acknowledgement that single mothers often stay out of the labour force for a long time to care for their children or

that having children may have interrupted their basic schooling. There is limited support for bridging programs to help such women re-integrate or for programs to bring them up to basic high school levels. Training is often based on the male experience in which temporary earnings interruption is the norm, not a long-term absence from the labour market to look after dependent children.

As we saw in chapter three, the Government is beginning to address some of these problems, but there is still much work to be done. Until the programs are made more flexible and accommodating of the differing needs of single mothers, training policy will not truly assist these women. Rather, it will continue to reinforce the status quo and the options our society provides for women will remain as narrow as ever.

4. Cumulative Effect

In total, child care, social assistance and training programs do little to address the fundamental problems of single mothers. Policy-makers have recognized that there are single-mother families in Canadian society but, by treating such families as deviant, they have been able to isolate them from the mainstream and ignore their real needs. The three policies examined in this thesis do not complement each other and do not provide comprehensive support to single mothers. How can women really participate in training if adequate child

care is not available? How can they look after their own children properly on the low benefits provided by the social assistance system? How can they leave social assistance if training programs only prepare them for poverty-level jobs and child care is unavailable when they finally obtain employment?

It is not that the state does nothing for single mothers, but rather that it does not acknowledge the realities of their lives. Lip service is paid to helping these "dysfunctional" families become "functional" through such policy mechanisms as the Canada Assistance Plan and Social Assistance Recipient training agreements. But these fragmented, half-measure policies do not constitute a genuine effort to accept and support single-mother families. There is a grudging acceptance that such families exist but no attempt to see them as a legitimate family form.

The one thing these three policy fields have in common is that they reflect the ambivalence and confusion of the state. They are attempts to deal with the superficialities of the problem, without addressing the underlying issues. Public policy in this area hides behind the myth of the traditional family to define single-mother families as aberrations which must be treated but not necessarily accepted or supported.

The result of all this is the promotion of the status quo -- the traditional two-parent family and female dependence on

males. The state does so little to support single mothers that it destines most of them to lives of poverty and struggle. The message, although not vocalized by state institutions, is clear. If you are going to live outside the norm of the traditional family, you will suffer for it.

5. State Control of Women

The question that must be addressed now is why the Canadian state, through its social policies, has developed this ambivalent and unhelpful attitude towards single mothers. To answer this, we must refer back to the theoretical overview provided at the beginning of the thesis. As we saw in chapter two, the state and the family are products of history. One of the reasons the state is unyielding in relation to single mothers is that, historically, it has supported a certain kind of family. The traditional family is an institution in our society and, as Mary Douglas has made clear, institutions are thought to be "natural." Once we have institutionalized something, it becomes very difficult to deny it or acknowledge that it is not the only viable means of organizing society.¹¹

But there is more to this than the inertia of institutionalized tradition. Gerda Lerner says that patriarchy is based on the control of women's reproductive powers and sexuality. She says that the modern state was built on the image of the patriarchal family and the maintenance of its

rules became crucial for the maintenance of hierarchy in the state.¹² The traditional family is a good means of maintaining patriarchal power and reinforcing state control. Mary O'Brien has offered a persuasive explanation for why such control is necessary. She traces institutions such as the traditional family back to the male desire to control women's sexuality and reproduction because of the man's alienation from the reproductive process and his need to assert paternity and appropriate women's reproductive labour.¹³ Related to this, as McDonough and Harrison say, is the fact that traditional familial structures, through their control of woman's procreative capacity, are an efficient means of passing on private property and reproducing the next generation of labour power.¹⁴ Zillah Eisenstein adds to this that the current reproduction of gender rules through the family leads to the more subtle forms of patriarchal organization: the sexual division of labour in the work force, the division between public and private life and the divorce of political and family life.¹⁵

Single mothers constitute a threat to all of this. They are women without men, trying to raise children outside the boundaries of marriage. They have stepped outside the means society has chosen to organize sexuality and reproduction and they suffer for that transgression. Single mothers threaten

the state's ability to control the nature of sexual relations, reproduction and the socialization of children. They threaten the system men have developed to appropriate women's reproductive power and their children. What kind of children will women outside the status quo raise? Will their children in turn constitute a threat to the norm? These are questions we do not yet know the answer to and, if current state policies continue, those children may be too beaten by poverty to provide a real answer.

