

"Child care delivered through the mailbox": Social reproduction, choice and neoliberalism in a theo-conservative Canada ^[1]

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Author: Bezanson, Kate

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Excerpts from chapter:

There was a brief window, early in the first decade of the 2000s, when the era of neoliberal spending cuts and rescaling of the Canadian welfare state slowed and even reversed course. The federal Liberal government, in power for thirteen years, rode a wave of economic growth and budget surpluses. By the middle of the decade policy thinking about demographic change, poverty, and gender seemed to indicate that important elements of the Canadian welfare state were poised for a new progressive gender-aware expansion. The hodge-podge system of tax credits for children was reorganized and was delivering money directly to households, based on income, in recognition of the high costs of caring for and raising children. Maternity and parental leaves were extended to almost a year, and although eligibility for and remuneration under the Employment Insurance system remained relatively low, the change was an important recognition of the work of social reproduction. Most significantly, the federal Liberals negotiated the legal framework with the provinces and territories for what was to become a national childcare system, emphasizing non-profit, high-quality, centre-based, affordable childcare. Even the contentious topic in the leaders' debate that followed the dissolution of Parliament and the election of 2006 headlined key equality and income security issues: childcare, abortion (not usually on the Canadian menu), poverty, charter rights, and same-sex marriage, to name but a few. On the way to the ballot box, Canadians waffled. In January 2006, a minority Conservative government was elected, under Stephen Harper. In virtually all respects, but especially with regard to social spending, the environment, and family policy, the policies and ideological positions of this leader and this party departed dramatically from the route Canada was on. Exit the post-neoliberal Liberals, enter the libertarian-leaning neoliberal theo-Cons.

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