

**The Insertion Model or the Workfare Model?
The Transformation of Social Assistance
within Quebec and Canada**

by

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The research and publication of this study were funded by Status of Women Canada's Policy Research Fund. This document expresses the views of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official policy of Status of Women Canada or the Government of Canada.

September 2002

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Status of Women Canada thanks those who contribute to this peer-review process.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Morel, Sylvie, 1955-

The insertion model or the workfare model? : the transformation of social assistance within Quebec and Canada [electronic resource]

Issued also in French under title : Modèle du workfare ou modèle de l'insertion? La transformation de l'assistance sociale au Canada et au Québec.

Also includes bibliographic references.

Issued also in print format.

Mode of access: WWW site of Status of Women Canada.

ISBN 0-662-32346-7

Cat. no. SW21-95/2002E-IN

1. Public welfare – Quebec (Province)
 2. Public welfare – Canada.
 3. Welfare recipients – Employment – Quebec (Province)
 4. Welfare recipients – Employment – Canada.
- I. Canada. Status of Women Canada.
II. Title.

HV105.M57 2002

362.5'82'09714

C2002-980162-1

Project Manager: Vesna Radulovic, Status of Women Canada

Publishing Co-ordinator: Cathy Hallsesey, Status of Women Canada

Editing and Layout: PMF Editorial Services Inc. / PMF Services de rédaction inc.

Translation: Lexi-tech

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ABSTRACT

This study is a comparative analysis of the evolution of social assistance policy in Canada, primarily in Quebec. By means of institutionalist analysis inspired by the theory of J. R. Commons, it assesses whether the new reciprocity established for the category of “employable” recipients and, specifically, between poor women and the State, is closer to the American workfare model or the French insertion model. The study also includes observations, more limited in scope, about the provinces of Ontario and New Brunswick. It reveals, overall, that Canada has not one, but several social assistance configurations of *rights and duties*, depending on the jurisdiction studied or the gender and age of the recipients. This being said, we conclude, based on the cases of Quebec and Ontario, that Canada is currently evolving towards workfare, but encompasses several variants.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------|---|
| ACSW | Advisory Council on the Status of Women (N.B.) |
| AFDC | Aid to Families with Dependent Children (U.S.) |
| AGIR | Activité de groupe pour l'intégration par la recherche d'emploi (Que.) |
| ANPE | Agence Nationale pour l'Emploi (France) |
| BNAA | British North America Act |
| CAP | Canada Assistance Plan |
| CCSD | Canadian Council on Social Development |
| CEQ | Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec |
| CHST | Canada Health and Social Transfer |
| CJE | Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploi (Que.) |
| CNFPV | Coalition nationale des femmes contre la pauvreté et la violence (Canada) |
| CPMT | Commission des partenaires du marché du travail (Que.) |
| CSF | Conseil du statut de la femme (Que.) |
| CSN | Confédération des syndicats nationaux (Canada) |
| DIA | Department of Income Assistance (N.B.) |
| FFQ | Fédération des femmes du Québec |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| HRDC | Human Resources Development Canada |
| HRD-NB | Human Resources Development New Brunswick |
| IAP | Interim Assistance Program (N.B.) |
| ICA | Integrated Child Allowance (Que.) |
| LEAP | Learning, Earning and Parenting (Ontario) |
| LEC | Local Employment Centre (Que.) |
| LTENP | Long-Term Established Needs Program (N.B.) |
| MES | Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité (Que.) |
| MFE | Ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance (Que.) |
| MMSR | Ministère de la Main-d'oeuvre et de la Sécurité du revenu (Que.) |
| MMSRFP | Ministère de la Main-d'oeuvre, de la Sécurité du revenu et de la Formation professionnelle (Que.) |
| MSR | Ministère de la Sécurité du revenu (Que.) |
| MSS | Ministère de la Solidarité sociale (Que.) |
| NBJC | New Brunswick Job Corps |
| NCW | National Council of Welfare (Canada) |
| NCWC | National Council of Women of Canada |
| ODSPA | <i>Ontario Disability Support Program Act</i> |
| OMA | Ontario Mothers' Allowance |
| OSARA | <i>Ontario Social Assistance Reform Act</i> |
| OWA | <i>Ontario Works Act</i> |
| PAIE | Programme d'aide à l'intégration en emploi (Que.) |
| PWA | Parental Wage Assistance (Que.) |
| RMI | Revenu minimum d'insertion (France) |
| SQDM | Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre (Que.) |
| SSP | Self-Sufficiency Project (N.B.) |

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|------|--|
| TANF | Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (U.S.) |
| UTPP | Upgrading, Training and Placement Program (N.B.) |
| WEIP | Work and Employment Incentives Program (Que.) |
| WIS | Work Income Supplement (Que.) |

PREFACE

Good public policy depends on good policy research. In recognition of this, Status of Women Canada instituted the Policy Research Fund in 1996. It supports independent policy research on issues linked to the public policy agenda and in need of gender-based analysis. Our objective is to enhance public debate on gender equality issues, and to enable individuals, organizations, policy makers and policy analysts to participate more effectively in the development of policy.

The focus of the research may be on long-term, emerging policy issues or short-term, urgent policy issues that require an analysis of their gender implications. Funding is awarded through an open, competitive call for proposals. A non-governmental, external committee plays a key role in identifying policy research priorities, selecting research proposals for funding and evaluating the final reports.

This policy research paper was proposed and developed under a call for proposals in August 1997 on *reducing women's poverty: policy options, directions and frameworks*. Status of Women Canada funded nine research projects on this issue. These projects range from very broad analyses to more focussed studies.

Some of the broad areas of policy research undertaken through this call for proposals examine the dynamics of poverty, links between social policy and gender inequality, and frameworks and policy options for reducing women's poverty. Some of the more specific research questions look at links between housing and employment, hidden costs of elder care, effects of home care, pay equity in Quebec, the relationship between women and the state in Quebec, and retirement incomes. A complete list of the research projects funded under this call for proposals is included at the end of this report.

We thank all the researchers for their contribution to the public policy debate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A number of people collaborated on this study. We would like to thank them. They are, first and foremost, Corinne Blanchette, who was the research assistant for the full duration of the project. She performed various tasks at each of the three stages of the study (preliminary report, interim report and final report), such as bibliographic and documentary research, the drafting of preliminary documents, the gathering of statistical data and the preparation of tables and graphs. Next, Francine Jacques acted as research professional for this project until December 1999. She was responsible for managing the project and revised part of the preliminary report. In addition, five other people, who were not directly involved in the project, contributed to this study: Jacques Langelier, Moscha Yannissi, Alain Tanguay, Marie-Josée Noël and Annabelle Viau-Guay. Jacques Langelier drafted a number of documents, tracing for us the history of social assistance in New Brunswick. The others helped to compile the bibliographies for the cases of France (Moscha Yannissi) and the United States (A. Tanguay and M.-J. Noël), and drafted a supplementary document on Quebec's local employment centres (LECs) (A. Viau-Guay).

We would then like to thank all those who very kindly agreed to grant us interviews. They are: Diane Bellemare, Francis Côté, Jean-Yves Desgagnés, Suzanne Leduc, Johanne Loyer, Manon Massé and Francine Séguin. We also benefitted from our discussions with Francine Lepage. All of these encounters unquestionably enhanced our work. Finally, we wish to thank the anonymous readers who, at the request of Status of Women Canada, provided their comments on an initial version of the final report.

The author guided the research and wrote the final version of the three reports, including this one, and assumes full responsibility therefor.

SUMMARY

The overall objective of this study was to do a comparative analysis of the principles and modalities that are shaping the transformation of social assistance policy in Canada, primarily in Quebec. We also took a brief look at the experiences of Ontario and New Brunswick. In previous works, we identified two broad, differentiated models of government intervention in the conception and implementation of the new “contract of social assistance reciprocity” between the poor and the State: workfare, as developed in the United States, and insertion, the chosen model in France. These two approaches represent two fundamentally different treatments of the problem of poverty. The main focus of the study was therefore to describe, in relation to these two models, the social assistance configuration of *rights and duties* currently being institutionalized between women and the State within Canada and Quebec.

We conducted our study using an analytical grid derived from economics, the institutionalist theory of J. R. Commons. This theory is well suited to analysing social policy and identifying the specific dynamics of interaction between social assistance, employment and the family, thereby shedding light on the gender aspect of the mechanisms that regulate the exchange of labour in society. The main research technique used to conduct the case studies was documentary analysis, carried out at several levels and supplemented, in the case of Quebec, with interviews. Once we had established our profiles of Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario, we analysed the social assistance reciprocity model in Quebec, comparing it to the reference models, workfare and insertion, by systematically looking at the various aspects of the “relationship of assistance” we had previously identified.

On the whole, we found that Canada has not one, but several social assistance configurations of *rights and duties*, depending on the jurisdiction studied or the gender and age of the recipients. The reciprocity approach developed in Quebec therefore differs from the one that exists, for example, in Ontario, just as the obligations imposed with regard to assistance differ between men and women, or even between the various “categories” of women. This being said, we conclude, based on the cases of Quebec and Ontario, that Canada is currently evolving towards workfare, but encompasses several variants.

A francophone North American society steeped in French culture, Quebec has also retained its distinctiveness with regard to social assistance. Borrowing from both the French approach and the American approach, the hybrid configuration of the Quebec social assistance reciprocity model is certainly quite unique, but definitely inclines towards workfare. A comparison of Quebec and Ontario, however, reveals a clear distinction between the two provinces. The relationship between the State and the “able-bodied” poor who receive assistance in Ontario not only tends towards the workfare model, but is a “hard-core” version of it. Quebec, by comparison, tends towards a “soft-core” version.

The study led to two types of recommendations: those concerning policies designed to improve the status of poor women, and those that suggest areas for further study. In the first case, we recommend, notably:

- reorienting the conception of social and employment integration policies for women receiving social assistance benefits by restoring the central role of the family, in order to better recognize the differentiated constraints of women and reduce the inconsistencies in the system of incentives and obligations stemming from other public policies;
- re-evaluating the principle of “tied aid” in social assistance policy, in order to reorient interventions in a way that is less stigmatizing for women and more concerned with providing ongoing support for individuals than with controlling their behaviour;
- devising mechanisms for the reinforcement of the accountability of the State in order to better ensure the fulfilment of the “obligation of means” with regard to the provision of social and employment integration measures, and introducing support measures for women on social assistance;
- devising government interventions aimed at giving poor women more power to influence the decisions that affect them.

In the second case, our recommendations include: working to elaborate a feminist problematic of exclusion in which poverty would be analysed within the broad perspective of social inequalities, those of the distribution of work in society and the undervaluing of activities performed by women (the work of caring, whether within the family or in employment), in the context of the new “social risks” arising from the changing institutions of the family and employment.

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of social assistance policies, that is, policies designed to alleviate poverty. In the wake of “active” policies, social assistance has been undergoing a fundamental transformation since the 1980s. Rather than being linked, as it once was, to the sole criterion of insufficient income, social assistance is now bound to a set of behavioural conditions that transform the “relation of assistance” into a relationship of “reciprocal obligations.” The coupling of social assistance with an employment integration process (employability measures, individualized action plans, etc.) is its most common form. The overall aim of this study is therefore to make a comparative evaluation of the principles and modalities that are shaping this transformation of social assistance policies in Canada, and particularly in Quebec.

This study is a continuation of previous works (Morel, 2000a) in which we identified two broad, differentiated models of government intervention in the conception and implementation of this new “contract of social assistance reciprocity” between the poor and the State: workfare, as developed in the United States, and insertion, the chosen model in France. Workfare was aimed primarily at recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), now Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),¹ which targeted poor, single-parent families, whereas insertion refers to the initiatives adopted in the context of the *Revenu minimum d’insertion* (RMI), a non-categorical program of minimum income support introduced in France in 1988. These two approaches, which are explained in detail in the next chapter, represent two treatments of the problem of poverty that differ fundamentally in several respects: relief customs, conceptions of poverty, citizenship and solidarity, practices in the field. In short, workfare and insertion correspond to the institution of two *differentiated formulas of rights and duties* in the context of social assistance. Also, the main focus of this study is to describe the social assistance configuration of *rights and duties* currently being institutionalized between women and the State within Canada and Quebec.

It first had to be determined whether the evolution of Canadian social assistance policy is consistent, as it is in the United States and France, with what can be termed a “contractual approach,” that is, a reciprocal obligations, relation of assistance based on the coupling of guaranteed resources/employment integration. This proved to be the case. In fact, the problematic of reciprocity in the context of social assistance is extremely topical in Canada. Since the 1980s, the Canadian provinces have been modifying their social assistance schemes to incorporate rules tending in this direction. In Quebec, the adoption of new rules of “reciprocal obligations” as a condition of entitlement to transfers has been highly controversial for several years. As a logic of reciprocity thus appears to be transforming social assistance within Canada and Quebec, the significance of the changes identified ought to be analysed in terms of their own “societal coherence.” In this study, we therefore concern ourselves with the following questions: Do the bipolar models developed in the United States and France, in the form of the workfare and insertion approaches, explain the approach favoured in Canada and in Quebec? Is Quebec’s approach more of a hybrid model that borrows from both those of insertion and workfare? Finally, can common traits be observed

in all national configurations? The study looks mainly at Quebec, but also includes observations, more limited in scope, about other Canadian provinces, in particular Ontario and New Brunswick.

The analysis of social assistance is cross-sectional, in other words, it is analysed in light of its links with the institutions of the family and employment, which profoundly affect the living standards of women. We thus attempt to identify the contradictions characteristic of government interventions vis-à-vis social assistance recipients. We find that the inconsistency of government social assistance interventions between policies, or even between different levels of government, detracts greatly from the effectiveness of anti-poverty policies in the United States and in France. It is therefore essential also to identify in Canada the deficiencies and constraints that thwart government action intended to promote the economic security of women.

Women's equality is conditional on combatting their poverty, but especially on a better distribution of wealth, on the recognition of women's work contribution in the domestic sphere, and on the equitable distribution of employment together with non-discriminatory wage conditions and social benefits. The implementation of "new reciprocal obligations" in the social assistance institution raises all these issues at once. Changes in the rules governing the allocation of social assistance transfers have a direct impact on the poverty of women, particularly that of sole-support mothers, who are clearly overrepresented among social assistance households. And the issue of social assistance reciprocity directly presents the problem of domestic work done by mothers in exchange for transfers from the State. In other words, it facilitates the elaboration of a feminist problematic of exclusion. Finally, our reflection turns to employment integration measures for social assistance recipients and comes to rest at the junction of the spheres of assistance and employment. It therefore implies a questioning of the modalities of paid work reserved specifically for women.

This study is intended to contribute to a better conception of social assistance policies by adding to the understanding of such policies. The comparative analysis of social assistance systems is a relatively new field of study. Moreover, few works situate Canadian social assistance policies in relation to those of other countries. And while reference is occasionally made to workfare and insertion in the context of the evolution of social assistance in Canada, there is no study that systematically compares the approaches of Canada and Quebec with regard to reciprocal obligations to those adopted in the United States and France. In this context, we consider a comparative analysis of the Quebec case, to shed light on the points of convergence and divergence of the measures adopted here and those adopted abroad, to be of undeniable importance.

The gender analysis of the welfare state is also a new field of study. Generally speaking, feminists are interested in how the inequalities between men and women are reflected in the structuring of social policies and, conversely, in how these policies in turn shape the social relations of gender. Now, it is essential that a gender analysis of the welfare state examine the systems of the provinces. As a rule, the analysis of welfare states provides a comparison of national public policies. This is owing to the fairly widespread tendency of such studies to look at social insurance schemes or universal transfers. While this tendency is owing to the

fact that social insurance is the most highly evolved form of cash transfers in a wage economy, it hinders an understanding of the nature of the reciprocity relationship between poor women and the State. Indeed, policies of relief for the poor usually are, and historically have been, developed at a subnational level (federated states, provinces, counties, municipalities) (Struthers, 1994, p. 4).²

In addition to its component of national case studies, this study has a major theoretical dimension, for it is consistent with current efforts to renew economic theory within a feminist perspective so as to counter the economistic vision that currently dominates this discipline. Our comparative study uses an analytical grid derived from economics, the institutionalist theory of J. R. Commons, whose relevance is being rediscovered today and which is well suited to analysing social policy (emphasis on the notion of *rules*,³ on the *social relations of rights and duties*, the cross-disciplinary approach, the importance of ethics and the question of the need for security in economic analysis).⁴ In our comparison of the United States and France, this theory reveals the specific dynamics of interaction between social assistance, employment and the family, thereby shedding light on the gender aspect of the mechanisms that regulate the exchange of labour in society. Institutional theory was therefore used because of what it contributes to the feminist analysis of social policy.⁵

The main research technique used was documentary analysis, supplemented with interviews. Our study combines various levels of analysis (history of the institution of social assistance, discourse and legislation concerning recent changes, results of evaluation studies of the implementation of employment integration programs) which themselves necessitated the resort to a wide range of documentary sources. Finally, in Quebec, we conducted semi-structured personal interviews with a number of individuals involved in the conception and implementation of social assistance policy or belonging to women's groups and advocacy groups affected by these policies.

We provide here some details to further explain our analytical approach. First of all, in this study, the term "workfare" refers not to the obligation to work in exchange for social assistance, but to a social assistance model of reciprocity whose characteristics are described in Chapter 1. Secondly, we attach particular importance to the treatment of the poverty of single-parent families. Inevitably, sole parenting is a primary focus of study in a gender analysis of poverty and social policy. First of all, because historically, sole parenting is a unique testament to women's status in society (Gordon, 1994, p. 12). In fact, the status of single mothers is evidence of "a society's and a government's commitment both to women's economic independence and to children's welfare" (Little, 1998, p. xii). The plight of poor single mothers is also very revealing of the profound ambivalence that characterizes the social management of poverty. Assistance for single-parent families refers to a dual system of representations. Two faces of "the poor" coexist in such programs: that of the child, and that of the mother. The first has the distinctive feature of referring "naturally" to involuntary poverty and, therefore, to the image of the "deserving poor." It is surrounding the second that the problems and ambiguities arise, for here is where the notion of responsibility, or voluntary poverty, comes in. The social treatment of poor mothers therefore differs according to which of these faces of the poor is given emphasis. And the plight of poor single mothers is illustrative

because it points up, while exacerbating it, a fundamental contradiction of our present-day societies, one also experienced by women living in a couple: the complex equation of reconciling employment and family. Sole parenting must also be analysed because workfare is indissociable from it, since it is single mothers who receive the AFDC-TANF. Finally, sole parenting represents, especially in North America, a profound change in the institution of the family, a favourite subject of study of feminists. For all these reasons, the study of sole parenting in the context of social assistance is a powerful analytical key to understanding the social status of poor women. It is also why we look specifically at programs of assistance for needy mothers, which historically were the first forms of the social treatment of women's poverty.

By way of a third preliminary clarification, this document also presents the forms of exchange required of men (or of broader categories, such as "youth"). Their analysis is essential to understanding the specificities of the forms of tied aid imposed on women.

Fourthly, we will not deal with the question of "employability" in the usual way. The most widespread usage of this notion is to present employability in a technical way, as a measure of an individual's capacity for employment (degree of schooling, skills and overall qualifications for a job, etc.). For example, in the 1988 Quebec government document entitled *Towards an income security policy*, employability is defined as "the relation between [the] individual's characteristics and the nature of the available job possibilities." Seen in this way, employability becomes a kind of measure of structural unemployment. Adopting this perspective, several authors associate, by extension, the notion of employability with a restrictive and punitive social assistance approach that attributes poverty to the personal shortcomings of recipients rather than to "social structures": "the 'concept of employability' in itself (...) implies a set of assumptions prejudicial to persons excluded from the labour market, to the extent that it places primary responsibility for the employment crisis where it does not belong" [*translation*] (McAll *et al.*, 1996, p. ix). We ourselves present employability, first and foremost, as a social construct. It is not an objective measurement of skills, but the outcome of strategies of various intervenors as well as of the change of the institutions of employment, the family and social assistance. Employability thus concerns the condition of those men and women who society believes have a *duty* to be employed. Also, to speak of persons as "employable" or "able to work" implies the existence of a set of social norms and expectations according to which the productive contribution of certain groups of individuals must stack up in the public arena of employment.

In the context of social assistance, the poverty of individuals who are "able-bodied"—"able to work" or "employable"—has always posed a problem. Difficulties arise when it comes to obtaining cash relief from the State for these individuals. Social assistance is subsidiary to the financial resources individuals are supposed to obtain from the family or from paid employment: the *duty* of the person deemed "able to work" to live by his or her own labour always takes precedence over the State's *duty* to provide them with social assistance. We call this the "custom of deservingness" because it is based on *rules* that classify the poor according to their "presumed employability," so as to identify those eligible to receive financial support from the State, the sole criterion being the means test. Considered thus,

“employability” is a social judgement of the capacity of individuals to earn their own livelihood through paid work. This judgement is therefore highly normative, conditioned by, among other things, the dominant values surrounding the performance of paid work. In a gender analysis, such a conception of employability shows that society’s expectations with regard to the labour market integration of poor women (or youth or the disabled) are socially constructed according to the changes in the role assigned to women in the home and in the workplace, these two spheres themselves evolving as they interact. In other words, employability, as a social construct, helps explain the exchange of labour imposed within the family, which could almost be referred to, by analogy, as “maternability”: the set of *rules* that define the skills pertaining to the role of mother, while controlling the relegation of women to the domestic sphere. Thus, similar principles govern the distribution of paid work and domestic work in society, in this instance the sets of *rules* governing the requirements attached to these contributions of work, differentiated according to gender in the social division of labour. The drawing of a parallel between the behavioural dictates imposed on women in the social assistance context in the days of mothers’ allowances and those of today’s employment integration programs points up this symmetry in the collective control of the work obligations aimed at poor women.

Finally, it must be stressed that the institution that is analysed here is social assistance, which is responsible in society for managing poverty. Its characteristics clearly distinguish it from other modes of social risk management (social insurance and universal transfers) and are such that the economic status of security it establishes can only be second-rate (Morel, 1999). One of the foundations of social assistance is the principle of *less eligibility*, designed to preserve the work incentive of persons considered “employable.” According to this principle, recipients who are “able to work” must be treated less well than wage-earners. As this principle determines the amount of financial support, it follows that payments are generally lower than the minimum wage and therefore usually below the poverty line. Thus conceived, programs for the poor are therefore hopelessly poor programs (Bellemare, 1981). We will come back, in the conclusion, to these considerations which lead us to think that as long as the economic vulnerability of women is inordinately undertaken, in the context of social security, by the reductionist logic of social assistance, they will find it difficult to exit poverty.

This research report is presented as follows: Chapter 1 provides the frame of reference for the subsequent analysis of reciprocity models in Canada and in Quebec. We present the workfare and insertion models in detail. For the sake of clarity, we present the experiences of Canada and Quebec separately (in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, respectively). For a more comprehensive view of the Canadian reality, we also provide a brief study of Ontario and New Brunswick, in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we present the results of our comparative analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 contains the main recommendations resulting from our study.

In closing, we wish to identify two major limitations of this study. Firstly, the implementation of employment integration measures for recipients was insufficiently studied. Although we tackled the problem of the organization of services for recipients, a number of issues, such as the nature of relationships with caseworkers, the quality of the training provided to participants in measures, the local constraints on program implementation and so on, remain unexplored. In particular, the manpower policy developed by Emploi-Québec is analysed only very generally.

As these are very complex issues, their analysis would have called for research far beyond the scope of this study, which is why they have not been given the in-depth examination they deserve. Secondly, the recent evolution of social assistance policies in the United States and in France is producing many changes that could not really be covered by our analysis.⁶ In other words, the workfare and insertion models are continually changing, and the analysis of this transformation itself requires ongoing study. Finally, we would point out that the information gathered for this report was last updated in January 2001.

Notes

¹ Until just recently, AFDC was the main American program of cash transfers to the poor.

² The extent of this refocussing of the analysis on the regional and local levels depends on the country studied, because the degree of centralization of social policy administration varies from country to country. In the United States and Canada, it is significant, but in France, this is far less apparent.

³ The terms in italics refer to the theoretical concepts of Commons. It should be noted that this author speaks of *working rules*. For an easier reading of the text, this not being the place to present Commons' conceptual framework, we use the term "rules" in the remainder of this report.

⁴ For a presentation of John R. Commons' institutionalist theory and the social assistance analytical framework that can be derived from it, see S. Morel, 2000a.

⁵ This viewpoint is developed in S. Morel, 2000b.

⁶ In the United States, major changes have taken place since the extensive welfare reform adopted in 1996. In France, insertion policies have also evolved, notably with the adoption, in 1998, of a framework law on combating "exclusions." In several respects, because of these changes, the contrast between these two models is even greater.

1. WORKFARE AND INSERTION: TWO LOGICS OF RECIPROCITY

Workfare¹ and insertion are two broad, differentiated models of government intervention in the conception and implementation of the “contract of reciprocity” between the poor and the State. These models in fact express two logics of reciprocity that are distinct, indeed, in some respects, opposite. In this chapter, we briefly contrast these two models based on a brief description of their main characteristics.² These characteristics are the criteria for our evaluation of the Quebec social assistance reciprocity model.

The Configuration of the Social Assistance System: Decentralized/Categorical or Centralized/Integrated

Before we tackle the question of reciprocity, a brief description is called for of the specific modes of structuring social assistance in the United States and in France. The American system is decentralized (largely conceived and administered by the states) and categorical (eligibility based on specific characteristics—marital status, age, etc.—in combination with the income and means test). Historically, it is single-parent families that have made up the most significant category of recipients in the American welfare system, in terms of both numbers and “visibility” in the debates surrounding reforms of this system. In France, the welfare system (“benefit” component) is, in contrast, centralized and partially integrated: the RMI (Revenu minimum d’insertion), which overlies a system of social minima that preceded it, is an integrated, or non-categorical program.

The Representation of the “Subject-Citizen” of Social Assistance: The “Dependant” or the “Excluded”

The first step in the elaboration of a social assistance reciprocity model is to determine the identity of the new social subject established vis-à-vis the State in the relationship of reciprocal obligations. In order to identify the representations of this “subject-citizen” of social assistance, it is necessary to consider the conceptions and discourses that construct the image of the poor in society. Also, the “recipient-citizen” of workfare is the “dependant,” while the “recipient-citizen” of insertion is the “excluded.”

The dependency theme is central to the conception of workfare in the United States. Usually, this term is not defined, “dependency” being considered a self-evident neutral designation denoting the status of persons living on State transfers. Similarly, the term “independence” (or “self-reliance”), which serves as the counterpart of “dependency” but is associated with paid work, also is not discussed: it is a given that paid work systematically confers independence on the individuals concerned. Yet, talk of “dependency” is not gender-neutral: the discourse surrounding the “dependency” of female workfare participants, in presenting them as dependent on society, obscures the value of the domestic work they do in raising children alone. The expression “welfare dependency” is also very pejorative, for it does not merely denote a source of income, it “implicitly suggests a passive, perhaps pathological dependence on government assistance” (Greenberg, 1992a, p. 2). In fact, the dominant conception of poverty that emerges from American debate surrounding workfare refers to a personal problem,

where the interaction of the poor with social assistance is deemed to negatively affect their behaviour. Seen thus, the issue of the poverty of social assistance recipients is posed first in terms of deviance. The workfare recipient is identified as someone “trapped” in the vicious cycle of social assistance, unable on their own to leave dependency behind and return to a normal social position of self-reliance.

With insertion, the symbolic representation of the recipient is that of the “excluded.” This different designation is a complete reversal of perspective of the American thematic of dependency. It is no longer essentially the shortcomings of the poor that are stigmatized, but those of society. Exclusion relates to the dysfunction of three principal institutions: employment, the family, and social security. Seen thus, it is no longer “culprits” but “victims” who are aided by society: the deviance is ascribed not to the poor, but to the social system as a whole. Along with the theme of “exclusion,” which, in the context of the RMI, is the antithesis of insertion, there appear those of “insecurity” and “vulnerability,” which make up the “new poverty.” In short, dependence and exclusion, the respective footholds of the reciprocity relationship in workfare and insertion, refer to opposing conceptions of poverty.

The Main Objective: To Combat Dependency or to Combat Exclusion

As they are based on opposing conceptions of poverty, workfare and insertion, which have remedial value, necessarily focus on divergent objectives. The main objective of workfare is to combat dependency. In addition to this overall objective, there are other objectives the analysis of which reveals the ideal model of citizenship that prevails throughout the institution of the “recipient-citizen” in the United States. The primary face of citizenship is that of the “worker-citizen,” which can be linked to the specific objective of preserving the work ethic. In this context, workfare is intended to reinforce the work incentive and bring social assistance into line with the surrounding values. Similarly, it is intended to improve the “employability” of social assistance recipients: workfare is supposed to increase the human capital both indirectly, by instilling a sense of responsibility or the work ethic, and directly, by building skills through well-structured work experience (Gueron, 1987, p. 16). The social normalization of the behaviour of AFDC-TANF recipients is then based explicitly on a criterion of fairness, by presenting the image of the “mother- and worker-citizen.” As most American mothers today are employed, workfare, or the imposition of the obligation to provide work in exchange for relief, is presented as designed to put recipients on an equal footing with wage-earning female citizens, who must work to earn an income. Workfare is also justified by the objective of reducing social assistance costs. It is the face of the “taxpayer-citizen” that then serves as a foothold for assessing *rights and duties* in the welfare context. The main concern, then, is to reduce the number of recipients by both deterring social assistance entrants and accelerating exits from the system. Finally, workfare, in tying social aid to work, is aimed at conferring greater “dignity” on recipients and increases public support for social assistance (Gueron, 1987, p. 16).

The main objective of insertion is to combat “exclusion.” By gradually reducing the “social fracture” of exclusion, the objective of the RMI “is to ensure participation in the

life of the community in the name of recognition of the right to citizenship” [translation] (Paugam, 1991, p. 95). Thus, while the term “exclusion” is absent from the American vocabulary of poverty, in France, it underlies the actions of all the French partners in the RMI mechanism. In France, the issue of “exclusion” is not about the “fringes” of social life, but has more to do with a reflection about society as a whole. The RMI is intended to break the isolation of the poor resulting from society’s failure to integrate them. Centred on an objective of social integration that relies on the collective responsibility for the “excluded,” the RMI was developed within a perspective clearly distinct from the individualistic conception of the struggle against poverty in which workfare is rooted. In the case of insertion, the face of citizenship that serves as a referent in the debates is that of “insiders.” Indeed, the social standing of the excluded is compared, as it is in the United States, to that of “worker.” Only in this case, the problem is that not everyone has access to the *rights* inherent in employment. Moreover, the struggle against exclusion in France is not aimed at reducing the costs of social assistance: “The politicians responsible or charged with social action rarely advance the idea that the ‘poor’ take advantage of the social assistance system and that supports should be reduced so they will be more motivated to look for work, as is the case in Great Britain (and, we might add, in the United States). The most widespread notion is that social spending should be increased out of a sense of solidarity” [translation] (Paugam, 1996b, p. 402).

The *Formula of Rights and Duties*: The Individual Duty of the Poor or the Collective Duty of Society

The *formula of rights and duties* refers to the type of *social relations* that exist between the poor and the State, notably, to the obligations that fall to each of the two parties in the new reciprocity relationship. Workfare and insertion refer to opposing conceptions of citizenship and social connection: the “dependent” needy mother and the “excluded” are linked, in the first case, with a logic of repayment, and in the second, with a logic of social debt.

Workfare represents the imposition of a new *duty* where before there was only a *right* (AFDC benefit). It is geared towards a “quid pro quo” relationship or a logic of compensation: a *right* (social assistance) entails a *duty* (work or other types of activity) on the part of the recipient. Workfare therefore stresses the individual *duty* of the poor to contribute to society by personally engaging in deserving conduct that will establish them as citizens. In contrast, insertion establishes the recipient’s *right*, which corresponds to the collective *duty*, particularly on the part of the State, to bring the excluded into a community of which he is, unquestionably, a full-fledged member. Moreover, in the case of the RMI, it is claimed that the mechanism frames a dual *right*, combining the *right* to a benefit (*revenu minimum* or minimum income support) and the *right* to insertion (the “i” in RMI), in a dynamic where insertion “finalizes” the allowance (Lafore, 1992, p. 76). In other words, insertion corresponds not to a logic of repayment, but to a logic of social debt. The Commission d’évaluation du RMI summarized the two conceptions of the link that exists between the allocation and insertion as follows:

In the first, (...) the emphasis is on the **responsibility of the individual** and therefore on the notion of “repayment”: enjoyment of the allocation is conditional on the individual’s participation in insertion initiatives. In the

second, (...) the emphasis is more on the **responsibility of society** for the exclusion of the individual and on the right to insertion: insertion is therefore an objective and not a condition. (CNE-RMI, 1992, p. 112) [*Translation*]

It went on to say that in the context of the RMI, the emphasis is on the “responsibility of society” since, in the spirit of the legislation, it is the notion of *reciprocal obligations* between the individual and society that is stressed, not the logic of repayment.

The Relief Custom: The Custom of Deservingness or the Custom of Solidarity

The relief *custom* refers to the *unorganized rules* that prevail within this institution. The origins of these rules, which guide the customary behaviour of individuals, extend far back in time. It is therefore necessary to look at the history of each country to discover the old forms of present-day rules, in order to assess the import and continuation of the typical representations of poverty. Again, from this perspective, workfare and insertion differ considerably. In the first case, the origins can be traced right back to the *custom of deservingness*, and in the second, to the *custom of solidarity*.

In the United States, the *custom of deservingness* derives historically from the fact that American welfare policy has been modelled on the British *custom* of the Poor Laws. This *custom* is notable for the importance it attaches to the selection of the poor based on deservingness: the welfare institution is dominated by the distinction made between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor, or the fashioning of rules that differentiate the poor according to their “fitness for work,” with a view to establishing different treatments. A second feature of the American custom of deservingness is that, historically, it was openly geared to controlling the work behaviour of women in the family. This was owing to the categorial nature of the social assistance system, in which single mothers have always predominated. The analysis of the logic of reciprocity from a gender perspective is thus facilitated, for the plight of women in the social assistance context becomes much clearer in this instance than when the social assistance population is made up of both men and women. The custom of deservingness according to gender is expressed in the United States by the adoption of rules such as the “suitable home” rule that was applied in the context of mothers’ allowances. As in the case of the *rules* constructing employability, this *working rule* of the custom of deservingness regulated a *duty* that applied not only to paid work, but to domestic work as well, thereby clarifying the gender aspect of the mechanisms regulating the exchange of work in society.

The differentiation of the poor and their differentiated treatment on the basis of employability are also a constant of social assistance policy in France. In that country, however, a major break occurred in the wake of the French Revolution, setting out the principles for the “republican pact.” Social assistance was redesigned to reflect the imperative notions of citizenship, making the integration of individuals into the body of society a major political issue. In short, whereas the “custom of deservingness” dominated the evolution of social assistance in America, the “custom of solidarity” became the foundation stone of the organization of “public assistance” in France. The principle of solidarity thus put its own stamp on the French relief *custom*. In the 19th century, under the Third Republic, the concept

of solidarity was embodied in the doctrine of solidarism. Thereafter, it underlay the whole system of social assistance. It also dominated the institution of the RMI, which, when first introduced, received broad popular support (Legros, Simonin, 1991, p. 214). The parliamentary debates leading up to the adoption of the RMI asserted a distinctive ideal of solidarity, that of “new solidarities,” geared specifically to combatting exclusion. Insertion therefore derives its meaning from this French *custom* of solidarity.

The Scope of the Reciprocity Relationship: The Categorical Approach or the Universalist Approach

The conceptions of reciprocity in workfare and insertion also differ in the extent of the obligations created. Workfare is conceived according to a categorical logic. In contrast, insertion is conceived according to a universalist logic.

Workfare is based on a process of categorization of the poor: the duty principle it entails is not uniformly applied to all social assistance recipients; rather, it is based on their differentiation. This selective model is implemented through a formalized system of exemption, whereby certain subgroups avoid the obligations of workfare. Two discriminating criteria of this targeting process stand out: the age of the children, and the gender of the recipients. The American selective model thus reveals the conjunction that exists between the social assistance recipient’s statuses of mother and worker. The universalist-inspired logic of insertion corresponds to the republican ideal founded on the formal equality of citizens. In accordance with this principle of equality, a component of the republican identity, no formal distinction is made between RMI recipients with regard to the duty of insertion. All recipients are bound by an insertion agreement, a compulsory complement of the allocation. Thus, with regard to the duty of insertion, treatment is uniform and all recipients are equal.

But while the French model is not selective, from a formal point of view, it is selective in its application. This points up one of the contradictions of the concept of citizenship which, historically, has also held true for women: behind the formal political rights, the representation of the “citizen” conceals differentiated treatment between men and women. We thus identified, in the United States and in France, two opposing recipient selection processes based on employability: the American model of “upstream employability selection,” and the French model of “downstream employability selection.” We have already described the American model: the selection of recipients occurs at the level of the conception of workfare, with its precise delimitation of categories. In France, this process of categorization occurs farther downstream, that is, at the implementation stage of the insertion mechanism. In the French case, selective practices are evidenced, first, in the differentiated application of the contractual process (signing of the insertion agreement), and second, in the “typical” trajectories followed by recipients under social or vocational insertion measures and other employment policy measures.

The Conception of the Social Integration of Social Assistance Recipients: Exclusively Professional or Professional and Social

In both countries, the new obligations connected with social assistance refer to a series of activities whose nature reveals the government's conception of social integration of the poor. Workfare is an employment integration model, whereas insertion combines the social and employment dimensions of integration. The notion of workfare is therefore far more restrictive than that of insertion in terms of integration of the poor into society. This denotes another divergence of the American and French approaches.

In the United States, all activities offered to recipients in the context of workfare programs have had to do strictly with employment integration (job search activities, training, education, work terms, community work, etc.). These activities did not extend, as they do in the case of the RMI, to "social insertion." In some cases, initiatives related to health problems such as addiction are imposed on AFDC-TANF recipients. But these are, at least formally, in addition to, not instead of workfare requirements. In France, the RMI legislation stipulates two types of insertion: professional insertion, and social insertion. This was an innovation of the RMI (Alfandari, 1990). Thus, while the general reference remains professional insertion, that is, employment or training leading to a job (through activities of job preparation or community interest, training, work terms, etc.), the RMI legislation extends insertion activities to include "measures enabling recipients to regain or develop their social autonomy through appropriate ongoing social support, participation in family and civic life, as well as in the social life, notably, of the neighbourhood or town and in activities of every kind, notably, leisure and cultural activities and sports," as well as "measures providing access to shelter, rehousing or better housing" and even to "measures aimed at easier access to (health) care" [*translation*] (MASSV, 1992, p. 62-63).

The Interaction Dynamics Between Social Assistance, Employment and the Family: The Primacy of the Family or of Employment

The workfare and insertion models also differ in that they derive from different interaction dynamics between social assistance, employment and the family. In the workfare model, the family ranks above employment in explaining the evolution of social assistance, while in the insertion model we see the reverse.

Workfare is rooted in the transformation of the institution of the family. The instability of family relations is the primary cause of recipients' *vulnerability*. Social assistance has thus become, in the United States, a family policy by default.³ The poor quality of jobs, which prevents social assistance leavers from entering a long-term remunerative relationship, is a secondary cause of their social condition. The problems of job retention are attributable mainly to the low wages and inadequate health coverage of the jobs social assistance recipients enter, in sectors traditionally reserved for women. Insertion is rooted in the transformation of the institution of employment. The main constraints faced by RMI recipients are the job shortage (high levels of unemployment generally, of insertion unemployment and of chronic unemployment) and the restrictiveness of unemployment insurance rules. With the RMI, social assistance has become, in France, a system of second-

tier unemployment compensation. The family ranks second in explaining the dynamics of poverty in France, but in that instance, poverty affects primarily female recipients of assistance.

Workfare is rooted in the family at another level: the family is the main impetus for the transformation of the social assistance relationship into a reciprocity relationship. Generally speaking, social assistance reciprocity is attributable to the establishment of new categories of “employable” people in the sphere of social assistance. Workfare thus occurs simultaneously with the social construction of the employability of AFDC recipients. We are indeed talking about a process of the social construction of employability, since this new condition of poor mothers (employability) is not the result of the acquisition of objective characteristics (skills, qualifications, etc.). Rather, it is the result of the evolution of the *institution* of women’s paid work, itself linked to the transformation of the family. In the case of insertion, the new employability at the root of the reciprocity relationship appears another way: it does not arise from the evolution of employment and the family, but rather from the taking in charge by the assistance system of new “employable” individuals. In France, it is primarily the transformation of employment and of unemployment insurance that explains the emergence of an employable population, that is, of unemployed men and women whose economic status no longer falls within the employment relationship or the insurance relationship, but within the assistance relationship.