Women on their own with children are obvious refutations of the traditional divisions of labour and responsibility. If such families were successful, they would raise questions about the "naturalness" of the norm, about the social formations we have taken for granted. This threat inevitably leads to a certain amount of fear. If the traditional family and its neat sexual patterns are not maintained, what kind of society will we have? Will we be able to support our economic system? How will we maintain the standard of living which is so comfortable for those at the centre of the status quo? The right wing of this country has already roused some fear by asking those questions. Analysts on the right worry that chaos will ensue if too many people step outside the norm. Many social policies are predicated on preventing just that.

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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No 2)

In some respects, single mothers are also a threat to the capitalist system. As we saw in chapter two, the two-parent, heterosexual family is useful to capital in a number of ways. It sustains the male worker, it produces the next generation of workers, and the women form a cheap reserve army of labour. State policies exert a subtle pressure on women to rely on men, to form the traditional family and thus provide the usual supports to capital discussed in chapter two. Of course, in certain ways, single mothers are also helpful to capital. The cumulative effects of the child care, social assistance and training policies often force women to take the low-paying, dead-end jobs which are so crucial to the capitalist system. Clearly, as we have noted, the relationship between capital and the family is not always straightforward. However, based on what we have seen of current policies, at this point in history the emphasis seems to be on reinforcing female dependence on men and retaining the traditional family.

In a sense, our current policy of providing a subsistence-level existence to single mothers constitutes a "win-win" situation for the capitalist system. It provides capital with both the male workers and future labour force of the traditional two-parent families and the desperate female workers of the single-mother families. The state also uses market-based options as part of its attempts to "assist" single

mothers. Witness the government support of private-sector child care centres and training programs. The clear links between social policy and the economic system illustrate the interdependence between the state and capitalism.

Familial ideology and the attendant ubiquitous images of the ideal family contribute to the problems single mothers face in finding acceptance and support as a legitimate family form. The mass media is filled with images of the perfect two-parent, heterosexual family (think of the Cosby Show and its many clones). Our politicians and policy-makers often speak of the importance of the family, usually meaning the traditional heterosexual two-parent unit. This ideological process becomes circular and self-perpetuating. The prevalence of familial ideology makes it very difficult for single mothers and their children to live with any comfort in our society. The fact that single mothers are so clearly suffering serves as a disincentive for others to choose this kind of life and thus in itself propagates the familial ideology which devalues women's work and marginalizes single mothers.

Marginalization and isolation are further exacerbated by the artificial split between public and private. On the one hand, we have, as a society, defined child-bearing and the family as private matters and are reluctant to support state efforts to help single mothers. This is clear in the welfare

state's tendency to provide only the basic minimum in its passive social assistance, training and child care policies. On the other hand, as Eisenstein says, the public/private split hides state interference with the family and control over women's sexuality and reproduction.¹⁶ Child care, social assistance and training policies are all based on assumptions about families and women's lives. Those assumptions are influential in shaping our perceptions. Elizabeth Wilson maintains that state policies try to prescribe what woman's consciousness should be. In reinforcing the status quo, they are an attempt at control over sexuality and reproduction. They "define women narrowly as wives and mothers ... and express disapproval of and punish women who have transgressed these norms."¹⁷ This is certainly the case with Canadian policies which relegate single mothers to lives of poverty on the margins of society. The real meanings behind those policies are often difficult to discern, however, because those actions are indirect. The state signals its disapproval of alternative family forms by refusing to acknowledge their real needs. This is what Michele Barrett calls "the coercion of privacy." The welfare state exerts covert control by supporting the myth of the private sphere and isolating women there.¹⁸

One should not assume from this analysis that the Canadian welfare state is involved in a conscious conspiracy to prop up the traditional family at all costs. As Jan Barnsley has pointed out, we should not see the state and its institutions as actively devious and manipulative. Rather, they are blind to the realities of women's lives.¹⁹ Through its social policies, the state acknowledges some of the problems single mothers encounter, but it appears not to see the underlying reasons for those problems. This leads to the ambivalence and confusion apparent in the policies analysed in this thesis. And, as Catharine MacKinnon has so clearly pointed out, because our current structures do not recognize the inequalities women face, they perpetuate them. State policies assume that society is basically just, that there are no structural inequalities, and they therefore support the status quo. There is no recognition that past policies were based on male experiences and the ideology of the traditional family, so nothing is done to challenge those experiences or that ideology.²⁰

The result of this is that the contemporary Canadian state ignores, minimizes and distorts the problems of single mothers through a series of contradictory, fragmented and inadequate social policy measures. Instead of helping single mothers, state policy serves to reinforce the ideology of the traditional family. Hypothesis two is accurate.

