

# Will the Prime Minister displace the finance minister? Paul Martin's social policy for a 'new era' <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

Full magazine available for order (see SOURCE). Individual articles available online for download.

- Article by Jane Jenson in pdf <sup>[3]</sup>

Excerpted from article:

Many of the social policy challenges that the new prime minister will have to overcome are of his own making: the emphasis on labour market participation and on children, a preference to use the tax system as the delivery mechanism, which limits the federal government's role to providing income transfers and has largely constrained its influence over policy, and a poisoned intergovernmental atmosphere. Martin has promised to improve intergovernmental relations, but that won't be enough, argues Jane Jenson, one of Canada's leading social policy experts. In order to ensure that all Canadians can fully participate in the mainstream, the Martin government will have to take on a new role that will rely on neither conditionality nor unilateralism, but will instead provide leadership.

It will also have to expand intergovernmental relations to include municipalities, and adopt a true social vision that "does more than alleviate poverty."

Research into children and child outcomes finds over and over that, while adequate income is fundamental to child wellbeing, services are absolutely essential as well. Families, even middle-income families cannot purchase all services if they are forced to pay full market prices. The government of Canada is fully aware of this need, and has tried for several years to promote early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. It has tried via the NCB, again via the injection of extra funds such as the Early Childhood Development Initiatives in 2000, and most recently via the 2003 budget promise to provide \$900 million for child care over the next five years.

Each attempt by the federal government, however, to ensure Canada improves its international ranking on this key social program runs up against the refusal of some provinces to follow federal priorities. Quebec is by no means the most recalcitrant on this issue. The Harris government in Ontario systematically refused to spend its NCB "reinvestments" and ECDI funds on new services for early childhood education and care. It was like pulling teeth even to get an agreement on accounting for the 2003 funds explicitly targeted to child care to ensure that they would be deployed only for new spending on child care (rather than used to release provincial funds for other purposes).

Many other countries have come to the conclusion that a society that wishes to ensure its own well-being must follow a strategy that does more than alleviate poverty. It must be able to provide high quality ECEC, healthy cities, good schools, safe and affordable housing, good working conditions, and leisure and recreation opportunities to all its citizens.

**Region:** Canada <sup>[4]</sup>

**Tags:** economics <sup>[5]</sup>

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