The Links with Employment Policy: Predominantly Selective or Predominantly Universal

Workfare and insertion measures often fall within different regulatory frameworks: in employment insertion, social assistance recipients often become wage-earners; in workfare, they mostly remain “on relief.”

In the United States, workfare programs have often been developed by social assistance agencies and consisted of measures aimed exclusively at AFDC recipients (job search activities, volunteer work, job preparation activities, remedial courses, etc.). The links with broader programs aimed at more varied populations have been more tenuous than in France. Moreover, in the United States, even when social assistance recipients have participated in programs intended for a broader pool of users, they have not had access to a very evolved manpower policy. In fact, historically, “employment policy” in the United States, inasmuch as the expression has any meaning in that country, has tended to be confined to the social policy sphere, that is to say, it has tended to target the most vulnerable groups within the population, the “economically disadvantaged.” The categorial nature of employment policy largely explains the narrow scope of labour market policies in the United States.

In France, insertion has extended beyond the institution of social assistance to a greater degree than in the United States. The professional insertion of RMI recipients relies heavily on employment policy measures administered by public employment authorities under the aegis of the Agence Nationale pour l’Emploi (ANPE). Recipients having access to this type of insertion have therefore acquired a new status, since the measures have usually come within the framework of actual employment contracts, giving recipients the same *rights and duties* as wage-earners. The problem is that these employment contracts have been mostly for part-time

jobs. Also, because of the considerable resources involved, France's employment policy is far more highly evolved than that of the United States.

The Current Regression Dynamics: Erosion of the Rights of Social Assistance Recipients or Erosion of the Rights of Wage-Earners

In both countries, we observed institutional regression dynamics. Once again, the process follows two opposing courses: whereas in the United States the regulation of employment determines that of social assistance and eventually weakens it, in France it is the regulation of social assistance that now influences that of employment, with the same outcome.

In the American case, the social assistance relationship comes up against the limitations of an employment relationship marked by the weakness of statuses. The poor quality of jobs impedes any improvement in the situation of social assistance recipients for at least two reasons. Firstly, low wages keep the maximum possible benefit levels down accordingly. Secondly, the existence of a class of working poor, in the broad sense of the term, exacerbates social polarization and destroys the solidarity between the working poor and social assistance recipients, thereby eliminating any possibility of a broad alliance, a necessary condition of progressive social assistance reform. In contrast, in France, the levelling down of collective protection measures seems to begin in the assistance sphere. Through the employment policy, the wage-earning relationship has been determined in part by the anti-exclusion policy, to the point of being transformed by it. The volume of professional insertion measures has resulted in an area of overlap between assistance and employment, while slowly eroding, through part-time jobs, the space of *rights*. France's method of regulating poverty is therefore having the effect of downgrading the terms of the wage-earning relationship. Using the situation of the "excluded" as a point of comparison for that of "insiders" has served as a pretext for the downward revision of *rights* in the employment sphere. Indeed, since, in France, the pathology is to be sought in society and not in the poor, it is those who are integrated—"les inclus" or "insiders"—who bear the brunt of the social confrontation between those who receive assistance and the rest of the citizenry. It is not social assistance recipients who rouse indignation, as is the case in the United States, but "privileged" wage-earners. The problematic of exclusion thus leads, by a curious twist, to the questioning, not of the *rights* of recipients, as we see in the American case, but rather, the rights of the other citizens.

Conclusion

The United States and France have embarked on the path to "active policies" and this is evidenced, in the realm of social assistance, by the establishment of "reciprocal obligations" between the poor and the State. However, while they appear outwardly as the same phenomenon of social assistance reciprocity, the same *rules* are not observable in both countries. Two logics of reciprocity govern the transformation of the social assistance relationship in the United States and in France. In terms of the historical *custom* they revive and the means of determining the subject of social assistance, and in terms of the objectives pursued and the conception and implementation of reciprocal obligations, workfare and insertion are two fundamentally different phenomena. In short, workfare and

insertion reveal the particular paths followed by the United States and France respectively to transform social assistance according to the specific conflicts these countries face in the *institutions* of the family, employment and social assistance.

Notes

¹ The workfare and insertion models are presented in accordance with our analysis from the mid-90s.

² The reciprocity models of workfare and insertion are presented in detail in S. Morel, 2000a; a number of passages that follow are taken from this work.

³ The United States is the only Western industrialized nation that has never had a system of family allowances.

2. THE CASE OF CANADA

Our study of social assistance reciprocity in Canada begins with an examination of the Canadian experience, in three parts. First of all, we consider how Canada differs, in its social policy, from other countries of comparable economic standing, particularly the United States. In so doing, we look at the assertions of a number of authors in this regard.¹ We then set out to substantiate our problematic of social assistance reciprocity by examining whether social assistance in Canada has evolved in this direction. Thirdly, we present a brief historical analysis, in order to assess whether the changes observed recently in Canada in the relationship between the poor and the State are a continuation of, or a break with past experience, and also in order to identify the initial forms of intervention that have shaped the relationship between poor women and the State. Here, particular attention is paid to mothers' allowances, which were of primary importance for women. Indeed, it was in this context that social assistance policies targeting women emerged and that "sole parenting" received, for the first time, social treatment.

Canada: A Distinct Welfare State?

A number of authors deal with the question of the distinctiveness of the Canadian welfare state. In relation to industrialized countries generally, Canada is among those with a liberal tradition. From this standpoint, its kinship with the United States is obvious. Canada cannot, however, be lumped in with the American case, as it has subtle differences: the government has elaborated a series of social policies that have no equivalent in the United States. While there is general agreement that Canada differs from its American counterpart with respect to social rights, opinion is more divided when it comes to assessing the recent evolution of Canadian social policies.

According to the typology of welfare states posited by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990), Canada is among those welfare states of liberal inspiration.² In the "liberal" welfare state, "means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social-insurance plans predominate" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 26). In countries where this type of regime exists (United States, Canada, Australia, etc.), social transfer payments are small, the rules for granting them are stringent and the recipients are often stigmatized. The State stimulates the market either passively, by guaranteeing only a minimum income, or actively, by subsidizing private schemes of protection (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27).

A typical feature of liberal welfare states is what is known as the "residual concept" of social security, which, according to Dennis Guest (1980), has been prevalent in Canadian history. According to this concept, social security is a recourse of last resort: government intervention is justified only when the usual recourses of the family and the marketplace have been exhausted.³ This is, then, a limitative conception of the State's role with respect to social rights. The work ethic, according to James Struthers (1983), is central to the social assistance interventions of the Canadian state. The pre-eminence of the work ethic in Canadian society is also revealed in Diane Bellemare's analysis (1981) of the Canadian welfare state. The author asserts that three fundamental but conflicting values characterize "the preferences of Canadians

with regard to the organization of economic life”: the value of “freedom,” which denotes the importance attributed the “principle of individual freedoms and economic liberalism”; the value of “independence,” or the conviction that “every individual has a duty to ensure their own independence by means of work or, if necessary, by means of savings or insurance”; and finally, the value of “charity.” This last refers to what we call the *custom of deservingness*, that is, the fact that “Canadians consider it important to show ‘charity’ towards the ‘deserving’ poor, namely, those who involuntarily find themselves in a situation of need” [translation] (Bellemare, 1981, p. 17). Thus, in Canada, social assistance is based, according to this author, not on the notion of solidarity, but rather on that of charity:

Today, as has traditionally been the case, (...) relief (for the “deserving” poor) is not a “right” of the poor but rather an “act of kindness” that they ought to accept with gratitude. Canadian society therefore values charity or what others mistakenly call the principle of collective solidarity.
[Translation] (Bellemare, 1981, p. 102)

Although both the United States and Canada fit this model of the liberal welfare state, they differ in several respects. According to Gérard Boismenu (1994, p. 409), the American and Canadian social protection systems are characterized by “the same type of welfare state, but differently inspired.” Canada is “essentially liberal, with a touch of social democracy, evident especially in its public, universal health-care system” [translation] assert Camil Bouchard, Vivian Labrie and Alain Noël (1996, p. 4). In their view, Canada differs from the United States in that it redistributes the wealth “a little more”:

The United States has the most inegalitarian distribution of before-tax revenues and transfers of the OECD countries. After taxes and transfers, it is still the most inegalitarian. Canada is fairly close to the United States before taxes and transfers, but its policies are more redistributive. Between 1970 and 1986, the American poverty rate rose, [while] that of Canada fell or remained stable, essentially because transfers declined in the United States while in Canada they increased. [Translation] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 6-7)

Social policies serve to define a Canadian identity in opposition to the reality of the United States (Banting, 1997; Myles, Pierson, 1997). It should be recalled that the latter, unlike the other industrialized nations, has never had a national family allowances program or even public systems of health insurance and parental leave. Its child poverty rate is the highest of the developed countries. According to Ruth Rose (1998, p. 114), “Canada lies somewhere between the American approach and the European approach” [translation]. D. Guest (1980) also recognizes that, while the residual conception of social security played a decisive role in the elaboration of social policies until the 1940s in Canada, it was replaced, as of the Second World War, by the “institutional concept.” The latter corresponds to a broad view of social security, seen as an integral part of revenue distribution mechanisms in an industrial society and as a legitimate function of the State.⁴ Also, according to Christopher Leman (1980), there were real differences, ascribable mainly, in his view, to the political institutions, in the way in which Canada and the United States conducted the debate surrounding social assistance policies and elaborated those policies in the 1960s and 1970s.

For many authors, with the rise of the conservative ideology seen in the 1980s came a pendulum swing in the conception of social policy: the residual conception made a comeback and State interventions embraced its logic (Guest, 1980). Ruth Rose (1998, p. 115) also considers that the recent evolution of social policy in Canada harks back to the residual approach typical of the American case: “The recent reforms of family policy and unemployment insurance in Canada closely follow the path laid out by the United States” [*translation*]. According to J. Struthers (1983, p. 214), current policies are a resurgence of former practices: in the early 1980s, as in the 1930s, “economists, newspaper editors, and prime ministers (...) accused the unemployed of preferring relief to work.”

Conversely, John Myles and Paul Pierson believe Canada’s approach to income support differs from that of the United States. The specific realities of the two countries explain why they have “diverged considerably in both the extent and content of policy change” (Myles, Pierson, 1997, p. 445). Keith Banting (1997, p. 270) also asserts that Canada and the United States are on different paths in terms of social policy, such that these “two systems are as different in the mid-1990s as they were in the mid-1970s.”

The Recent Changes in Social Assistance Policy in Canada

There is no doubting the relevance of our problematic to the Canadian situation. Firstly, social assistance policy in Canada has changed considerably since the 1980s (Box 2).⁵ Many reforms have been introduced right across the country, in every province and territory (NCW, 1997). A number of studies have analysed these changes, attesting to the interest in measuring the extent of the transformation that is taking place. For this transformation of the social assistance system is still going on: changes continue to be made or are planned for the immediate future. A study such as ours therefore invites an examination of a vast laboratory of evolving experiments. Secondly, in describing these changes, Canadian social policy analysts use the terms and descriptors on which we have based our problematic. Many authors use the term “workfare” to describe the direction taken by provincial governments in reforming their social assistance policies (Boivin, 1995; Callahan *et al.*, 1990; Evans *et al.*, 1995; Fontan, Shragge, 1996; Kitchen, 1996; Langlois, 1987; McAll, White *et al.*, 1996; Noël, 1995; Richards *et al.*, 1995; Shragge, 1997). Parallels are also drawn between Canada and the United States (Boychuk, 1995; Evans, 1993; Hardina, 1997). In addition, the terminology used in Canada draws on the arsenal of reasoned exposition typical of the French tradition, for example, “insertion” and “solidarity” (Deniger *et al.*, 1995; Fortin, 1989; Girard, 1996). This last comment is especially valid for Quebec.

In short, there is a real interest, in the feminist literature on social policy, and even on the part of organizations that advocate for women’s rights, in this question of the transformation of State social assistance intervention and its repercussions on the living standards of women (Evans, Wekerle, 1997; Lepage, 1998; Rose, 1997). From the theoretical perspective of gender-based social relations, especially in English Canada, female researchers have been closely following the introduction of new obligations for poor women. The plight of single-parent families in particular has captured their attention, as have, in the wake of the groundbreaking analysis of Veronica Strong-Boag (1979), the mechanisms of “moral regulation” that are a particular feature of the social treatment of women’s poverty (Evans, 1992, 1995; Little, 1998; Little, Morrison, 1999; Mayson, 1999). The social assistance

policies adopted by the provinces are invariably interpreted as a backlash, an erosion of social rights, a reversal that has worsened the financial position of women and made them more vulnerable to poverty.

Researchers are also critical of workfare because of the express aims of such programs and the kinds of employment regulation these policies are meant to ensure. For Eric Shragge (1997), workfare programs merely shuffle the line-up for income support. They keep the unemployed connected to the labour market and maintain a pool of cheap, skilled and disciplined labour (the “reserve army”). Ernie S. Lightman (1997) asserts that workfare programs are part of a broader strategy to dismantle Canadian social programs by reducing government responsibility for social services. Other authors point up the harshness of workfare by placing these policies in an historical perspective. The new obligations of workfare are compared to the old forms of putting the poor to work (Mullaly, Weinman, 1994; Shragge, 1988; Struthers, 1983).

Other authors, such as Réjean Bussière (1994), whose work examines the different approaches of the Canadian provinces to social assistance policy, point out the link between social assistance and employment. After analysing social assistance in four provinces (British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick), the author concludes that the policies converge in the following respects: the creation of employability enhancement programs, the widening gap between people who are able to work and those who are unable to work, and the increase in the allowable earnings exemption. In the same vein, according to Sharon M. Stroick and Jane Jenson (1999, p. 81), provincial programs designed to encourage welfare recipients to join the labour force reveal the existence of a dual consensus: priority is given to enhancing employability as an integral component of assistance and to rapid job placement; and in order to make the road to employment as short as possible, government champions the idea that “any job is a good job.”

As mentioned earlier, there are already a number of studies of workfare in Canada. We might mention two in particular (Evans *et al.*, 1995; Schragge, 1997) that provide in-depth analyses of workfare programs in Canada. More recently, the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) also published a series of studies on “welfare-to-work programs” in Canada and their impact on low-income single-parent families (Gorlick, Brethour, 1999, 1998a, 1998b), as well as a discussion paper on the subject. This paper asserts that there is now in Canada “a reinterpretation of the link between social assistance and employment” (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998a, p. 1) characterized by the introduction of programs making employment “an integral component of social assistance programming” and aimed at providing “the shortest route possible to employment” (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998a, p. 6). The authors also present the compulsory nature of the new measures adopted by Canada’s provinces and territories as a common feature of the new approach adopted in Canada. The classification of social assistance recipients according to the criterion of fitness for work is, according to this report, another distinctive feature of the reform of Canadian welfare policy. We might add that from this perspective, the category of sole-support mothers is emerging in the United States as a “target group” and as such is subject to special treatment by the State.

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time

In this section, we consider the *custom* of social assistance in Canada as it has evolved over time. We look at the *rights and duties* that characterize this *custom*, first from a general perspective, and then in the more specific context of mothers' allowances. We then attempt to identify the initial forms of intervention that have shaped the relation of assistance between poor women and the State. We will see that the *rules* of social assistance interact directly with those of the *institutions* of employment and the family. We will also see that the management of poverty in Canada cannot be studied apart from its embedment in the unemployment compensation system.⁶ In this regard, the case of Canada is distinguished by its strict separation of the insurance and assistance functions. Two programs provide benefits in the case of unemployment: employment insurance, which falls under federal jurisdiction, and social assistance, which is enshrined in provincial legislation. This jurisdictional duality creates inconsistencies in the treatment of situations of non-employment and directly affects the phenomenon of poverty and the implementation of social assistance policies.

The Rights and Duties of the "Able-Bodied" Poor

In Canada, the pre-industrial model of economic and social organization prevailed until the turn of the 20th century. This model was distinguished by the fact that the extended family was the primary locus of the output and distribution of current production. The responsibility of the family institution for the economic security of individuals was expressed by the legal recognition of "family obligation." The provincial laws in force in the 18th and 19th centuries thus obliged the family, on penalty of fines, to care for its members in need (Bellemare, 1981). In New France, a royal decree outlawed begging by able-bodied persons and threatened reprisals against anyone who came to their aid (Bellemare, 1981, p. 137). During the years of colonization, in addition to the family, private institutions (establishments operated by religious communities, organizations that performed good works, etc.) cared for indigents. After the Conquest, houses of correction were set up to punish vagrancy. This type of social organization coincided with the primacy accorded individual responsibility, which would long be a feature of the representations of poverty. Poverty was associated with wrongful conduct, with "a disease that must be treated with discipline and repression" [*translation*] (Bellemare, 1981, p. 138):

[A]t first, society adopted a punitive attitude towards economic dependants and especially towards those who were able-bodied. The latter were placed in confinement or in workhouses to acquire the work habit. In the nineteenth century and throughout the first half of the twentieth century, every individual was responsible for ensuring his own economic independence.

[*Translation*] (Bellemare, 1981, p. 105)

The organization of social assistance can be traced back to late-16th century England and France. But the provinces differed in the way they integrated this colonial legacy. English Poor Law served as the model for relief in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, influenced, notably, by the Loyalist migrations during the American Revolution (Guest, 1980). Upper Canada adopted the British model, but not the Poor Laws. Finally, Lower Canada stood apart for its tradition inherited from France's *ancien régime*. With the rise of liberalism in the 19th century, the

problem of poverty was presented in terms of the failure of the individual to adapt to the economic and social system (Linteau *et al.*, 1979, p. 201). Work is the source of the wealth of societies and of individuals. It was felt that the provision of relief to the able-bodied poor might lead to undesirable behaviour on the part of those receiving it. In 1867, the *British North America Act* (BNA) was enacted. It made no reference to income security as such. It was through the interpretation of the Constitution that social assistance came to be regarded as a provincial responsibility (Bussière, 1994; Guest, 1980).

In the early 20th century, social assistance for the able-bodied and jobless poor was available only in the form of public works organized by the municipalities. The jobless were hired to chop ice or break stones (Bellemare, 1981, p. 306). The economic hardship brought on by recessions (especially the Great Depression of the 1930s) forced government to step in. There followed a growing centralization of income protection functions, marking a shift in responsibility away from the municipalities to the provinces, and from there onto the federal government. The first Canadian law enacted expressly to help the unemployed find work was the *Employment Offices Coordination Act* of 1918. It was spurred by the economic hardship of the recession of 1914-1915 (Bellemare, 1981, p. 310). For the first time, measures of direct aid to the unemployed were brought in. The municipalities initiated special public works and distributed direct relief. It was not until the recession of 1920 that Canadian government intervention was formalized, with the enactment of the first unemployment assistance program. The monetary assistance given the unemployed was to be repaid (through participation in public works or job seeking) (Bellemare, 1981, p. 313).

Relief for the jobless continued in its initial form throughout the 1930s, despite the Great Depression, especially devastating in Canada, that hit the industrialized countries. The federal government introduced, year by year, temporary measures for assisting the unemployed. Despite the government's penchant for public works, the public authorities provided mainly direct relief. In April 1933, about 14.9 percent of the Canadian population was on social assistance (Bellemare, 1981, p. 371). Yet it was felt that aiding the "able-bodied" poor led to poverty and social unrest. In this regard, we cite Louis Dupire (1935, p. A1), in the newspaper *Le Devoir*, who rose up against the high level of unemployment assistance expenditures:

Where has this led if not to the creation of a regular army of unemployed that we can never fully dismiss? The professional unemployed worker is a social scourge, he is the hornet to honour, he is anarchy in the hive. But he is here to stay. (...) Shall we continue to toss millions to the wind? To allow the army of involuntary unemployed to stagnate in energy-sapping idleness? (...) Or shall we provide work, useful work (...)?[*Translation*]

During the parliamentary debates in Ottawa surrounding the enactment of unemployment assistance legislation in 1935, one member of Parliament, Mr. Henri Bourassa, rose up against the proposed measure because, among other reasons, it risked having disastrous effects on the "able-bodied" poor: "[T]he effect of our whole so called social legislation is to debase the social spirit of our people, to create a fast growing class of beggars, loafers and crooked men, who expect the state to give them a living and who are endeavouring to

avoid any individual or collective effort to help save their own situation.” According to the member, work ought to be required in exchange for social assistance just as repayment is required of anyone benefitting from the public purse.⁷ The consensus was that one had an obligation to earn relief through work.

Unemployment insurance was adopted in Canada in 1940. The history of its creation is that of a long process of the maturing of attitudes about the reality of unemployment. In counterpoint to the adoption, in the face of this risk, of insurance mechanisms to protect income, there was a new representation of the phenomenon of unemployment; it was no longer perceived as a temporary problem, but as a reality with which society must come to terms on a long-term basis (Bellemare, 1981, p. 401). With this qualitative leap, unemployment came increasingly to be seen as an involuntary phenomenon. In 1956, the adoption of the federal unemployment assistance program marked an historic turning point, for it corresponded to recognition of the “entitlement to assistance,” regardless of the cause of the need: “[f]or the first time in the history of social security in the Province of Quebec a social measure was adopted which, whatever may have been the legislators’ intention, considered indigence, irrespective of the causes, as a factual situation justifying assistance by the State” (Boucher, 1963, p. 55).

It was in the context of the “War on Poverty” declared by Prime Minister L. B. Pearson (Little, 1998, p. 138) that the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was introduced in 1966. The CAP was a shared-cost program under which the federal government matched the amounts allocated by the provinces and municipalities to social spending. The federal government thus helped finance provincial and territorial social assistance programs. There was no maximum allowable cost. The CAP marked the beginning of the modern history of social assistance in Canada: it “signalled a major shift in the Canadian welfare state towards an “entitlement” model of social assistance” (Morrison, 1998, p. 2). In fact, the CAP prompted the provinces to provide assistance to anyone in need, with the goal of eliminating the “conditions giving rise to poverty” (Morrison, 1998). Furthermore, significantly, the CAP did not allow the introduction of workfare in Canada, under threat of stiff monetary penalties for the provinces. In fact, the federal government’s financial contribution was conditional, notably, on payment of the assistance to “any person in need” within the meaning of the CAP (HRDC, 1994e, p. 6). In basing eligibility for social assistance on the criterion of “need,” the CAP prohibited the imposition of other, conflicting requirements (Moscovitch, 1996). The effect of the CAP was to standardize provincial welfare systems and speed up their modernization. In Quebec, the *Social Aid Act* of 1969 incorporated the need criterion, as had been done in other provinces (Bussière, 1994, p. 51). The CAP, in encompassing earlier programs, brought to an end the categorial approach at the federal level.

In 1971, unemployment insurance underwent a reform that had repercussions on social assistance. Women and youth in particular benefitted from the program’s more relaxed rules and a number of unemployed workers went from assistance to insurance (Bellemare, 1981, p. 577). But as of 1975, there was growing concern about budget deficits and increased public spending, including spending on income security. In 1990, the government announced “its unilateral decision to cap at 5 percent ‘shareable’ CAP cost increases in the three wealthiest provinces” [*translation*] (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario), a decision which led to several billion dollars in lost revenue, particularly for Ontario and British Columbia (Vaillancourt,

1997, p. 19). This cap was maintained until 1994-1995 and led to the adoption of budget cuts, notably for social assistance, in the provinces concerned. In the 1990s, the federal government carried out three very restrictive reforms of Canadian unemployment insurance. This had an immediate impact on the provinces, which saw the ranks of social assistance entrants swell appreciably and, accordingly, the costs of their social assistance programs (Fortin, 1997). Social security also became increasingly selective. From 1960 to 1992, selective transfers as a share of all cash transfers increased from 21 to 52 percent (Stroick, Jenson, 1999, p. 99).

In March 1995, the Minister of Finance announced that, in future, federal transfers would be lumped into a global budgetary allocation. This meant the end of separate allocations of the federal contribution to funding for social assistance, health and post-secondary education. The CAP⁸ was replaced by the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). In addition, the federal government's financial participation was limited to a fixed amount. According to Bruno Thérêt (1999, p. 67), "the federal government was (...) consistent in its policy of cutbacks when, after reducing unemployment insurance coverage, it guarded against the effects of its reform of the CAP by breaking with the shared funding formula" *[translation]*. The impact on the provinces was considerable; the reduction in federal transfers forced them to drastically reduce social spending (Box 3). With respect to social assistance, "the reductions stepped up the trends towards reducing basic needs coverage and introducing welfare-to-work programs" *[translation]* (Thérêt, 1999, p. 72). "National standards" of social assistance were also eliminated, except for the introduction of the residency criterion. In English Canada especially there was much concern that social assistance would be eroded as a result of this change. Another decisive aspect of the evolution of Canada's social assistance system: the elimination of the CAP ended the prohibition against the provinces' imposition of conditions on social assistance recipients in addition to assets and income tests. Several analysts see this change as marking the beginning of the institution of workfare in Canada. It is also said to mark the end of the right to assistance (Little, 1998, p. 185).

Eliminating the primacy of the need criterion is not the only way the federal government has influenced the evolution of social assistance in Canada in recent years. As B. Thérêt (1999, p. 72) explains, "it is essentially through federal-provincial agreements governing employment benefits that the provinces have been able to remobilize federal resources to some degree" *[translation]*:

The provinces can, in fact, through employability programs such as PAIE (Programme d'Aide à l'Intégration en Emploi) in Quebec (...), qualify a certain number of their aid recipients for employment insurance and thereby give them access to employment benefits. This indirect method of mobilizing federal employment insurance resources is greatly facilitated when a province has concluded an agreement with the federal government giving it 'full responsibility for designing, managing and delivering active employment measures (...) funded by the Employment Insurance Account.'⁹ For example, in the case of Quebec, such an agreement gave the province access to average annual federal funding over five years of more than 500 million dollars as of 1997 (or an amount equivalent to about 14% of the CHST cash transfer for that province). *[Translation]* (Thérêt, 1999, p. 73)

Thus, the author continues, there was “considerable overall coherence of the federal policies of 1994-1995 governing the labour market, social protection and intergovernmental relations” [translation]. After toughening the employment insurance rules and turning over responsibility for a large number of unemployed to the provinces, while at the same time cutting back on its financial support, “the federal government induced the provinces to accept the offer of the devolution of ‘employment benefits’ “ [translation] (Thérêt, 1999, p. 73). In other words:

(...) by reducing assistance funding sources and simultaneously increasing needs through the reform of income benefits, the federal government found a way to steer employment and assistance policies in all provinces in the direction it wanted, the model adopted for employment insurance thus being reproduced in provincial social assistance regimes. In so doing, it strongly encouraged the provinces, if necessary, to adopt policies for reducing or more narrowly targeting benefits, and by increasing the funding sources available for active employment policies, it encouraged them to replace social assistance with workfare policies. (Thérêt, 1999, p. 74) [Translation]

Mothers’ Allowances

Programs of assistance for needy mothers first appeared in Canada in the 1910s, as they did, moreover, in the United States: Manitoba adopted its program in 1916, followed by Saskatchewan in 1917, Alberta in 1919, and British Columbia and Ontario in 1920. The eastern provinces did not follow suit until later: Nova Scotia enacted its relevant legislation in 1930, followed by Quebec in 1937. In New Brunswick, legislation was enacted in 1930, but not implemented until 1944 (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 25).

Provincial programs of assistance for needy mothers, introduced in Canada during the First World War, were “the first modern *public assistance* programmes in Canada” (Guest, 1980, p. 63). Along with legislation governing the minimum wage and old age pensions, they were the “sole evidence of a welfare state in Canada in the 1920’s” (Guest, 1980, p. 74). Manitoba, the first province to adopt a program of assistance for needy mothers, conducted a study of American mothers’ pensions before enacting its legislation (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 26). As in the United States, it was essentially women’s organizations that were behind the adoption of legislation in favour of single-parent families. In Canada, the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) led the lobby for the adoption of mothers’ allowance legislation (Little, 1998, p. 13). Another important point of convergence between the two countries: it was around a “maternalist” ideology, exalting the role of women as mothers and keepers of the hearth, that demands for programs for needy mothers rallied the support needed for their success.

This ideology was based on deservingness: social assistance was an acknowledgement of the worthiness of the role of mother and of the need to help those mothers who, raising children alone, were having difficulty making ends meet. Women deserved to be looked after to the extent that they ensured the “preservation of the race” (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 24). To affirm this idea of “service to the nation,” the women’s organizations of the day favoured the term “pensions” to designate the assistance given needy mothers. American feminists had adopted the same strategy (Gordon, 1994; Skocpol, 1992). The term was in fact chosen by analogy

to the Canadian veterans' pension program intended, obviously, for a class of undeniably deserving citizens. Many interested parties shared this view, including J. Howard T. Falk, Director of Social Work at McGill University and formerly responsible for administering Manitoba's pensions program:

The child is the nation's asset, be he immigrant or native, and knowing this it is our duty to conserve the potential value of the human life (...). This (objective) must be met by the proper interpretation of the new system,—the recognition of the widowed mothers as the new "civil service." The soldier is awarded his pension for service rendered; the widow will be given hers for active service in the nation's work, here and now. (Falk, 1919)

The use of the term "pension" was also intended to encourage women to take advantage of this assistance by the "lessening of the charity stigma" (Guest, 1980, p. 54). The director of the Canadian Council on Child and Family Welfare, Charlotte Whitton, opposed the use of the pension concept in the British Columbia legislation, claiming that it entailed "a grave danger of the development, as a matter of course, of a general tendency to reliance on social aid."¹⁰ The term "allowances," which prevailed over that of "pensions," reflects another point in common with the American experience: the fact that it was mainly the needs of children, and not those of women, that were central to this legislation:

The singling out of children insured that the women's predicament, with all the shortcomings it underlined in marriage law and economic opportunity, went largely ignored. The fact that 'the primary object of this legislation is the conservation of home life'¹¹ meant in effect that once again women were considered deserving of recognition only inasmuch as they were mothers. (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 31)

A study of policy governing mothers' allowances shows, as we will now see, that the *custom of deservingness* in the context of social assistance—and the related issue of the exchange of work—differs according to gender. This policy introduced regulation as a means of control specific to women, for it regulated, as a priority, the conduct of recipients within the family, and in employment. While the institutions of social assistance, the family and employment were still jointly regulated, the *custom of deservingness* applied directly to poor women based on the institution of the family. The *custom of deservingness* assumed its singular form through the establishment of *rules* governing the morals of recipients, in addition to the usual needs and income tests of social assistance.

First of all, the establishment of rules governing eligibility for mothers' allowance confirmed the *custom of deservingness*. These rules in fact described a veritable "hierarchy of deservingness" by establishing subcategories of the eligible and the ineligible. The application of this categorization was aided by the criterion of marital status. The same was true in the United States. Initially, it was widows who received the allowance, not poor mothers generally. Only this group deserved social assistance, for the other categories of mothers could be suspected of being responsible for their lot. The eligibility requirements varied greatly from province to province in terms of both the categories of mothers eligible for

the allowance and the requirements of residency or even nationality (Guest, 1980, p. 59-60). Thus, “provinces differed in the methods of separating the deserving and the undeserving” (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 27). While widows with two or more children were always eligible, this was not necessarily the case for mothers whose husband had a mental or physical illness or was in prison. Canadian legislation generally excluded single or divorced mothers. British Columbia was the most liberal in terms of eligibility (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 27). In the 1930s, Alberta was more generous than Ontario with regard to the disability of the needy mother’s husband (Little, 1998, p. 69).¹² Since such categorization of single mothers meant that only “deserving” poor mothers qualified for assistance, mothers’ allowances received public support (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 25). At the same time, and for the same reasons, the American public supported the policy of assistance for single mothers.

The *rules* of deservingness governed not just entry into, but also maintenance in the social assistance system. In all provinces, the legislation stated that the mother had to be “fit and proper” to be eligible for the mothers’ allowance (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 27). The process of the social control of recipients was thus based on highly arbitrary criteria, in this instance the good morals of the poor mothers. Depending on the province and the day, different indicators were used to establish the model of the good mother. Thus, it was cleanliness, sobriety, chastity or, more generally, sexual conduct that dominated the investigations of social workers.¹³ According to D. Guest (1980, p. 60), the requirement that women applying for relief be of good character was “a throwback to poor law concerns about distinguishing between worthy and unworthy applicants.” It was common practice to require a mother applying for assistance to provide two letters of reference. Inquiries could be made about her social standing in the community (Guest, 1980, p. 60). The enterprise of rehabilitating poor mothers, organized in the context of the mothers’ allowance through the application of moral criteria, was, according to V. Strong-Boag (1979, p. 28), an extension, via the state apparatus, of the middle class’ ability to control the conduct and development of working-class Canadians.

The *rules* of the social assistance institution were also linked to those governing employment. The mothers’ allowance was designed to organize the distribution of employment as well. In Canada, a rhetoric developed likening poor mothers to “employees of the State” who were required to correctly fulfil the function of raising children. As an employer, the State had to ensure the satisfactory performance of this “employment contract,” as the initiatives of the Manitoba government attest: “Manitoba (...) appointed a ‘visiting housekeeper’ to instruct mothers, arguing that ‘when the contract of employment between the mothers and the Province is signed, and the mother in receipt of her salary that the Province should satisfy itself that the services rendered for the salary are accomplishing what was intended...’.”¹⁴ A report of the Social Workers’ Club of Winnipeg, circulated before the legislation was enacted in that province, was entitled *State Salaries for Mothers* (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 26). In Ontario, there is evidence of similar practices. The mothers’ allowance formalized in a social contract the mother’s job of raising children at home, and depicted recipients as “employees of the State.” Next, the rules imposed a “female” behavioural model with respect to employment. Caseworkers advocated part-time employment or paid work done in the home rather than outside the domestic sphere (Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 27). This, concludes this author, ensured “the maintenance of a

pool of vulnerable, cheap and part-time labour.” Finally, these programs were a means of regulating the competition for employment between various groups (by excluding women from paid work) during a period of job scarcity, a situation seen especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Morel, 1987). According to D. Bellemare (1981, p. 301), the mothers’ allowance was designed expressly to “dissuade mothers from participating in the labour market,” conveying “society’s expectations” of women’s behaviour with regard to employment [*translation*] (Bellemare, 1981, p. 586).

Conclusion

In Canada, the welfare state has its own configuration, distinct from that of the United States. The thematic of reciprocal obligations, observed by social assistance analysts, shows that the relationship between the poor and the State has undergone a transformation in Canada. Also, we see that the *custom* of deservingness in the social assistance context has existed in various forms throughout the history of social assistance in Canada. In the relation of assistance, public aid expressly entails an exchange of labour. Legislation respecting mothers’ pensions, which represents an important episode in Canada, gives us a better understanding of the specificity of this *custom* as it applies to women. This social policy, besides its component of income support for single mothers, was a disciplinary mechanism regulating the behaviour of poor women as mothers and wage-earners, that is to say, as domestic workers and as paid workers. The study of this policy reveals that the conception of *rights and duties* in the context of social assistance differs according to gender.

Notes

¹ It is not our aim here to explain the theses or arguments of these authors, but merely to identify some of their conclusions about the issue.

² The author identifies three main types of welfare state: in addition to the “liberal” welfare state, there is the “corporatist” welfare state (the case of France) and the “social democratic” welfare state.

³ From this perspective, the emphasis is on individual behaviour and responsibility.

⁴ The institutional conception focusses on prevention, collective responsibility and collective rights.

⁵ The boxes and tables are appended to this report.

⁶ This expression is understood in the broad sense of aid to the unemployed based on the principles of both social insurance and social assistance.

⁷ *House of Commons Debates, Official Report*, February 14, 1935, p. 850.

⁸ Established Programs Funding, which had to do, notably, with health and post-secondary education, was also replaced.

⁹ HRDC, *Highlights of the Canada-Québec Labour Agreement in Principle*, 1997.

¹⁰ Cited in Guest, 1980, p. 56.

¹¹ Alberta (1918), Superintendent of Neglected Children, *Annual Report*, p. 8.

¹² For the categories of eligibility in Quebec and Ontario, see chapters 3 and 4.

¹³ See, in this regard, the chapters on Quebec and Ontario.

¹⁴ Mothers' Allowances Commission (1920-1921), *Annual Report*, Manitoba, p. 21; cited in Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 28.

3. THE CASE OF QUEBEC

Quebec's social assistance system has changed considerably since the 1980s, notably to the extent that the relation of assistance between the poor and the State has been transformed into a reciprocity relationship. In this chapter, we describe the stages in the evolution of the social assistance institution in Quebec. Our objective is to show, while giving them meaning, the forms of reciprocity that have existed throughout history up until their recent transformation.

Quebec: a "Distinct Society" in Canada

Before we go on to analyse the social assistance institution as such, it is worth recalling that Quebec differs from the other Canadian provinces with regard to social security, as it does in other spheres of collective life. It is also differentiated by its innovations with respect to social assistance reciprocity.

The distinctiveness of Quebec derives, first of all, from the conception of the role of the State that is asserted within the society. For many reasons, including its status of "small francophone society on an anglophone continent," "the State retains, in the eyes of Quebeckers, a legitimacy it does not enjoy everywhere in North America" [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 9). The full coverage of social assistance and the benefit levels, which are twice as high as in the United States, explain, the authors argue, why there has been no increase in poverty rates, in either Quebec or Canada, comparable to that experienced by our neighbours to the south (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 19). On the North American continent, Quebec is, of the three "ideological regions"—the other two being the American south (conservative), and the rest of the United States and Canada (fairly moderate)—the one that "appears to be North America's most liberal and egalitarian society": Quebeckers "are systematically less authoritarian, more egalitarian, more favourably disposed to State intervention, more accepting of unions, and more feminist than their neighbours in the rest of Canada and in the United States" [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 9-10). This is evidenced by an institutional context specific to Quebec (financial institutions, high union density, interventionist State, strong trade unions, etc.). Quebec's family policy is the most progressive in Canada, particularly with regard to public child-care services. The parental leave policy currently proposed by the Quebec government is also well ahead of what exists in other Canadian provinces (Box 11).¹ In this regard, then, Quebec serves as a model, British Columbia having just announced its wish to "model itself on the Quebec program of 5-dollar daycare and introduce its own 7-dollar daycare service in the school setting" [*translation*] (Dutrisac, 2000a, p. A4).

Quebec also differs in the way it has chosen to integrate its social assistance system. It has developed a more ambitious, more universal and more integrated approach to relief than what existed at the federal level in the context of the CAP (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 10). Over the past decade, a period of evolution for its social assistance system, Quebec has also stood out for its innovative approach of linking employment and assistance, which initially took the form of income supplementation measures through the tax system. Thus, the WIS (Work Income Supplement) program created in 1979, was the first of its kind in

Canada (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 121). Secondly, Quebec is an innovator in the area of “active” measures: for 10 years, “no Canadian province has been as innovative as Quebec in making the transition from a social assistance system geared strictly to income support to a system favouring labour market integration” [translation] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 75). The Quebec experience “is now copied by most other Canadian provinces” [translation] (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 19).

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time: Rights and Duties Generally

In the 17th century, the organization of relief for the poor in the colony was directly influenced by France. The British influence was also felt, but later and to a lesser degree, being confined to initiatives in the city of Montreal in the 19th century. During this period, relief for the indigent was provided essentially, in its organized forms, by private charity, being the work of religious and philanthropic institutions. The first social assistance legislation was enacted in 1921. It marked a decisive turning point in the history of social assistance in Quebec. Thereafter, social assistance became institutionalized in the form of categorial programs for groups recognized as being in specific circumstances warranting public relief. The Great Depression of the 1930s forced government to set up these programs. It is in this context that the program of assistance for needy mothers was introduced. Later, the recession of the late 1950s exacerbated the many inconsistencies that existed between categorial programs; hence the standardization of the social assistance system through the *Social Aid Act* of 1969. This marked an important stage in the evolution of Quebec’s social assistance system: categorial programs were recast into a single system, ushering in the contemporary period.

During the pre-industrial era, the treatment of poverty was structured within the context of a social organization dominated by the family and private institutions (Guest, 1980). In the 17th century, the organization of aid for the poor in the colony was directly influenced by France. The family was the primary institution given responsibility by society for providing aid to its indigent members. This responsibility became institutionalized legally through the obligations recognized by the *Code civil*, which clearly stipulated the obligations between parents and children: children had the right to demand of their parents food, maintenance and education. Conversely, they had the duty to provide their parents and indigent ascendants with the necessary support “to the extent of the need of the one requiring it and of the means of the one required to give it” [translation] (Laroche, 1950, p. 10). Moreover, the Catholic reform that took place in France in the 17th century meant that, unlike England, which adopted the Poor Law of 1601,² “the system of relief in France and Canada was built on the humanitarian foundations of Catholicism and Christian charity” [translation] (Laroche, 1950, p. 15). Thus, the French Catholic tradition predominated in New France and the Church was responsible for the health, education and welfare of the community.³ The Sulpicians, who came to Montreal in 1657, followed “the principles practised in Saint-Sulpice parish in Paris” [translation] (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 31). The Grey Nuns worked with them. In the city of Quebec, there were the Ursulines and the Augustinian Nuns (established in 1693).