HYPOTHESIS THREE

State assumptions that single-mother families are deviant stem from the reluctance to recognize both the realities of today's families and the links between public and private. Single-mother families need help from the public sector. They cross over the public/private split so there must be something wrong with them. If state policies were to acknowledge that, in fact, these families are basically functional but are experiencing problems coping with the society we have created, the Government would have to recognize its role in building those barriers. It might also be forced to acknowledge that other functional families could be having problems coping. After all, if we were to admit that single-mother families are basically sound but running up against structural barriers, might that not mean that other sound families could also be experiencing problems? We would then have to take a more realistic look at all families and recognize our collective responsibility for the problems they face. Providing real help for single mothers would force the Government to acknowledge that their problems are caused by barriers in the public sector, that the lines between public and private are more blurred than one might think and that most families, despite myth and ideology, need some kind of help. State policies

could no longer be based on the assumption that individual men and women can take total responsibility for the family.

That recognition of collective responsibility does not now underlie Canadian policy. As a recent document published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development pointed out, for example, Canada's child care policy is based on the assumption of "maximum private responsibility." According to the author of that document, our policy has three objectives: the establishment of a "safety-net" capable of ensuring child care services to those families and children deemed to be in greatest socioeconomic need; the encouragement of recourse to private market-based or voluntary services; and, the assurance of minimal standards of care.²¹ The welfare state will provide the minimum but nothing further. Under no circumstances will we acknowledge that the problems many families face are a direct result of the kind of society we have constructed. We will not take collective responsibility for each other.

That philosophy will never lead to real assistance for single mothers because it does not recognize the structural basis of their problems. If we are to truly assist single mothers, we must move away from the concept of "maximum private responsibility." We must begin to recognize different family forms and our collective responsibility for our families. A

feminist analysis, which deconstructs both the institution of the family and current state policies, would move us in this direction.

If Canadian policy-makers adopted a more fluid definition of the family, they would not automatically assume that single-mother families are deviant. Margrit Eichler says that we must stop thinking that there are universal functions which all families possess and think instead of "dimensions of familial interactions." According to Eichler's theory, there is no such thing as "the family." Each family differs according to which dimensions of familial interaction it fulfills. We cannot assume that each family has a mother, father and biological children. It may or it may not. We cannot assume that the father provides financial support and the mother emotional sustenance. This may happen or it may not.²²

This theory changes the definition of the problem family. As Eichler says, currently all single-parent families are perceived as problem families.²³ Therein lies the crux of the matter. It is assumed by current policy that the problems of single mothers are caused by the structure of the family itself, i.e. the absence of the man. In fact, that is not the problem. Extrinsic factors such as the poverty caused by a discriminatory work force and poor training are at the root of many of the difficulties faced by single mothers. We are

blinded, however, by what Eichler calls the monolithic bias. We feel that only one family form is really functional -- the heterosexual, two-parent family. Therefore, we make the mistaken assumption that single-mother families cannot succeed. If we assumed that many different forms had the potential to succeed, we would look more closely at the real causes of family problems. We would realize that the difficulties of single mothers could be corrected through a variety of systemic and policy reforms. It is not single mothers themselves which are the problem. It is the societal structures which bind them.

This leads logically to the question of what can be done to truly assist single mothers. That is a difficult question to answer without appearing naive or simplistic. A revolution in societal structures is probably the easiest answer. I do not believe, however, that a Canadian revolution waits around the corner. Instead, I would respond that what we need is reform at two levels.

We need a widespread change in Canadian attitudes towards the family and women. In particular, politicians and policy-makers need to be pressured into an awareness of the feminist deconstruction of the family. They must realize that "all societies contain a multiplicity of family forms whose structural arrangements respond to complex conditions."²⁴ They

have to realize that there is no such thing as one ideal family but that families take all kinds of forms, depending on the people in them, the society in which they exist and the historical time frame. They have to come to understand the kinds of families which exist in contemporary Canada and the fact that different family members experience those families in different ways. They must come to see that our society contains structural barriers which work against certain families, particularly those headed by women.