As for public authorities, the municipalities had powers of intervention that permitted them to help the indigent within their jurisdiction. However, unlike other Canadian provinces, they

had no legal obligation to assist the poor. Their interventions sprang from a discretionary power.

In 1688, the Sovereign Council of Quebec decreed the establishment of *bureaux des pauvres* in the cities of Quebec, Montreal and Trois-Rivières. In operation until 1760, these agencies received funds which they distributed to the poor. Recipients provided work if they were able (Laroche, 1950, p. 16). Also, until 1854, the year the feudal system was abolished in Canada, seigneurs had some responsibilities towards poor settlers living on their lands. The Conquest (1760) had little impact on the system of charity established in Lower Canada. Protestants and Catholics had their separate institutions. There was no attempt to introduce British Poor Law, and the Church extended its sphere of influence into the area of public assistance.

The 19th century saw a number of developments worthy of mention, first of all because they illustrate old forms of exchange in the context of relief, among the first introduced on Quebec soil, and secondly because they show that the French influence was not as monolithic as it appears at first glance. During that period, in the realm of relief for the poor, the number of relief providers grew. In Montreal, for example, the congregation of the Sisters of Providence was founded, as were lay organizations (Les Dames de la Charité, in 1827; The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in 1847). The practice of categorizing the poor was already an underpinning of the organization of charitable relief.

Eighteen-century documents of the Order of Sulpicians set out specific rules and principles for serving the poor: the poor were classified into categories, including, notably, the “honest poor,” those worthy of aid, and the “notorious poor.” The Sulpicians of Montreal were applying these rules in the 19th century. These two categories of indigents were treated differently: the first received monetary aid, while the second, most of Montreal’s poor, received aid in kind. This “distinction was a measure of the trust in the first category of indigents” [*translation*] (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 31). Thus, it was indeed an assessment of worthiness that guided the choice of the means used to help the poor, based on the fundamental criterion of fitness for work:

The poor who were helped by organizations (in the 19th century) can be divided into two categories. First, there were those who were unable to work because of age (children, the elderly) or temporary or permanent disability; then, there were those who were able to work but would not (the misfits) or had no work (the unemployed). Each of these two groups was then divided into those who were helped in the home (Oeuvre de la soupe, Dépôt des pauvres, etc.) and those who were helped in an institution (Hôpital Général, Asile de la Providence, etc.). [*Translation*] (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 14)

Institutional aid also took various forms according to whether it was intended for the poor who were “unable to work” or those who were “able to work.” For the first group, made up of foundlings, orphans, the elderly and the infirm, in the 18th century, institutions with no particular vocation, conceived along the lines of the Hôpital Général, were established to take them in (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 145). There was a certain tolerance of persons deemed

“unable to work.” In the 19th century, the surge in the needs to be met by relief institutions gradually prompted them to differentiate their aid:

[C]are became specialized according to the particular needs of the various groups. Thus, the number of almshouses and houses of refuge for the elderly, convalescent homes for the sick, orphanages for children, institutions for unwed mothers, grew. In short, institutions specialized according to the various possible causes of unfitness for work. *[Translation]* (Bellemare, 1981, p. 176)

During this same period, the poor who were “able to work” received different treatment. Two kinds of institutional aid was reserved for them: a service known as the Maison d’industrie was set up in the city of Montreal, which combined relief with moral rehabilitation through labour; and various services were set up to help find work for those seeking it. The Montreal experience of the Maison d’industrie is of interest because it shows that Quebec was influenced, to a degree, by English Poor Law: “To the social miseries caused by the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, French Canada had an innovative social response, inspired by the French and English models” *[translation]* (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 291). Opening its doors for the first time in the winter of 1820, and in operation sporadically until the 1870s, the Maison d’industrie was a local version of the workhouse (Box 5).

There was also a pathologic aspect to the poverty of those “able to work.” Insofar as the values of self-reliance and mutual aid within the family were of prime importance, it was necessary to protect the economic independence of one and all (Bellemare, 1981, p. 136). The newspapers of the day denounced begging, asserting that among the real beggars were imposters who exploited honest people: “[T]he impossibility of distinguishing the deserving poor man from the idler and the wicked provides many with the means to lead a comfortable life” *[translation]*.⁴

Other institutions stepped in to help the poor who were “able to work.” The Confrérie du bien public, created by the Sulpicians, also helped the poor directly by providing employment: work tools were provided and loaned to the unemployed assigned to complete the agreed work. Some poor people spun wool and knitted, others worked as cobblers or broke up rocks, as did the men at the Maison d’industrie. Women performed work in the home (knitting, sewing) “which fit in easily with their domestic chores” *[translation]* (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 218). Les Dames de la Charité provided placement services for young girls seeking work as domestic helpers, “unplaced servants,” while the Sisters of Providence did the same for the unemployed of both sexes. To institutional relief was added assistance in the home (non-institutional relief) between 1831 and 1846.

Early in the 20th century, municipal relief came in various forms: grants to charities, direct aid or various services. For example, the municipal assistance division of the city of Montreal was involved, notably, in steering indigents to the appropriate charitable institutions, issuing begging permits, or rounding up the poor (Bellemare, 1981, p. 289). However, social assistance programs were still not highly evolved. It was not until 1921 that the State became

involved in assisting the poor, with the *Public Charities Act*. This legislation protected the principle of private charity and reassured those who had feared State interference in an area previously beyond its ken. The *Public Charities Act* did not institute direct relief (payment of financial aid) for the poor, but helped private institutions (hospitals, crèches, orphanages, refuges, homes) to assist the poor. The government paid a portion of the costs of the maintenance, lodging and treatment of indigents admitted to a public charitable institution (Marie Alice, 1953, p. 8). This law favoured the development of the private system of relief for the poor: it “made [in this province] considerable advances in combatting indigence, particularly for children” [translation] (Laroche, 1950, p. 25). Thus, as noted by Gonzalve Poulin (1955, p. 71), this “system recognized the private structure of assistance, but saw in it a public function” [translation]. The funding introduced by the legislation was modelled on the French system (Poulin, 1955, p. 72).

In the 1930s, social assistance became institutionalized in the form of categorial programs. Since the actions of the Quebec government relating to income security and other concerns cannot be understood without reference to the interventions of the federal government, our presentation of the evolution of relief measures in Quebec refers here to the report on Canada as a whole. In Quebec, it was not until the Great Depression of the 1930s that the government took social policy action:

In 1930, given the scope of the problems of poverty compounded by unemployment, the Quebec government established the commission of inquiry on social insurance (...) [whose] report served as the model for most insurance and assistance legislation subsequently adopted both federally and in Quebec. [Translation] (Poulin Simon, Carroll, 1991, p. 772)

Acting on the recommendations of this commission of inquiry, known as the Montpetit Commission, Quebec followed the example of the other provinces and adopted, in 1936, its program of “assistance for needy mothers.” In 1954, it was the elderly and the blind, the poor “unable to work” who were targeted for assistance. Social assistance programs kept the recipients in poverty. Indeed, although benefits were calculated on the basis of need, the notion of need remained generally quite vague. In particular, the benefit amount was kept small owing to the principle of less eligibility.⁵ For example, the weekly federal allowance was less than half the minimum wage in effect at that time (Bellemare, 1981, p. 301). “Needy mothers” were a special case since, in order to dissuade them from seeking employment, their allowance was just below the minimum wage (Bellemare, 1981).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Quebec government agreed with the federal authorities, as did the other provinces, to provide assistance to the unemployed, either directly or through public works that put men to work. The policy of aid for the unemployed adopted by Ottawa in 1933 was aimed “at helping people help themselves” [translation] (Godbout, 1954, p. 55). The practices observed with respect to the “unemployed in need” who received assistance during the Great Depression reveal two things: firstly, exchange was a formative element of the organization of relief, which means that the problem of the work incentive was still omnipresent, and secondly, the enterprise of “moral regulation” also guided the measures taken, through “conditions of eligibility for aid that focussed on the good morals” of the unemployed [translation] (Légaré, 1980).

In the post-war period, more and more categorial programs left many people without minimal protection:

A number of people able to work but unable to find employment lived without means; these were workers whose jobs were not covered by the unemployment insurance legislation, or unemployed workers whose entitlement had expired, or even unemployed workers who did not qualify because they had not contributed for enough weeks or had been temporarily unable to work. Also in need were a number of workers who had a job but for whom the seasonality or irregularity of the work or simply the pay did not provide a decent income. *[Translation]* (Bellemare, 1981, p. 582)

To counter these many situations of destitution, in 1956 the federal government introduced a shared-cost unemployment insurance program with the provinces.⁶ Also, there were inconsistencies in the social assistance, a result of the coexistence of a range of programs introduced at different times, each with its own rules:

[A]ll jobless dependants in need were protected by categorial programs, each with its different levels of assistance and means tests of varying strictness: the elderly, needy mothers, the infirm, the blind, the unemployed were all treated differently (...) differentiation between the dependants of a given province or municipality that depended on the causes of the economic dependence. *[Translation]* (Bellemare, 1981, p. 586)

The government then set up a public assistance task force, the Boucher Commission, which would influence the future structure of the social assistance system not only in Quebec, but in Canada as well. Indeed, the Commission's recommendations were the impetus for the process of standardization that took place almost simultaneously at the federal level and in Quebec. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was adopted in 1966 to "standardize the social assistance system, first, by asking the provinces to abolish categorial programs and come up with a comprehensive program, and second, by proposing that the provinces establish a single benefits schedule based on the budget method" *[translation]* (Bellemare, 1981, p. 590). Quebec was the last province to reach an agreement with the federal government in 1967.

An important stage in the evolution of Quebec's social assistance system was reached in the late 1960s. In December 1969, Quebec streamlined its own social assistance system with the enactment of the *Social Aid Act*. Bill 26 integrated the social assistance system by combining the various categorial benefits into a single program. Thus began an era "when the Quebec government became particularly aggressive with regard to secondary income distribution in an attempt to regain control in this sphere" *[translation]* (Bellemare, 1981, p. 588). The integrated social assistance program provided last-resort aid to anyone in need. For—and this point is essential—the Boucher report explicitly recognized the contribution of factors unrelated to individual responsibility to states of indigence:

It was formerly believed that when a person was poor, it was his own fault. It is now better understood that poverty is often due to economic or social factors beyond the control of the individual. (Boucher, 1963, p. 119)

From this observation followed another of the report's main recommendations, which reiterated the principle of the right to assistance previously established by the federal *Unemployment Assistance Act*. It stated that "any individual in need is entitled to assistance from the state, whatever the immediate or remote cause of this need may be" (Boucher, 1963, p. 118). The reform of the Quebec social assistance system was therefore modelled on a policy position that set new guidelines for State intervention, based on the notion of social justice. About this recognition of the right to assistance, the members of the Boucher Commission were very clear:

Admission of this right would reject the latent and inadmissible concept of public charity which may often actuate the State when it prepares social policies, and in its place would be injected the principle of social justice, a more accurate proposition and much more consistent with the facts. Application of this principle would eliminate any danger of arbitrary action, ever a possibility as long as it is supposed that the principle of charity can be satisfied by legislation and regulations. The state need not worry about being charitable, but it has a duty to be fair. It is important therefore that the right of the citizen to assistance when in need should be clearly recognized. (Boucher, 1963, 118)

For women, the *Social Aid Act* was determinant. The benefits for single-parent families were increased slightly and the principle of their indexation was incorporated into the legislation. Above all, the social aid introduced in 1970 put an end to the requirement of "good morals" imposed on poor mothers as a condition of eligibility for assistance,⁷ a principle that had prevailed since 1937 in the context of assistance for needy mothers.

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time: Assistance for Needy Mothers

Quebec was one of the last Canadian provinces to enact, in 1937, legislation to provide assistance for needy mothers, bringing in one of the first continuous programs of assistance in Quebec. The preponderant role in and control over assistance assigned to the clergy and religious congregations, as well as to charitable organizations, partly explain its late appearance (Gauthier, 1985). Describing the conception the Quebec people have of assistance for the destitute, on the eve of the adoption of assistance for needy mothers, Bernadette Laroche (1950, p. 32) stated as follows:

Everything leads us back to religion, to work and to the influence of the clergy, to worship and to the strength of the family, to tradition. This is what our people saw in their past when they were being offered new social assistance measures. From the outset they were wary of them and rejected them, because they still believed, in the twentieth century, that the religious and philanthropic institutions that had always been up to the task could continue to be so; that the French-Canadian people were sufficiently conscious of their moral obligations to continue to care for their poor.

[Translation]

Assistance for needy mothers appeared as new legislation “that brought the State directly into the family” [*translation*] in a country whose people resist government interference in their private lives (Laroche, 1950, p. 33, 34). According to Laroche, it was therefore not surprising that “a population steeped in Catholicism, as is ours, saw the social assistance problem on a more personal level, that is, made it a responsibility and a duty of individuals, above all, and of small groups: families, parishes, cities” [*translation*] (Laroche, 1950, p. 36). The urgency of the need, which heightened during the Great Depression of the 1930s, overcame the resistance. The moral obligation of municipalities to help the destitute was not enough. The public authorities now had a legal obligation. Moreover, with the legislation of 1921, placements in institutions surged and there was concern about the impact this phenomenon would have on the preservation of the family. Indeed, in the early 1930s, Quebec had a system of foster homes and orphanages that was more extensive than all other Canadian provinces combined, and most of the children admitted to orphanages were not orphans (Laroche, 1950, p. 43, 53). This increased reliance on institutions distracted them from their suppletive role and took away from the family, the “primary social unit, [a] unique, irreplaceable context for the full development of the individual,” the primacy that was “naturally” its due:

Excessive encouragement of the system of placement in homes and orphanages, as currently practised in the province of Quebec, is a mistake in many cases and a less perfect form of protection by society. In separating mother and children, the former is deprived of her essential role and the latter of the family environment they need. [*Translation*]
(Laroche, 1950, p. 52)

The Quebec Social Insurance Commission, known as the Montpetit Commission, also paid considerable attention to the question of “care of the child.” Instead of proposing the expansion of services of “institutional” care, the Commission recognized the superiority of family placement and care in the home. The program of assistance for single mothers with children could thus “reunite families that are today broken up.” Nearly all those who appeared before it, the Commission said, had declared their support for this form of assistance “in order to keep the family together, to protect the mother and to save the children” (Commission Montpetit, 1933, p. 36). In this context, poor women were assisted only by virtue of being mothers, and the child was the main person the legislation targeted for assistance: “Charity for needy mothers is attached directly to the protection of the child, in the sense that it grants the mother, burdened with a family, the means of keeping her children with her and of bringing them up” (Commission Montpetit, 1933, p. 33).

In the face of family and child protection, State intervention, instead of being seen solely as an element destructive of individual and private responsibility, acquired a certain legitimacy: “[The State] must protect the family unit and the first step is to leave the children in the home if the mother [or her substitute] is able to care for them and give them the necessary education. It must ensure that she is secure in performing this task, with the best chances of success” [*translation*] (Laroche, 1950, p. 52). The presence of mothers in the home as the surest means of achieving this objective garnered much support, as the ladies of the Fédération Nationale St-Jean-Baptiste pointed out:

The Mothers' Pension, as it exists in most Latin and Anglo-Saxon countries, consists in paying the widow, who is responsible for the family and has no means of supporting her children, a sufficient sum that she need not work outside the home and is able to raise her children while remaining at home. A mother whose husband is disabled and unable to work enjoys the same privilege. Need the excellence of this legislation and the advantages the country ought to derive from it be shown, for in keeping the home intact, the children are placed in normal conditions of development, health and morality. We know the disruption caused when the mother deserts the home and the countless troubles that ensue. The home is essential to the well-being of the child and it is necessary for the wife. It appears that everyone is in agreement to call for this reform and that there is no need to argue for it. *[Translation]* (LBP, 1931, p. 3)

When the government of Maurice Duplessis acted, after a five-year delay, on the recommendations of the Montpetit Commission, it too stressed the role of women in the education of the children, but also the contribution to society that this work represented:

It is not assistance legislation (...) but something owed mothers for the work accomplished and the enrichment of the province. We want to pay mothers' allowances to conserve our human capital, to conserve, in families abandoned by the breadwinner, that family bond so essential to education, to moral and spiritual instruction. We want the mother to stay at home to care for and raise her children rather than scatter them to the four corners of the province.⁸
[Translation]

In the context of assistance for needy mothers, the domestic work of mothers took on the dimension of women's contribution to citizenship. To the members of the legislature who opposed the expenditures imposed by this legislation, the Premier pointed out that "the pension granted needy mothers is not an expenditure, but an investment" *[translation]* (Laroche, 1950, p. 59). In the mind of the lawmaker, states B. Laroche (1950, p. 56-57), the needy mothers' allowance "is intended to enable any mother who is morally and physically able to do so to raise her children by keeping them with her and doing what is necessary to make of them good citizens. (...) For the State, it is an investment in citizenship" *[translation]*. As women's social contribution was explicitly recognized, the allowance, which was its quid pro quo, was therefore likened to a "right": the "work of the mother concerning everything to do with the education and maintenance of her children can rightly be considered the active contribution of a citizen to the good life of the country and of society, which contribution confers rights" *[translation]* (Laroche, 1950, p. 54). It also emerged from the parliamentary debates preceding the enactment of the legislation that "the vast majority of the members of the legislature consider this measure to be something owed" *[translation]*. In this regard, the Minister of Labour said: "This is not public assistance legislation, nor a kind of charity; nor is it a pittance or alms that are being given: it is the granting of a right"⁹ *[translation]*. In 1950, commenting on the change in attitude of poor mothers towards this allowance, B. Laroche (1950, p. 83) wrote: "At first the claimants readily likened the mothers' allowance to the aid provided by the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and some continued to behave as 'apologetic poor' or with feigned discomfort. The

education is now complete and people, after the change wrought in us by the various social security measures, particularly the notion of old age pensions, have become accustomed to the idea of a ‘pension’ ” *[translation]*.

As in the United States and elsewhere in Canada, the income test and lone parenthood were not enough, on their own, to confer rights on poor mothers. These mothers were classified into categories established mainly on the basis of the husband’s status. The Montpetit Commission had already set priorities as to the categories of mothers that were to receive public assistance. First of all, it had divided needy mothers into five categories:

- widows burdened with one or more dependent children;
- women whose husbands are insane;
- wives whose husbands are incapable of working due to some incurable disease;
- deserted wives;
- wives whose husbands are in prison (Godbout, 1954, p. 124).

Next, the Commission had recommended the specific targeting of aid: “After studying the problems specific to each category and the available resources, the Social Insurance Commission concluded that only the first three categories of needy mothers should receive support” *[translation]* (Godbout, 1954, p. 125).

When it was created, in 1937, the needy mothers’ allowance was granted to a widow or the wife of an interned husband (section 3*b.* of the Act of 1937).¹⁰ And only a woman who kept with her at least two children under the age of 16 received assistance. According to the Premier’s answers given to the Legislative Assembly, it was for financial reasons that mothers with only one child were not initially covered (Laroche, 1950, p. 58). In 1939, it was thought preferable to be explicit about the meaning of “child” by adding the word “legitimate,” so that only “legitimate” children, that is, children born to married parents, qualified for relief. In 1940, a new provision expressly stipulated that unmarried women were excluded from the application of the Act (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 8). Thereafter, fewer and fewer unmarried single mothers applied for social assistance, despite their poverty (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 8). It was also in 1940 that mothers with only one child became eligible for assistance,¹¹ as did mothers whose husband was absent, that is, whose husband had disappeared without a trace (Laroche, 1950, p. 77). Wives who had been abandoned at least five years were not eligible.¹² This five-year standard would remain in effect until 1947, when it was reduced to 12 months. In 1961, women whose husband was in prison and abandoned wives were eligible for State assistance after three months¹³ (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 8). It was not until 1947 that the Act covered a child under 19 years of age who was unable to work because of a physical or mental disability, as well as the daughter- or son-in-law caring for their mother-in-law (Laroche, 1950, p. 80). In 1950, the cases of “unwed mothers” and divorced or separated mothers were not yet covered by the Quebec legislation (Laroche, 1950, p. 82). Even in 1958, the vast majority of women receiving the needy mothers’ allowance were widows (Table 1) and were among the oldest cohorts (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 9).

The Montpetit Commission also recommended, along the lines of what existed in the other Canadian provinces and in the United States, that conditions related to the worthy conduct of mothers become integral to proving the claimant's eligibility for assistance: "Every needy mother who requests a grant should (...) be of good character and able to bring up her children in good moral conditions" (Commission Montpetit, 1933, p. 39). The proof that was to accompany a claim for the needy mothers' allowance included "reasonable guarantees of her competency to give her children the care of a good mother" (section 3*d.*), which "are established by at least two certificates, one provided by a member of a religious denomination and the other by a disinterested person unrelated to the claimant (section 12)" [*translation*] (Laroche, 1950, p. 68). An investigation was conducted yearly to determine whether the conditions of entitlement were still met (section 18), mainly to control and prevent fraud (Laroche, 1950, p. 98). In the 1947 Act, temporary absences from the home were also controlled: "When a beneficiary or one of the children for whose care an allowance is paid must be temporarily absent from the home, the Office can continue to pay the allowance, provided it is shown to its satisfaction that this absence is necessary or appropriate (section 35)" [*translation*] (Laroche, 1950, p. 123). We might add that in the 1950s, Gonzalve Poulin (1955, p. 119)¹⁴ pointed out that the Needy Mothers' Assistance Act "could occasionally be used to rehabilitate unwed mothers who wanted and were able to provide for their children" [*translation*].

The needy mothers' allowance was also a tool for regulating the employment of women, a means of controlling their participation in the labour force. During the 1930s and the crisis that raged at that time, there was a backlash against the employment of women. A number of measures were implemented to keep mothers away from paid work, notably by attempting to reinforce their attachment to the home. The Montpetit Commission, in its analysis of the issues surrounding "employment of women," a theme discussed under this heading in the section of the report on "some causes of unemployment," stated that "(t)he testimony in general holds in very slight favour the working in a factory of a mother burdened with children." Yet during this period many women had to find a way to earn income, having become the family breadwinner when their husbands became unemployed (Scharf, 1980).

Although the contribution of mothers in the home was presented as an alternative to employment, women were entitled to supplement their allowance, which was not large enough to support a family, with earnings from part-time work. Thus, the recipient could earn a net annual income of 300 dollars without seeing her allowance reduced (Laroche, 1950, p. 75). The claimant could never, however, "accept employment prejudicial to the education and maintenance of her children" [*translation*] (Hamelin, 1952, p. 54). In a study done in the early 1950s of 80 families living in Quebec City, Claude Hamelin reported that 23 of the 75 mothers worked outside the home or at home (Hamelin, 1952, p. 74). Also, a number of families placed their children in an institution; in most cases, the placements were of children whose mother worked outside the home (Hamelin, 1952, p. 75).

In the early 1950s, the importance of the stability and preservation of the family was still asserted loudly and clearly in Quebec. The same was true of individual responsibility for supporting oneself, as the following comments show: "The primary duty of citizens in [ensuring a country's security] is to assume full responsibility for their life, to provide, through

their work, for themselves and for their dependants. (...) It is therefore very important that the family prepare for society those legions of loyal and devoted citizens who will be its most intrepid defenders (...)” [translation] (Hamelin, 1952, p. 18-19). Thus were established two types of contribution, two orders of “duties of the citizen,” demarcated along the same lines as the division of labour between the sexes in society. There were those, moreover, who wanted to see them recognized once and for all:

[I]f mothers’ allowances cannot be made contributory [sic], could not interpretive work be done to somehow change the attitude of beneficiaries and of the population generally? (...) [T]he mother who does a good job of raising her children is performing her normal role in society and contributes her active share, the same as the labourer, the skilled worker, the farmer in a different sphere. If all this were clearly understood, we would gradually give up this idea of relief, a free ride or a pension, and give the thing its rightful place in the distribution of work and income. There would be no more claimants, no more dependants; on the contrary, the question would be seen from its true perspective! No need to explain that we are talking about mothers who are not supported by a husband and who, without State intervention, would not have the means indispensable for fulfilling their obligations. [Translation] (Laroche, 1950, p. 99)

“Tied Aid”: Contemporary Forms

In the late 1980s, the chronic unemployment that was rampant in Canada, but especially in Quebec, turned the profile of social assistance recipients on its head: now, the “able-bodied” poor were in the vast majority. This observation regarding the employability of recipients underlay the reforms that were to gradually transform the relation of assistance into a new reciprocity relationship, thus introducing the contemporary forms of exchange between the poor and the State. This transformation began primarily with the reform of 1988-1989, and continued with the reform of 1998, whose foundations were laid in 1995.

The Dualization of the Social Assistance System

About 20 years after integrating it, the Quebec government restructured the social assistance system owing mainly to creeping unemployment and changes in unemployment insurance. The social assistance reform undertaken with the *Act respecting income security* enacted December 14, 1988,¹⁵ represented a radical turnabout in the management of the jobless. From that point on, the issues of employability and work incentives, which had always been the underpinnings of social assistance policy, came to the fore. Beneath the surface could also be seen the re-emergence of an individualistic conception of employment problems and the much-debated theme of voluntary unemployment.

Towards an income security policy

The reform of Quebec’s social assistance program was presented in December 1987 in a position paper entitled *Towards an income security policy*. The theme of the work incentive was pre-eminent in this policy statement, which also dealt with the streamlining of the social aid system through “active policies.”

Thus, besides the very substantial increase in the number of social aid recipients,¹⁶ there was concern, “still more importantly,” that the characteristics of beneficiaries had changed entirely. Over a period of some fifteen years, the ratio of those who were “able to work” to those “unable to work” had been completely reversed: when the program was introduced, the latter had represented 63.9 percent of claimants, whereas now those “able to work” accounted for nearly three quarters of this population (73.4 percent). Moreover, this “clientele” was increasingly comprised of single people and youth. It was felt that the social aid program had become “obsolete and inadequate” because it was ill-suited to the needs of the short-term unemployed “whose employability is often very limited” (MMSR, 1987, p. 5, 8). The increase in the cost of the program was another major concern.¹⁷ It was recognized that these problems were attributable mainly to the economic context and high unemployment. The revision of the unemployment insurance program, it was also argued, had “contributed significantly” to the increase in the number of claimants (MMSR, 1987, p. 11). Another explanatory factor cited was “changes in certain fundamental values and concepts such as marriage and the family.” The family had become more fragile. However, the sense of responsibility had also weakened:

These changes have also affected our concept of work and individual and family responsibilities. Today, unemployment is common and receiving unemployment benefits or any other form of social aid, perhaps, no longer carries the negative connotations which formerly acted as an incentive for workers to look for a job. Changes in the roles of the family and the State have in some way contributed to the disintegration of the traditional concepts of family or social responsibility. (MMSR, 1987, p. 11)

It was proposed that Quebec’s social assistance system be adapted according to the capacity for work. In other words, the reform was entirely geared to the notion of employability, that is, to the distinction, deemed essential by the government, between the poor who are “able to work” and those who are “unable to work.”¹⁸

Clearly people who, for health reasons, are unable to work and depend entirely on social aid benefits to meet their needs should not be treated in the same way as those who are able to work and who can perform remunerative tasks while waiting to rejoin the labour force definitively. (MMSR, 1987, p. 13)

Two new programs were created to handle the two categories of recipients separately: the Work and Employment Incentives Program (WEIP), for those “able to work,” and the Financial Support Program, for the rest.¹⁹ In addition, an existing program was modified with the adoption of the Parental Wage Assistance (PWA) program, which supplemented the income of low-income earners who had at least one dependent child.²⁰ According to the legislation, all recipients were presumed to be able and available for work unless they could show otherwise. Recipients were therefore registered right away in the WEIP, which had the following objective: “[P]ersons intent on returning to work will be provided with support; those who wish to enhance their employability will be offered assistance in improving their skills” (MMSR, 1987, p. 23). Employability enhancement would be achieved through various means, such as academic upgrading or training programs, work terms or on-the-job

experience as well as community service. Measures that had previously been created on a trial basis for unemployed youth were thus extended to all groups.

The reform had two opposite effects, according to the category of poor concerned. It improved the situation of the “unemployable,” and it worsened that of the rest (except youth ages 18 to 30) by reducing the direct assistance paid to them. In the context of the WEIP, *availability* and *effective participation* in employment integration measures were the criteria used to determine the level of aid granted. Four categories were established on the basis of these criteria; they corresponded to differentiated benefit scales and work income exemptions (Table 11). Those who refused to act with a view to “enhancing employability” were severely penalized, the difference between their benefit and the benefit paid to participants in such measures, in the case of a single person, being nearly one quarter of the amount of the aid received. Moreover, if the treatment of recipients (age 30 or older) under this reform is compared with the treatment they received under the old system, it will be seen that, as a rule, except for persons effectively participating in measures, they received less protection. Thus, a single person receiving 503 dollars in 1989 (the existing system indexed for 1989) received, after the reform, 420 dollars, 460 dollars or 520 dollars, depending on whether they were classified as “eligible for measures,” “unavailable” or “participant.” A single mother with one dependent child, entitled to 684 dollars in 1989, received 620 dollars, 660 dollars and 720 dollars in the same instances. When we then look at the evolution of the benefit scales from 1988 to 1996 for the various types of household, a considerable inequality of treatment between the categories of beneficiaries becomes apparent (Table 13). This rate structure was designed to encourage beneficiaries to participate voluntarily in “active” measures or intensify their job search. This objective conflicted to some degree with that of cost reduction since, depending on the scenario used, the financial impact of the WEIP ranged from a savings of 145 million dollars (scenario of 25 percent of “employable” persons participating in measures) to increased spending of 55 million dollars (participation rate of 50 percent), compared to the annual cost of the system in place in 1987 of 1.9 billion dollars (MMSR, 1987, p. 32). By comparison with the benefit scales for persons “able to work,” the treatment of persons “unable to work” was very advantageous, equivalent for example, for a single-parent family, to an increase of about 100 dollars a month (Table 12). Finally, while the reform put an end to the former age-based discrimination,²¹ it maintained different treatment on the basis of this criterion. In fact, the principle of the “parental contribution” was introduced, whereby any adult not meeting certain conditions set out in the Act was deemed to be receiving aid from their parents. This provision had the effect of disqualifying many people for aid or reducing the amount of their benefit.

Organized resistance

This bill spurred many groups to action. From the time it was published, the government’s position paper provoked a wave of disapproval, the extent of which was clearly expressed at the hearings of the parliamentary commission charged with sounding out the views of interest groups. The pressure continued long after, with no substantive amendment being made to the bill.

The criticisms of pressure groups were fairly similar. They blamed mainly the government not only for the complexity of the new system,²² but for choosing the wrong target in

speaking of the employment incentive rather than the job shortage. The poor were the scapegoats for a situation that was structural in nature. The government's rationale for reducing aid for persons "able to work" was based on a bald assumption: that the benefit reduction was offset by the obtaining of gainful employment, meaning that fictional earnings were considered actual earnings:

What is the variable that (...) determines the possibility of having employment income? Sheer potentiality: the ability to work. From this purely hypothetical principle, the realization of earnings is thus inferred. Between the two, the very concrete stage imposed by the reality has been overlooked, namely, **the unavoidable necessity of obtaining employment.** In failing to posit this stage, where the possibility exists of the individual not being hired because of a job shortage, one readily comes to believe that it does not arise. (CSN, 1988, p. 16-17)

Many groups also opposed the classification of recipients based on the criterion of ability to work. They argued that this practice harked back to the time of categorial systems and the old notion of public charity, believed to be an outmoded social policy. Moreover, the modulation of aid according to the necessarily arbitrary distinction made between those "able to work" and those "unable to work" went directly against the principle established in the Boucher Report of the right to assistance, whereby the cause of the need must not interfere with the level of aid granted (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 190). The principle of social justice was therefore, the groups claimed, principally challenged:

The reform is intended to select two categories of "poor." On the one hand, it rewards the "good poor," those who cannot and never will be able to work because of a serious physical or mental handicap. On the other hand, it penalizes those qualified as the "bad poor," those who could work, who take advantage of the system and who must be put back to work. [*Translation*] (FTQ, 1988, p. 21)

The groups opposed the compulsory nature of the "employability enhancement" measures. They feared there would not be enough such measures, that they would be adapted not to the needs of individuals but rather to the requirements of companies, and that they would not lead to employment. They deplored that there had been no systematic evaluation of previous measures. Work terms were of particular concern to organized labour, which saw them as potentially contributing to job instability. Several groups were concerned that the trainees were beyond the reach of labour standards, as these recipients were not covered by the labour legislation that protects the labour force as a whole.²³ The introduction of the principle of the parental support requirement was also denounced as a throwback to traditional values. It discriminated against youth, but also against women, who shoulder a disproportionate share of family responsibilities. Moreover, the over-representation of women among social aid recipients already made them the primary victims of this reform.²⁴

Over and above the criticisms presented to the parliamentary commission, a number of Canadian social policy analysts expressed their disagreement with this reform. In making a comparison with Ontario, Luc Thériault and Yves Vaillancourt (1991, p. 190) asserted that

the “Ontario model of social aid reform outlined in the reports *Transitions* and *Back on Track*²⁵ differs at the outset from the residual model” [translation] of reform found in the 1980s in provinces such as Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Quebec. In their view, Quebec’s social aid reform was like an exercise in “recategorization” that harked back to the distinction between the “deserving poor” and the “undeserving poor” (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 190). The approach of the Quebec government was, in their view, “coercive and enforcement oriented,” relying on punitive control mechanisms to get aid recipients back to work. They also felt that beneficiaries and the community had not been consulted about the design, management and assessment of the programs (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 190). Other authors stressed specifically the fact that the Quebec reform was a return to the “Elizabethan” Poor Law tradition (Shragge, 1988).

The Quebec reform was directly associated with workfare (Deniger, 1991; Shragge, 1988, 1990). According to Marc-André Deniger (1993, p. 38), Quebec “chose workfare as the underlying trend of the new income security system” [translation]. The change represented the transition from “welfare” to “workfare,” evoking “the profound transformations of the orientations and rules of the social assistance programs” [translation] of today. This policy, in his view, coupled “income security with the work requirement” and organized “a mechanism for managing work exclusion which, in creating a hierarchy of statuses of the various groups marginalized by unemployment (‘low-income earners, the regular unemployed, aid recipients able to work, aid recipients unable to work’), constituted a kind of labour market antechamber where those excluded from paid work were confined—to varying degrees” [translation] (Deniger, 1991, p. 9). Moreover, he saw in the Quebec reform “increased bureaucratization of the social assistance system, the erosion of individual and collective rights and freedoms, and the reduction of social spending.” It was a “Reaganesque and punitive” reform, maintained Denis Fortin (1990, p. 162). Also, the notion of employability advanced by the reform conjured up, for many analysts, a reading of the problem of poverty that focussed too strongly on the personal shortcomings of the poor. “The employment integration objective of these [employability] measures [of Bill 37] rested almost entirely on the shoulders of individuals,” [translation] asserted C. Bouchard, V. Labrie and A. Noël (1996, p. 53).

Other criticisms were subsequently raised as many problems related to implementation surfaced. Among them, we might mention a central problem which cannot be overstated, namely, the inadequacy of the measures offered to recipients,²⁶ but also the creaming-off practices of social assistance officers,²⁷ the system’s lack of transparency, “the emphasis on financial incentives and controls” rather than on the “intrinsic motivations of individuals” [translation] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 79-80). The inadequacy of resources remained, for some observers, the primary pitfall of the reform: “Managing the out-of-work population at the lowest possible cost, while letting on that this management was aimed at real social and employment reinsertion—such was the reform put in place in 1989 by the *Act respecting income security*” [translation] (McAll, White *et al.*, 1996, p. xi).

The Latest Reform of Quebec’s Social Assistance Policy

The recent reform of social assistance policy was spurred by the enactment, on June 19, 1998, of the *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*.

This legislation was the culmination of a long series of events that began in 1995. For about three years, then, the history of social assistance policy in Quebec was marked by reflection, planning, consultation, dithering and division.

The Comité externe de réforme de la sécurité du revenu

In May 1995, the government formed the Comité externe de réforme de la sécurité du revenu, whose mandate was to propose a comprehensive reform of income security, with the following objectives in mind: greater accountability of individuals and communities; more effective job entry assistance for recipients; simplification of the system; harmonization of the various forms of income security, both internally and with the tax system; establishment of “a social solidarity contract based on a fair balance of the respective responsibilities of the State, individuals and society” [translation]; a more effective struggle “against poverty, social dependence and black market labour” [translation]; the advancement of equity between taxpayers and recipients; and finally, respect of the financial constraints of government (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 5). This committee was co-chaired by Camil Bouchard and Pierre Fortin.²⁸ In the spring of 1996, two separate reports were tabled. Profound disagreements had led to the implosion of the committee, though its members also shared many positions. The issue of the compulsory participation of youth in programs was not the main point of divergence, but was nevertheless one that pitted committee members against each other. The reports revolved around different axes of reflection.

The arguments of the Bouchard, Labrie, Noël report were developed mainly in terms of social rights. The authors concerned themselves, notably, with the stigma suffered by recipients and proposed the elimination of recipient status and of the categories connected with it (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 38). The analysis focussed on exclusion and poverty. It was important, it pointed out, to not demean recipients, to “place the individual at the centre of the process” [translation], to decentralize and democratize the system. Thus, the emphasis was on the users’ input into the planning and implementation of their social and employment insertion, or “moving from the notion of employability to a system of paths to employment” [translation], which meant shifting the emphasis away from the personal shortcomings of individuals to the quality of the support provided to them in the insertion process (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. IV). In this regard, the authors expressly fall within the perspective of the assertion of social rights inherited from the French approach. Thus, in recognizing each person’s right to build an individualized path to employment, they stated:

we place a new right within the context of income security, the right to social and economic integration. In recognizing this right, as France did with the Revenu minimum d’insertion, Quebec would undertake to open up avenues to the most disadvantaged, avenues leading as far as possible, but not always, to labour market integration. [Translation] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 115)

The balance of rights and duties was an important theme of the report. Within the overall perspective of a society project for Quebec, the authors considered the weight to be assigned to “individual responsibility, collective responsibility, solidarity” in the planning of the system. They banked on the contribution of the State, but also on that of the community

in combatting exclusion: the duties pertained to all stakeholders, the community sector occupying, in this context, a predominant role. As in the report of P. Fortin and F. Séguin, the creation of Local Employment Centres (LECs) was proposed. They ought to have users committees, notably to protect the rights of recipients (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 34). The committee members also objected to the requirement of work in exchange for social aid. They considered it unfair because “work is costly” and if these additional costs were offset by a specific allocation, there was a risk of creating a “parallel job market, where the laws and usual standards do not apply” [*translation*]. Moreover, putting a large number of individuals to work was thought to be unrealistic because it was too costly (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 104-105). The voluntary approach to participation in programs was presented as a general principle of public intervention on the “road to employment.” The personal paths of recipients ought to be coherent, continuous and progressive while being adapted to meet their specific needs (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 84). The voluntary approach was, in this context, essential, summing up the committee members’ conception of social assistance reciprocity:

The principle of the individual, voluntary initiative implies that a coherent path to employment can only be determined by the person concerned, on a voluntary basis. It may be possible to induce some people to learn and advance through coercion. But it is difficult to induce people to regain their confidence, to project themselves positively in the future and to take control of their life if they are not permitted to make choices and assume responsibilities (...) One must never lose sight of the importance of autonomy, which necessarily begins with the determination of a personal path. [*Translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 85)

Using the Danish experience as a model, the Committee proposed the adoption of a social and employment insertion plan “to be defined jointly by the individual and their counsellor” and “leading to a signed agreement” that was voluntary and binding on both parties [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 86). Reference was made to article 1 of France’s RMI legislation regarding the community’s obligation to propose options for the jobless (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 82). The Committee thus recommended “that the Quebec government recognize the eminently collective and social dimension of social and employment insertion, and undertake to offer realistic options and to support the initiatives of persons on their road to employment” [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 83).

For youth under age 25, the authors proposed “making a portion of the allowance (\$2,000) conditional on participation in an insertion plan” [*translation*]. Such a stipulation, they admitted, “is itself an infringement of an historic rule that has prevailed until now in the offer of last resort in Quebec: the unconditional nature of aid. This infringement can only be justified by a greater public investment in young adults, which this report urges Quebec society to make” [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 158). While proposing differentiated treatment for young adults, the committee members diverged from the position developed by P. Fortin and F. Séguin: “[F]or young adults, we adopt an approach of trust rather than distrust” [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. III):

We consider it extremely important to send a clear signal to the community as a whole that the approach towards young people must not be one of “tugging ears” or “tightening screws”! Our proposals are based on a society’s trust in its youth, not on distrust. (...) They must first be given a chance and not be flattened by a doctrine of effort that ultimately is based only on an approach of blame and punishment. [*Translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 157)

The principle of reciprocity between the poor and the State was clearly presented as fundamental to “a new approach of ongoing support for youth”: “the allowance given young adults must be based on a mutual youth -State obligation in the context of a formal agreement that defines a social and employment insertion plan” [*translation*] (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 156). However, the emphasis was primarily on the State’s obligation of means, which ought to be discharged before further obligations are imposed on youth (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 156-157). According to A. Noël, it is not so much the existence of the exchange that is important, but rather “the conditions that can make this contract and this exchange fair and democratic” [*translation*]. The “mutually binding exchange,” as opposed to the “individualized exchange,” is, according to the author, one where “the involvement will be negotiated on a collective basis, and will be as binding on the State as on the individual” [*translation*] (Noël, 1996, p. 118).

Pierre Fortin and Francine Séguin presented, in their report, a strategy based on a series of measures covering at once “job supply and demand” [*translation*] (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 128). They were concerned about the growth of the population of social aid recipients and the resulting costs. They examined the problem of unemployment and its causes—especially the orientation of the unemployment insurance reforms brought in and the restrictive monetary policy adopted by the Bank of Canada. Intergenerational poverty, school leaving, the work disincentive and social assistance fraud were some of the issues this subcommittee identified as major problems urgently requiring corrective action (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 6).

With regard to the establishment of benefit scales, the authors recommended that the government continue its policy of moderation and stability, but change the structure of benefit rates. They thus suggested lowering the “rates for beneficiaries who are fit for work”²⁹ and raising by 6 percentage points the rates of persons “with severe limitations to employment” [*translation*] (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 127). P. Fortin and F. Séguin also advocated an employment policy, notably through aid to businesses. They recommended that a “good portion” of the savings generated over the short term by the proposed measures (estimated at 129 million dollars) be reinvested in increasing the number of social assistance officers, in their training, in active job-creation measures, in daycare services, and so on.

Concerning reciprocity, the authors strongly defended the principle of the recipient’s obligation to participate in measures leading to employment, but also the State’s obligation to provide the necessary means to this end. Thus, they recommended:

[s]trengthening the reciprocal obligation, on the one hand, of income security beneficiaries who are able to work to spend the time they are on social assistance enhancing their capacity to effectively enter the labour market and, on the other hand, of the State to provide them with sufficient means. Entitlement to the social assistance benefit entails, in our view, the unavoidable obligation to actively look for work or to participate in a job preparation or employment integration program. This principle (...) should apply to all beneficiaries. But it should apply with particular force to young beneficiaries ages 18 to 24, who are entering an especially significant phase of their integration into working life. It should, at the same time, compel the State to provide a range of job preparation and employment integration activities of unquestioned quality and effectiveness. *[Translation]* (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 36)

The authors also pointed up the need for more controls to identify fraud, to toughen the marital status criteria and to better verify the job search efforts of aid recipients. A poverty reduction strategy for people presenting no employment limitations ought, in their view, to focus on strengthening the link between income security and employment. To this end, two conditions were essential: first, better verification of the efforts of claimants and help in developing and intensifying these efforts, if necessary; and second, improvement of recipients' capacity to hold a job and of "the financial advantage of finding one" (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 7).

P. Fortin and F. Séguin were in favour of reinforcing the employment integration obligations for recipients of all ages, but especially youth (ages 18 to 24), who ought to receive "considerable ongoing support and guidance" *[translation]* (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 67). Once a young person entered the system, it was necessary to ensure, for example, that he "has made real efforts to find a job or prepare for employment." If "the verdict is negative, he can still be granted the social assistance benefit, but on the express condition he become involved in an intensive job preparation program" *[translation]*. The *formula of rights and duties* that, according to P. Fortin and F. Séguin, ought to regulate the relation of assistance between youth and the State, is best expressed in the following passage:

A young person's refusal to become involved in such a program will lead to his exclusion from social aid. However, a young person's agreement to become involved in such a program will entail a strict obligation on the part of the State to offer him services and activities that truly achieve the desired objective of insertion in working life. There will be a true contract of social and employment insertion that will require as much of the State as of the young person. *[Translation]* (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 67)

Single-parent families formed a distinct group and their poverty was very worrisome, according to the authors. However, in their view, the approach developed for them in the social assistance system was "far too passive":

Our system in fact sends the signal to sole-support parents that they can remain on social assistance for six years following the birth of a child, while

being exempt from any participation in an active process of job preparation and employment integration and receiving an annual unavailability supplement of \$1,200 in addition to the basic \$1,500 for the essential needs of the child. *[Translation]* (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 62)

For reasons to do with the work incentive and equity with low-income earners, they recommended the introduction of a selective annual benefit of 1,300 dollars for all lower-income single-parent families.³⁰ In addition, the unavailability benefit rates of social aid for dependants “logically” ought to be eliminated, in their view, with the introduction of an integrated child allowance.³¹ The monies thus saved ought to be invested in active measures to promote the employment integration of single mothers. Conditional on their participation in an active process, these mothers could also be granted a supplement to ensure that “the payment for the 14-month period surrounding maternity is similar to that provided under federal law for female employees registered for unemployment insurance³² *[translation]*”. Finally, they recommended the application “to all citizens” of the automatic collection of support payments. In short, the concern of society ought to be, first and foremost, for the employment integration of this group:

The objective we ought to pursue here as a society is to help single-parent families leave poverty and gain financial independence through employment integration. These families also have responsibility for the education of a disproportionate number of today’s poor children, whom we do not want to see living in poverty tomorrow. *[Translation]* (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 61)

These two reports, with their different orientations towards compulsory participation in employment integration measures, expressed two very present trends in Quebec: one more progressive, focussing mainly on the rights of the poor, the other more liberal, focussing mainly on their duties, but also recognizing the obligations of the State. This divergence of approaches can be seen to convey the ambivalence of Quebec society with regard to the community’s treatment of the poor.

The green paper on the income security reform

In late 1996, the government tabled a consultation paper on the reform of social aid, entitled *The Income Security Reform. The Road to Labour Market Entry, Training and Employment* (MSR, 1996). This green paper outlined the main orientations of the new government policy governing social assistance in Quebec. The logic of reciprocity was central to the government’s favoured approach:

While maintaining the principles of solidarity, equity and social justice that underlie the current system, the new income security system seeks a reciprocity agreement based on open, democratic relations and solidarity between individuals, the government, labour partners and communities. (MSR, 1996, p. 7)

A number of major changes were announced in this document, which also took up some of the recommendations of the two external subcommittees. These included the adoption of a single entry point to end the separation, in manpower policy, of the unemployed who receive

employment insurance and those who receive income security; adherence to the “principle of integration” of “passive income support measures and active employment assistance measures”; the strengthening of the “active labour force policy” and its link with “local development”; the setting up of local employment centres; and the creation of the integrated child allowance.

The green paper made several points about the reciprocity relationship between recipients who are “fit for work”³³ and the State. With respect, first of all, to recipients, it suggested looking “beyond the notion of employability” by introducing paths to employment (MSR, 1996, p. 13); lowering from six to two the age of the child giving entitlement to the supplement for persons “presenting temporary limitations to employability” (replacing the unavailability allowance)³⁴; requiring “[a]ll income security recipients except those presenting limitations to employability” to “take the measures deemed appropriate for entering the labour market” (MSR, 1996, p. 20)³⁵; gradually extending compulsory participation in customized measures to defined target groups, beginning with persons ages 18 to 24, followed by sole-support parents (MSR, 1996, p. 21); and finally, imposing a financial penalty for non-compliance with the new rules (150 dollars per month for 12 months for a refusal to comply) (MSR, 1996, p. 21). The State, for its part, would have the mandate to put in place customized measures, notably in the context of “partnerships,” as well as support services, in particular child care services. It would also to have the “responsibility” and obligation to inform users of the various financial assistance measures and employment services that existed and of the possible means of recourse (MSR, 1996, p. 21). Finally, it would set up a users advisory committee (MSR, 1996, p. 21). In short, while everything “must be structured to meet the needs of those seeking employment,” these persons “in turn, must make an effort to actively try to enter the labour market” (MSR, 1996, p. 27).

The Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity

Bill 186 was enacted June 19, 1998, and the legislation came into force in the fall of 1999. At the time of its enactment, this legislation directly affected 730,000 social assistance recipients in Quebec, including 225,000 children, or one in ten Quebeckers. Generally, the Act renewed, under new designations, the previous financial assistance programs. Of its 218 sections, only about 30 made changes to the former legislation (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 1). The contractual relationship and reciprocity were the central themes of the rhetoric surrounding this legislation.

Bill 186 maintained the dual structure of the social assistance system by renewing, under different names but based on the same logic, the two previous programs. The Financial Support Program became the Social Welfare Program for recipients with a “severely limited capacity for employment” (disability) and not registered in an employment integration process. The WEIP became the Employment Assistance Program for those likely to re-enter the labour market and needing encouragement to undertake or pursue such a process. The logic between the old system and the new was the same insofar as the criterion of fitness for work (the level of “limitations to employment”) served to separate the two streams.³⁶ The third program of income supplementation for the families of low-income earners with dependent children, the PWA program, was also maintained.

The benefit rate structure remained the same throughout the new terminology geared to the notion of “limited capacity for employment.” Persons with “no limited capacity for employment” were to receive a basic benefit equivalent to the former “non-participant” rate. Those with a “temporarily limited capacity for employment” were entitled to the basic benefit plus a “temporarily limited capacity for employment allowance” corresponding to the former status of “unavailable”; pregnant recipients³⁷ or those caring for a pre-school dependent child fell into this category. Finally, persons with a “severely limited capacity for employment” received the basic benefit plus the maximum supplement (“severely limited capacity for employment allowance”), the whole being the same as what they would have received under the old Financial Support Program (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 2). In addition, the former status of “participant” granted to those participating in active measures was maintained. They were to receive, in addition to the basic benefit, the Employment Assistance benefit, which replaced the old participation allowance.³⁸

Additional obligations for recipients: Bill 186 was an important stage in the institution of the reciprocity relationship between the poor and the State. First of all, it was an extension of the previous legislation in that it increased the obligations imposed on the poor considered Able to work. Women, however, were no longer specially targeted. Between late 1996, when the green paper was published, and June 1998, when Bill 186 was adopted, the government reoriented some of its policies.³⁹ In particular, the requirement that single mothers participate in measures was abandoned. Their registration in a measure became voluntary. The category of youth, however, was still targeted by the exchange requirement. The new obligations, therefore, affected mainly young people ages 18 to 24.⁴⁰ In the case of recipients in other age brackets considered “able to work, the obligations that had previously been imposed on them were formalized.

Throughout this process, the face of the “social assistance recipient” was becoming less and less distinguishable from that of the “social insurance recipient” and, further upstream, from that of the “job seeker.” In fact, it was unemployed status that served as the referent in characterizing the duties imposed on the poor. This problematic was similar to that of France, but had its own nuances. Hence, the obligations of social assistance recipients were similar to those, notably, of unemployment insurance beneficiaries. The names given to the programs served, moreover, as a reminder: employment assistance on the one hand, employment insurance on the other. For its program of assistance for the poor considered “able to work,” the Quebec government chose a name that exactly replicated, in the sphere of assistance, the unemployment insurance program administered by the federal government.

Thus, the fading distinction between the face of the poor person and that of the social assistance recipient was confirmed, first, by the fact that the definition of unemployed person (no job, available for work and actively seeking employment) was used directly in defining the obligations of employment assistance recipients: “An adult must make such efforts as are appropriate in the adult’s circumstances to find suitable employment and follow any direction from the Minister in that regard” (s. 45).⁴¹ Moreover, section 47 stated: “For the purposes of section 45, the Minister may require the adult to attend an interview to enable the Minister to provide information and instruction to help the adult find suitable employment. The instruction

may include requesting the adult to (1) register for employment at an employment agency recognized by the Minister and to report to the agency at reasonable intervals; (2) actively seek employment, through a formal job search activity, for instance.”

Next, the obligations to be met by employment assistance beneficiaries had to do with refusing or leaving employment. It was stipulated that an adult in this category “must not, without serious cause, refuse or leave a suitable employment or lose suitable employment through the adult’s own fault, permanently or temporarily, so as to become or render the adult’s family eligible under the program or so as to be granted a benefit of a greater amount than that which would otherwise have been granted” (s. 49). Bill 186 introduced the notion of “suitable employable,” whereas before it had only been a question of “remunerated employment.”⁴² The notions of suitable employment and of “just cause to leave employment” were borrowed from the *Employment Insurance Act* (Campeau, 1998, p. 10). More generally, the use of the notion of “suitable employment” was “one of the main trends in employment policy in Europe” in the area of unemployment compensation [*translation*] (Pineschi-Gapenne, 1996, p. 47).

Among the serious causes recognized in the legislation for refusing or leaving suitable employment, we might mention “obligation to accompany a spouse or dependent child to another residence,” “obligation to care for a child or a member of the immediate family,” situations of sexual harassment, “discrimination prohibited under the Charter of human rights and freedoms” [*sic*] (s. 50-51). In the event of non-fulfilment of the obligations stipulated in the legislation, the Minister could “(refuse to grant an application or) reduce (or cease to pay) a benefit by *the amounts and*⁴³ according to the conditions determined by regulation” (s. 55).⁴⁴ These obligations were not all new and several were toned-down versions of previous provisions, in response to representations made by groups reacting to the 1997 bill, as Minister Louise Harel pointed out:

While it is true that the legislation requires that no one refuse or leave suitable employment without serious cause, there is no question of eliminating income security. The non-fulfilment of this obligation already resulted in a reduction of the amount of the benefit. Henceforth, the *Act* will require that the employment be suitable before the reduction is applied when there is no serious cause for refusing or leaving employment. These are important changes that show that recipients will not have to accept just anything and will not be unduly penalized. [*Translation*] (MSS, 1999)

The Individualized Integration, Training and Employment Plan: Bill 186 affected youth in particular, targeting the category of persons “aged 18 to 24 with no limited capacity for employment and no children.” The legislation was innovative in that it imposed an individualized plan on this group, as stipulated in section 56:

An independent adult under 25 years of age or an adult who is a member of a family without dependent children, must, if the adult’s capacity for employment is not limited (...), attend an interview at the Minister’s request to enable the Minister to evaluate the adult’s circumstances and determine

certain activities to be engaged in as part of an Individualized Integration, Training and Employment Plan. The adult must complete all activities under the Individualized Plan within the allotted time.

Young people faced specific obligations with which they had to comply or see their allowance not eliminated, but reduced (section 57). For a first infraction, the financial penalty was 150 dollars, bringing the defaulter's basic allowance down to 340 dollars a month.⁴⁵ A further penalty of 150 dollars was stipulated for a second refusal. The government introduced, by amendment, the notion of "good cause" for refusing to engage in or withdrawing from certain Plan activities, notably "if the activities are not appropriate to the adult's circumstances" (MSS, 1999). The Plan was to be evaluated within three years of its effective date, bringing us up to September 1, 2000. The regulations respecting the Plan were to be implemented as of February 1, 2001 (Box 8).

Several amendments were made regarding the parental contribution. This contribution was to be harmonized with the Student Assistance Program, which improves the circumstances of many young people. The parental contribution would no longer apply to someone who had completed their full-time studies at least seven years previously (after age 16).⁴⁶ The parental contribution was also to undergo evaluation. Finally, the obligations linked to employment assistance did not apply just to beneficiaries, but to their dependant children as well (s. 20) (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 3).

Bill 186 further formalized the links between social assistance and "the social economy," a sphere of activity that had seen a significant increase in its visibility since the 1996 Summit on Employment. Thus, under a new section of the Act (s. 6), volunteer work performed with a non-profit organization became recognized as a social insertion measure, giving the recipient involved in such activities access to the Employment Assistance benefit. It should be recalled that this was in addition to the basic benefit. Volunteerism could thus be included in an Individualized Plan. Participation in such activities "will thus enable those excluded from the labour market to maintain certain skills, attitudes and behaviours likely to enhance not only the potential for entering the labour market, but also self-esteem, personal growth, as well as free them from the status of 'outsider' " [translation] (MSS, 1999). Through this provision, Bill 186 strengthened the links between entities of the social economy and the institution of social assistance.

New rights for recipients: The rights of recipients were also reinforced. The Act, following the recommendations of the green paper, made it a requirement to inform recipients, as fully as possible, of their rights and obligations and of the measures available. It also introduced the obligation to help recipients with financial assistance programs, employment assistance measures and services, and reviews (MES, 1998). The Act established a bureau of information and complaints for informing claimants of their rights and obligations, and an advisory committee made up of recipients' representatives. The mechanisms for review and appeal, the two types of recourse provided by Bill 186 and continued from the previous legislation, were improved. Nearly all decisions of social assistance officers could now be challenged, including the obligations imposed on individuals: "Compared to the *Income Security Act*,

which did not permit the content of action plans and proposed measures to be challenged, Bill 186 allows the content of action plans to be questioned” [*translation*] (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 4).

Rules governing earnings were also introduced: recipients could earn income and not see their benefit reduced by an equal amount. For a single person, the maximum exemption was 222 dollars a month (287 dollars for a couple). This measure represented an increase for 40,000 households (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 5).⁴⁷

Reactions of some organizations and associations to Bill 186: Following the publication of the green paper, in December 1996, most groups, which had two opportunities to appear before the parliamentary commission (February 1997 and May 1998), expressed their disagreement with the compulsory approach the government was introducing to participation in measures.⁴⁸ The obligation imposed on young people stirred quite a reaction, particularly since, as mentioned earlier, this was the only group to be targeted by compulsory participation in action plans, after the government had opted for the voluntary approach for sole-support mothers.

The Coalition nationale sur l’aide sociale⁴⁹ considered Bill 186, which was a continuation of the former legislation, to be “totally unacceptable on the merits”: it “perpetuates and further complicates the current income security system and further extends the workfare logic introduced by the 1988 reform” [*translation*] (Desgagnés, 1998, p. 9). The Coalition demanded voluntary participation in action plans instead. It also deplored the Bill’s failure to recognize every recipient’s “right to a decent income” (through benefits covering essential needs and real special needs). Gains described as “modest” were, however, associated with the reform, such as the financial improvements introduced by the legislation (elimination of the penalty for sharing shelter, exemption for support income for children under age 5, etc.), as well as entitlements to additional recourses, which further democratized the system (Desgagnés, 1998).

After the green paper was tabled, the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ) condemned the impact that compulsory participation in action plans would have on single-parent families and youth, arguing, first, that the approach was coercive, and second, with regard to single mothers, that the raising of young children was a social contribution that ought to be recognized. The FFQ demanded instead “an approach that addresses the specific needs of women” [*translation*] (FFQ, 1998). In its interim assessment of the reform, in August 1998, the FFQ considered that women had made “some gains” with, notably, the withdrawal of mandatory participation in action plans for single mothers. The FFQ felt, however, that the “social aid battle” had not been won, in part because “many members of Parliament and public opinion, largely shaped by politicians and the media, hold quite reactionary views regarding social assistance recipients,” and in part because “the present government’s obsession with the zero deficit has cut into social programs, including those that affect the most poor” [*translation*] (FFQ, 1998). The FFQ reiterated its opposition to the requirement that young people participate in action plans. Moreover, it demanded, in the short term, that benefits be indexed, that “thousands of qualifying insertion measures” be put in place to meet the needs, and that the proposed action plans be more adapted to individual paths, as compelled, for example, by the particular circumstances of single mothers. In the medium

term, the FFQ believed it was necessary to “aim at covering the essential needs of individuals, whether or not they have access to employment” [*translation*] (FFQ, 1998).

In reaction to Bill 186, the Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) stressed the importance of ensuring all social assistance recipients of a “decent income”: it was “legitimate for the government to want to support recipients in their employment integration process. However, this concern must not cause one to forget the Act’s mission of last resort assistance. The financial assistance granted must provide a guarantee of sufficient resources to individuals and families” [*translation*] (CSF, 1998). Such a guarantee was considered a prerequisite of the success of an employment integration process. Also, the CSF (1998) recommended “that the Act be much more explicit” about this social assistance mission of ensuring “a decent income for every person and every family”⁵⁰ [*translation*]. Regarding the employment insertion of women, the president of the CSF, Diane Lemieux, stated, in May 1998, that the measures proposed in Bill 186 should be more mindful of the specific barriers encountered by mothers wishing to return to work, particularly sole-support mothers. The extent of family obligations in particular was inadequately recognized: “The energy and the time needed to care for and educate children is almost always underestimated” [*translation*]. In order to succeed, according to the CSF, employment integration ought to be gradual, backed by quality support services and geared to qualifying training, so that employment provided a way out of poverty. The CSF therefore placed particular emphasis on the State’s obligation of means, consisting in providing recipients with the necessary care and support in the form of both active measures and support services. Finally, it was pleased that some of its recommendations had been adopted, including the voluntary approach to participation in action plans for sole-support parents.

Initiatives Taken Since the Social Assistance Reform

Since the social assistance reform of 1998, a number of initiatives have been taken that define the institutional framework in which the measures aimed at recipients considered “able to work” will be applied, or indeed extend their reach. They are *Destination emploi*, *Solidarité Jeunesse* and *Ma place au soleil*.⁵¹

Destination emploi

On May 1, 2000, a “new support activity” for recipients “who are able to work” was introduced. Called *Destination emploi*, this “strategy of ongoing support towards employment” reflects, according to the government, a choice in favour of “a fast, proactive intervention, with new resources and shared responsibility” [*translation*] (MSS, 2000a). The Minister saw it as a whole new approach to receiving new employment assistance recipients. The activity involves two steps: on entering the assistance system, the candidate undergoes an evaluation of their eligibility for assistance and “employment potential” by a social assistance (or socio-economic assistance officer).⁵² Particular attention is paid to individuals at risk of long-term unemployment. Those lacking employment potential may be referred to community relief agencies “on a voluntary basis.” Those with employment potential are directed to the Emploi-Québec unit responsible for overseeing their subsequent action plan. There are then two possible courses of action: the recipient is either interviewed and a personalized action plan is drawn up, or they are directed to a job-search support activity, a one-day group activity. In the second instance, recipients must conduct their own job search. After six months, those who have not found employment are individually asked to “go over

the results of [their] efforts.” This regular support is provided to persons who have been registered for employment assistance for several months or years. Specialized services are available at all times. For financial year 2000-2001, the government anticipated that about 66,000 people would be interviewed on entering the system, and 155,000 new participations would be registered (double the number the previous year) in an activity or active measure of Emploi-Québec, and that more than 50,000 people would be followed by social assistance officers. The group activity is evaluated by the recipients and “the overall process will undergo a comprehensive evaluation” [translation] (MSS, 2000b, p. 7).

The government committed itself to making additional resources available to recipients to “optimize the chances of labour market integration” [translation] and minimize the risk of long-term unemployment. Thus, an additional sum of 8.4 million dollars was earmarked for the hiring of 270 new officers. The caseload of officers in the income security unit was also reduced.⁵³ The Minister planned to rely on the economic context, which is favourable to the employment integration of assistance recipients.⁵⁴ Since 47 percent of new social assistance entrants enter the system after having exhausted their employment insurance benefits, these people have work experience, the Minister pointed out (MSS, 2000a). Through this measure, the government anticipated that 8,000 additional households would leave employment assistance in 2000-2001 (MSS, 2000b, p. 6). While, with *Destination emploi*, the government positioned itself as a “support,” recipients, for their part, must demonstrate goodwill. The exchange principle was clearly expressed as being the basis of the relation of assistance:

The Ministry of Social Solidarity grants financial assistance to recipients and gives them a major boost in their job-search initiatives. In return, recipients must take appropriate steps in their circumstances to find suitable employment. This principle of reciprocity is at the heart of our income support system and is an integral part of the *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*. [Translation] (MSS, 2000b, p. 4)

Thus, the government considered it “a fundamental responsibility” of recipients to “take appropriate steps.” A “social assistance recipient who is able to work has the responsibility to look for employment” [translation]; this, it recalled, was a principle contained in the *Act respecting income security* since 1989 and confirmed by the 1998 statute. Also, the Minister, through ministerial officers, “can issue directions regarding these initiatives, and recipients have an obligation to comply unless they have serious cause not to do so.” Sanctions would be applied if the recipient did not comply with “these directions” [translation] (MSS, 2000b, p. 4). The benefit would be reduced by 75 dollars a month (for a period of 12 months) for a first refusal to comply with a direction.⁵⁵ For monthly assistance of 502 dollars, this represented 15 percent (Thiffault, Gamache, 2000, p. A7). The Minister, however, stated her desire “to rely more on the support than on the sanction”⁵⁶:

[I]t should be made clear that the benefit reduction will be the last means resorted to. It will be applied only in the case of people who refuse to act without serious cause and who fail, after a formal meeting, to take follow-

up action, and once personalized verifications of the causes for refusal or absence have been carried out.

At all times, recipients may make amends and regain their full benefit if they agree to undertake a process appropriate in their circumstances. Recipients will be given every opportunity to show their willingness to take the steps appropriate in their circumstances. In short, a small number of recipients might be sanctioned. *[Translation]* (MSS, 2000b, p. 5)

Solidarité Jeunesse and Ma place au soleil

A pilot project is under way on the voluntary employment integration of youth. The project is *Solidarité Jeunesse*, the outcome of the Quebec Youth Summit, and is piloted by the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale (MSS):

This project is aimed at ‘all young people under age 21 who are able to work and who apply for and are eligible for social aid. Special consideration will be given to young people from families receiving income security and to single-parent families. Participation is voluntary and there is no penalty for refusing to take part’.⁵⁷ *[Translation]*

About 15,000 young people are eligible each year under *Solidarité Jeunesse*. The Quebec government earmarked 84 million dollars for the two years of the project (MSS, 2000c, p. 2). As from November 2000, the young people affected are offered voluntary participation for three months in job preparation activities. Services are provided by Carrefours Jeunesse-Emploi (CJEs), non-profit agencies subsidized by Emploi-Québec that help people ages 16 to 35 with their job-entry, return-to-school or self-employment initiatives. CJEs, which are community-based, have been extended, with the help of government, throughout Quebec.⁵⁸ They provide ongoing support to the participant for a period of a year, even if, after three months, the participant becomes involved in an action plan overseen by Emploi-Québec.

Solidarité Jeunesse is designed to keep young people off social assistance. Participants are not considered employment assistance recipients. And instead of a social assistance cheque, they receive financial assistance paid directly by the CJE that is at least as much as the benefit rate for participation in an active measure (MSS, 2000d). According to the MSS, the goal of the project’s conceivers was to avoid giving the employment integration process the stigma currently associated with social aid. A principle of “conversion” of assistance monies therefore applies, whereby the MSS pays to the CJEs, for them to administer, the funds needed by way of financial support for youth: “For the first time in Quebec, we are transferring social aid monies to communities and tying them to the attainment of objectives,” said Minister Boisclair *[translation]* (MSS, 2000e).

Solidarité Jeunesse is run by a project oversight committee and will undergo an evaluation. To facilitate this exercise, Minister André Boisclair gave the experiment a national target, “setting at 75 percent the percentage of young people who are in school, employed or in training 18 months after they apply for income security” *[translation]*. The MSS bases its action on various types of “partnerships” and suggests that “partners” sign a solidarity agreement for these young people. On October 24, 2000, Minister Boisclair tabled in the

Quebec Legislature 55 solidarity agreements⁵⁹ signed by more than 1,200 partners (MSS, 2000e).

The MSS has launched other pilot projects. In December 2000, in the wake of *Solidarité Jeunesse*, the project *Ma place au soleil* was introduced, aimed at young mothers under age 21 who are on social assistance. The objective is to enable them to “continue their schooling while adjusting to their new family responsibilities” [translation] (MSS, 2000f). The approach is prevention-oriented: ongoing support is personalized and participants are helped in finding daycare and transportation services suited to their circumstances. The training process has been described as “realistic in duration and geared to occupational training and non-traditional trades” [translation] (MSS, 2000f). Sixty young women are involved in this project. Also in December 2000, the Minister announced the establishment of the project *Espoir*, this time targeting homeless youth. Quebec would contribute 419,000 dollars over two years and give 50 “street kids” access to measures “promoting social re-insertion through a return to school or labour market integration” [translation] (MSS, 2000g). The project is for young people ages 18 to 24 who are receiving or have applied for social assistance.

The Recasting of Government Employment Services

The draft reform presented in December 1996 in the green paper was inspired by an umbrella strategy, for it fell within the scope of an “active labour market policy.” This policy of the Quebec government took shape in the establishment of Emploi-Québec and the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail (CPMT), along with the system of Local Employment Centres (LECs). It was within this institutional framework that the relation of assistance of reciprocal obligations was implemented.

The recasting of government employment services in Quebec dates back to the signing, in November 1997, of the *Canada-Quebec Labour Market Agreement*. Under this agreement, the Quebec government assumed responsibility for the planning, development and implementation of active employment measures paid for out of the employment insurance account, and for certain functions of the National Employment Service. To this end, the federal government transferred to Quebec 2.4 billion dollars, spread over the next four years, and 1,038 employees, who became, on April 1, 1998, provincial public servants.

The Quebec government turned over responsibility for its manpower and employment interventions to Emploi-Québec and to the CPMT, which replaced the SQDM (Société québécoise de développement de la main-d’oeuvre). The CPMT is made up of representatives of labour organizations, employers, and the community and education sectors. Emploi-Québec is an autonomous service unit within the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale⁶⁰ and is co-managed by the CPMT.⁶¹ The director of Emploi-Québec reports to the deputy minister of Social Solidarity. On April 1, 1998, Emploi-Québec began creating LECs, which provide, under one roof, the client and employer services previously dispensed at Travail-Québec centres (CTQs) and local SQDM offices, as well as certain services dispensed at federal human resource centres.⁶² Within a year, 150 LECs had been created. The combining of employment and income security services within LECs was designed to support the employment integration of people receiving employment insurance, employment assistance or no income support at all. LECs provide services to people looking for a job or wanting to upgrade their skills (access to

a placement service, job-search assistance, labour market information, training, etc.). These measures may be supplemented with financial assistance. LECs also provide services to employers, including, notably, counselling for businesses subject to the *Act to foster the development of manpower training* (1 percent).⁶³

Starting mainly in the summer of 1999, Emploi-Québec encountered problems that undermined the agency's credibility, particularly with regard to its management. Some people spoke of a "three-fold crisis": a crisis of funding for active employment and training measures, a crisis of partnerships, and a crisis of the Emploi-Québec mission (Ollivier, Normand, Bérubé, 1999, p. A11). First of all, the crisis of funding for active measures became apparent when the agency exceeded its annual budget by 80 million dollars before the close of the financial year. Under the agreement signed with Ottawa, the federal government was to take back any monies not spent by Emploi-Québec. The LECs had therefore been instructed to spend their budget as quickly as possible. Also, the budgetary control system was inadequate. As a result, cutbacks were instituted, depriving many users of services. The LECs, being unable to pay return-to-school allowances, stopped making referrals to occupational training or adult education centres, resulting in teacher layoffs. Programs were suspended or eliminated. Community agencies generally, including those with a job re-entry mission, were threatened with closure or had to cut back drastically on services in the wake of the budget reductions imposed on Emploi-Québec. In June 1999, the agency even reneged on training commitments already made to over 4,800 beneficiaries. According to the Coalition nationale des femmes contre la pauvreté et la violence (CNFPV), the budget cuts imposed on Emploi-Québec with respect to manpower initiatives had serious consequences "for thousands of people who had embarked on a 'path' of socio-professional integration" [*translation*] and for a number of community agencies specialized in manpower integration, including several working with women.⁶⁴

Secondly, the crisis of partnerships refers to the modalities of interaction between the Quebec government and CPMT members, as well as the tensions referred to earlier with the community sector. The replacement of the SQDM with the CPMT had already aroused considerable fear about the real power Quebec intended to give the partners in influencing labour market policy.⁶⁵ Another stage was reached when Minister Lemieux relieved CPMT chairperson Diane Bellemare of her duties six months before the end of her term. This decision, made without consulting CPMT members, threw into question the Commission's role within Emploi-Québec. According to several members, among them Lorraine Pagé, then president of the Centrale de l'enseignement du Québec (CEQ), the CPMT was increasingly limited to a consultative rather than a decision-making role, to the regret of the groups represented on it. They wanted Emploi-Québec to become an independent government agency, as the SQDM had been.

Finally, the problems of funding for active measures prompted Emploi-Québec to redefine its mandate more narrowly. In the context of rationalizing expenditures, the Minister, in October 1999, proposed a "redefinition" of Emploi-Québec's mission. This exercise covered three aspects:

- the service offering to individuals and businesses;

- the links with other government ministries and agencies;
- relations with the community sector (Lemieux, 1999, p. 12).

The question of shared responsibility for users between Emploi-Québec and other ministries was raised.

Firstly, this involved the Ministère de l'Éducation, which administers the system of loans and bursaries. From the “accountability” viewpoint of persons who had become involved in a training activity, and in fairness to those who had incurred debt in doing so, it was proposed that Emploi-Québec look at ways to create a stronger link between the system of loans and bursaries and the income support Emploi-Québec provided to participants in active measures. According to the CNFPV, this meant that “someone who wanted to participate in occupational training would receive less (or no) financial support from Emploi-Québec but would instead be referred to the system of loans and bursaries of the Ministère de l'Éducation” [*translation*]. According to the Coalition, given the rules of the system of loans and bursaries for women with children, this strategy “will considerably limit” the access of these women to qualifying occupational training (Box 15).

Secondly, the redefinition of the mission of Emploi-Québec affected the range of measures it offered. The Minister proposed favouring short-term interventions (occupational and technical training of short duration, employment assistance and job preparation services, etc.) to the detriment of more costly long-term measures (literacy, general educational development, etc.). For the CNFPV, this meant “that Emploi-Québec would further neglect those experiencing significant labour-market integration difficulties and target only those able to find a job more easily” [*translation*], further blocking women’s access to qualifying training:

This affects especially women who have been out of the labour market longer, but also those with inadequate schooling or even those whose occupational qualifications are out-of-date. Finally, this affects many women who want a non-traditional job and need longer-term training to reach their goal. Will all these women have the opportunity to get the training that will enable them to leave unstable job sectors? Considering the combined effect of the first two strategies proposed by the Minister, there is no doubt that women’s access to education is greatly compromised. [*Translation*] (CNFPV, 2000)

A third proposal of the Minister was to redirect those who held subsidized jobs with community agencies (through social insertion programs) to the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale. Thus, while recognizing the social insertion mandate of Emploi-Québec, the Minister questioned the role of such measures in its service offering, given the many manpower training needs of the unemployed (Berger, 1999, p. A4). We might add that, because of budgetary concerns, Emploi-Québec had already been cutting back on services for social assistance recipients for some years, specifically those services that, as a rule, required the most costly interventions. The funding rules imposed by the federal government in the context of the Canada-Quebec agreement were also directly implicated here. Under this agreement, the money

paid by Ottawa was to go only to people who had received employment insurance in the previous three years (five years in the case of parental benefits). This constraint prompted Emploi-Québec officers to direct the offer of training to the recipients of employment insurance and employment assistance affected by this rule, in order to fund as many active measures as possible out of the employment insurance fund rather than out of the coffers of the Quebec government. The government of Quebec had in fact drastically reduced its financial contribution to the active measures of Emploi-Québec. Although, between 1998-1999 and 1999-2000, the agency's budget grew from 690 million to 738 million dollars, the increase was owing to larger federal government transfers, since, in the same period, Quebec's contribution dropped from 204 million to 182.8 million dollars. Of this drop of 21 million dollars, "14 [million] was owing to the efforts required to reach a zero deficit" *[translation]*, Minister Lemieux's office was told (Lessard, 1999, p. B1). Overall, the provincial allocation for active measures went from 353.1 million dollars in 1995-1996 to 182.8 million dollars in 1999-2000, a decrease of 170.3 million dollars (CSN, 2000, p. 3). Moreover, the federal government, in addition to its decommitment to employment insurance benefits, stopped funding employment insertion initiatives for disadvantaged groups (women, visible minorities, the disabled, the chronically unemployed) (CSN, 2000, p. 3). To compound the problem, Emploi-Québec abandoned its measures geared to businesses, and this not only overlooked the whole aspect of preventing unemployment through actions directed at wage-earners, but had the effect of further distancing long-term recipients from regular employment streams. We will come back to this in Chapter 5, in the section on the links with employment policy.

All these developments placed in doubt a fundamental orientation of both the social assistance reform and the creation of Emploi-Québec: the introduction of the "single entry point" to provide access to training and employment assistance measures to all unemployed workers, without distinction, whether they received employment insurance, social assistance or no government assistance at all (the "chequeless"). Community stakeholders spoke of the Quebec government breaking "the moral contract of solidarity," the "reciprocity agreement" consisting of the Quebec government's commitment, reiterated numerous times from 1995 to 1998, to "make active training and employment measures available to all jobless individuals, regardless of their status" *[translation]*, and, "in return," of the obligation of "individuals to take control of, and make every necessary effort to achieve their economic and social autonomy" *[translation]* (Ollivier, Normand, Bérubé, 1999, p. A11).

New Interventions in Other Spheres of Social Security

The various measures adopted by the Quebec government since 1996 make it financially more advantageous to hold a job, even a low-paying one, than to end up on income security. The PWA program, the Return to Work Supplement, the new family benefit, the shelter allowance, pharmacare and the tax credit are work incentive measures that further encourage low-income earners to keep their job or find another one and mean that workers are better off financially than employment assistance recipients. *[Translation]* (MSS, 2000b, p. 5)

In order to understand the orientation of social assistance in Quebec, it is essential to look beyond the strict scope of this institution and consider the recent changes that have taken place in other spheres of social security (family policy, health policy, etc.). In recent years, a number of the Quebec government's interventions have consisted in adjustments to other social policies to modify the relative positions of social assistance recipients and low-income earners. The aim was to promote the work incentive in both groups by inducing the former to get off assistance and the latter to stay employed. In order to widen the gap between the living standards (income and related benefits) of the two groups, the Quebec government decided, from the perspective of fairness that emerged especially from the Fortin-Séguin report, to improve the lot of those working for the minimum wage:

A third way to widen the gap between the social assistance benefit and employment income (other than lowering benefit rates and raising the minimum wage) is to extend to low-income earners some of the benefits currently enjoyed only by social assistance recipients. Any such measure would kill two birds with one stone: on the one hand, it would reduce the financial loss incurred by the recipient who leaves social assistance to go out and work, and thereby make it more worth his while to accept a job; on the other hand, the low-income earner would feel he was receiving fairer treatment in relation to that given the social assistance. The measure thus makes it both more worthwhile financially for the recipient to work and fairer for the worker. [*Translation*] (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 78)

Quebec's new family policy (Box 11) is probably the best example of a government initiative outside the sphere of social assistance that is closely linked to the employment integration mechanisms deployed within this sphere. At least two family policy components are directly related to social assistance policy: the creation of an integrated allowance, and the extension of daycare services. In both cases, one of the objectives is to increase the work incentive of mothers on social assistance by making it easier and more attractive for them to get off social assistance (Lepage, Martel, 1997, p. 5).

First of all, the integrated allowance includes that portion of the social assistance benefit intended to cover children's needs.⁶⁶ The social assistance benefit is therefore reduced accordingly. As from July 1, 1998, the benefit no longer covers children's needs, but essentially those of adults. This automatically widens the income gap between social assistance households with children and minimum wage households. The transition from social assistance to employment therefore becomes financially less disadvantageous for recipients, since they do not lose the supplements for dependent children. The coverage for children's needs remains the same, regardless of the source of income. Both reports produced by the *Comité externe sur la sécurité du revenu* recommended such a merging of the various supports for children into an integrated allowance, but advocated keeping a universal portion, an option the Quebec government did not adopt. Which is why CSF researchers wondered whether it was "essentially a family policy or an anti-poverty policy" [*translation*] (Lepage, Rochette, 1997, p. 8). On the other hand, the introduction of full-time kindergarten for all

5-year-old children and the extension of low-cost daycare services (5 dollars a day) are initiatives that make it easier to reconcile employment and family activities (Lepage, Rochette, 1997, p. 51). Beyond this overall objective, these measures are also clearly aimed at increasing the employment of mothers on assistance. It will be recalled that the status of “temporarily limited capacity for employment,” which pertains largely to mothers on employment assistance with one dependent child, applies to women whose child is under age 5.