If politicians and policy-makers developed a more realistic idea of the types of families which exist and of the capabilities and limitations of those families, Canada could begin to move towards a more sensible, adequate social policy. This new approach would have to be centered on the notion of collective responsibility as the feminist framework recognizes that all families are products of the society we have created and that therefore we have a responsibility in helping them to interact and cope with that society.

Bringing about such a change is a difficult, some might say impossible, task. It is, however, one we cannot ignore if we truly want to improve the situations of single mothers. The first and most important step is the development of a new feminist policy analysis. We must, as Nancy Fraser says, engage in meaning-oriented inquiries.²⁵ We must expose and

challenge the assumptions underlying state policies. Too much analysis simply details programs and problems without stopping to ask what those policies actually mean. Until we come to understand and articulate that meaning, we will only be able to achieve the piecemeal reform that has so far characterized policy change.

Feminists must expose the assumptions underlying state policy and make the meanings clear and well-known. They must work outside and inside the state to change the nature of policy analysis and then change policy itself. Only in that way will we be able to pressure the state into making the necessary alterations to our current system.

In the past decade, many task forces, commissions, academic institutions and advocacy organizations have recommended sound and far-reaching alterations to our social policy system. They have not been able to achieve any real change because they did not begin with an attempt to understand and challenge the institution of the family. The Cooke Task Force on Child Care is a good example of this phenomenon. It failed because the groundwork was never laid for the implementation of its recommendations. The Cooke Report clashed with societal assumptions about the family and therefore it could not be implemented. The state will not institute meaningful reform while it is still operating under

the ideology of the traditional family. We must prepare the groundwork for change by fighting that ideology.

When traditional familial ideology has been weakened, then we can go back to the many substantial recommendations outlined in the reports discussed in this thesis and work to put them in place. There are a number of concrete reforms which, if instituted, could assist single mothers. Most of these are quite obvious. We need a comprehensive child care system which is affordable, accessible and of high quality. It must be flexible enough to meet the varying needs of different families and their children. Tied to this, we need a much better system of parental leave which supports parents who remain at home with their children. We also need a radically different social assistance system which allows recipients to live in dignity and helps them in the transition to meaningful employment. Equally important, we need a children's benefit, similar to that recommended by the Social Assistance Reform Committee, which will do for children and their families what elderly benefits did for the aged -- move them out of poverty. Finally, we need a training policy which is based on the recognition of women's different training needs and which acknowledges and combats the real barriers facing women in the work place.

This all sounds like an unrealistic wish list. Maybe it is. Maybe none of this will take place. My point is that these changes will **definitely** not occur until we begin a serious effort to understand and challenge the assumptions underlying our current social policy. That is our first battle.

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24. Rayna Rapp, "Family and Class in Contemporary America: Notes Towards an Understanding of Ideology" in Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions Barrie Thorne and Marilyn Yalom, eds. (New York: Longman Inc., 1982) p. 169.
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CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: STRENGTHENING THE ATTACK ON THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

Using feminist theories of the family and the state, a statistical overview of the situation of Canadian single mothers, and an extensive examination of child care, social assistance and training policies, this thesis has argued that the three hypotheses presented in chapter one are correct. It has demonstrated that the numbers of single mothers in this country are steadily increasing and that many of them are experiencing severe financial problems, leading to numerous other difficulties. It has argued that current child care, social assistance and training policies fail to address the real problems of single mothers and that a feminist approach to policy-making would assist the state in meeting the needs of this group.

I hope, however, that the thesis has done more than that. It has been my goal to dig under the policies themselves in order to reveal the assumptions hidden beneath them and uncover their real meanings for single mothers. Based on my analyses of the three policies fields and my understanding of feminist theory, I have concluded that these policies reflect state ambivalence and confusion about single mothers. The policies acknowledge that single-mother families exist and that many of

them are experiencing financial, child care and other difficulties, but they seem unable to address the real problems these women face. It is my contention that this is because policy is based on the assumption that the traditional, two-parent, heterosexual family is the model family and that all others are deviant.