On the whole, Quebec’s family policy stands alone, in North America, for its broad scope. Nevertheless, while it is difficult to assess the precise net effect, Francine Lepage and Maude Rochette estimate that this policy has penalized many poor mothers. Social assistance recipients who have young children or are sole-support parents have experienced a decline in income with the introduction of the integrated allowance (Lepage, Rochette, 1997, p. 34). As for 5-dollar-a-day daycare, it has benefitted mainly middle- and high-income families that did not previously enjoy a tax benefit. Low-income families (income under 20,000 dollars) spend more on daycare than they did under the old financial exemption program (Lepage, Rochette, 1997, p. 51).

The coming into force, on January 1, 1997, of the pharmacare plan is another factor to be considered in the evolution of the living conditions of social assistance recipients. This policy was another means of widening the gap between the living standards of recipients and those of low-income earners. The former used to receive special allowances to cover the cost of medication, dental care, optometry services, medical-related transportation, and so on. Low-income earners did not qualify for these allowances, and had only limited access to company plans. The institution of a government pharmacare plan for Quebec residents not covered by a private group plan, made the idea of employment more attractive while providing low-income earners with additional benefits and eliminating the penalty of forfeited medical assistance for social assistance leavers. The new plan did, however, penalize social assistance recipients by taking away their free medication and medical services, since they now have to pay a yearly deductible and a share of the co-insurance.

The treatment of the child allowance is yet another means of encouraging mothers on assistance to enter the labour market. These mothers are now at a disadvantage compared to wage-earning mothers. Except for a 100-dollar exemption applicable only in the case of children under age 5, the amount of the child allowance is deducted from the mother’s allowance: “No distinction is made between the support paid strictly for the benefit of the recipient and that allocated for support of the child” [*translation*] (Lepage, Rochette, 1997, p. 41). This situation is especially illogical, these authors point out, since the social assistance payment is no longer determined based on the needs of the child. At the same time, since the child allowance has become tax exempt, it is no longer included in the calculation of the custodial parent’s taxable income. In short, if the custodial parent is a mother receiving social assistance, the allowance reduces her income, whereas if she is a mother working for the minimum wage, the allowance does not affect her income. This disparity in treatment is therefore tantamount to an indirect work incentive mechanism.

Conclusion

Social assistance reciprocity has always existed in Quebec. It has, however, assumed various forms throughout history. The *custom of deservingness* has been of considerable import, relief having been modulated according to the degree of availability for work ascribed to the poor. Women, for their part, first earned their citizenship through the work done within the family. The defence advanced for the program of assistance for needy mothers was in fact the reverse of the current discourse surrounding active policies: whereas today “active” assistance is contrasted with “passive” assistance, assistance for poor mothers was seen as a way of enabling them to make an “active contribution” of citizenship. In the late 1980s, with the integrated social aid program, women were farther behind than with the openly differentiated treatment they had received from 1937 to 1969. Their situation then became somewhat entangled in the new categorization of recipient groups (under age 30/age 30 or older, “able/not able”). Most recently, single mothers have again been targeted by special requirements, this time having to do with paid employment. Although the situation has not changed as drastically as it might have had the government followed through on its initial plan to lower from 6 to 2 the age of the child exempting the mother from participation in an action plan, the age was still reduced to 5. The social category of employability is therefore evolving for women, as are the institutions of the family, employment and social security generally (unemployment insurance, family policy, etc.). Especially evident in the case of the United States, this evolution shows that the reciprocity relationship has changed, with family obligations being replaced by employment obligations.

Notes

¹ The boxes and tables are appended to this report.

² This law instituted three categories of poor and echoed the *custom* established with the law of 1576, whereby the able-bodied poor who asked for relief were required to work for it.

³ In the early days in New France, lay authorities created the first public relief programs.

⁴ *La Minerve*, July 28, 1836; cited in Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 200.

⁵ See, in this regard, the introduction to this report.

⁶ See, in this regard, the case of Canada in this report.

⁷ In addition, half of the programs exempting low-income families from daycare costs were funded by the CAP (Rose, 1998, p. 97).

⁸ Cited in Gauthier, 1985, p. 278.

⁹ The Honourable William Tremblay, reported in Laroche, 1950, p. 60.

¹⁰ Reported in Laroche, 1950, p. 103.

- ¹¹ S.Q., 1940, c. 43, s. 2(b) (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 89).
- ¹² A number of stakeholders appearing before the Montpetit Commission said they feared that granting relief to abandoned mothers would encourage husbands to desert their family, a position the Commission would adopt (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 8).
- ¹³ S.Q., 1961, c. 55, s. 3(a) (Kaye-Russell, 1992, p. 90).
- ¹⁴ Poulin was charged by the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Constitutional Problems with reporting on the history of social assistance in Quebec.
- ¹⁵ As of August 1990, all households receiving social assistance were subject to this legislation.
- ¹⁶ There were 649,555 social assistance recipients in 1987, versus 435,045 in 1976.
- ¹⁷ Costs more than quadrupled in 10 years (MMSR, 1987, p. 9).
- ¹⁸ The new classification based on the employability of social assistance recipients replaced the previous distinction based on age. Under the old system, recipients under age 30 with no dependents received 178 dollars a month (in 1988), compared to 487 dollars for those age 30 or older.
- ¹⁹ This had been proposed by the previous government in MF, 1984.
- ²⁰ The PWA program replaced the Work Income Supplement (WIS) program, which dated from 1979.
- ²¹ See chapters 3 and 4 for the categories of eligibility established in Quebec and Ontario.
- ²² In 1989, the number of benefit scales rose from 8 to 48 (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 22).
- ²³ The *Labour Code*, the *Act respecting collective agreement decrees*, the *Public Service Act* and the wage-related provisions of the *Act respecting labour standards* do not apply to the beneficiary who performs work “in the context of a designated program” [translation].
- ²⁴ Women accounted for 55 percent of social assistance recipients in 1987.
- ²⁵ See, in this regard, chapter 4.
- ²⁶ In 1995, nearly 50,000 people were classified as “available,” that is, they wanted to participate in a measure but could not be offered one. This was the same as the number of participants in training and employability measures (Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 76).
- ²⁷ The most job-ready recipients were offered these measures, notably owing to the pressure officers were under because of performance criteria, which were geared to activity volume.

²⁸ There were three other members: Vivian Labrie, Alain Noël and Francine Séguin.

²⁹ In their view, with the amounts thus saved, the penalty for sharing shelter and the shelter test could be eliminated.

³⁰ There was a single-parent family supplement for social assistance recipients.

³¹ This measure was recommended by both external subcommittees; the Quebec government adopted it as part of the new family policy of 1997. In this regard, see Box 3, appended.

³² At the replacement rate of 75 percent.

³³ The terminology related to “fitness for work” gave way to the notion of “limitations to the capacity for employment.”

³⁴ This measure would be introduced gradually, along with the “gradual extension of day care services, and quite possibly, full-day kindergarten at age 5 as early as [1997]” (MSR, 1996, p. 20).

³⁵ “... based on the ability of the network to establish customized measures.”

³⁶ It should be noted that the Social Welfare Program never came into effect. All recipients were therefore directed to the Employment Assistance Program, where distinctions were made between recipients presenting “no limitations,” “temporary limitations” and “severe limitations.”

³⁷ From the 20th week of pregnancy until 5 weeks after delivery.

³⁸ The legislation also allowed part of the benefit to be withheld if the recipient failed to pay their rent.

³⁹ For example, under Bill 186, the allowance for unavailability because of age continued to be granted after age 55 (not age 60, as proposed in the Green Paper); recipients age 55 or over could opt for either the Employment Assistance Program or the Social Welfare Program, and so on.

⁴⁰ A moratorium was adopted, and remained in effect until September 2000, on the imposition of penalties in the case of refusals.

⁴¹ In Bill 186, the notion of availability for employment was no longer asserted.

⁴² The *Act respecting income security* stated that the recipient “must take such steps as are appropriate in his situation in order to find a *remunerated employment*”; the emphasis is ours.

⁴³ The words in italics did not appear in the initial bill (tabled December 18, 1997).

- ⁴⁴ The text between brackets refers to passages in the original bill that did not appear in the final version.
- ⁴⁵ Cabinet reduced the financial penalty for non-compliance to 75 dollars a month.
- ⁴⁶ Other exemptions from the imposition of parental contribution were introduced.
- ⁴⁷ As of June 1, 2000, the exemption was 200 dollars a month for a single person and 300 dollars for a couple.
- ⁴⁸ “A parliamentary commission convened in February 1997. Some 100 organizations appeared before it. With the exception of Pierre Fortin, of the Conseil du patronat and the Ligue des propriétaires, all expressed their opposition to compulsory action plans” [translation] (FFQ, 1998).
- ⁴⁹ The Coalition nationale sur l’aide sociale, formed in January 1997 and led by the Front commun des personnes assistées sociales, brought women’s groups (Fédération des femmes du Québec, l’R des centres de femmes, Conseil d’intervention pour l’accès des femmes au travail, Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec, etc.), advocacy groups, labour organizations and so on under one umbrella (FFQ, 1998).
- ⁵⁰ The CSF proposed requiring the Minister of Employment and Solidarity to report to the government every three years on the results of this mission, based on recognized social indicators (CSF, 1998).
- ⁵¹ The government also established the *Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté* (Box 10).
- ⁵² In addition, the officer will provide “information about their rights and obligations. This interview will provide an opportunity to identify who is most likely to benefit quickly from employment assistance measures based on local priorities and resources” [translation] (MSS, 2000b, p. 3).
- ⁵³ Their case load dropped from about 400 to 268 (MSS, 2000b, p. 6).
- ⁵⁴ “There were 160,000 jobs created in Quebec in the past two years. The number of people on social assistance has declined 23 percent over a three-year period” [translation] (MSS, 2000a).
- ⁵⁵ We might point out that the sanctions were reduced, the financial penalty dropping from 150 to 75 dollars.
- ⁵⁶ “I have been assured that the sanctions will be applied judiciously and with respect for the individual. In fact, only after personally contacting a recipient will an assistance officer be able to impose a penalty,” explained André Boisclair [translation] (MSS, 2000a).
- ⁵⁷ MSS, <http://mss.gouv.qc.ca/serper/secretv/soljeune/document/soljeune.pdf>.

⁵⁸ There are currently 93 CJE's in the 17 administrative regions of Quebec, grouped under a single organization, Réseau des carrefours jeunesse-emploi du Québec. Each CJE is autonomous.

⁵⁹ They were similar to the one presented in Box 9.

⁶⁰ Following the provincial elections of December 1998, the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale was overhauled. Diane Lemieux was named Minister of State for Labour and Employment, while André Boisclair became Minister responsible for the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale.

⁶¹ The mandate of the CPMT included determining the manpower development requirements, advising ministers on the overall orientations of the active labour market policy, and contributing to the development of manpower and employment strategies and objectives.

⁶² This called for the merging and distribution of nearly 3,000 employees within the local (LECs), regional and central structures of Emploi-Québec. These employees came from four organizations connected at three levels of government: federal (HRDC), provincial (SQDM and MSR), and municipal (employability development personnel of the City of Montreal).

⁶³ The aim of this legislation, adopted in 1995, was to promote further training. It required employers with a payroll of 250,000 dollars or more to invest at least 1 percent of the company's payroll in manpower training. <http://www.mss.gouv.qc.ca/francais/eq/loi1pc.htm>

⁶⁴ Coalition nationale des femmes contre la pauvreté et la violence, site of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, www.ffq.qc.ca/marchequbec/pourquoi/quebec/html, consulted February 12, 2002.

⁶⁵ "This partnership had scarcely begun to bear fruit, regionally and nationally, when it was severely shaken by the dismantling of the SQDM" [*translation*] (CSN, 2000, p. 3).

⁶⁶ The reform of the system of Quebec family allowances was headed in the same direction as Canada's "child benefit system" (Thérêt, 1999, p. 83).

4. THE CASES OF ONTARIO AND NEW BRUNSWICK

In order to provide a more complete and comprehensive picture of the Canadian reality and to complement the analysis of the case of Quebec, we have elected to take a brief look at two other provinces whose social assistance programs have undergone significant change: Ontario and New Brunswick.¹ The profiles presented below² cover the measures and practices adopted historically or quite recently in these provinces, for a better assessment of the contractual models introduced in Canada

The Case of Ontario

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time: Rights and Duties Generally

In Upper Canada, when the province was formed in 1792, legislation was modelled on the English civil code. A poor law, however, was specifically excluded (Guest, 1980, p. 12). Consequently, there was no public responsibility for the poor, who could rely only on family members or charitable organizations for help. The government built local jails that served as catch-all institutions for diverse categories of individuals: the homeless, the insane, offenders, and so on (Cassidy, 1932, p. 77; Guest, 1980, p. 12-13).

Towards the end of the 19th century, given the high number of indigents and vagrants populating the local jails, the provincial government adopted a resolution to force Ontario counties to establish houses of refuge. The inmates of these establishments worked in exchange for their subsistence (Struthers, 1996, p. 2). Thus, in Toronto, “the House of Industry required each applicant for relief to break up a crate of rocks weighing 650 pounds” (Ontario, 1988, p. 72). The quid pro quo imposed on persons living in poorhouses or seeking relief at Toronto’s House of Industry was a practice that continued until the 1930s (Struthers, 1996, p. 2-3). At the turn of the 20th century, the “widespread belief persisted that the poor and the destitute were morally inferior, lazy, quarrelsome, and unable to budget properly” (Ontario, 1988, p. 72).

James Struthers (1996) calls attention to what we refer to here as the *custom of deservingness*, that is, the systematic practice of imposing a requirement of work in exchange for relief provided. He draws a parallel between the current period and the Great Depression of the 1930s, and numerous other episodes in the history of social assistance in Ontario. When the Great Depression of the 1930s forced the Ontario and Canadian public authorities to create new structures of aid for the unemployed, the issue of exchange was keenly debated: “[F]ew questions proved more explosive than whether the unemployed should be compelled to work in exchange for their subsistence” (Struthers, 1996, p. 2). In the early 1930s, “employable” men assisted by public works had to demonstrate their willingness to work. They worked for the going wage or in exchange for assistance. Practices varied from city to city, but for the most part there was no work requirement for “employable” men in 1931 and 1932 (Cassidy, 1932, p. 176). Given the high cost of social assistance, the municipal authorities, refusing to continue to provide allowances to the “able-bodied” unemployed in exchange for nothing, decided to send a number of poor city-dwellers to work on farms in return for the allowance. Those who refused to go no longer qualified for assistance (Cassidy, 1932, p. 177). In the spring of 1932, the idea of providing jobs for the unemployed was abandoned and relief was redirected into direct in-kind relief (food vouchers, clothing, loans) rather than cash. At

this second stage, “[t]he primary emphasis of relief policy (...) was simply getting relief to families in need, not attempting to test the work ethic of the unemployed” (Struthers, 1996, p. 3). Finally, in the summer of 1933, the government made a radical turnabout with the implementation of work incentives and requirements. A system of work camps was set up across the country, an initiative similar, according to J. Struthers, to the guiding principles of Victorian workhouses. While single “employable” men over age 16 had no formal obligation to take part, work camps were the only place where they could receive assistance. The primary concern of the Bennett government was to ensure the willingness of the jobless to work, not to provide them with work. For, as one government spokesperson said, “[a] dole mentality was creeping into the minds of the single unemployed” and, for some, “assistance from the State was their inherent right” (Struthers, 1996, p. 3). No wages were paid in work camps. In 1933, confronted with the growing discontent of the unemployed, the federal government proposed the establishment of “camps of discipline” (Struthers, 1983, p. 102). After the Liberal Party came to power in Ontario in 1934, the obligation to work in exchange for public aid, which had applied exclusively to single men, was extended to married men. Mandatory work tests became a feature of social assistance policy until the end of the Depression (Struthers, 1996, p. 5).

In the 1960s, attitudes changed. In both Ottawa and Ontario, the idea of work in exchange for social assistance no longer seemed acceptable (Struthers, 1996, p. 186). The federal minister of Health and Welfare, who opposed the forced labour of the poor, likened it to a return to “old Poor Law concepts” that reflected a “punitive approach to relief recipients” (Struthers, 1994, p. 188), and announced that municipalities that continued in this vein would no longer be entitled to the federal financial contribution to social assistance expenditures.

In Ontario, in the late 1960s, two statutes governed the sharing of responsibilities between the provinces and the municipalities, designating the two principal social assistance programs in the province: the 1967 *Family Benefits Act*, and the 1958 *General Welfare Assistance Act*. The first partially integrated the previous social assistance system by replacing the former categorical programs for needy mothers, the blind, the disabled and the elderly (Little, 1998). The provincial government assumed responsibility for categories of recipients “deemed to have long-term needs” (disabled adults and children, single-parent families, etc.), while the municipalities, which administered general social assistance, were “responsible for delivering and sharing the costs of the program only for those presumed to be short-term recipients,” that is, the “employable”³ (Ontario, 1988, p. 391). This arrangement survived into the 1990s.

The distinction made between “short-term” needs and “long-term” needs refers, more fundamentally, to the criterion of “employability.” The categorial logic was at work here, in the form of an assessment of the employability of each group of recipients. Thus, “employability” was the main criterion that governed the steering of recipients into one or other of the two social assistance programs:

The social assistance system of the 1960s was based on certain assumptions: GWA was to serve a largely employable population who were in need of only short-term crisis assistance. FBA was targeted towards those requiring long-

term support and deemed to be unemployable, principally single mothers and disabled people. (Ontario, 1988, p. 52)

In the mid-1980s, the Ontario social assistance system was one of the most traditional in Canada (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 181). While dual in structure, it was segmented to an even greater degree. In all, the legislation established 22 categories of eligibility (Box 6).⁴ In the case of single-parent families, the system was extremely complex, with 36 different benefit levels (Ontario, 1988, p. 125). The Social Assistance Review Committee (Ontario, 1988a) made much of the connection between categorization in the social assistance system and the principle of deservingness, whereby the poor are classified as “deserving” or “undeserving,” with the resulting differentiation of treatment. The welfare system, it said, had always tried to establish a “hierarchy of deservingness” (Ontario, 1988, p. 72). There was also considerable stigma attached to receiving assistance (Ontario, 1988, p. 132). In 1988, the Review Committee regarded this structure of programs based on employability and on the distinction between long-term and short-term recipients as outmoded (Ontario, 1988, p. 391). Even until the sixties, the decision of social assistance officers to steer the poor to the general social assistance program or the family benefits program was made based on the assumption that sole-support parents, like the disabled, ought to be considered unable to work (Ontario, 1988, p. 57-58).

Twenty years later, “such clear-cut distinctions bear little or no relationship to the realities (...). The GWA program now contains a sizeable minority of chronically ill and other long-term recipients who have little or no prospect of securing immediate employment; FBA now includes many single parents and disabled persons who succeed in re-entering the labour force within a year” (Ontario 1988, p. 52).

Furthermore, the Review Committee pointed out, judgements about employability had evolved, particularly with regard to single mothers and the disabled. In the case of the former, the social representations surrounding the role of women in the labour force and in the family had overthrown the established order:

Employment aspirations and expectations of single mothers have changed, however, as the rate of participation by women in the labour force continues to increase. The same is true of people with disabilities, who have been among the most vocal in their demands to be able to work. In other words, public attitudes about the “employability” of two of the largest groups on social assistance—sole-support mothers and disabled people—have undergone a profound change in the last two decades. (Ontario, 1988, p. 263)

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time: Assistance for Needy Mothers

In the history of social assistance for needy mothers supporting children on their own, the *custom of deservedness* was continually confirmed. It concealed, however, a gender-based variant, as we have already seen in the American case. This specificity of the *custom of deservingness* in the case of women was owing to the fact that the work requirement imposed in exchange for relief applied to domestic work. For mothers on assistance, the behaviour considered when assessing their deservingness was not related to employment,

but to the social function devolved mainly on women at that time, that of mother. The *rules* of assistance thus regulated not only the *institution* of employment, but also that of the family. From the establishment of the Ontario Mothers' Allowance (OMA) right up to the Ontario Works program, modes of regulation specific to women occurred within the family (Little, 1998).

The early 20th century was characterized by recognition of the importance of the care being provided for children within the family, rather than in institutions. Keeping mothers at home seemed the most appropriate solution for child protection: "As early as 1900, the Ontario Superintendent of Neglected and Dependent Children argued that a great deal of the neglect that led to wardship might be prevented if necessity did not force mothers to support their children by working outside the home. The idea of supporting mothers to remain at home to devote their full time and attention to their children gained favour during the pre-war years" (Ontario, 1988, p. 72).

The idea of an allowance for needy mothers originated with the Children's Aid Society, but it was women's organizations, under the umbrella of the National Council of Women (NCW), that dominated the provincial lobby in favour of the Ontario Mothers' Allowance (Little, 1998, p. 12). The NCW was a broad coalition of representatives of the Church, charitable associations, the medical profession, women's organizations and labour associations. A maternalist philosophy was unanimously endorsed: it advocated "the notion of a gender difference, asserting that women's 'natural role' in life was that of care-giver while men were 'naturally' economic providers" (Little, 1998, p. 9). All groups saw the importance of mothers staying at home. Juvenile court magistrates argued the existence of a close association between working mothers and juvenile delinquency (Little, 1998, p. 19). Labour associations supported the policy, since a mothers' allowance was a means of reducing the competition for jobs (Little, 1998, p. 22).

Until the 1920s, the State preferred to fund institutions that cared for the poor (asylums, hospitals, schools, refuges, etc.) rather than pay the poor cash relief. Children from poor single-parent families were often placed in orphanages when their mother had to seek paid employment (Little, 1998, p. 5). This institutionalization of child care led to a disturbing increase in costs: "It was generally agreed that care in the home with a government allowance would provide both superior care and be less costly" (Little, 1998, p. 5). As argued by J. Howard T. Falk (1919), "mothers' allowances is [*sic*] 'good business.' The scheme may be expensive but we must pay one way or the other. Think of the cost of children's homes, orphanages, reformatories, etc., which would disappear to a great degree with the adoption of this system." Until the First World War, the Ontario government set up commissions of inquiry. In 1907, the rapid growth in child labour at unsafe work sites was documented. In 1916, the commissioners of the inquiry into employment conditions were disturbed "by the number of women, including mothers, who worked outside the home" (Little, 1998, p. 5). Home economics education was recommended for all women, based on the conviction that "home occupations are the ultimate employment for all but a comparatively small percentage of women" (Little, 1998, p. 5). It should also be noted that Canada was not entirely impervious to the eugenics that prevailed during that period. The commission set up by the Ontario government placed single mothers in the category of the "feeble-minded" and felt that these

women “should be institutionalized to prevent them from reproducing other feeble-minded citizens” (Little, 1998, p. 6).

The *Mother's Allowances Act* was adopted unanimously in 1920. It would be one of the most popular social assistance measures in Ontario (Little, 1998, p. 1). The legislation marked a turning point: first of all, it introduced the province's first welfare experiment by granting a permanent subsistence allowance to a category of the poor, and secondly, it established the opportunity to provide the poor with help in the home, rather than in an institution designed for this purpose (hospices, orphanages, reformatories) (Ontario, 1988, p. 82). According to M. H. Little (1998), this legislation was both a continuation of and a change from former legislation: a continuation, in that it maintained the categorization of “deserving” and “undeserving” poor. A change, in that it was a new form of moral regulation by the State, “more intrusive than previously” (Little, 1998, p. 2). The allowance was for the child. Moreover, the mother no longer figured in the calculation of the amount granted (Little, 1998, p. 74).

The mother was continually subjected to a morality test, “forced to prove her deservedness” (Little, 1998, p. 75). While initially, cleanliness, sobriety, work with children and chastity were the criteria of motherhood, towards the 1950s, financial honesty and sexual conduct dominated the investigations of social workers. In other words, the forms of the morality test were evolving, but the principle of moral regulation continued to have import throughout the history of the program. It was a question of creating “respectable mothers” (Little, 1998, p. 89). During the 1930s, the conduct of children was also regulated: “[T]he allowance created a new method of regulating school attendance” of children under age 16 (Little, 1998, p. 71).⁵ Moreover, the allowance was reduced by the anticipated earnings of the oldest children, forcing them to find employment or training (Little, 1998, p. 55).

At the same time, the *rules* of the social assistance *custom* of deservingness regulated labour market behaviour. Recipients were strongly advised to find part-time work or work in the home, in order to limit the time spent outside the home (Strong-Boag, 1979). The requirement that women work in exchange for social assistance was expressed in explicit reciprocity terms, since the contribution of women was presented by analogy with the provision of work in a context of employment. In the early 1920s, the Ontario Mothers' Allowance Commission thus said about mothers who received the allowance: “The mother is regarded as an applicant for employment as a guardian of future citizens of the State, and if she does not measure up to the State's standards for such guardians, other arrangements must be sought in the best interests of the children and to prevent increase in the number of dependents of this nature.”⁶ The Social Assistance Review Committee later asserted this notion of the mothers' allowance as payment for a service: “Mothers' allowances were the first program to reflect a new set of values and assumptions in social assistance: they were felt to be a reward for service rather than a form of relief. Mothers were entitled to support from the community at large for undertaking a responsibility to the state in bringing up its future citizens” (Ontario, 1988, p. 73).

The Second World War saw a decline in the number of OMA recipients as needy mothers took advantage of the new employment opportunities available to them. The social nature of the notion of employability emerged again here, the expectations regarding participation in paid employment being a direct function of the prevailing economic conditions (and the

availability of jobs) at a given time. The social assistance modalities regulating paid employment of needy mothers also changed:

The fact that the mother is allowed, and in fact encouraged to work, gives her better satisfaction and tends to raise the morale of the family and creates a hope that she will eventually become independent of any public assistance. The fact that children in these homes have to assume some responsibility fairly early in life is undoubtedly one reason why juvenile delinquency is a negligent quantity in the families of our beneficiaries.⁷

In the 1950s, the program was extended to more categories of single mothers, leading to the implementation of additional regulations (Little, 1998, p. 125). The theme of “dependency,” typical of the debates surrounding social assistance in the United States and the workfare model, emerged in Ontario in the mid-1950s. OMA recipients were described as “families with multiple problems.” Moral regulation assumed a new form and there was increasing concern about the break-up of families: the emphasis was on the importance of keeping families intact, with the nuclear, heterosexual family serving as the norm. In 1956, the category of unwed mothers became eligible for the OMA. Incentives in the form of social assistance bonuses were adopted to reunite families (Little, 1998, p. 134). Thus, a “hierarchy of deservingness” was established: “Widows had the least restrictions and were considered the most worthy, whereas *deserted* and *unwed mothers* experienced a number of [program] eligibility barriers and were considered the least deserving” (Little, 1998, p. 130). The distinctions disappeared after the 1960s. Whereas needy mothers had previously been viewed as full-time mothers and part-time paid workers, the norm was now full-time employment outside the home, and this exerted considerable pressure on those who had a dual task to perform.

In 1997, the passing of Bill 142 “marks the end of seventy-seven years of mothers’ allowance policy in Ontario” (Little, 1998, p. 182). Single mothers no longer formed a distinct category of recipients: “This new legislation incorporates the disabled, elderly, single adults, and single parents under one social assistance policy that links all welfare benefits to employment” (Little, 1998, p. 182). According to the author, this meant the special needs and responsibilities of sole-support mothers were no longer recognized (Little, 1998, p. 182).

The moral regulation of single mothers was no longer effected mainly through the family, but through employment. The normative model used to regulate their conduct now arose from the rules of the employment relationship, with the explicit reciprocity associated with a contribution of work through employment that characterizes it. Sole-support mothers ceased to be regarded as the “deserving poor.” The demonstration of deservingness now fell within the sphere of paid work. The integration achieved by combining categories previously considered unemployable under a new social labelling of “employable categories” was not, for all that, an advancement, for the transition from a categorial system to a more integrated one occurred within a punitive perspective, that is, within the terms of a clearly predominant custom of merit.

“Tied Aid”: Contemporary Forms

The late 1980s were marked by the publication of the report *Transitions*. This report, which came out in 1988, had few concrete repercussions. Nevertheless, we present it briefly since, first of all, it provides an interesting parallel with Quebec, which was involved in a fundamental social assistance reform during that same period. There was a clear divergence of strategies between Quebec and Ontario. While Quebec was toughening the rules and heading down a path to the constraining contractual approach towards social assistance recipients, Ontario was planning to expand recipients' rights. Secondly, the *Transitions* report was itself an event: it would leave a lasting impression across Canada, for it presented an ambitious, integrated project of social assistance reform.

The *Transitions* report: a project of extended social rights and tied aid

In July 1986, the government, led by the New Democrats, established a Social Assistance Review Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the province's social assistance programs and to identify, within the framework of “overall strategies,” the guiding principles for a desirable reform of the system (Ontario, 1988, p. 1). The composition of the Committee was “progressive and community-based” [translation] (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 181). After two years of work, the Committee published, in September 1988, its report entitled *Transitions*, which contained an impressive 274 recommendations. This report was a watershed in the history of social assistance in Ontario because of the scope of its aims and the progressive orientation it championed, within the context of a philosophy of active intervention that broke with the former traditional principles of the organization of relief for the poor. Some social policy analysts would speak of an “Ontario model” constituting an “inevitable benchmark for all those interested in social assistance reform in Quebec and the other provinces” [translation] (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 191). In the view of Ian Morrison (1998, p. 3), *Transitions* was “one of the most influential policy pieces in modern social assistance history.”

First of all, according to the Committee, the fundamental objective of a reform of the social assistance system in accordance with the principles of equity had to be one of shared responsibilities and respect of the dignity of individuals, to enable the poor “to move from dependence to independence, and from exclusion on the margin of society to integration into community life” (Ontario, 1998, p. 8). From the 10 principles formulated by the Commission to guide the reform, there emerged the affirmation of the *right* to social assistance; the importance of conceiving it as an active policy, by presenting social assistance as a system having two components, namely, a transition mechanism, and a social integration process (“transition” and “access to opportunities”); adequacies of aid as a “prerequisite for transition.”⁸ The conception of integration included, besides labour market insertion, social insertion.

The analysis of poverty was developed in terms of social inequities giving rise to society's duty towards the poor. The discourse surrounding poverty was also presented in terms of “exclusion” (Ontario, 1988, p. 3). According to Ian Morrison (1998, p. 3), “[w]hile *Transitions* did recommend strengthening the connection between employability enhancement and the right to income support, it did so in the context of a basic principle of a right to assistance on the basis of need and an assumption that social assistance programming should be part of a broader

anti-poverty strategy.” In this sense, it reaffirmed the “entitlement model” established with the creation of the CAP in 1966 (Morrison, 1998, p. 2).

The proposed reform was ambitious, for it also covered the “related areas” of employment, labour, education, health and housing. It also proposed the merging of municipal and provincial programs, the adoption of an annual benefit indexing formula and the provision of daycare services. Employment was presented as a key component of the strategy to improve the living standard of the poor (Ontario, 1988, p. 90). We might point out that in Ontario, “employable” recipients already had work-related obligations, since they had to “demonstrate a willingness to obtain work in order to qualify for GWA benefits” (Ontario, 1988, p. 28). Moreover, certain categories of the population were not eligible for social assistance, including youth, and this inevitably evoked the American experience of “learnfare.” The Committee recommended that youth no longer be excluded solely because they were not attending school, mentioning in passing its opposition to American learnfare (Ontario, 1988, p. 143).

In 1988, single-parent families were the second largest group of recipients, after disabled people (Ontario, 1988, p. 37). They were targeted by special programs of assistance. Also, single mothers receiving family benefits could not work an average of more than 120 hours a month for four consecutive months, on penalty of losing their right to benefits. This “120-hour rule” applied only to the category of single-parent families (Ontario, 1988, p. 259).

The Committee felt the system was too limited to providing income for the poor, without tackling the problem of the transition to leaving social assistance. It was also concerned about the growing number of “employable” recipients. The aim of the Committee members, then, as in Quebec at the same time, was to transform the traditional social assistance policy into an active policy (Ontario, 1988, p. 203). The Committee believed that the two broad functions of income support and opportunity planning should be separated (Ontario, 1988, p. 212). Moreover, the Committee declared its support of a “limited policy of conditional entitlement” (Ontario, 1988, p. 231). However, it preferred the idea of the social contract of reciprocity to the imposition of conditions on social assistance entitlement:

We have also accepted the proposition that society operates by way of mutual responsibilities and shared obligations between the state and the citizenry. The state has certain responsibilities for its citizens, and all citizens have certain responsibilities for one another, which are fulfilled through the state. In our view the state has a responsibility to ensure that realistic and meaningful opportunities are made available to recipients of assistance to help them increase their capacity for self-reliance and reduce their dependence upon assistance. If the state fulfils its responsibility, it is legitimate and reasonable to insist that some recipients also have responsibilities that they must fulfil. It is not legitimate to require recipients to meet those conditions if the state does not fulfil its part of the bargain, however. (...) [If this were the case, it would] effectively release recipients from any obligations they otherwise may have had. (Ontario, 1988, p. 230)

Recipients exempt from conditions would be people with disabilities, sole-support parents, temporarily unemployable people, and the elderly (Ontario, 1988, p. 231). The exemption of single mothers was justified because they, wanting “to be free of social assistance,” “would gladly seize any opportunities enabling them to do so” (Ontario, 1988, p. 232), because the sanctions imposed on mothers could filter down to the children, and finally, because the participation of single mothers in programs ought to be voluntary by virtue of the principle of their freedom to choose to stay at home and care for their children: “Childrearing is such an important function that we believe sole-support parents of young children should be able to say at home if they so choose. Conditional entitlement would deny them that freedom of choice” (Ontario, 1988, p. 233).

Participation in the labour force is not a realistic expectation for all social assistance recipients. (...) We believe, for example, that a sole-support parent who stays home to raise young children is engaged in a vitally important activity that can be as demanding as a paid job. (Ontario, 1988, p. 257)

The social assistance entitlement of the other recipients, namely, persons ages 18 to 64 not falling into the above categories, would, according to the Committee, be subject to conditions. These would go hand in hand with “a set of procedures to protect the rights of recipients,” such as the availability of programs or measures proposed in the opportunity plan (Ontario, 1988, p. 235). After “a grace period,” a sanction, in the form of a reduced benefit, could be applied for a failure to meet the conditions imposed. The recipient would also have the right to challenge the proposed plan. According to the Committee, specific programs would have to be developed for young people ages 16 or 17, who ought to have access to assistance only in cases of real need and provided they participated in an opportunity plan (Ontario, 1988, p. 236).

The Ontario government reacted favourably to the *Transitions* report. So, too, did social groups in Ontario (CNBS, 1997, p. 53). This was in sharp contrast to the reactions provoked in Quebec in the community and labour sectors by the publication of the position paper *Towards an income security policy*. According to Thériault and Vaillancourt (1991, p. 182), the Peterson government proved to be “in no great hurry to act on” [translation] the recommendations of the *Transitions* report. The 1990 provincial elections brought the New Democrats to power. The government created the Advisory Group on New Social Assistance Legislation. In March 1991, the Advisory Group published its report *Back on Track*; most of its 88 recommendations were taken from the *Transitions* report (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991).

A radical turnabout in 1995: the “Common Sense Revolution”

The provincial elections of June 1995, won by the Progressive Conservatives, signalled a turnabout with regard to social assistance in Ontario. The 1995 election campaign was the first in Ontario since the Great Depression of the 1930s during which “welfare was a core issue, indeed perhaps the core issue” (Struthers, 1996). During this campaign, the Conservative team, lead by Mike Harris, promised what it called a “Common Sense Revolution.” The planks of this election platform were major tax cuts, lower social assistance benefits, and the creation of a mandatory work program for able-bodied social assistance recipients.

An unambiguous rhetoric: The discourse surrounding Ontario's social assistance policy is of interest because of its transparency: there is no getting around the harshness of the terms used. As I. Morrison explains, in the mid-1990s, there was evidence of a growing public backlash against social assistance, which became a scapegoat for "a complicated set of public fears, anxieties and anger." The Progressive Conservatives "capitalized brilliantly" on this general feeling of dissatisfaction (Morrison, 1998, p. 4). During the 1995 election campaign, Mr. Harris' comments about his social assistance reform objectives spoke for themselves. All "able-bodied" social assistance recipients, including single parents, would have to work for their benefits, and, he promised, they would lose their benefits entirely if they refused to do so (Wright, 1995, p. A16). The goal was not to replace existing jobs with workfare jobs, but to give social assistance recipients "something to keep themselves occupied." Thus, he stated:

"[A]ll able-bodied people on welfare could be ordered to work as hall and yard monitors at schools or as crossing guards, or could be told to plant trees or work as seasonal laborers on farms. (...) In some cases, those who are currently collecting benefits, looking after one or two children at home, could look after one or two more children." Many people on welfare "have skills they can share with others. (...) Many recipients' workfare placements will consist of providing the instruction or training which is the 'learnfare' placement for other recipients. (...) A Harris government will ensure that those good people who are trapped in Welfare Ontario will be given an opportunity to make the move to Opportunity Ontario." (Lakey, 1995, p. A16)

A computer registry of all workfare placements would also be used in administering the system (Wright, 1995, p. A16). And the Progressive Conservatives promised to drastically lower "cadillac" social assistance rates (Morrison, 1998, p. 4), which, according to them, being the most generous on the North American continent, explained the high number of recipients in Ontario (OPCP, 1995, p. 11). In their view, these rates also discouraged social assistance recipients from seeking work (Mallan, 1999, p. A6). Benefits would therefore have to be brought down to a level equivalent to 10 percent above the national average. The assistance granted to the elderly and people with disabilities would not be affected. They also promised a war on social assistance cheats, one of the favourite themes of the Conservative team (Morrison, 1998, p. 4).

What has been called the "beer crack" was a blunder made by Premier Harris in April 1998, when he stated that the provincial government intended to eliminate the monthly benefit of 37 dollars for pregnant recipients, so that "those dollars don't go to beer": "What we're making sure is that those dollars don't go to beer, don't go to something else (...) [I]f there are requirements for the health of the mother they'll get it from us, but it won't be a blanket cheque that can be spent on anything (...) It will be spent to the benefit of the child" (Girard, Orwen, 1998, p. A1). Apologies followed a few hours later in a press release.

Throughout the 1999 election campaign, Premier Harris reiterated his belief in the validity of his actions during his previous term. He claimed social assistance reform was one of his

proudest accomplishments as premier (Mallan, 1999, p. A6). The government would continue to require as many recipients as possible to work in exchange for their benefit. Mr. Harris' comments about workfare took on a radically punitive tone that was striking in its similarity to the "penal State" ideology being deployed in the United States with regard to the poor (Wacquant, 1999). In his view, one should also:

(...) require social assistance recipients to take a mathematics and language test, and remedial courses should they fail. Those who refuse would lose their benefit. Give social workers the authority to require recipients to take a drug abuse screening test, with mandatory treatment for those whose results are positive; those who refuse would lose their benefit. Permanently disqualify anyone convicted of social assistance fraud. Extend workfare to include jobs in park and road maintenance programs, necessitating a review of the legislation to amend collective agreements. Penalize cities and towns that do not push recipients towards workfare jobs. [Translation] (Mallan, 1999, p. A7)

The Ontario Works program: In November 1997, the *Ontario Social Assistance Reform Act* (OSARA) brought about extensive changes to the social assistance system: this was the first major revision of social assistance legislation since the 1960s (Morrison, 1998). The OSARA replaced the existing laws with two new ones: the *General Welfare Assistance Act* was replaced by the *Ontario Works Act* (OWA), and the *Family Benefits Act* disappeared and the *Ontario Disability Support Program Act* (ODSPA) was brought in.⁹ In future, disabled people who met a strict disability criterion would receive income support and increased services under the ODSPA. Other social assistance claimants would come under the Ontario Works program. This signalled a major change for women.

And so the Ontario Works program became Ontario's workfare program. All "employable" recipients of financial assistance under the *General Welfare Assistance Act* were required to participate in the program in return for their benefit. Disabled persons, persons age 65 or over and sole-support parents receiving financial assistance under the *Family Benefits Act* could participate in the program voluntarily. As one official document put it, if "you are a single parent with young children, the age of your youngest child will be a factor in your participation in Ontario Works" (MSSC, 1997). However, for the first time, single mothers with dependent children under age 16 were expected to look for a job (Jenson, Thompson, 1999, p. 50). The treatment reserved for single mothers changed more radically on April 1, 1998. Single mothers were required to participate in the Ontario Works program as soon as their children reached school age, that is, age 6 (MSSC, 1998a). A recipient could be exempted from participating in the workfare program if they had a valid reason, such as "becoming temporarily sick or injured, or taking care of a child, an adult with a disability or an aged family member who needs regular care" (MSSC, 1997). The reasons for non-participation in the program were assessed on a case-by-case basis. Persons working part-time were subject to special conditions of participation and had to look for full-time work. Someone working less than 70 hours a month might be required to "top up" their hours through a community placement in order to fulfil their conditions.