The assumption that there is only one functional type of family means that current policies reinforce female dependence on males. These policies are not based on an acceptance of single mothers but on the belief that these women have failed. Canadian social policies ensure that single mothers and their children do not starve but they do not provide any level of comfort. As a result, many single mothers end up in the poverty trap. Social assistance provides them with a subsistence existence. They face structural barriers in the work force which training policies do not acknowledge. They also have full responsibility for their children and must grapple with a fragmented, inadequate child care system. What are their alternatives? Training will likely provide them with a poverty-level job and increased child care costs. Social assistance is certain poverty. Post-secondary education might help, if they could afford it and had the prerequisite education, but they would likely still end up earning less money than a man with the same qualifications. One of the most

viable means of escaping the poverty trap in today's society continues to be marriage or remarriage.

As was acknowledged in the previous chapter, this is not a conspiracy on the part of the welfare state. Rather, the state is blinded by its own assumptions. Catharine MacKinnon says, "to make sex equality meaningful in law requires identifying the real issues, and establishing that sex inequality, once established, matters."¹ We have not yet reached that point. The welfare state, through its policies, has not recognized that women face structural inequalities; there is no realization that many of the institutions which make up the status quo, such as the traditional family, perpetuate inequality because they tie women into traditional roles, support the perception that they are secondary earners and contribute to discrimination in the labour force. The welfare state is operating on the assumption that our present society is basically just. Until social policies are founded on the recognition of fundamental inequality in our society, they will not meet the needs of single mothers. The state does not have to conspire to oppress women; by supporting the status quo, it automatically does so.

The welfare state is not the only segment of society to exhibit ambivalence about the growing numbers of single mothers. There is a certain amount of confusion within society

as a whole about women raising children on their own. Perhaps the trend produces ambivalence because people are worried about the detrimental effects on children of being raised by one parent. But the point is that these women are here to stay. Having ambivalent or confused feelings, wondering if the children would be better off with a father, does nothing to improve the situations of single mothers. The fact that these families are different from what we are used to, and may have different strengths and weaknesses than the families we are used to, does not mean that they are deviant. It simply means that we have to change our policies and structures to accommodate new realities.

Our present inability to recognize that all kinds of families are legitimate, also prevents us from seeing the links between families and the social structures we have created. Only after we acknowledge the structural barriers which cause the problems of single mothers, will we be able to take the collective actions that are necessary to establish policies to help these women. Once we realize that the lines between public and private are very blurred and that what we do in the public sector has a profound effect on the private, our collective responsibility for all families will become clear. We have created the barriers which oppress single mothers. The problem lies not with the individual woman but with our

society. Therefore, we must, as a society, take action to dismantle the barriers.

Our first step in this direction is to strengthen the attack on the institution of the family. Meaning-oriented analyses such as this are one means of accomplishing that goal. In the past, policy analysis has examined gaps and problems in policy but has not paid sufficient attention to the underlying assumptions and ideas. That is where my work has, I think, differed from previous research in this area. It has provided extensive, although not exhaustive, examinations of three policy fields in an attempt to determine their real meanings and effects. Much more needs to be done in this area. For example, in this thesis I have analysed the policies themselves, using government documents, legislation, and the critiques of policy analysts. It might be useful, as a complement to this work, to examine the explanations of these policies and the process of creating them given by politicians and policy-makers, in speeches, committee minutes and so on, to test my contention that policy is based on the ideology of the traditional family. As well, other parts of the state apparatus should be examined with the goal of uncovering the assumptions and meanings embedded in actions. Groups other than single mothers should be the focus of study. What effects do state policies have on other women? How does the ideology

which influences state policies affect groups such as single women, the elderly and so on? We must create a large body of meaning-oriented analysis which makes clear the assumptions and ideas tangled up in policies. Only when we truly understand policy, can we improve it. Once we have uncovered the assumptions we are dealing with, we can begin the long process of changing policies so that they do more than reinforce the status quo.

Some feminists would argue that the direction I am advocating contains the danger of being co-opted by the state. That is true. But as Frances Fox Piven says, "undiscriminating antipathy to the state" is not helpful.² As we have seen, state policies have great power over women's lives. To ignore or attempt to work outside those policies would be naive and ineffectual. We need to engage in a debate with the state, we need to make state assumptions and meanings clear and we need to discredit those assumptions. Nancy Fraser says we must struggle to secure the political status of women's needs, to challenge the traditional interpretations underlying most policies, to empower women to interpret their own needs and to elaborate and support policies based on feminist interpretations of women's needs.³ We may risk co-option but if we do not enter into this struggle we risk continued oppression by unacknowledged and unexamined state assumptions.

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