The Ontario Works program was presented as “the new way of delivering welfare and employment services.” For the recipient, it “brings financial assistance, help in getting off welfare, and opportunities to contribute to [the] community into one program” (MSSC, 1997). The objectives of the Ontario Works program are numerous, but the reduction of social assistance rolls and related costs is among the most important (Box 19). The approach advocated with respect to workfare, as in the United States, puts work first (Work First Approach). According to the Ministry of Community and Social Services, rapid job placement is the primary goal of the Ontario Works program. Moreover, any training a recipient receives has to be directly job-related.¹⁰ Thus, the purpose of the program is to “connect” recipients “to their community, to important skills and training, and to the job market” (MSSC, 1997). The recipient’s path through the program is precisely regulated (Box 20).

The Ontario Works program is mandatory for social assistance recipients who are “able to work”; if they refuse, they “will no longer be eligible to receive welfare” (MSSC, 1997). Before their benefits are reduced or cancelled, the recipient receives a formal notice and has 30 days to take part in a review of the situation, after which they are granted another 10 days to comply with the requirements. After a first refusal to participate in the program, payment of benefits is suspended for three months. Each subsequent refusal incurs a six-month suspension. In the case of families, only the defaulter’s share is cut off. Thereafter, recipients must reapply to have their eligibility for social assistance reinstated. Finally, the program provides certain protections. The rights granted to program participants have to do with their coverage by the social rights typical of the system of ordinary law. Thus, workfare community placements must comply with legislative standards regarding hours of attendance, public and religious holidays, pregnancy or parental leave, and termination of placement. The organizations participating must also comply with occupational health and safety legislation, standards and regulations. As well, recipients have recourse to dispute workfare assignment decisions, sanctions, and so on, as the case may be. The employees of businesses engaged in workfare activities also have certain protections.

New obligations: the LEAP program for youth, and drug treatment: The differentiated treatment of youth is one of the recent developments that has occurred in workfare in Ontario. Once again, youth are treated as a special category, with the Learning, Earning and Parenting Program (LEAP) created in March 1999. This program is aimed at unemployed young parents ages 16 to 21. The main goal of the program, which is modelled on American learnfare experiences, is to “break the cycle of dependence” of teen parents on social assistance. LEAP thus requires youth to attend an institution of learning and work towards a high-school diploma in exchange for social assistance benefits. It is mandatory for 16- and 17-year-old social assistance recipients with dependent children who have not finished high school and are registered in Ontario Works. Recipients ages 18 to 21 may participate on a voluntary basis if they have not completed high school. The program was to be implemented across the province in 2000. An allocation of 25 million dollars was earmarked to cover the child-care, transportation and related costs of the participants.

Recently, the Ontario government was once again in the spotlight for its interventions aimed at “welfare cheaters,” who can now be permanently disqualified from social assistance, and at

“drug users” receiving social assistance, for whom new requirements governing drug treatment have been introduced (Box 22).

The Case of New Brunswick

The Reciprocity Relationship Over Time

The social assistance system in the Maritime provinces differs from that of the other Canadian provinces in that the traditional English Poor Law model prevails. Thus, in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the influence of England, with its *custom of deservingness*, left its imprint: “[P]oor relief bore the strong stamp of the Elizabethan poor law legislation of 1601” (Guest, 1980, p. 9).

New Brunswick’s Poor Law dates from 1786. According to the principles of Elizabethan Poor Law, care of the poor fell to the parishes, placed under the central responsibility of London. The poor were to be classified into distinct categories and labour was to be obtained from the “able-bodied” poor. Workhouses would come later. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, however, did not wholly adopt the relief systems of the British model. There were differences in application owing to the particular North American context. Thus, some poor rural parishes in New Brunswick auctioned off care of the indigent, that is, they entrusted care for the poor to the “lowest bidder,” rather than build and operate their own poorhouses. This “contract system” continued until the late 19th century (Guest, 1980, p. 11).

In New Brunswick, responsibility for social assistance fell to the parishes (Guest, 1980, p. 11). Although Poor Law, in the late 18th century, recognized the principle of government responsibility at the local level for the indigent, this function was fulfilled primarily by private charity, often organized along religious lines. The purpose of relief, private or public, was to promote “individual self-reliance by keeping relief discretionary, minimal, and degrading” (Struthers, 1983, p. 7). Under the province’s Poor Law, there were two systems in place in the 19th century: in addition to the family placements of the contract system, there were almshouses. They provided, first of all, shelter for the destitute, but also for the sick, the elderly, and others. Specialized public institutional relief for the poor appeared in the mid-19th century. Outdoor relief completed the system (Guest, 1980, p. 11). Every year, each city and parish appointed overseers of the poor responsible for meeting their basic needs, finding work for the able-bodied and punishing those who were able to work but refused to do so (Lemon, 1977, p. 4). Almshouses were supplemented by workhouses. While almshouses provided shelter, food and protection for those unable to meet their own needs, workhouses had a very different vocation, which was to accommodate “indolents who needed some form of correction or detention” (Whalen, 1972, p. 59). In the 19th century, the “able-bodied” poor without means were therefore considered persons who, when they sought relief, required rehabilitation.

In 1929, the report of an inquiry into child welfare in New Brunswick noted that there were a great many widows supporting their children by their own means. But New Brunswick was “exceptionally slow” when it came to social assistance services (Grauer, 1939). During the 1930s, despite clear directives from the federal government that direct relief was to be provided to those left destitute by the Great Depression, the municipality of Moncton, in line with the provincial government, attempted to tie relief to the performance of work by

recipients. Thus, a government directive called on the municipalities to put the poor to work in exchange for relief (Lemon, 1977, p. 28). The author Lemon divides the 1930s into three distinct periods, corresponding to different trends in interventions aimed at those without work: from 1930 to 1932, priority was given to public works; from 1933 to 1936, priority went to direct support, but the idea of tied relief remained firmly established; and finally, from 1937 to 1939, direct assistance was gradually abandoned and replaced with public works and programs intended to reform the unemployed. Throughout the Great Depression, the principle of the work requirement was inherent in the public authorities' conception of relief for the unemployed (Lemon, 1977).

Direct unemployment relief was provided until 1933 (Grauer, 1939, p. 83). That same year, the province and the municipalities created the Work for Relief Program, requiring the unemployed to work for cities in exchange for the relief granted. A work camp was also established in the region of York-Sunbury and a program of placement of the unemployed on farms was introduced. The city of Moncton closed its municipal social assistance office in June 1934 and left the fate of the unemployed in the hands of the almshouses. Tied relief survived in a new form:

Anybody who received such assistance from the city was required to sign an agreement permitting it to deduct from any future salary the individual might receive, from the city, an amount equal to the assistance granted. Gone were the days of free relief. (Lemon, 1977, p. 52)

Donald Percy Lemon assessed this second period in the evolution of the unemployed as follows:

During the second [phase], 1933-1936, the focus would be on direct relief as the primary form of assistance. Nevertheless, the idea that relief was charity unless the recipient performed some sort of manual labour in return for assistance received continued to pervade the city's direct relief programme. (Lemon, 1977, p. 24)

During the final phase of the Great Depression, no direct support was provided. The grants given under the unemployment relief program went into public works and manpower training programs, such as "Youth Training Programmes" (Lemon, 1977, p. 47). By the late 1930s, in New Brunswick, it was noted that "every county has its poorhouse or almshouse where indoor relief is given. Moreover, there were no mothers' allowances in New Brunswick" (Grauer, 1939, p. 83).

New Brunswick was the last Canadian province to repeal its Elizabethan Poor Law, with the adoption, in 1960, of the *Social Assistance Act* (Mullaly, Weinman, 1994, p. 1). With the Robichaud reform of 1967, administrative responsibility was centralized in the hands of the provincial government. In 1970, the principle of uniformity prevailed in the determination of social assistance benefit rates: 50-year-old disabled persons unable to work received the same benefit payment as young "able-bodied" recipients. According to Gerard W. Boychuk (1998,

p. 80), this was consistent with the “noncategorical [*sic*] tradition” historically seen in this province. The conditions of eligibility were, however, very strict (Boychuk, 1998, p. 80-81). In 1970, the Liberal government published its White Paper on Social Development, whose general principles hinged on the objective of promoting the participation of every citizen in economic growth. From 1965 to 1975, the composition of the social assistance rolls gradually changed, with the rise in the proportion of recipients considered “able-bodied.” In the early 1990s, 76 percent of recipients in New Brunswick were “employable” (Boychuk, 1998, p. 18).

In 1974, the Conservative government reformed the social assistance system to make recipients more “independent.” Labour market integration projects were created for the “able-bodied,” but there was no provision for a monetary penalty. Moreover, the benefit amount was based on the minimum wage. The number of recipients increased from 18,348 in 1973 to 26,069 in 1977 (Lévesque, 1987, p. 4).

The Social Assistance Reform of 1982

The most significant changes since 1960 took place with the reform of 1982. Until the 1980s, benefit rates had not been determined based on the recipient’s category. In 1983, in the wake of the *Social Welfare Act* adopted the previous year, the province began to differentiate the relief given according to the claimant’s employability and age. The social assistance system integrated the principle of the categorization of recipients. And the lowest benefit rates were for the most “employable.” The 1982 reform thus established a system of the classification of social assistance recipients based on the criterion of employability (ACSW, 1988, p. 15). Recipients were classified into three categories. The 1985-1986 data show that 25 percent of recipients were classified as “long-term” (having limited “employment potential”), 65 percent were directed to “upgrading, training and placement programs,” while 10 percent were directed to “interim assistance.” In other words, for about 75 percent of recipients, labour market insertion was presented as the path to follow: “In future it will be necessary to demonstrate a willingness to work. What is taking place is a reassignment of social assistance eligibility criteria according to the labour market” [*translation*] (Lavoie, 1990, p. 119). One sign of this reorientation: social assistance officers were given the duties of employment counsellors in addition to their traditional duties (Lévesque, 1987, p. 5-6).

In the 1980s, the social assistance system was highly stigmatizing (Boychuk, 1998, p. 81). For example, in 1983, the province hired assistance recipients to conduct visits to the homes of other recipients to reassess their eligibility. Social assistance officers could contact banks, insurance companies or any other source considered appropriate to confirm the information provided by claimants. Claimants could be required to have their landlord complete and sign a form identified as originating from the Department of Income Assistance. In the late 1980s, there was a change in attitude. In 1987, mandatory home visits ceased (Boychuk, 1998, p. 82). That same year, the New Brunswick Action Committee for the Status of Women considered the province to be at the forefront in Canada in terms of the rules governing living arrangements.¹¹ But prejudices continued to have currency, as evidenced by the comments of Premier Frank McKenna, who said, in 1993, that income assistance programs “foster dependency, which make it comfortable for people to do nothing and learn nothing.”¹²

During the 1990s, the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty drew attention. In 1993, in New Brunswick, 13,000 single mothers were on social assistance, accounting for 30 percent of all recipients. Also, 67 percent of social assistance families were single-parent families, 80 percent of them headed by a woman (ACSW, 1993, p. 3). Three-quarters of these families lived below the “poverty line.” Most of them spent at least 65 percent of their income on rent (ACSW, 1988, p. 22).

At the time of the 1995 reform, the system still consisted of three programs: Long Term Established Needs (LTEN), Upgrading, Training and Placement (UTP), and Interim Assistance (IA) (DIA, 1993, p. 38). Three levels of employment potential were thus distinguished. Recipients under the LTEN program were long-term recipients of limited employability. The other recipients were divided between the UTP and IA programs, depending on whether their employment potential was assessed as moderate or high, respectively (Boychuk, 1998, p. 82). The UTP program accounted for 66 percent of all recipients. If to these were added IA program recipients (14 percent of benefit recipients), then 80 percent of recipients were considered moderately or highly “employable.” Single-parent families were overwhelmingly classified (95 percent) in the intermediate UTP category, accounting for 45 percent of all recipients. Finally, single-person households represented 94.3 percent of IA recipients. This contrasted distribution of household types among the programs partly explains the differentiation according to gender that is observed: 63 percent of UTP recipients were women, whereas men made up nearly three-quarters of IA recipients. Finally, the benefit rates varied considerably according to the level of employment potential, the benefit amount for the single person registered in the LTEN program (521 dollars) being double what it was for the single IA claimant (257 dollars in 1993). However, there were generous earnings exemptions and taxback rates for IA program registrants (Boychuk, 1998, p. 82).

Work Incentive Measures

The experience of New Brunswick in the area of employment integration stands out on the Canadian landscape for the innovative initiatives adopted in the early 1990s. Prior to the 1995 reform, which marked the government’s adherence to the principle of tied aid, the measures put in place had adopted the voluntary approach. Beginning in 1992, the work incentive formula was tried, according to various modalities, in the context of two pilot projects: New Brunswick Works (NB Works), and the Self-Sufficiency Project. They were both systematically evaluated and developed in partnership with the federal government. Finally, they involved primarily the category of sole-support mothers. The initiatives adopted in the context of these two programs to encourage recipients to find work were assessed to determine whether they might serve as intervention models for other Canadian provinces.

NB Works was a national pilot project created in 1992 under a federal-provincial agreement; it ended in 1998. It targeted people with dependent children, limited schooling (no high-school diploma) and few skills, as well as little work experience. Participation in the program was voluntary, which distinguished it from numerous other programs adopted elsewhere in Canada. Geared mainly to education and training, this program had as its primary goal to ensure that participants achieved a level of qualification that would enable them to develop a lasting

“attachment” to the work force (Mullaly, 1997, p. 36) (Box 23). This program was in the full glare of the media throughout Canada, and was even described by Prime Minister Chrétien as a model for the country.¹³

The Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) was another major joint project of the federal and New Brunswick governments, designed to encourage social assistance recipients to get off social assistance and find employment (Box 24). It was implemented in New Brunswick and British Columbia. The SSP offered an income supplement to single parents who had been receiving income assistance for at least one year. The supplement was paid for a maximum period of three years to persons working full-time. Participants had one year to find full-time work (at least 30 hours per week in one or more jobs); the jobs had to pay at least the minimum wage and be covered by employment insurance. Once they found employment, recipients no longer received assistance and were not entitled to a medical assistance benefit or card (Michalopoulos, Robins, Card, 1999, p. ES-2). The SSP was geared to an incentive approach since it offered a wage supplement that had the effect of increasing the level of remuneration, and therefore the available income, of recipients finding employment. As in the previous case, the evaluation of the program was a key element (Box 25).

Another job-entry pilot project carried out in partnership with the federal government was launched in 1994: the New Brunswick Job Corps (NBJC). The program was specifically for unemployed workers ages 50 to 65 who were receiving social assistance or employment insurance, had exhausted their insurance entitlements or were “permanently displaced employees.” Volunteer participants were matched with host agencies to perform community services (HRD-NB, 1994c). In exchange for 26 weeks of volunteer work with a private company, a municipality, a non-profit organization, a government service or any other organization, project participants received a yearly income of up to 12,000 dollars. Participation was for three years. The philosophy behind the program was based on the idea that it was necessary to recognize the job re-entry difficulties experienced by certain segments of the labour force, in this case older, less mobile, less qualified workers, given the needs of the new economy. The aim was also to enable “working-age adults who are at risk of long-term dependence” [*translation*] to find work (BMR, 1995, p. 3). To qualify for the program, household income had to be less than 20,000 dollars. The NBJC generated an annual expenditure of 80 million dollars and lasted until 1999 (CNBS, 1997, p. 26).

The mandatory approach: the social assistance reform of 1995

The social assistance reform of 1995 marked a turning point in terms of the extent of the constraints imposed on social assistance recipients. In 1991, the Department of Income Assistance undertook an extensive review of its mandate, “in recognition that its legislative and policy framework required significant reforms if it were to reflect the economic and social environment of today and tomorrow” (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 1). In December 1993, the government released a discussion paper entitled *Creating New Options*. Following the public consultation on this subject, a policy statement called *From Options to Action: A new social assistance policy blueprint* was published in the fall of 1994. From this point on, the intervention philosophy of the government was marked by mandatory participation in employment integration measures.

Creating New Options. The future of income support services and employment-related supports

The principles and strategies set out in this document evidenced a turnabout in the approach of the New Brunswick government to social assistance relations. The discourse turned to the importance of active measures, a new sharing of responsibilities between the government, individuals, and the family, as well as, in the context of partnerships, the community and business. The subsidiary role of social assistance was affirmed. The State proposed a redefinition of assistance for those poor who were capable of getting off social assistance.

At the outset, this document clearly affirmed the importance of moving from “passive” to “active” assistance if, rather than “treat the symptoms of unemployment and poverty,” it was to “cure the problem” (DIA, 1993, Foreword). It stressed education and training, as well as skills upgrading, as “key elements” of the government’s vision of “the future income support policy,” with a view to “attracting more businesses to New Brunswick, and to encouraging existing industries to invest and create more jobs in the Province” (DIA, 1993, p. 15). Next, it clearly distinguished between two groups of recipients having “different needs”: those in need of “permanent support due to very significant and sometimes insurmountable barriers,” and those “whose connection with the system is of a temporary nature.”¹⁴ The latter “should undertake personal and educational development which could lead to a partial or full exit from the income support system” (DIA, 1993, p. 11). Associated with these two categories, conceived according to the criterion of employability, were two different treatments: a “safety net” for the first, and temporary income support for the second (DIA, 1993, p. 14). In other words, the rate structure would be reconfigured into two fundamental categories of basic income support (permanent income replacement and temporary income replacement), to which would be added various income supplements (DIA, 1993, p. 20).

The question of revising the terms of the relation of assistance was clearly raised. The document states: “Perhaps the time has come to re-define the client-government relationship, particularly with those clients who have the potential to move away from income support programs” (DIA, 1993, p. 16). To this end, the section on “*shared responsibilities*” proposed a clear allocation of the respective “responsibilities” of the “government” and the “client.” While the first ought to “provide quality and equitable services,” “education, work experience and skills upgrading opportunities,” and provide information on programs and services, “clients” had a duty “to explore all other sources of support and to inform the Department of all income and other financial assets,” to look for or accept employment, to “pursue personal development, education and training opportunities” and to inform the Department of any change in circumstances that might affect eligibility for benefits (DIA, 1993, p. 16-17). Two other levels of obligations were to be strengthened in the treatment of poverty: “local solidarities,” based on “creative partnerships” with the community,¹⁵ and “family obligations,” which reaffirmed, by virtue of the subsidiary status principle, the primacy of the family in caring for the poor (DIA, 1993, p. 18). It was within this perspective that the imposition of a parental contribution for persons under age 30 was envisaged.

The issue of mandatory participation in “active programming” was treated with much caution. It was considered “premature” to take a stand on this subject before a “national social policy debate [took place] over the next few months.” It was felt, however, that while there was no

need to place constraints on certain recipients who wished to become self-reliant, nevertheless “there is a segment of employable clients who are not as highly motivated” and for “a variety of reasons are reluctant to leave the security of income support and refuse opportunities for training and employment when presented” (DIA, 1993, p. 19). “Valid reasons for non-participation” (presence of very young children, temporary health impairment) could justify an exemption. However, in other situations, “the system could be more persuasive” (DIA, 1993, p. 19).

During the public and private consultations that followed the document’s publication, there was widespread consensus that changes needed to be made (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 17). Specifically, intervenors agreed with the proposal to create two categories of basic financial support, the institution of a “single entry point” for services, the increase in the earnings exemption, and so on. There was strong support for the plan to provide more services to recipients to help them develop their employment potential (HRD-NB, 1994a). Regarding tied aid, the government rallied the public behind the imposition of compulsory participation in initiatives. The document reads:

Many participants felt that people who are able to work should do so as long as the necessary safeguards are in place to protect those who can’t work and as long as the necessary transitional supports exist to help people bridge the gap between “social assistance and work.” (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 3)

The recipients themselves were very much in favour of the mandatory approach: “Able-bodied individuals should be forced to work.” The business community shared this view, given the need to control costs. The “public in general” expressed an even more radical viewpoint: “Those who are able to work, should and the province should not be financially responsible for meeting their basic needs” (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 14). Moreover, there was a call for greater equity between social assistance recipients and low-income earners. Organized labour was concerned about the substitution effects of measures, that is, that workers would be displaced by those receiving assistance. They sought a higher minimum wage and better support for the working poor (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 13). The concept of requiring a parental contribution for clients age 30 or under was rejected (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 5). In contrast, support for stricter enforcement of support payments was “very strong.” Many respondents, including social assistance clients, were concerned about the abuse occurring in the system¹⁶ and the possibility that the current level of assistance for adolescent parents encouraged them “to have children in order to leave home” (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 5). Finally, the problem of child care was identified as being of paramount importance to recipients wishing to participate in measures. The fear of losing access to health benefits also dissuaded many recipients from pursuing training or seeking employment.

The new social assistance policy

In late 1994, the “new social assistance policy” was presented. The reform, implemented in 1995, contained the key elements mentioned above. Activities centred mainly on supports for recipients entering the labour force, “those who are striving to become more self-reliant” (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 3).

The State admitted a number of responsibilities. The government acknowledged that “reaching self-sufficiency can be a long and complex process and the Department’s role is to support individuals in making the transition to work” (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 2). While the reform had to “be affordable,” it was made clear that the policy “is not a budget reduction exercise.” A range of services were offered, including personal financial counselling, individualized needs assessment, case management, education and training activities, financial assistance for child care, transportation costs, wage exemptions, transitional measures, and so on. Provision was also made for the establishment of an “agreement of understanding” between the recipient and “the Province” (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 8).

The government brought in new obligations for recipients “who are striving to become more self-reliant,” that is, the “able-bodied” poor, and youth under age 21. The former were required to actively seek employment and to participate in the measures offered to them. While the new policy provided additional supports to those who wanted them:

It will also require that individuals take greater responsibility, especially when opportunity presents itself. In this context, clients may be asked for evidence that they have sought employment. In addition, where people refuse, *without just cause*, to participate in an education, training or work experience, the following may apply: a reduction in the monthly basic financial assistance may be applied; upon evidence that a client has refused a legitimate job offer, basic assistance would be reduced by the dollar amount the individual would have received had they accepted the opportunity; if an individual quits a job, social assistance may be denied or delayed. (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 4)¹⁷

Youth under age 21 would fall within a “separate framework” and “social assistance will not be as easily available for youth” as before (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 4). They would receive counselling and career advice enabling them to remain in school or go back to school. The new youth policy would be developed along the following guidelines:

[A]ttendance at an education or training institution will be required of those under 21 seeking social assistance. Youth will not be offered support to live on their own unless there are no other options available or there is evidence [*sic*] the home environment is unsafe. Other options such as extended family households or a room and board arrangement with adult supervision must be explored. For adolescent parents (less than age 19), family support will be sought from a non-custodial parent and from grand-parents [*sic*] of the child(ren). Adolescent parents will be required to take parenting classes. A separate income benefit structure will apply to these youth. (HRD-NB, 1994b, p. 4)

The *Youth Policy*, the learnfare approach¹⁸ that came into effect in September 1995, very clearly established the tied aid approach in New Brunswick (Box 26).

Conclusion

Ontario and New Brunswick have, each in its fashion, a strong *custom* of deservingness. Both in the past and more recently, the imposition of the work requirement on the “employable” poor was vigorously defended. There were periods, however, when a different orientation in the relation of assistance was advocated. The Ontario plan presented in the *Transitions* report is one example: it fell within the traditional perspective of rights linked to the level of aid, while being based on a whole new type of relation of assistance between the poor and the State. Thus, in relation to Quebec, the two neighbouring provinces were developing, over the same period, very different discourses surrounding what were already coming to be termed “active policies.” As of 1995, however, the context changed significantly in Ontario. The election of a Progressive Conservative government had a profound impact on the evolution of social assistance in that province. Thereafter, conversely, a process of convergence seemed to be underway between the two provinces. Nevertheless, the toughness shown by the Ontario government with the adoption of workfare, can in no way be compared to the approach developed in Quebec. As for the New Brunswick government, it has shown the same wavering between the voluntary approach and the mandatory approach to participation in measures, the same strategy of turning away from the mandatory approach through the adjustment of rate scales according to employability, and the same targeting of youth, as its Quebec counterpart. As in Quebec, however, it has, more recently, resolutely chosen to move in the direction of tied aid, particularly with regard to youth.

Notes

¹ Our choice of these two provinces to complement our study of the case of Quebec was based on an exploratory analysis of Canadian provincial welfare policies. See, in this regard, Box 2 appended.

² An analytical grid that presents the essential aspects of our problematic, was used in the interest of a more uniform treatment of the experiences of Ontario, New Brunswick and Quebec.

³ “[I]n the municipalities, 50% of the cost of benefits is paid by the federal government, 30% by the province, and 20% by the local level” (Ontario, 1988, p. 28).

⁴ The boxes and tables are appended.

⁵ In 1927-1928, school attendance records were to be presented monthly before the mother received her allowance (Little, 1998, p. 71).

⁶ Mothers’ Allowances Commission (1920-1921), *Annual Report*, Ontario, p. 27; cited in Strong-Boag, 1979, p. 27.

⁷ Reported in Little, 1998, p. 110.

⁸ “[A]dequate rates and a clear and reliable system of mandatory benefits will provide the stability and self-esteem that many recipients need if the transition to autonomy is to take place” (Ontario, 1988, p. 133).

⁹ These programs came into effect in April and June 1998, respectively.

¹⁰ The training offered excluded long-term education—college or university studies, for example—since support for such a process fell under the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP).

¹¹ Reported in Boychuk, 1998, p. 82.

¹² *The Daily Gleaner*, June 15, 1993, reported in Mullaly, Weinman, 1994, p. 2.

¹³ Reported in Mullaly, 1997, p. 35.

¹⁴ We would point out that the French version of the text uses the term “dépendance.”

¹⁵ “Community volunteers can offer valuable assistance by offering services such as tutoring, mentoring, temporary child care and transportation. In return, individuals who are unemployed can offer valuable services by helping in community projects or serving groups (...)” (DIA, 1993, p. 28).

¹⁶ In this regard, participants encouraged “government in being more vigilant in addressing the issue of the ‘man in the house’ as this was perceived as a major source of abuse in the system” (HRD-NB, 1994a, p. 9).

¹⁷ The terms in bold appear this way in the original.

¹⁸ Learnfare is the requirement, on penalty of a financial sanction, that young recipients who have not graduated from high school attend school or training.

5. THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The analysis presented in this chapter concerns essentially the case of Quebec, since Quebec was the principal reciprocity model we studied. Here, we examine the reciprocity relationship generally, and in relation to women's status. Both perspectives are necessary in order to understand the effect of changes in social assistance policy on the living standards of women. In studying reciprocity from a general perspective, we come to understand the overall philosophy that motivates State intervention vis-à-vis the poor, while an examination of the differentiated treatment of poor women helps explain the particular terms that define their social citizenship. The gender analysis of *rights and duties* in the social assistance context brings the two together: the singular, diversified reality of women is reconstructed, but points of comparison are also established, revealing the differences in the treatment of men and women. The tension between social assistance, the family and employment, institutions on which the social constructions of employability and "maternability" are built, becomes all the more clear. We analyse the Quebec social assistance reciprocity model by considering, individually, each of the specific characteristics of the workfare and insertion models identified in Chapter 1. The observations regarding the cases of Canada as a whole, and of Ontario and New Brunswick are incorporated into the comments concerning Quebec.

The Configuration of the Social Assistance System: Decentralized/Categorical or Centralized/Integrated

In terms of its configuration, the Canadian social assistance system lies somewhere between the American and French models. First of all, like the American system, it is decentralized, being conceived and administered by the provinces. Since the 1960s, however, it has ceased to be a categorical system, as social assistance continues to be in the United States. In the wake of the CAP, the Canadian provinces integrated, to varying degrees, their social assistance programs, thereby ending the categorical approach that had previously held sway. Because of its integrated nature, the configuration of Canada's social assistance system is more akin to the French RMI than to the American AFDC-TANF. However, as France, at the national level, has a dual social assistance structure (the RMI on the one hand, and a system of social minima on the other), it ultimately lies mid-way between Canada (integrated system) and the United States (categorical system). In other words, it is the Canadian case that attains the highest degree of integration. This being said, the foregoing assertion must be qualified to some degree. The Quebec model (like that of other Canadian provinces) is definitely integrated, but remains, in a certain way, a dual system of assistance, with two separate programs for "employable" and "unemployable" populations.¹ This gives it a distinct configuration. We will come back later to the dualism of the social assistance institution in Quebec.

The last Canadian reform of social assistance funding, when the CAP was replaced by the CHST, also marked a certain convergence with the sweeping reform of the American welfare system, which, in 1996, gave a new orientation to "the social contract" between the poor and the State. In both cases, the principle of the closed budget envelope had been adopted. As we

have seen, in Canada, funding is no longer earmarked specifically for social assistance costs. Rather, each province receives a lump sum that it is free to allocate as it sees fit (education, health or social assistance). Given the limited public support for social assistance, it is highly likely that spending on social assistance has been reduced (Little, 1998, p. 185-186). Moreover, as in the United States, the provinces now have more latitude to choose the eligibility criteria of programs. The federal government therefore paved the way for provincial social assistance reforms. What is more, in drastically reducing the amount of cash transfers to the provinces, it triggered a series of actions by the provinces aimed at curbing social assistance costs. As work requirements had been defended in order to reduce social assistance spending, despite the profound contradiction this objective concealed,² the federal government directly helped promote their adoption by the Canadian provinces. If we add to its social assistance strategy the one it deployed in the area of insurance, with its systematic restrictions on unemployment insurance protection, its withdrawal of funding for this program and its use of employment insurance fund surpluses to wipe out its budget deficit, the federal government bears considerable responsibility for the decline in the living standards of poor women in Canada: “[I]n preventing the policy pursued by one order of government from being offset by that pursued by another,” the federal policy had the effect of “cumulatively reducing the social safety net against poverty and inequalities, and therefore Canada’s capacity to reproduce its specific social capital” [*translation*] (Thérêt, 1999, p. 73).

The Representation of the “Subject-Citizen” of Social Assistance: The “Dependant” or the “Excluded”

In Quebec, the “subject-citizen” of social assistance has a dual representation: the image of the poor person in society is constructed from the two registers of dependency and exclusion, with the first predominating. In this regard, the Quebec model of reciprocity is a case midway between the workfare and insertion models, although, for the reason stated earlier, it tends more towards the American case. Quebec reciprocity does not hinge, however, on an image that simultaneously condenses the prejudices about poverty and gender, as is the case in the United States. In other words, the discourse surrounding dependency is not specifically sexist: it does not concern just women, but has also developed, in the Canadian and Quebec contexts, around another category of recipients, “youth,” with no particular reference to the women within it. This is the difference between an almost exclusively female population of recipients (the American case) and a population about half of which consists of women (the Canadian or Quebec case).³ For women, however, and especially for single mothers, the discourse surrounding dependency refers, as in American workfare, to the fundamental problem of non-recognition of their work contribution —or more broadly, of *caring*— within the family.

The Quebec government promotes a terminology borrowed from France with its frequent use of the terms “insertion,” “exclusion” and “solidarity.” For example, the 1996 green paper (MSR, 1996) on income security reform includes the term “insertion” in its very title [of the French version] and the theme of poverty is presented in terms of exclusion. This is not exceptional. On the contrary, this language is widespread in both government publications and in documents produced generally in Quebec. Another example: before the last government restructuring, the ministry responsible for social assistance was the ministry

of “Employment and Solidarity,” the same name as a ministry in France. Quebec now has a ministry of “Social Solidarity,” a name that, to our knowledge, exists nowhere else in North America.

This being said, beyond the rhetoric, the theme of dependency strikes us as more prominent in the representations of poverty than that of exclusion. In Quebec, since the 1980s, the emphasis has been on the problems of dependency and work incentive of social assistance recipients. These considerations even underlie the recasting of the system into two distinct programs. While “structural” causes, such as unemployment and the restrictiveness of unemployment insurance, are cited to explain the increase in the number of recipients, the interpretation of poverty in terms of deviant behaviours of the poor dominates both government discourse and the popular belief. The thematic of the “cheater,” omnipresent at various times, is one example. This thematic took a distinctly sexist turn in the 1980s, when home visits were stepped up to look for the unreported spouse of single mothers receiving assistance. The very term “welfare recipient,” which evokes the image of someone “living off society,” has a highly pejorative connotation, although relatively few people are aware of this, it has become so widespread and apparently self-evident. What is more, social assistance does not enjoy broad support among the general population, another feature of the workfare model.

While Quebec borrows from both the American and French models, Ontario, again with regard to representations of the poor, is today indisputably dominated by the workfare model. In that province, each of the aspects identified above for Quebec is more pronounced. In Ontario, adherence to the workfare philosophy is openly asserted. The theme of dependency is central: “We must all do more to help everyone break free from the cycle of welfare dependency” (MCSS, 2000a). In that province, the government has cultivated to the extreme the idea of the image of the cheater, to the point of introducing an institutionalized system of whistle-blowing, setting up a telephone line Ontarians can call to denounce “welfare cheaters.” And no other jurisdiction in Canada has come closer to the new American policy of limited life assistance, with the institution, in April 2000, of the “zero tolerance policy for welfare fraud,” whereby those convicted of this offence are banned from receiving social assistance for life. Finally, it was in Ontario that Premier Mike Harris, in defending the hard line towards social assistance recipients during the 1995 election campaign, was able to capitalize on the dissatisfaction of the Ontario people with this system, just as certain political leaders had done before him, in 1994, in the United States:

[W]orkfare may not produce benefits for the participants, but it serves the purposes of politicians. On the one hand it allows them to appear to get tough on recipients by making them work for their benefits, while simultaneously arguing that they are helping them find jobs. (Schram, 1999)

In Quebec, such a theme has never dominated a provincial election. The notion that this could even happen seems fairly incongruous, underscoring the difference between the two provinces. Just as, conversely, it would be surprising, at least in the current political context (no changeover of political power, lukewarm public support for social assistance, priority of the health issue, etc.), if the “struggle against exclusion” were to become the central theme

of an electoral campaign in Quebec, as it did during the presidential campaign of Jacques Chirac in France, in 1995.

Given the gender-based social division of labour, we had seen that in the United States workfare has many consequences for mothers who, in being presented as “dependent,” are wholly denied the value of the contribution they make in raising children. These differentiated effects are also noted in Canada (Baker, Tippin, 1999; Evans, 1997). The Canadian workfare approach runs counter to recognition of the value of the work of caring done by women in the home (Baker, Tippin, 1999, p. 59). Moreover, the requirement that single women with children who receive social assistance do paid work represents a paradox. From a woman’s standpoint, the *duties* regulated by assistance refer simultaneously to the obligations of domestic work and of paid work. This was always the case, as we have seen over time, when the control of work within the family simultaneously shaped the role of women as employed workers, through the predominance of social assistance protection that steered them towards family obligations. Little has changed in this regard, there still being close interaction between family obligations and work obligations. The difference, however, lies in the paradoxical requirement imposed on single mothers to join the labour force while bearing the pressure of reconciling work and family, for which society still assigns them most of the burden. Not only are the supports not in place to assure proper child care; when single mothers join the labour market, they are charged with additional responsibilities formerly assumed by the State. The requirement is paradoxical in that, through the very mechanism of social policy, the State requires women to engage in conflicting behaviours: on the one hand, paid work, encouraged or imposed in the discourse surrounding “employability,” and on the other, work within the family, imposed on women through the reform of health and social services, for example, where “without their consent,”⁴ “helpers-caregivers” are sought to take care of the sick, the elderly, the “deinstitutionalized.”⁵ To say nothing of the possible indirect impact on women of the Quebec government’s treatment of youth. The introduction of the principle of the parental support requirement prompts young people to fall back on “family solidarities” to ensure their security, and this risks further increasing the workload of women within the family. In Canada, care of the elderly is also largely provided within the family (Aronson, 1998).

The Main Objective: To Combat Dependency or to Combat Exclusion

In connection with the foregoing, we consider that the logic of reciprocity in Quebec, in terms of the objectives pursued through the institution of reciprocal obligations, is primarily the combatting of dependency, but also, to a lesser degree, the combatting of exclusion.

First of all, we would recall that the objective of combatting dependency, typical of workfare, is accompanied by other objectives, including that of reducing social assistance costs. Now, the work incentive and reduced social assistance spending are central in the evolution of Quebec’s social assistance system. In this regard, then, Quebec indisputably tends towards the workfare model. In Quebec, the generation of savings in the social assistance budget has been an important leitmotif of government decisions since the reform of 1988-1989, and has intensified with the “zero deficit” objective of recent years. All ministries have been mobilized in the struggle to wipe out the deficit, and this has had a decisive impact on the

evolution of assistance in terms of both benefit levels and the institution of obligations. Even in 1995, the mandate of the Comité externe de la Sécurité du revenu was limited by “the fiscal constraint of the government.” The goal of a zero deficit also heavily influenced the implementation of the “active measures” offered by Emploi-Québec, when the 1999-2000 funding crisis threw the offering and organization of services into upheaval. Since the creation of this agency, the orientation of decisions seems to have been governed by budgetary concerns. More generally, in Canada, as M. Baker and D. Tippin (1999, p. 102) recall, the criterion used to evaluate the success of employment integration measures has not been the number of recipients hired full-time, but the decrease in the number of social assistance recipients and the savings thus generated. These criteria have also dominated the evaluation of workfare programs in the United States.

The faces of citizenship that were evoked in the discourse surrounding reciprocal obligations in Canada and in Quebec were also similar to those that led to the institution of the workfare “recipient-citizen.” Thus, the face of the “worker-citizen,” which goes hand in hand with preservation of the work ethic, clearly emerged in the debates. The need to reinforce the work ethic was an argument that permeated the 1987 position paper of the Quebec government entitled *Towards an income security policy* (MMSR, 1987). Then, in the Fortin-Séguin report, equity between recipients and (low-income) wage-earners was a central concern. The criterion of equity was, however, invoked more with regard to the income component (amount of the social assistance payment and of related benefits) than with regard to work obligations, as it was in the United States. But ultimately, the objective was the same: to influence work behaviours, urging towards social assistance leaving, principally through the restructuring of the relative positions of recipients and low-income earners. One further nuance: the equity criterion does not refer so much to the “mother- and worker-citizen” typical of workfare, but more to that of the genderless worker. Moreover, directly in keeping with the centrality of budget savings, the importance of the taxpayer stands out in the Canadian and Quebec debates. Finally, workfare is intended to make recipients more “worthy” and to increase public support for social assistance. These arguments are an integral part of the defence of reciprocal obligations in Quebec, where the people feed on many biases regarding “welfare recipients,” but are not ready, for all that, to squander the social assistance system. We might point out that Quebec stands out once again in that it combines all these objectives, typical of workfare, with a discourse on the objective of gradually reducing the “social fracture” of exclusion.

The *Formula of Rights and Duties*: The Individual Duty of the Poor or the Collective Duty of Society

Quebec’s hybrid model is again confirmed at the level of the *formula of rights and duties* instituted in the context of social assistance. The logic of exchange (compensation) is dominant, but it coexists with the assertion of the *duty* of society to provide the poor with the means for social integration. It does not, however, go so far as to assert the primacy of the social debt to the poor, an orientation typical of the insertion model. Moreover, the extent of the obligations imposed on social assistance recipients in Quebec is difficult to determine. The Individualized Integration, Training and Employment Plan is required, for now, only of the youth category (recipients ages 18 to 24), the majority of whom are women, as we will see later. Bill 186, however, also contains a whole series of obligations

aimed at recipients presenting “no limited capacity for employment” (“without employment constraints”), now made operative by the new mechanism, *Destination emploi*. Of all female recipients under the Employment Assistance Program in August 2000, 37.8 percent fell into this latter category. Then, there is a set of obligations, “suspended” for the time being, pertaining to recipients with a “temporarily limited capacity” for employment. While this status covers a range of situations,⁶ the fact remains that more than one third of women (34.9 percent) receiving employment assistance benefits fall into this group—50.9 percent of whom are single mothers (Box 13)—mostly because they have dependent children whom they are raising alone (57 percent). Behind the genderless language of employability statuses, the reality differs greatly according to gender. Social assistance reciprocity thus masks a number of scenarios.

Generally speaking, the logic that guides a tied-aid relation in Quebec is that of exchange (compensation), specific to workfare, corresponding to the imposition of a new *duty* where before only a *right* existed. In fact, unlike France, which formally rejects it, Quebec openly affirms that the new reciprocity relationship is based on the principle of exchange. The green paper states: “These persons, in turn, must make an effort to actively try to enter the labour market” (MSR, 1996, p. 27). This principle is reaffirmed in Bill 186 and in *Destination emploi*: “The Ministry of Social Solidarity grants you financial assistance and gives you a major boost in your efforts to find a job. In return, you must take appropriate steps to find a job in accordance with the *Act respecting income support, employment assistance and social solidarity*” [translation].⁷ This is truly a “give–give” relationship, in which social assistance (*right*) creates, in return, an obligation on the part of the individuals assisted (to become involved in an employment integration initiative), or a *duty* on their part. In this version of reciprocity, the *formula of rights and duties* is presented in terms of “shared responsibilities”—an expression used by the government—between the State and the poor. Recipients must demonstrate goodwill, representing their individual *duty*, and society must fulfil its collective *duty*. The Fortin-Séguin report, which, of the two reports submitted to the Minister in 1996, was the one that more forcefully reaffirmed the value of work in society, nevertheless very clearly set out the need to require the State to provide recipients with a range of quality, effective employment integration measures.

In an initial version, the argument of “shared responsibilities” was presented by placing the duty of the poor and that of the State *ex oequo*. In this case, the State’s *duty* in the relation of assistance, recognized as an integral part of the professional integration initiative of recipients, was presented as being equivalent to “the personal commitment” of the poor: “The coming together of individual effort and collective effort in favour of employment will bear its fruit,” it asserted [translation] (MSS, 2000a). The terms of the equation, the individual and the collective, were supposed to be equivalent. Taken literally, this version of shared responsibilities supports the fiction of the symmetry of the positions of the State and the poor. In other words, behind the thematic of the reciprocal relationship is the myth of the equality of the parties in the relation of assistance, which evokes the equality of the parties in the employment relationship.⁸ There is, however, another version of the thesis of “shared responsibilities,” in which the individual responsibility of the poor is clearly more salient than the State’s “duty to step in”:

“The State has the **responsibility to provide ongoing support** to recipients in their job-search initiatives by offering them services adapted to their needs, **but the recipients remain the primary ones responsible** for their road to employment,” said Mr. Boisclair. The Minister recalled that **the young person, like all recipients, has the obligation to take steps to find suitable employment. That is the principle of reciprocity.** “We believe that the obligations to be fulfilled by the government and recipients are key elements of the social contract of solidarity underlying the income support system,” Mr. Boisclair said. The Minister recalled that **it is the duty of society to step in to prevent the long-term exclusion of Quebeckers**, particularly young Quebeckers who have not yet developed a significant attachment to the labour market. “With the individualized plan offered by Emploi-Québec, there is more support for young recipients than ever before,” Mr. Boisclair concluded.⁹ [Translation]

Note the similarity of the vocabulary with that of the French government’s statement explaining the objectives of the TRACE program, launched in July 1998, for youth ages 16 to 25 “in difficulty and at risk of professional exclusion”: “The government has the intention to provide ongoing support until employment is obtained by those young people who are furthest from it. That is why it has proposed including the TRACE program within the scope of the program of preventing and combatting exclusions, and in article 2 of the anti-exclusion bill currently being debated in parliament”¹⁰ [translation]. Behind these nuances, it will be seen that, in the first version of the thesis of shared responsibilities, when the obligation of the poor and that of the State are presented as being *ex oequo*, that of the poor is usually expressed first. But beyond that, it will be noted, above all, that social integration is never presented as a *right* of the poor, establishing a debt of society towards them, which is the primary sense of the logic of social debt specific to insertion.

A certain evolution, at least in the discourse, is worth noting, however, since the late 1980s. The State’s obligation of means, or the collective duty with regard to the professional integration of the poor, was implicitly denied when Quebec shifted the burden of its own non-fulfilment—that is, its inability to offer, in sufficient quantity, the necessary employment integration measures—onto recipients. It was recipients who were penalized financially for the lack of spaces in job readiness programs, with the introduction of a “status of availability,” an interim status during which recipients who were prepared to participate in a measure were placed in a holding pattern, there not being enough spaces available to accommodate them; the amount of their benefit was then reduced and fell below the level set for recipients who had found an available space. The financial crisis experienced at Emploi-Québec in 1999 had similar consequences for many recipients: the poor paid for the State’s failure to fulfil its commitments.

The Case of Youth

The first group targeted by the Quebec social assistance policy is youth. In fact, this is the most controversial category of recipients with regard to the exchange (compensation) obligation, and therefore subject to the most structured behavioural requirements regarding employment integration.

The Quebec government today adopts an ambiguous approach towards youth. Whereas the regulations governing compulsory participation in action plans were to become effective February 1, 2001 (Box 8), *Solidarité Jeunesse* relies, in contrast, on a voluntary approach to the employment integration of youth. The ambivalence is even more pronounced when it is noted that the implementation of both types of initiatives relies on separate intervention networks, or “partnerships”: Emploi-Québec and the CPMT, with regard to action plans; the Carrefours jeunesse-emploi (CJEs), with regard to *Solidarité Jeunesse*. Moreover, different ministers are behind the two initiatives, responsibility for Emploi-Québec resting with Diane Lemieux, and for *Solidarité Jeunesse* with André Boisclair, the incumbent Social Solidarity minister. Taking the bleak view, one almost gets the impression that the dual scenario outlined by the two reports of the Comité externe de réforme de la Sécurité du revenu in 1996 has been revived.

We might mention, with regard to the logic of reciprocity, that emerging from the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale is a discourse based on terms of solidarity. It is in the context of *Solidarité Jeunesse*, in fact, that the notion of the collective *duty* to integrate youth into the community is advanced furthest in government rhetoric: “The situation of young people who are beginning their adult life on employment assistance is sufficiently worrisome to **necessitate a collective mobilization of Quebec society** with a view to the Summit” [translation] (MSS, 2000j).

This pilot project is too recent to permit an evaluation, beyond the pronouncements, of practices in the field and especially of the way in which the Quebec government will incorporate the results of its evaluation into its elaboration of youth policies in the future. In other words, it is too soon to know whether this project will affect the compulsory approach developed thus far towards this category of recipients. In passing, note is taken of the fluctuating nature of the definition of the “youth” target group, which changes according to the period or the program in question: age 30, in the late 1980s, for the fixing of benefit rates, age 25 for individualized plans, and age 21 for *Solidarité Jeunesse*.

The neutrality of the discourse surrounding youth conceals the differentiated reality of women. First of all, most young adults are women: 57 percent of young recipients under age 25 are female (Box 12). A high proportion of them are single mothers. Young women are not very visible in the discourse about youth. On the one hand, those who are raising children are not affected by the obligation to undertake an individualized plan, which for now targets, as we said earlier, only young people with no dependent children. Secondly, in the context of the *Solidarité Jeunesse* pilot project, women are clearly underrepresented. According to the latest data on participation in the project, of all youth “sounded out” by participating LECs, 28 percent were women, while 23 percent of all participants (52 out of 93) were women. Also, 88 percent of participants were single (MSS, 2000i). The *Solidarité Jeunesse* recipient within the population of youth recipients is therefore the young male, considered, for administrative purposes, as single. In other words, in actuality, the voluntary approach currently being tried by the Quebec government does not address primarily young women. It is true that *Solidarité Jeunesse* recently adopted a component that targets women (*Ma place au soleil*). It remains to be seen whether this project will receive enough government investment to be expanded and truly make a difference for young sole-support mothers. As CSF researchers recommended: “It is hoped, then, that the projects adopted (by *Solidarité Jeunesse*) will be accessible to both female and male clients and will be adapted

to the particular needs of women, if necessary. We also hope that an equal proportion of men and women will take part in this voluntary experiment” [translation] (Desrochers, Lepage, Moisan, 1999, p. 12).

New Brunswick, for its part, has taken two approaches in its employment integration programs, relying in turn on incentives and obligations. The New Brunswick Works program and the Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP), involving mainly women, were voluntary. In contrast, the 1995 *Youth Policy* is based on the compulsory approach and is akin to the American workfare variant known as *learnfare*. One might well wonder what direction the government in that province will take in future if the evaluation of the pilot projects influences the elaboration of programs. The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), a non-profit agency created in 1992 and charged with making this evaluation, is closely connected to the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), the pioneer and principal contractor of experimental evaluations of American employment integration programs for social assistance recipients. This close co-operation means that the Canadian experience is being monitored very closely by the United States. Moreover, as it is similar to a number of initiatives that have been put forward in that country as an alternative to the approach of the 1996 reform (Box 27), the Canadian project is of interest to many stakeholders. Thus, the SSP could have a feedback effect on the income supplementation policies pursued by our neighbours to the south. The federal government’s interest in these trials is also confirmed.

We might add that New Brunswick’s 1995 reform advanced, as in Quebec, the conception of “shared responsibilities” between the poor and the State, as the discussion paper *Creating New Options* shows (DIA, 1993). The targeting of youth as a category for the imposition of specific obligations is another point of convergence with the Quebec case. The same can be said of Ontario, which adopted the compulsory approach with the learnfare program LEAP, for adolescent parents on social assistance. However, in that province, the approach is unequivocal. As a rule, it does not get bogged down in nuances. In Ontario, little to do with notions of the obligations of the State filters through from the discourses that focus unflinchingly on the *duties* of the poor.

The Indirect Route: The Adjustment and Reduction of Benefits

The analysis of rights and duties in the context of social assistance would be incomplete without an examination of the benefits component (in addition to the component of mandatory participation in measures). The policy governing the setting of social assistance benefit rates is directly implicated in the government’s strategy of encouraging recipients to leave social assistance. In this case, however, one could say that the approach used is indirectly mandatory, rather than openly so, as it is when using the lever of compulsory participation. While it cannot be said to be tied aid per se, the means employed is nevertheless the same: the financial penalty as a preferred tool for prompting the desired behaviour, that is, social assistance leaving. The sanction is applied indirectly and implicitly, for rather than the benefit itself being reduced or eliminated, benefit levels are frozen or reduced. Keeping benefit levels low induces recipients to leave the system. For example, the New Brunswick government, while still reluctant to openly adopt the compulsory approach, took this roundabout approach to achieve its objectives:

An approach under consideration is ensuring that the level of benefits take into account, among other criteria, the willingness to participate in work and training opportunities. Full mandatory participation may not be the appropriate approach in the short-term [*sic*], but in the suggested client-government arrangement both will be expected to fulfill their responsibilities. (DIA, 1993, p. 19)

In that province, benefit levels were adjusted according to the participation in employment integration measures. The result was the more precarious status of women on social assistance. Thus, single women who agreed to take part in measures saw their benefit increase, while those who refused to participate lost a sizeable portion of their assistance (from 260 down to 50 dollars a month). Similarly, single mothers under age 18 who participated in an employability measure received a monthly allowance of 700 dollars, compared to 300 dollars for those classified as “non-participants.”¹¹ Thus, rather than intervening *ex post*, the government acted *ex ante*.

In Quebec, the government borrowed the same strategy when, in the late 1980s, it adjusted the level of aid on the basis of “ability to work” and participation in employment integration measures. We will come back to this in our analysis of the social assistance custom. Suffice it for now to say that this strategy considerably impoverished persons classified as “able to work,” and, among them, a significant number of women (Table 13). This indirect policy approach, which consisted in acting on the amount of the payment in order to induce recipients to exit the system, was again borrowed, in the 1990s, with the implementation of adjustments aimed at “greater equity” between assistance recipients and low-income earners. The adjustments were made at two levels: less protection for social assistance recipients, and more protection for low-income earners, to encourage the first to join the ranks of the second. Also, reforms that could be considered social advances (family policy, pharmacare) ultimately lowered the standard of living of women on employment assistance. The treatment of the support payment further lowered recipients’ income.

In Ontario, the notable feature has been the extreme variability of assistance levels. The sudden and sizeable decrease in the amount of social assistance benefits decided on, in 1995, by the Harris government, after the previous government had increased them significantly, recalls the United States of the early 1990s, when several states elected to reduce, in real or even nominal terms, the amount of the AFDC. But never, to our knowledge, had the decrease been so drastic. A major difference remains, however, vis-à-vis the United States regarding the setting of benefit levels: the rule of the family cap, applied by several American states and incorporated into the 1996 reform, was not applied in Canada. In Quebec, the Fortin-Séguin report (1996, p. 57) stated in this regard: “The taking into account of the presence of children when calculating a family’s basic needs is absolutely essential and must not be called into question” [*translation*].

The Relief Custom: The Custom of Deservingness or the Custom of Solidarity

Social assistance in Canada has been dominated, as it has in the United States, by a *custom of deservingness*. This *custom* has been taking shape since the period of colonization,

particularly in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, provinces marked by the traditional English Poor Law model. It has been evolving up until the present day, and is now being reasserted by the direction that tied aid is taking. The new *rules* of reciprocity therefore perpetuate, in new forms, a relief *custom of deservingness* very present throughout history. Moreover, in Canada, again as in the United States, there is a gender aspect to the *custom of deservingness* that is particularly salient and is attributable to the markedly categorial structuring of social assistance policy; to the fact that social assistance has been instituted by isolating various categories of the poor, including single mothers.

Thus, the historical analysis yields at least four observations. First of all, the representations of poverty, in Canada, have developed more in terms of deviance ascribed to the poor than in terms of dysfunctions of society. Secondly, the imposition of work requirements on the employable poor has existed throughout the history of Canadian social assistance policy. Thirdly, the “deserving/undeserving” dichotomy is a fundamental trait of the Canadian social assistance *institution*. Fourthly, to understand the place of women, it is necessary to look mainly to the family, firstly, because women are conspicuous by their absence from conventional forms of putting the poor to work (such as the public works undertaken during the Great Depression), and secondly, because historically, the use of social assistance to regulate poverty has been based mainly, in the case of women, in the institution of the family, and only indirectly on employment. In short, the *rules* by which this *custom of deservingness* in the context of social assistance is applied have evolved over time. They have also assumed different forms for women.

The pre-eminence of the gender problematic we have already noted in American social assistance also emerges in the Canadian, Quebec and Ontario cases.¹² In the United States, a striking feature of social assistance is the fact that the *duties* imposed on the poor are elaborated according to gender-based *rules*. For men, the *custom of deservingness* refers to the obligation of paid work. For women, it has regulated the obligation of domestic work, throughout much of history, and, at the workfare stage, the obligation of employment. In Canada, we have seen the same prevalence of a *custom of deservingness* in social assistance differentiated on the basis of gender, though it has assumed different forms since the 1960s. Government interventions, as in the United States, have taken the form of categorial programs, whereby social assistance narrowly targets specific groups, particularly single mothers. Programs of assistance for needy mothers were promoted, in both countries, by women’s groups in the name of the same maternalist ideology, arguing the meritorious contribution of mothers raising children. Canada drew its inspiration directly from the American experience, the programs appearing more or less at the same time, although slightly earlier in the United States. Finally, as in the American programs, the *custom of deservingness* was recognized in Canada through the “suitable home” rule which, like the *rules* constructing employability, regulated a *duty* that applied, not to paid work, but to domestic work. As was true of the *rules* constructing employability, the “suitable home” *rule* was designed to provoke appropriate conduct so that recipients could fulfil their social obligation, in this case not paid work, but the work of childrearing. To this end, it entailed a clear judgement of the rules of conduct attesting to the ability to correctly fulfil this role, with the “morality test” being added to the “income test.” Imposing a duty in the context of relief, the “suitable home” *rule* clearly emerged from the *custom of deservingness*. As with

employability, a classification of poor mothers was established to distinguish, among single mothers, those who “deserved” financial relief from the State.

Quebec adopted, later than most of the other Canadian provinces, a program of assistance for needy mothers that corresponded to a *custom of deservingness* differentiated according to gender. The Quebec legislation of 1969 was inspired more by the *custom of solidarity*, and clearly affirmed the right to assistance asserted in the Boucher report, which would also influence Canada, though to a lesser degree, when the CAP was introduced. In Ontario, the custom of deservingness seems to have been remarkably persistent: from the program of assistance for single mothers, it survived in the “hierarchy of deservingness” recognized and underscored in the *Transitions* report of 1988 (Box 17), re-emerging in another form in current practices. This leaves less room for a vision in terms of social rights. In this regard, moreover, the *Transitions* report is highly illustrative (Ontario, 1988).

Finally, the institutionalization of differentiated treatments for the poor, deriving from a categorization of recipients according to their presumed employability, as occurred in Quebec in the late 1980s and in Ontario before that, arose directly from the *custom of deservingness*. The New Brunswick reform was similar to the categorization schemes applied in Quebec and Ontario. A paradox is worth noting: While New Brunswick is the one province that one might have thought, because of its English-inspired relief *custom*, would have integrated the principle of the quid pro quo of the “undeserving poor” to the greatest degree, the province’s language surrounding categorization of these poor is the most ambiguous, the least direct. Indeed, the two groups of recipients described in ministerial documents (HRD-NB, 1994a, 1994b) (policy proposal and social assistance policy of 1994) are wholly consistent with the characteristics of what are openly referred to in other provinces, such as Quebec or Ontario, as “employable” and “unemployable.” But in New Brunswick, the distinction is not clearly presented in these terms.

The Scope of the Reciprocity Relationship: The Categorical Approach or the Universalist Approach

Quebec is definitely closer to the United States because of its categorical approach. Tied aid is applied unevenly. Thus, a range of treatments have been instituted for each category, depending on the group to which the recipient belongs—youth, single mothers with a child under age 5, the elderly age 55 or over—and these categories face systematically different obligations. Recipients are selected according to the upstream model of screening for employability that is typical of workfare and of the *custom of deservingness* that runs through it. These rules of classification are especially important to understanding how the social construction of the employability of women works. For the categorical approach, applied in determining employment obligations in the social assistance context, is largely based on shifting rules relating to the age of the children in the woman’s care.

The employability of single mothers receiving employment assistance is the outcome of the combined action of the evolution of women’s employment and the evolution of the family. As in the United States, two distinguishing criteria emerge from this process of targeting obligations on the basis of employability (upstream screening): the age of the children, and

the gender of the recipients. We have already touched on how the woman/child duality leads to ambivalence about the treatment of single-parent families in the social assistance context, owing to the coexistence of two opposing images (undeserving adult/deserving child). This attitude, deeply rooted in the *custom of deservingness*, goes hand in hand with the fact that the boundary that defines the “deserving” mother has gradually shifted, according to the age of her children. In Canada, the process has unfolded temporally, with a gradual lowering of the age of the child at which the mother becomes exempt from employment-related obligations. But it has also unfolded spatially: today, the standard applied is not the same in all Canadian provinces, just as it differs between countries. These national differences can be explained partially by the changes in women’s employment.

Beyond a configuration of duties differentiated according to the various categories of recipients, the adjustment of the benefit payment according to ability to work, and then according to participation in measures, is also an approach foreign to the universalist-inspired approach that prevails in France. The able–unable division directly revives the division between the “good poor” and the “bad poor.” The changes made to the rate structure in the late 1980s, when the distinction between “employable” and “unemployable” recipients was formally introduced, severely penalized a high proportion of recipients, in this case individuals age 30 or over, who fell into the first category and did not participate in a job preparation or job entry measure. Conversely, they favoured the “unemployable,” increasing their benefit levels (Table 12). This undeniably instituted a two-tier social assistance system based on the *custom of deservingness*. Moreover, the reform had almost no budgetary impact, meaning that the improvement in the situation of some was “paid for” by the deterioration in the position of others: “Cost increases arising from the parity granted to youth and the increase for disabled persons, were offset by the concentration of clients in the ‘non-participant’ category, for which the benefit rate was appreciably lower” [translation] (Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 23). The system was therefore realigned, in the end, by transferring funds from the “bad poor” to the “good poor.” The 1997 reform largely maintained the previous division, with the continuation of this dual structure.

We should make it clear that disparities in treatment are not non-existent in France, the difference being that these disparities occur not between, but within population categories. For example, the unemployed are compensated by means of either unemployment insurance (which itself has two distinct components) or the RMI; single-parent families are assisted by the *allocation de parent isolé* (API) for single parents or the RMI; the disabled may receive the *allocation pour adulte handicapé* or the RMI. This situation, which conveys a certain inconsistency in the treatment of poverty, is owing to the structuring of the national social assistance system, namely, the fact that the RMI is in addition to a pre-existing and still operative system of social minima. It is quite different from the logic of deservingness expressed through different treatments for different population groups, according to the deservingness associated with each in terms of the social norms that apply to their respective employability. There remains the case of youth: in France, persons under age 25 with no dependent children are not covered under the “general” social assistance regime, that is, the RMI. A comparison with Quebec for this group is therefore difficult to make. However, France has developed, for youth under age 25, a series of social and professional insertion

measures (training activities, *Emplois Jeunesse*, individualized plans, housing services and meal subsidies for university students, etc.) that have no counterpart in Quebec.

The Conception of the Social Integration of Social Assistance Recipients: Exclusively Professional or Professional and Social

Within Canada and Quebec, the social integration of social assistance recipients that emerges from the conception of employment integration measures is professional. The activities proposed to recipients are, in fact, geared to immediate employment integration, job preparation (education and training measures), business immersion (work terms), community work, and so on. In all cases, the activities are related to, or prepare for employment.

The most radical professional integration approach is that of Ontario. In the context of the Ontario Works program, the province adopted the approach favoured by the United States since the reform of 1996: the “work first approach.” Nor has Quebec adopted the social insertion perspective. Here, the Quebec case provides a fine example of rhetorical effect, for Quebec uses the expression “social insertion” in referring to its activities. Now, this same expression conceals dissimilar realities: “social insertion,” as it is used by *Emploi-Québec*, means insertion in community organizations through, for example, wage subsidies. This is not consistent with the definition used in France. There has been a definite distortion of meaning: the term has clearly been borrowed from France, but has been given a definition closer to the conception of integration that is typical of workfare.

The Interaction Dynamics Between Social Assistance, Employment and the Family: The Primacy of the Family or of Employment

As in France, the Quebec reciprocity model is rooted predominantly in employment. In this regard, it corresponds to the insertion model. The recipient is, first of all, an unemployed worker who either has no unemployment insurance or has exhausted his entitlements (Box 6). A rise in insertion unemployment for younger workers, in the case of the first, or a marked increase in long-term unemployment for older workers, in the case of the second, are the main phenomena behind the swelling ranks of recipients from the 1980s until quite recently, coupled with fewer protections offered by the Canadian program of unemployment insurance. Conversely, the prevalence of the employment thematic in social assistance entries also explains the steep decline noted in recent years in the number of employment assistance recipients: in August 2000, in Quebec, there were 378,115 households receiving employment assistance, down 4.8 percent from August 1999 and a decrease of 23 percent over three years (MSS, 2000h).

Quebec is a society of high unemployment, and has been for even longer than France. The employment situation has therefore been a determining factor for understanding the appearance of tied aid. The process that occurred is the one described in the French case: the employability of social assistance entrants, of unemployed workers with no insurance coverage, led to the transformation of this institution. This same dynamic still predominates: for example, in August 2000, 42.5 percent of new employment assistance entries were unemployed workers with insufficient or no employment insurance protection (Box 14). The

transition from employment insurance to assistance has therefore had the direct effect of seriously eroding *status of economic security* instituted in the context of the collective assumption of social risks. This substitution of the logic of social assistance for that of social insurance, in the face of the risk of unemployment, has greatly affected women: the toughening of unemployment insurance requirements has affected primarily wage-earners in unstable jobs, of which women represent a disproportionate share, and labour market entrants-re-entrants, of which they also make up a sizeable proportion.

Like the RMI, social assistance has thus become, in Quebec, a secondary system of unemployment compensation, “employment assistance” being the skilled-down version of “employment insurance.” Moreover, as in France, the family ranks second in explaining the dynamics of poverty, and then, it concerns women; the paths are differentiated according to gender, social assistance entry following a marital breakdown being a typically female profile: “Unlike men, the loss of the spouse is, for women, a major cause of turning to social assistance, even though, for both, job loss remains the primary cause” [*translation*] (Lepage, Martel, 1997, p. 21). Seen in this way, the social construction of the employability of social assistance recipients is similar to that observed in the case of workfare, directly influenced by changes in the family and, in particular, the increase in lone parenthood.

The Links with Employment Policy: Predominantly Selective or Predominantly Universal

The professional integration activities offered to recipients in Quebec maintain, for the most part, the deskilled status of “recipients” rather than providing access to wage-earner status. In this regard, then, it is closer to the workfare model. As for the government employment service, its form of organization makes it a hybrid, borrowing from the policies of both France and the United States.

On the whole, before the last Quebec reform, it was observed that “participants are unable to benefit from the vast majority of laws in force in the area of labour relations,¹³ even though the most important re-insertion measures require participants to provide work” [*translation*] (Dufour, 1996, p. 183). Apart from the *Programme d’aide à l’intégration en emploi (PAIE)*, a measure of subsidized employment, “the beneficiary who participates in government measures cannot expect to be considered an employee within the meaning of the principal laws (...)” [*translation*] (Dufour, 1996, p. 261). The last reform changed this situation somewhat, by improving access to the protections provided under labour legislation.

Several features of Quebec’s government employment service make it similar to both the French and American systems. On the one hand, its scope is unparalleled anywhere else in Canada and, more widely, in North America. Quebec’s “active labour market policy” (with *Emploi-Québec*, the CPMT and the system of LECs, in liaison with regional and local development structures) is original and ambitious. This was already true of the integrated manpower policy that was beginning to take shape with the SQDM. Even then, the legislation respecting vocational training was an innovative institution in North America, directly inspired by European experiences, particularly that of France. With its concern to elaborate a manpower policy, Quebec is like France. However, the close proximity between the government employment service and social assistance unquestionably makes it more like the American case. And the fact that the institutional framework of its employment policy is

the Quebec social assistance institution, gives it a singular orientation that limits its power of expansion, the nature of its interventions and, by extension, its ability to enable women to exit poverty.

As is the case in the United States, it is possible to speak of a relative confinement of government employment services within the sphere of social assistance. Rather than the culture of employment influencing the culture of social assistance, as the proponents of one-stop service would have it, it is the culture of social assistance that influences the culture of employment. Quebec did not choose to entrust primary responsibility for employment policy to an independent agency, such as, for example, the former SQDM. Instead, the Quebec government chose to integrate the active labour market policy into a ministry, initially the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale, which then became the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale. Budgetary reasons, once again, were behind the government's decisions, as the president of the Association des manufacturiers et des exportateurs du Québec, Gérald Ponton (2000, p. B1), said: "It was explained to us that our solution cost 80 million dollars more in budgetary resources." Rather than set up an independent network of government employment services, with a culture of unemployment prevention and employment integration (job adjustment and retention through the development of advancement courses, reclassification, and so on, employment insertion through specific expertise in business services, thereby facilitating the development of business links), Quebec chose to integrate the new services into a ministry and, what is more, one dominated by a culture of social assistance. It thus entrusted manpower policy to an institution dominated by a culture of control which, by its very nature, is alien to a culture geared to employment and whose personnel have specific expertise in managing social assistance problems.¹⁴ In so doing, Emploi-Québec "lost much of the expertise of the (...) SQDM, even of HRDC, in the area of business services and partnership, with disastrous consequences," notably "the disaffection of employers" [*translation*] (CSN, 2000, p. 2). Moreover, as these services were integrated into a ministry whose primary function was to manage social assistance budgets, in a context marked by the struggle to overcome the deficit, the primary concern was to reduce social assistance costs, rather than elaborate a true manpower policy that would put in place a sound strategy of employment integration services for social assistance recipients:

Concerned primarily about the income security component of its mission, the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale devotes most of its efforts to this clientele and to reducing its inherent costs. With respect to manpower, the problematic of the employment insertion of employable income security recipients, notably to ease the income security coffers, dominates the ministry's concerns. [*Translation*] (CSN, 2000, p. 2)

In the United States, the association of manpower policy with "managing the poor" has contributed greatly to the loss of credibility of this type of intervention with the general population, and is thus a major obstacle to the elaboration of a real employment policy in that country. Poor women have been the big losers as a result.

In Quebec, interventions continue to target social assistance recipients. Thus, *Destination emploi* is exclusively aimed at this group. Differentiated treatment is therefore still reserved

for assistance recipients. By comparison, we give the example of the French program *Nouveau Départ*, a program of individualized plans for the chronically unemployed. This program does not target RMI beneficiaries exclusively, and is administered solely by the ANPE, an independent government agency. The principle of one-stop service is also harmed by the existence of two parallel systems: the one put in place by Emploi-Québec, and the one now being solidified in CJE. Since the creation of Emploi-Québec, in April 1998, the two structures have coexisted despite the overlap of their missions. The redefinition of the mission of Emploi-Québec also completely altered the plan for one-stop service and diluted the service offering for women. The choice in favour of short-term measures¹⁵ risks having a major impact on women receiving assistance. Indeed, for these women, access to long-term, adapted education and training measures is essential to obtaining jobs that will take them out of poverty (Box 15).

Finally, there is the problem of the lack of services for “chequeless” women, that is, women who apply for employment integration services at the “single window” of Emploi-Québec, but receive nothing out of the budgets administered by this agency in the way of income support (social assistance) or income replacement (employment insurance). Behind this designation of “chequeless” are recipients with a range of profiles: laid-off wage-earners who have exhausted their employment insurance entitlements (and eligibility for active measures), women who do not qualify for social assistance but want to take advantage of active measures, youth, and so on. “Chequeless” women, who are often women in unstable jobs, have been let down by the service offering of Emploi-Québec. They have been unable, until now, to participate in many employment integration measures, despite their need to do so. This is because the budget savings criteria that have dominated the management of this agency’s service offering placed this group at a disadvantage: the services offered these women did not reduce social assistance budgets, and since the costs often were not covered by federal government allocations, they merely generated more costs. This explains, from an accounting standpoint, why this group received few services, even though this made no sense in terms of improving “employability.”

These developments yield another result of our analysis, this time concerning the problem of the State’s obligation of means. When new behaviour criteria are introduced in the context of assistance, an obligation of means—a new *duty*—is created for society and, in particular, the State: the duty to provide programs (or jobs) that will enable recipients to fulfil their obligation. One of our questions at the outset was whether there were traits common to all national configurations. With respect to the obligation of means, the answer is, yes. Our study of the United States and France revealed a fundamental conflict at the level of State intervention in applying the philosophy of “active policies” in the sphere of social assistance: the State’s financial involvement is never equal to the stated objectives, in the context of either workfare or insertion. This, then, is a trait inherent in each of the reciprocity models we studied, for our finding was the same for Canada. If we have presented, in the preceding pages, mainly the contradictions that exist between discourse and practice in Quebec, the same could be done for the other provinces we studied. In Ontario, where, as in the United States, workfare is clearly the favoured approach, with its strenuous injunctions designed to force “employable” recipients to work, the means also have not followed the discourse. “This is the first time that we have met our annual placement target since workfare became law three years ago” (MSSC, 2000a)

it was recently stated. We might add, however, that it is very difficult to obtain reliable data on participation in workfare activities in Ontario. This contradiction, that is, the lack of means to enable recipients to engage in a qualifying employment integration process, is a major obstacle to the implementation of policies for improving the living standards of poor women.

The Current Regression Dynamics: Erosion of the Rights of Social Assistance Recipients or Erosion of the Rights of Wage-Earners

The regression dynamics seen in Canada are also typical of the American case. As in the United States, the regulation of employment determines that of social assistance. In fact, the primary concern is for fairness towards low-income earners, considered to be unfavourably treated compared to social assistance recipients. Quebec is no exception to this rule. The poor quality of jobs has stood in the way of improving the situation of assistance recipients: low wages and the growing phenomenon of the working poor (Ross, Scott, Smith, 2000), together with the argument of the high tax level, have been the most significant forces brought to bear on the dynamics between employment and social assistance. Social polarization and the lack of solidarity between the working poor and social assistance recipients have had the same harmful effects on the plight of the poor in Canada as in the United States. If policy makers derive any benefit from their hard-line approach to social assistance recipients, it is because, it is said of Americans, “the public blames the social assistance system for problems in their own life” (Hagen, Lurie, 1994a, p. xxviii). The situation is comparable in Canada (Baker, Tippin, 2000) and in Quebec as well, although to a lesser degree.

In the context of this dynamic of comparing relative situations of the poor, we observed income transfers between the various categories of “undeserving poor” and others. First of all, among social assistance recipients, between the “employable” and the “unemployable,” the bad poor and the good poor: the second have been rewarded to the detriment of the first. Then, at the junction of assistance and employment, between “employable” recipients and low-income earners—the bad poor and the working poor, by definition the good poor—with the transfer of wealth in the same direction. Thus, while the Quebec government has raised the standard of living of low-income earners, it has lowered that of “employable” recipients. The guiding principle of the government’s action has been that holding a job, any job, is preferable to social assistance.¹⁶ In this context, there has been very little reflection about the quality of jobs, particularly for women leaving social assistance, who usually end up among the working poor. The same applies to the specific difficulties experienced by single mothers, who grapple with serious problems of reconciling employment and family, and face poverty, to boot:

Low-income mothers make decisions about paid work within the context of their family responsibilities and economic constraints. (...) [E]xpecting beneficiaries to move into paid work is often complicated and risky for low-income mothers and may result in a net financial loss for them and their families. Such complications, which are not always recognized by policy makers or politicians, call into question the insecurity and low pay of available jobs, the shortage of training positions to allow workers to move

to better positions, and the psychic damage caused by dead-end and low-paid work. Recognition of these facts also requires an acknowledgement of the lack of child support paid by some non-resident fathers and the inaccessibility of affordable public childcare. (Baker, Tippin, 2000, p. 60)

On the question of child care, this quotation applies more to Ontario than to Quebec; in Ontario, owing to the weakness of the daycare system, the workfare approach is having serious repercussions on the living standards of women. In Quebec, the scope of family policy changes things, giving the policy a distinct nature. But it should be remembered that Quebec family policy has been drawn up in the context of the social assistance agenda (Rose, 1998),¹⁷ as has, moreover, manpower policy. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, when referring to the examples of France and the United States, the limited effectiveness of social and family policies in Canada in combatting women's poverty is similar to that of its neighbour to the south. In fact, in terms of the impact on the poverty of single-parent families, Canada ranks close to the United States and far from France: "Lone parenthood is less often synonymous with poverty in France than in Anglo-Saxon countries. In all, 17 percent of single-parent families live below the poverty line in France, while the proportion is more than half in the United Kingdom or the United States" [*translation*] (Olier, Herpin, 1999, p. 333). The low poverty rate of single-parent families is owing to "the significant participation of single mothers in the labour market, in full-time jobs, but also to the effectiveness of social and family policies" [*translation*] (Olier, Herpin, 1999, p. 333):

In the mid-eighties, the proportion of "poor" families among single-parent households declined by half in France under the influence of social and fiscal policies, going from 38% before to 17% after the effect of social transfer payments, whereas in the United States or Canada, this effect was distinctly weaker (the proportion of poor single-parent households going from 56% to 53% and from 60% to 48%, respectively. [*Translation*] (Olier, Herpin, 1999, p. 333)

Conclusion

As we expected at the outset, the preferred approach of Quebec is a hybrid model, borrowing from the two models of workfare and insertion. Based on the criteria we used, however, workfare is the dominant logic of Quebec's social assistance reciprocity model. Indeed, at the various levels of the relation of assistance, the characteristics of the Quebec model are similar, in most cases, to those of workfare, rather than those of insertion. Thus, the theme of dependency prevails over that of exclusion in the representation of the "subject-citizen" of social assistance and in the objectives assigned to social assistance reforms. While it does coexist with the affirmation of the *duty* of society to provide means of social integration for the poor, the logic of exchange (compensation) dominates social assistance reciprocity. The custom of deservingness is historically rooted in a logic of type and in the dual structure of the assistance system, based on ability to work. The reciprocity relationship is applied using a categorial logic, with its gradings and classifications determining different treatments for the groups concerned. The social integration of assistance recipients is professional, with a clear inclination to maintain "recipient" status.

Finally, it is the improvement of the situation of low-income earners and taxpayers, not that of the “employable” poor, that is the primary concern of the public authorities. However, the priority given employment in the institution of social assistance reciprocity brings the Quebec model closer to that of insertion. The reciprocity relationship that emerges from the analysis of the Quebec case also has distinct features, such as the blending of referents to solidarity and deservingness, or even dependency and exclusion, in the constitution of the assistance institution. This distinctiveness becomes even clearer when Quebec is compared to its neighbouring province. For in Ontario, the question of the nature of the reciprocity is decided at the outset: that province uses an approach very similar to the one adopted in the United States in recent years, which is a radical, hard-line version of work requirements. As for New Brunswick, the points of comparison we identified do not allow us, at the present time, to situate its workfare approach more precisely in relation to Quebec and Ontario. In all cases, women, and especially single mothers, are caught between their family responsibilities and their employment obligations.

Finally, we identified a feature common to all national configurations: the contradiction of the State’s obligation of means. We found that the incoherence of government interventions (limited funding for employment integration measures in relation to the stated objectives, performance requirements counterproductive to service quality, inadequacy of other social policy arrangements, particularly unemployment insurance, but also family policy in Ontario and New Brunswick) greatly undermines the effectiveness of anti-poverty policies in Canada and Quebec, as well as in the United States and France. While the inconsistencies brought to light in this study are the same as those we have previously identified in other countries, one specific feature nevertheless emerges from the Canadian case: the power-distribution arrangements in the sphere of unemployment compensation. In dividing responsibility for good risks (unemployment insurance) and bad risks (unemployment assistance) between the federal government and the provinces respectively, they have had the perverse effect of seriously eroding the *economic status* of a large fraction of the unemployed. They have, without a doubt, profoundly affected the reciprocity relationship instituted with respect to women.

Notes

¹ It could even be considered tripartite, counting the PWA program.

² See, in this regard, the links with employment policy later in this chapter.

³ In August 2000, in Quebec, women accounted for 51.8 percent of households receiving employment assistance (Box 12).

⁴ See, in this regard, CSF, 2000.

⁵ Among the serious causes recognized by Bill 186 for refusing or leaving a suitable employment, we might mention the “obligation to care for a child or a member of the immediate family” (s. 50). Through this provision, social assistance reform was integrated with health and social services reform.

⁶ Persons presenting temporarily limited capacities are those: whose health condition prevents them, for a period of at least one month, from participating in an employment integration activity; women who are less than 20 weeks pregnant; who have a dependent child under age 5 or not attending school because of a disability; who are age 55 or over; who are living in a shelter for victims of abuse; who provide ongoing care to a person whose autonomy is reduced because of their physical or mental condition; who are placed in a foster family; who are responsible for a foster family or manage a reception centre for this purpose (MSS, 2000h, p. 6).

⁷ *Destination emploi* folder, Ministère de la Solidarité sociale, 2000.

⁸ This equality is symbolized by the orthodox theoretical representation in economics of the equality of supply and demand on the labour market.

⁹ Emphasis added. Excerpt from the appended news release (Box 8).

¹⁰ Circular of July 1, 1998.

¹¹ Only some of the difference can be justified by expenditures related to participation in measures.

¹² For New Brunswick, we did not have access to documents that dealt extensively with the program of assistance for needy mothers.

¹³ The *Act respecting labour standards*, the *Act respecting collective agreement decrees* and the *Civil Service Act*.

¹⁴ We thank Diane Bellemare for bringing out these aspects during the interview.

¹⁵ At least this is what the data on participation in the active measures of Emploi-Québec tend to suggest. From 1998-1999 to 1999-2000, the number of “yearly active participations” went from 301,362 to 236,642. While participations in employment assistance services increased from 96,464 to 102,008, participations in training declined from 121,073 to 77,170 (Lemieux, 1999, annexe).

¹⁶ Thus, the document presenting *Destination emploi* states that “[h]aving a job, even a low-paying one, is worth it” [translation] (MSS, 2000b).

¹⁷ According to Ruth Rose (1998, pp. 96, 9), Quebec uses family policy “as a tool for controlling social assistance beneficiaries”; social assistance “is the carrot at the end of the reductions stick” [translation].

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the subject of the formulation of social assistance policies and practices, we conclude with a number of recommendations concerning policy and suggested areas for further study which, in our view, would improve the status of poor women.

Policy Recommendations for Improving the Status of Poor Women

1. Reorient the conception of social and employment integration policies for women on social assistance by restoring the central role of the family, in order to better recognize the differentiated constraints on women and reduce the inconsistencies in the system of incentives and obligations stemming from other public policies.
2. Re-examine, in the conception of social policies governing income security,¹ the definite conflict that exists between “active” measures and “passive” measures, in order to formulate policies that integrate income transfers and social and employment integration measures in a way that is complementary rather than mutually exclusive.
3. Re-evaluate the principle of “tied aid” in social assistance policy, in order to reorient interventions in a way that is less stigmatizing for women and more concerned with providing ongoing support for individuals than with controlling their behaviour.
4. Add “social insertion” measures to the professional activities offered to social assistance recipients, to provide women with a more gradual process of social integration, when necessary, and one based on their differentiated needs.
5. Develop programs that take into account the differentiated reality of women: by devising, in addition to social insertion measures, gradual processes, part-time activities, adapted education and training measures as well as measures of assistance and ongoing support that will help women successfully complete their integration process; and by properly recognizing the value of the work done by community and women’s groups with expertise in this area.
6. Devise mechanisms for increasing the accountability of the State in order to better ensure the fulfilment of the “obligation of means” with regard to the provision of social and employment integration measures, as well as support measures (daycare services, transportation assistance, etc.), for women on social assistance; these mechanisms might include the institution of new forms of collective representation at decision-making sites, a stricter requirement that the relevant government ministries and agencies provide information about public funds earmarked for programming, the number of participants, and so on.
7. Consider devising new forms of “exchange” (compensation) for employers, in terms of new obligations concerning jobs, to be integrated in public supports for employers, to ensure that the public funds thus allocated produce additional social benefits.

8. Expand the sphere of “active policies” at the level of employers, similar to the interventions being introduced in the area of “insertion intermediation,” to help employers better define their manpower requirements, so as to promote the employment integration of stigmatized populations, including women on social assistance.
9. Revisit the original idea of “one-stop service” in Quebec and give an independent, public agency an exclusive mandate for manpower development policy.
10. Devise government interventions aimed at giving poor women more power to influence the decisions that affect them, notably through mechanisms that give the unemployed collective representation in bodies that administer income security and manpower policies (unemployment insurance commission, government employment service, etc.), through increased public funding for groups that advocate for social assistance, and so on.
11. Define terms of reference for the elaboration of new employment and social security policies such as those being developed, notably, in Europe around the thematic of “transitional markets,” to eventually bring the *economic statuses* of women, particularly sole-support mothers, within the sphere of influence of institutions “of ordinary law,” so that they and their families have access to living conditions that are less degrading than the conditions established under social assistance.

Suggested Areas for Further Study

12. Carry out a systematic analysis comparing the conception and implementation of programs of assistance for needy mothers adopted in the Canadian provinces with the programs adopted in various American states.
13. Extend the analysis of the links between these programs and current workfare measures, to assess the significance of the kind of work obligations imposed on women today and their evolution throughout history.
14. Work to elaborate a feminist problematic of exclusion in which poverty would be analysed within the broad perspective of social inequalities, such as the distribution of work in society and the undervaluing of activities performed by women (the work of caring, whether within the family or in employment), in the context of the new “social risks” arising from the changing institutions of the family and employment.
15. Evaluate the implementation of employment integration measures in the Canadian provinces, in order to better understand the real treatment provided for women in this context.
16. Improve the methodological tools (long-time longitudinal analyses or panel studies, development of qualitative criteria for evaluating the situations of women in the family and in employment, etc.) to gain a better understanding of the trajectories of social assistance leavers within the family (blended families) and in employment.

17. Extend reflection about the new “social risks,” such as the break-up of the family, in order to develop social insurance programs that protect women who find themselves alone with dependent children, as has historically been done for the “unemployment risk.”
18. Study the modalities and repercussions of the shift of responsibilities from the employment insurance program to the Canadian provinces, and especially Quebec, with a view to developing an integrated strategy of unemployment compensation policies (social insurance/social assistance) and a manpower policy geared to the needs of the unemployed, rather than to budgetary concerns.
19. Continue to do comparative studies between Canada and the United States, notably to analyse the relative evolution of their workfare approaches.
20. Continue the comparative studies between Canada and European countries, some of which are developing their social and employment policies along paths other than those favoured by Anglo-Saxon countries.

Note

¹ Social policies governing income security encompass three forms of transfers: social assistance, social insurance and universal transfers.

7. CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to identify the kind of social assistance configuration of *rights and duties* that exists between women and the State within Canada and Quebec. On the whole, we found that Canada has not one, but several social assistance configurations of *rights and duties*, depending on the jurisdiction studied or the gender and age of the recipients. The reciprocity approach adopted in Quebec therefore differs from the one that exists, for example, in Ontario, just as the obligations imposed with regard to assistance differ between men and women, or even between the various “categories” of women. Public policies thus institute different treatments, according to the classifications they establish. This being said, we conclude, based on the cases of Quebec and Ontario, that Canada is currently evolving towards workfare, but encompasses several variants.

A francophone North American society steeped in French culture, Quebec has also retained its distinctiveness with regard to social assistance. Borrowing from both the French approach and the American approach, the hybrid configuration of the Quebec social assistance reciprocity model is certainly quite unique, but definitely inclines towards workfare, the dominant logic. A comparison of Quebec and Ontario, however, where the discourses and certain interventions take a decidedly tough approach towards the poor who receive transfer payments from the State, reveals a clear distinction between the two provinces. The relationship between the State and the “able-bodied” poor who receive assistance in Ontario not only tends towards the workfare model, but is a “hard-core” version of it. Quebec, by comparison, tends towards a “soft-care” version. To extend the analysis further would, however, require the study of the implementation of the measures, based on extensive investigations in the field.

From the standpoint of the living conditions of poor women, it is of interest to note that the Canadian and Quebec cases are closer to the reciprocity logic of workfare than to that of insertion. For, while the logic of insertion is consistent with a reinforcing of the social rights structure, that of workfare is tantamount to its gradual dismantling. The 1996 reform undertaken in the United States clearly shows that workfare, when taken to its extreme, is indeed synonymous with a significant erosion of the collective guarantees instituted in the context of assistance to protect individuals against social risks. Conversely, the framework anti-exclusion legislation adopted in France represents a clear political will to extend the collective protections of the “excluded.” The conception of “active assistance policies” can thus obey extremely differentiated logics of intervention with respect to the poor.

We then looked at reciprocity that is differentiated according to gender, owing to the rooting of women in the family. In this regard, all Canadian provinces are alike. Historically, social assistance reciprocity for women has regulated the work obligations in the family and thereby, indirectly, in employment. Today, pressure is building for assistance to further regulate the obligations of paid employment, following the transformation of the family and of employment of women. The problem, though, is that the rise in employment of women has not been accompanied by the change in the transfer of family responsibilities as it should have. Thus, today, women are mobilized in all quarters, and their active citizenship, that is,

their contribution to the collective wealth, is being played out implicitly within the sphere of the family, and at the same time explicitly in the sphere of employment.

In a wage-based society, the preponderant mode of social relations regulating the distribution of income is based on a relationship of “contribution-reward.” In other words, the “right to income” is based principally on the work contribution of the one entitled: paid work in exchange for wages, in the employment relationship, the premium for social insurance benefits, in the social insurance relationship. The only way to avoid it is to be “unable to work.” In the sphere of social assistance, we have seen that at one time, when it was rooted in the family, the contribution/ reward principle was explicitly recognized as the basis of the relation of assistance between women and the State. The State, through the mothers’ allowance, made an “investment in citizenship.” Women’s social contribution was explicitly recognized, the allowance, which was its *quid pro quo*, was therefore likened to a “right”: the “work of the mother concerning everything to do with the education and maintenance of her children can rightly be considered the active contribution of a citizen to the good life of the country and of society, which contribution confers rights” [*translation*] (Laroche, 1950, p. 54). The same principle was always at work: the formally recognized contribution establishes a right. If the existence of this work contribution of women in the family was truly recognized, might it not be again today, current feminists wonder. Should we not work to have the unrecognized contribution of women in the family again create a *right* to social assistance for women? We have strong doubts. Now that women’s right to employment is openly recognized, social assistance can no longer be a site of recognition of women’s citizenship, as historically conceived by feminists in the day of the mothers’ allowance; we would recall that they based their strategies on consolidating a right to assistance for mothers, certainly, but to the detriment of championing the employment of women. It seems to us that the central question feminists must now debate among themselves is whether social assistance should continue to have the role it has historically had, namely, a means of access to income, particularly for single mothers.

In the context of a *custom of deservingness*, such as Canada has, we believe it would be risky to reaffirm such a strategy. Also, we believe that working to obtain recognition of the productive contribution of women means acting primarily before social assistance. In order to be of quality, the *rights* of women must be consolidated within the sphere of influence of institutions other than social assistance: women need, above all, rights as beneficiaries of universal family policies, as paid workers, as social insurance recipients. In a society dominated by the *custom of deservingness*, is the issue for women not so much to reduce the *duties* of assistance, as to restore *rights* in spaces of “ordinary law,” where everyone is affected?

The institution of *economic statuses* for women, particularly single mothers, will have to be re-examined within a new architecture of social *rights*, allying, on the one hand, on the front line, employment conceived in a broad perspective of space linked to the family, but also to other spaces of human development, such as educational and training institutions, participatory institutions in the milieu or in the broader political community, and on the other, by way of second-line guarantees, of renewed forms of social insurance and universal transfers, adapted to more varied, more flexible and more complex life paths. It

is this new flexibility that can guarantee a richer life for women. Social assistance has always been just a temporary defence behind which those raising their children alone have taken refuge, when all else fails. Still fragile and uncertain, this institution of management of the poor has now become an intolerable place, the source of accelerated impoverishment, in short, irreconcilable with the serenity demanded by this work, of inestimable value, of caring for children and other loved ones.

APPENDIX: BOXES

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Box 1: The Interviews

As part of this study, we conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with several people responsible for the conception and implementation of social assistance policies. The criteria governing the choice of these individuals were: current or past decision-making or representational positions with groups affected by these policies (specifically social assistance recipients and women); knowledge of practices in the field; analytical and critical abilities or even special expertise. These interviews enabled us to extend our analysis by giving us an opportunity to discuss points with our informants that both they and we consider essential. The following individuals agreed to grant us interviews:

- Diane Bellemare, economist, past president of the Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre and former chairperson of the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail;
- Jean-Yves Desgagnés, spokesperson for the Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec (FCPASQ);
- Suzanne Leduc, union advisor, Research, Training and Labour Relations, Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN);
- Johanne Loyer and Francis Côté, respectively income security advisor and Solidarité Jeunesse advisor, Office of the Minister of Social Solidarity, Mr. André Boisclair;
- Manon Massé, head of policy issues, Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ);
- Francine Séguin, professor, École des hautes études commerciales (HEC) in Montreal, and former member of the Comité externe de réforme de la sécurité du revenu.

Box 2: Overview of Canadian Provinces

Evolution of the Social Assistance Systems of the Canadian Provinces Since the 1980s

The exploratory analysis of the Canadian provinces consisted in taking a quick look at the situation that prevailed in each province. This guided our choice of the two Canadian provinces, besides Quebec, that underwent more in-depth analysis. In this box, we present a few excerpts from this analysis, which was included in our preliminary research report, in order to outline the changes recently made to the social assistance systems of the Canadian provinces (other than Ontario and New Brunswick).

All Canadian provinces have undergone some degree of transformation of their social assistance system. As Carolyne Gorlick and Guy Brethour (1998a, p. 5) put it, “[a]lthough most provinces studied models from other provinces and countries before reforming their social assistance programs, each developed its own program design and implementation model.” Despite their differences, however, all provinces require participation in their employment integration programs by some or all persons receiving social assistance. In other words, a refusal to participate in the measures offered in this context results, for these individuals, in a financial penalty, in the form of either partial or total loss of their benefits. We can thus assert that each Canadian province has transformed its social assistance institution into a contractual relationship in which assistance has become tied aid.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, the recent BC Benefits Program, the most extensive reform of the social assistance system, dates back to 1996. Long before that, however, the government of that province was promoting or introducing measures to further the employment integration of social assistance recipients. In fact, measures were introduced as early as the late 1980s. Also, British Columbia was one of the first provinces to state its intention to more closely link social assistance and employment. Employment integration programs target employable recipients, including single persons, couples and families with children. At present, it is not a priority of these programs to target sole-support mothers.

Alberta

Alberta is a very voluntarist province in terms of promoting the employment integration of social assistance recipients. The first round of reforms came fairly early in that province, back in April 1993, two months before the provincial election that put into office Ralph Klein, who soon became leader of Alberta's Conservative Party (Murphy, 1997, p. 112). Other Canadian provinces seem to have followed Alberta's lead. Alberta provides an interesting case of the plight of sole-support mothers, since the age of the youngest child, used to determine the transition of recipients from the "unemployable" to the "employable" category, is the lowest of all the provinces. In Alberta, sole-support recipients become employable when the youngest child reaches 6 months of age, compared to age 2 in Saskatchewan, the Yukon, Newfoundland & Labrador, age 6 in Manitoba and age 7 in British Columbia, though it is the neighbouring province (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998a, p. 9). Alberta's policy governing the employability of single parents is thus of considerable interest in the context of our study, particularly as employment integration in that province is not all that easy, the minimum wage being among the lowest in Canada (Murphy, 1997).

Saskatchewan

As early as 1984, Saskatchewan demonstrated its interest in social assistance policies geared to tied aid, that is, policies that associated assistance with new conditions linked to participation in employment integration programs. With the change in government that occurred after the 1991 provincial election, this policy was set aside. It was not until 1997 that the proactive policy adopted by Saskatchewan, aimed at integrating social assistance recipients into the labour force, took definite shape. For the government,¹ one of the essential focuses of the Income Security Redesign was to act outside the social assistance system, providing relief not just to social assistance recipients, but to all low-income individuals. This approach gave the Saskatchewan Assistance Plan (SAP) back its role of last resort assistance for individuals making the transition to employment and those unable to provide for their needs. The emphasis was on job preparation and establishing attachments with existing jobs. In 1997, the Provincial Training Allowance was created to provide financial support for adult education and to prepare adults for job entry.

Manitoba

In Manitoba, it was in 1996 that an employment integration program was introduced for social assistance recipients. One particular aspect stands out: a process of reciprocal obligations was, at that point, openly favoured between the poor and the State. What continues, however, to profoundly mark the social assistance culture of that province is the structuring of its social

assistance system into two distinct components. Under this system, different treatments are instituted for the poor, at distinct levels of administrative responsibility, based on their employability. Sharing this last trait with two other Canadian provinces, Manitoba has made numerous efforts to resolve the problems associated with this segmented configuration.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia is one of three Canadian provinces whose history of the social assistance institution is marked by a two-tier system. Unlike Manitoba, however, this province has advanced quite a way towards standardizing its system, to the extent that it was to be a one-tier system by August 2001. Nova Scotia also has a series of employment integration measures for social assistance recipients, in which the assessment of employability is a mandatory phase.

Prince Edward Island

Prince Edward Island has long had employment programs that emphasize the business immersion of social assistance recipients. Thus, the Employment Enhancement Program (EPP) and the Job Creation Program (JCP), both created in 1986, are aimed primarily at job creation in the private sector, even as they provide access to positions in the provincial and municipal governments as well as with non-profit organizations. The learning or upgrading of occupational skills through on-the-job experience are the province's preferred means of reintegration. At first, the programs were aimed mainly at "heads of large families." They were then extended to all categories of recipients so that all "employable" individuals "must participate in the programs. There is a "contractual understanding" with each participant (Gorlick, Brethour, 1999, p. 3). The practice of "creaming off" is, however, pre-eminent, as it is the most employable persons who benefit most from the measures (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998b, p. 35-36).

Newfoundland & Labrador

In Newfoundland & Labrador, the program developed to support the job entry of social assistance recipients, the Supports to Employment Program (STEP), was launched in 1996-1997. A number of other measures preceded it. This province stands apart from the others in that the voluntary approach is the one favoured. All "employable" recipients are eligible for STEP, but "[n]o employability criteria have been developed, and no tool is used to define employability" (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998b, p. 1). According to the Department of Human Resources and Employment,² everyone is to be considered employable, recipients wanting to enter the labour market must be looked after, and no recipient is automatically excluded from program coverage.

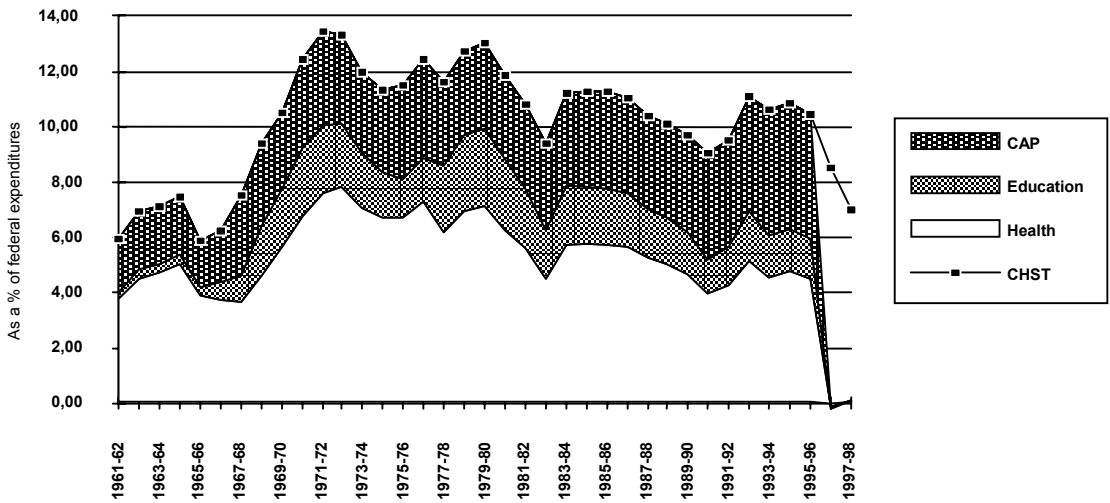
Box 3: From the CAP to the CHST: Unparalleled Cutbacks (excerpt from Thérêt, 1999, p. 67-72)

The main reason for the CAP reform and the integration of federal social assistance funding into a global transfer for health and social programs, was to permit a reduction in federal spending that was not permitted under the shared funding formula. (...)

The 1996 reduction was equivalent to 55% of total federal spending under the CAP the previous year, and the 1997 reduction came to nearly 35% of that amount. Thus, within two years, the federal government eliminated the equivalent of about 90% of the CAP transfers in 1995. For all areas affected, the decrease in transfers to the provinces over these two years was 23.6%, bringing the federal expenditure for all transfers ultimately grouped under the CHST to its average level for the 1960s (a time when the CPS was not yet highly evolved with regard, notably, to health and public welfare), or to about 7% of federal expenditures and 1.2% of the GDP, whereas it had been more than double that percentage of the GDP in the 1970s and 1980s (Thérêt, 1999, p. 173-175).

For the provinces, these cutbacks meant that over three years, the federal share (excluding tax point transfers) in their revenues went from 20% in 1995 to 14.7% in 1997, a drop of 5.3 points more than the tendential decrease of 4.7 points between 1983—the year federal funding to the provinces reached 24.7% of their total revenues—and 1995.

Figure 1: The CHST and Its Components



Source: Finance Canada, *Fiscal Reference Tables*, Public Works and Government Services, Canada, November 1998.

Figure 2: Share of Federal Transfers in Revenues of the Provinces

Source: Finance Canada, November 1998.

For 1998 and 1999, the initial plan was to freeze the CHST at its 1997 level, and for 2000 to 2002, to increase it to the level of the increase in the GDP less 2%, 1.5% and 1% respectively. But given the dramatic effects [the cuts] had on the standard of living of segments of the population and on the legitimacy of the federal government's role as guardian of the unity of the federation, these targets were revised upwards several times: the minimum level of cash transfers was first increased from 11 to 12.5 billion dollars in 1997; then, in the 1999 budget, a further 11.5 billion dollars was injected for the period 1999-2003, including 3.5 billion dollars immediately, to take the health component of the CHST "as high as it was before the period of expenditure restraint of the mid-1990s" (Finance Canada, 1999c).

The impact of the 1996-97 cuts was considerable. It accelerated the decline in the quantity and quality of benefits granted by the provinces, since the provinces could not fully offset the decrease in federal resources with an increase in their own revenues, particularly as they were already having financial difficulties owing to earlier EPF cuts, the "cap on the CAP" and their relatively large budget deficits. *[Translation]*

Box 4: Arrangements for the Sharing of Responsibilities Between the Federal Government, the Province and the Municipalities: The Example of Ontario

Ontario is one of three Canadian provinces with a two-tier social assistance system, that is, a system of shared responsibilities between the provincial government and the municipalities. The federal government intervenes at the level of program funding. In 1997, the social assistance system was radically altered by a reform, but nevertheless maintained this structure, renewing it in new forms. The evolution of the sharing of responsibilities between the different levels of government shows another trend: increased decentralization of powers

from the federal government to the provinces and, secondly, from the provinces to the municipalities.

This decentralization took the form of the federal government's gradual withdrawal from the funding of social assistance programs, which it shared with the provinces. The Ontario government suffered heavy losses following the changes in social funding arrangements in Canada. The federal government, under the rules of the CAP, generally paid 50 percent of welfare costs.

The 5-percent cap on CAP spending increases penalized particularly Ontario, which was going through a deep economic recession and had just elected a New Democratic government that had promised to reform social assistance (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 188). Thus, the loss of revenue was estimated at some 1.1 billion dollars for fiscal year 1991-1992 alone (CNBS, 1997). For fiscal year 1992-1993, the federal government's contribution covered barely 28 percent of overall expenditures borne by the province although, in theory, the costs were to be shared equally. The economic recession led to increased unemployment. The social assistance rolls nearly doubled between 1989 and 1995 (CNBS, 1997). On January 1, 1992, the province increased the basic needs portion of benefits by 2 percent and the shelter allowance by 3 percent. On July 1, 1992, the shelter allowance was increased a further 3 percent. Financial pressures on Bob Rae's New Democratic government were, however, mounting. In all, the NCW estimated that Ontario's near total assumption of the increase in social assistance spending had cost the province more than 8.4 billion dollars (CNBS 1997).

The Advisory Group on New Social Assistance Legislation (the Moscovitch Group), established in 1990, openly opposed the federal government's decision to cap the sharing of social assistance and social services costs, and urged the Ministry of Community and Social Services to enter into talks with the Mulroney government to persuade it to maintain its traditional financial contribution under the CAP (Thériault, Vaillancourt, 1991, p. 188).

The social assistance reform also led to a restructuring of municipal and provincial social services.³ The main changes were those made to the funding of programs and services. Direct service delivery also underwent a transformation. But from the legislative standpoint, it was still the provincial government that held the powers.

What is new about the Ontario Works program is that it transfers responsibilities for assistance for single-parent families between levels of government. This category of recipients no longer receives its benefits under the Family Benefits Program, but under Ontario Works. Whereas the provincial government assumed the full costs of the former, the costs associated with the latter are partially assumed by the municipalities (up to 80 percent of general costs and 50 percent of administrative costs). Still in terms of cost-sharing, the municipalities assume 20 percent of the costs of the income support component of the Ontario Disability Support Program. Previously, the province assumed all costs, not just the employment support component for the disabled, as it does now.

Finally, the provincial government no longer ensures the direct delivery of employment support programs for the disabled; the municipalities or other organizations can be enlisted.

The sharing of daycare service costs is the same as under the Ontario Works program, the province assuming 80 percent of prescribed services, and the municipalities 20 percent. However, the municipalities replace the province as service managers.

Box 5: Montreal's *Maison d'industrie* in the 19th Century (excerpt from Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 214-215)

Montreal's *Maison d'industrie* was modelled on the 17th century workhouses of England. The model was introduced in the United States, notably in New York and Boston. Ten years after John Conrad Marsteller made his bequest, the "regulations" of the *Maison d'industrie* were printed. The principles were as follows:

(...) that all individuals who reside there, or depend in any way on this establishment be of good character and conduct themselves properly and lawfully, that they be clean about their person and their quarters, that they be made accustomed to Industry and made to practise it; that this establishment be maintained as intended and in such a way as to accord with the views of its benevolent founder and that justice be done to all parties (McCord, 1819).

The *Maison d'industrie* was operated by francophones and anglophones and took in "mendicants" of both sexes (Lapointe-Roy 1987 :202). At the time it was created, it was to remedy the situation of the many indigents who begged without permits in the streets of Montreal. It was to:

"provide work for these needy, shelter them and reform them. Mendicants who refused both work and reform through work or any other form of relief were to be considered swindlers and confined for vagrancy." In other cases, in that day, people without means were imprisoned. Thus, a distinction was made between the clientele of the Workhouse and that of the House of Correction: the first accepted work, a form of rehabilitation through confinement and imposed discipline; the second was quite simply incarcerated for having disturbed the public peace (Lapointe-Roy, 1987, p. 200).

Indigents admitted to the *Maison d'industrie* received shelter and food. Men, women and children slept in separate dormitories. During the day, all went about their business. On admission, the poor were informed of the obligation to work according to their skills and abilities. A timetable set the rising hour at six o'clock, from October to March. The workday, punctuated by meals and recreation, ended at six o'clock in the evening, except from Saturday afternoon until Sunday evening, which was time off. The hour of retiring was nine o'clock at night. Anyone residing in the house was cared for without charge.

Residents needed a trustee's permission to receive visitors or leave the establishment, or to consume alcohol. The published regulations stipulated mandatory attendance at religious services on Sundays and public holidays.

Any breach was punished by deprivation of food or additional labour. These “regulations” of 1819 are the only ones known of. They were likely applied to varying degrees depending on the circumstances, until Saint Bridget’s Refuge was established, in 1865.

The principle of the workhouse was to rehabilitate mendicants through work and an ordered life. In Montreal, it seems that the main labour assigned to men was the breaking of stones for city streets. Sometimes, they made mattresses and dust mops, worked with wood or frayed old rigging. The women spun wool or sewed. *[Translation]*

Box 6: The Substitution of Unemployment Insurance with Social Assistance

By way of unemployment compensation, assistance gradually took the place of social insurance owing to the rise in chronic unemployment and unstable jobs and to the restrictions placed on unemployment insurance programs.⁴ The toughening of unemployment insurance rules took several forms and was seen in a number of countries of Europe, in the United States and in Canada from the 1980s until quite recently (Bassi, McMurrer, 1997; Chassard, Bosco, 1998; Fortin, 1997). This shift towards assistance meant, above all, a decline in status for the unemployed affected by it, i.e., their greater economic vulnerability.

The Effects of Unemployment Insurance Reforms on Social Assistance in Quebec

Pierre Fortin has studied, notably with Pierre-Yves Crémieux, the effects of the reforms of the Canadian unemployment insurance system, in the 1990s, on the work force and on the costs of provincial social assistance programs. About Quebec, the author wrote: “The 1996 *Employment Insurance Act* alone will ultimately put 36,000 more people on income security and will cost the Quebec treasury about 157 million dollars. These effects will be spread over a full decade, but 90 percent will be felt in the next five years” *[translation]* (Fortin, 1997).

Also, in Quebec, the employment situation is of primary importance in the dynamic of social assistance entries and exits. First of all, the profile of social assistance recipients shows that the majority are unemployed workers. In fact, about 60 percent of employment insurance recipients have work experience (MSS, 2000b, p. 6). In 1999, nearly 47 percent of new social assistance entrants were admitted to the system after having exhausted their employment insurance benefits (MSS, 2000a) or because they were not eligible for employment insurance (MSS, 2000b, p. 6).

Box 7: The AGIR Measure (adapted from Bouchard, Labrie, Noël, 1996, p. 94)

AGIR (Activité de groupe pour l’intégration par la recherche d’emploi) is a compulsory measure that targets WEIP recipients in the “non-participation” category who have been receiving assistance for more than 12 consecutive months and are considered ready for employment.

The proposed activities extend over seven weeks. They consist in a series of meetings (five group meetings and individual meetings) with the following objectives: “to provide information to participants, to help them identify their goals and opportunities and to prepare

them to conduct an effective job search” [translation] (p. 94). According to the members of the Comité externe de réforme de la sécurité du revenu, the results of the AGIR evaluation confirm that it “functions more as a measure of compliance control and deterrence than as a true insertion measure” [translation] (p. 94). Thus, in December 1995, the insertion rate of recipients who had completed their participation in activities (15 percent employed or no longer on social assistance, and 7 percent participating in another employability measure) was comparable to the insertion rate of recipients who had not participated in a measure (15 percent). The most remarkable finding about the AGIR measure, according to the authors, is the higher insertion rate (25 percent, with a net effect of 10 percent) of recipients who did not participate.

Box 8: News Release: Office of the Minister of Social Solidarity—The Individualized Integration, Training and Employment Plan for 18- to 24-Year-Olds (MSS, 2000k)

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR YOUTH INTEGRATION IN EMPLOI-QUÉBEC, 1 Dec. 2000 - “More than ever before, young income security recipients under age 25 who are able to work will have access to individualized services and measures adapted to their needs. The new service offering will provide exceptional support for their job-search activities,” said Minister of Social Solidarity André Boisclair. This service offering takes the form, notably, of individualized plans for youth ages 18 to 24. “Emploi-Québec has the human and financial resources needed to put these young people on a path leading to their labour market re-integration. Starting February 1, 2001, each one, unless already participating in a concrete process, will be required to attend an interview to evaluate their employment assistance needs,” said the Minister of Social Solidarity. The Minister explained that a young person could then choose from among measures adapted to his situation, such as support activities and supervision of his own job search initiatives. We would point out that the activities of the individualized plan will be agreed on with the employment assistance officer and, in the event of a disagreement, the young person will have access to a review mechanism. Minister Boisclair was pleased with the ongoing attention of his colleague, Minister of State for Labour and Employment Diane Lemieux, to implementing an individualized plan well suited to the needs of young people. The Minister said that if someone refused to participate in a plan, the reasons for this refusal would be properly assessed before any reduction in financial assistance was made. As is the case with *Destination emploi*, the young person will be able to change his mind at any time. Moreover, these reductions in financial assistance are gradual and lower than initially planned.

A MATTER OF RECIPROACITY

“The State has the responsibility to provide ongoing support to recipients in their job-search initiatives by offering them services adapted to their needs, but the recipients remain the primary ones responsible for their road to employment,” said Mr. Boisclair. The Minister recalled that the young person, like all recipients, has the obligation to take steps to find suitable

employment. That is the principle of reciprocity. “We believe that the obligations to be fulfilled by the government and recipients are key elements of the social contract of solidarity underlying the income support system,” Mr. Boisclair said. The Minister recalled that it is the duty of society to step in to prevent the long-term exclusion of Quebeckers, particularly young Quebeckers who have not yet developed a significant attachment to the labour market. “With the individualized plan offered by Emploi-Québec, there is more support for young recipients than ever before,” Mr. Boisclair concluded. *[Translation]*

Box 9: *Solidarité Jeunesse*: Commitment of Solidarity (MSS, 2000j)

Partners’ Declaration

- Whereas the partners wish to work together to combat the social and economic exclusion of youth in all its forms;
- Whereas the insertion of the most disadvantaged youth is a responsibility that must be shared by all participants in our community;
- Whereas there is a need to work together so that all youth find the place within our community to which they aspire and have the desire to assume that place;
- Whereas there is a need to provide youth with solutions other than the granting of an income security benefit;
- Whereas the *Solidarité Jeunesse* project is a concrete initiative that will enable youth to work for their future and achieve success and their full participation in working life.

We, partners in the National Capital Region, undertake to:

- **Work actively** to achieve the national objective of ensuring that 75% of youth under age 21 who are eligible for income security return to school, find employment or enrol in training within 18 months of making their claim.
- **Work together** to increase the capacity of institutions, organizations and businesses in our region to accommodate youth so that they can successfully move towards a return to school, training or employment as quickly as possible.
- **Promote** the prosperity of our region and job creation by encouraging greater participation of youth in the regional and local economy.
- **Offer** ongoing assistance to more than 1,200 potential young income security claimants in the National Capital. *[Translation]*

Mr. André Boisclair
Minister of Social Solidarity

Mr. Jean-François Simard
MLA for Montmorency

Mr. Martin Bouchard
 Representative, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi
 Charlevoix et de la Côte-de-Beaupré

Mr. Patrick Simard
 Chairman, Beauport Board of Trade

Box 10: *Le Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté* (MSS, 2000k,l)

Le Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté is an initiative dating back to the Summit on the Economy and Employment in November 1996, and renewed at the Quebec Youth Summit in February 2000. The Minister of Social Solidarity is responsible for administering it and Emploi-Québec assures “regional and local management.” This project, with a budget of 160 million dollars in the coming three years, supports “projects aimed at job preparation, job creation and job integration which are carried out by promoter organizations [non-profit organizations, cooperatives, municipalities, regional county municipalities and, in some instances, private companies] to help economically needy persons enter the labour market.” *Le Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté* favours projects that focus on target groups such as employment assistance recipients, immigrants, visible minorities and women. The job preparation projects generally consist in training, counselling and employability enhancement activities. The job integration projects all include a “period of apprenticeship and learning followed by work experience,” whereas the job creation projects are aimed at hiring “economically needy persons” in new jobs.

Between June 12, 1997, and March 31, 2000, 2,943 projects were subsidized, creating, according to the Ministry, 26,221 jobs, training placements or work terms. Nearly 80 percent of participants were social assistance recipients. Sole-support parents accounted for 20 percent of participants.

Box 11: Quebec’s Family Policy (1997) (MFE, 1999)

In 1997, Quebec undertook a vast reform of its family policy. The government reaffirmed three broad objectives, by means of three new provisions, namely:

- to ensure equity between families by providing greater assistance to low-income families: *the integrated child allowance*;
- to promote child development and equal opportunity: *educational services and daycare services*;
- to facilitate the reconciliation of parental and employment-related responsibilities: the *parental insurance plan* (MFE, 1999).

The Integrated Child Allowance

The integrated child allowance (ICA) replaces the basic family allowance, the allowance for young children and the allowance for newborn children (while taking into account the federal Child Tax Benefit). The ICA is calculated based on family income, the number of children and the type of family (single-parent or two-parent). It is paid up to age 18 and covers the basic needs of children in low-income families. This new allowance replaces the income security component intended to meet the needs of the child. These needs are assessed annually at 3,900 dollars for the first child of a single-parent family and at 2,600 dollars for the first

child of a two-parent family, and at 2,400 dollars for each subsequent child. The former allowance for handicapped children was preserved. Quebec families may be entitled to tax credits.⁵ The tax credits for dependent children, for single-parent families, for post-secondary studies and for any other dependants⁶ are non-refundable. There are also four refundable credits: for daycare costs,⁷ for the QST,⁸ for adoption costs, and for the housing of elderly parents. The families of low-income earners may benefit from the family tax reduction.⁹

Educational Services and Daycare Services

New services were created: a network of child care centres, and government-subsidized low-cost daycare places (5 dollars a day). Optional full-time kindergarten for 5-year-old children was also introduced. The child care centres offer parents educational daycare services. Daycare services in schools and non-profit daycare centres were also brought in.

Subsidized daycare places were offered, as of September 1997, to 3- and 4-year-old children and were to eventually be introduced for 2-year-olds, then 1-year-olds and, finally, infants. Parents receiving social assistance would be entitled to 23.5 free hours a week of these education and daycare services. After that, the Ministère de la Solidarité sociale would assume the cost for recipients participating in an employability initiative. The families of low-income earners eligible for PWA and paying daily daycare costs of 5 dollars, would receive the maximum daily compensation of 3 dollars.

The parental insurance plan

The Quebec parental insurance policy is still not in force,¹⁰ as it cannot be implemented until negotiations have taken place with the federal government on the transfer of more than 500 million dollars out of the employment insurance fund.¹¹ According to the initial proposal, the Quebec plan would have the following characteristics: coverage of all employees and self-employed workers (not currently the case under the federal program) with insurable earnings of over 2,000 dollars; the income-replacement rate would be higher (75 percent of net income) than those of maternity benefits and parental benefits under employment insurance (55 percent of gross income); there would be no provision for a qualifying period; it would include a new 5-week paternity leave.

The Quebec parental insurance plan is a current file. Early in June 2000, Minister of State for Health and Social Services Pauline Marois tabled Bill 140 respecting parental insurance, for the creation of a Quebec program of parental leave. This was intended to force negotiations with the federal government, which had once again been stalled, since April 2000.¹² The Quebec government had decided to take the matter to court should Ottawa refuse to resume talks, according to one government source.

The parental leave program, outlined in the Bill, would cost 666 million dollars, of which 532 million would come from a transfer of the contributions paid into the employment insurance fund, that is, the amount paid annually by Quebec businesses and employees into the federal fund to cover parental leave. The Quebec program would take the place of the federal parental leave program, for which Ottawa had announced an increase effective December 31, 2000 (Dutrisac, 2000b). The Quebec program would also give parents two income-replacement options to choose from: 70 percent of gross income for 25 weeks

and 55 percent for the next 25 weeks, or 75 percent of gross income for 40 weeks. The maximum insurable income would be 52,500 dollars (versus 39,000 dollars under the federal program). The Quebec plan would cost 44 millions (6.6 percent) more than the enhanced federal program. A resolution of the provincial legislature was also adopted making Quebec the operating agent of the family policy.

Box 12: Employment Assistance Program (August 2000) (MSS, 2000h)

Situation of Women

- Women represented 51.8 percent of all adult recipients in August 2000.
- Women accounted for 56.8 percent of all youth recipients under age 25.
- While the proportion of women is greater, the number of women on employment assistance has declined more rapidly than that of men. The number of women recipients dropped 5.6 percent between August 1999 and August 2000, whereas the decline for men was 4.5 percent.

Of the 222,044 female recipients under the Employment Assistance Program in August 2000:

- 37.8 percent presented no limited capacity for employment;
- 34.9 percent presented a temporarily limited capacity;
- 27.3 percent presented a severely limited capacity for employment.

The main reasons for the temporarily limited capacity of the 77,439 female recipients concerned were, in order of importance:

- 57.0 percent with a dependent child under age 5 or pregnant;
- 30.8 percent because of age (age 55 or over);
- 9.7 percent for health reasons.

Box 13: Situation of Single-Parent Families, Employment Assistance Program (August 2000) (MSS 2000h)

| | August 1999 | August 2000 | Annual Rate of Change (%) |
|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Adults under age 30 | 97,034 | 87,634 | - 9.7 |
| Youth under age 25 | 53,664 | 48,351 | - 9.9 |
| Single-parent families | 74,357 | 66,625 | - 10.4 |
| Adults born outside Canada | 71,701 | 68,898 | - 3.9 |

There are 66,625 single-parent families. They represented, in August 2000, 17.6 percent of all households.

- In one year, between August 1999 and August 2000, the number of single-parent families declined by 7,732 (10.4 percent).
- The proportion they represented of all households fell more than one percentage point, from 18.7 percent in August 1999 to 17.6 percent in August 2000.
- Half of sole-support parents on employment assistance (50.9 percent) presented a temporarily limited capacity for employment. The main reason cited (88.2 percent) was the presence of dependent children under age 5 (including pregnancies).

Box 14: New Entries¹ to the Employment Assistance Program, August 2000 (MSS, 2000h)

| | Number of Households | Percentage | Number of Recipients | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| End of E.I. benefits ² | 1,700 | 17.1 | 2,641 | 17.2 |
| Loss of job with no E.I. ² | 2,078 | 20.9 | 2,836 | 18.4 |
| Inadequate E.I. ² benefits | 456 | 4.6 | 716 | 4.7 |
| Subtotal | 4,234 | 42.5 | 6,193 | 40.2 |
| Loss of the spouse | 782 | 7.9 | 1,669 | 10.8 |
| End of full-time studies | 385 | 3.9 | 533 | 3.5 |
| Insufficient income | 1,677 | 16.8 | 2,677 | 17.4 |
| Awaiting income | 127 | 1.3 | 206 | 1.3 |
| Other reasons | 2,750 | 27.6 | 4,117 | 26.7 |
| TOTAL | 9,955 | 100 | 15,395 | 100 |

Notes:

¹ Denotes the number of approved applications for employment assistance benefits in August 2000.

² E.I.: employment insurance.

Box 15: Women and Job Training (excerpt from the Coalition nationale des femmes contre la pauvreté et la violence, site of the Fédération des femmes du Québec, <http://www.ffq.qc.ca/marcheQuébec/pourquoi/Québec.html>, consulted February 12, 2002)

New occupational, technical and even university training programs have been developed to meet the needs of new growing economic sectors. Most of these new programs, however, are aimed at youth in initial training and are not particularly well adapted to the reality of adults. This is the case, notably, for women with dependent children (and especially sole-support mothers) or even for women with no government financial support (chequeless women). With no real access to education, that is, without the financial support they need to return to school, these women are deprived of the essential means that would lift them out of poverty.

Indeed, women with dependent children face many difficulties when they decide to return to school. When they have young children, their availability, in some cases, may be limited and they can study only part-time. But this often proves impossible, as most job training courses at the secondary and

technical level are full-time and even, in some cases, intensive to meet certain requirements of adults.

For these women, access to the system of loans and bursaries is also a problem. Not only does this system undervalue the real costs related to children, but it also fails to recognize the financial autonomy of women. Thus, a woman whose husband receives employment income usually cannot have access to the system of loans and bursaries, particularly if she wants to study part-time. That is why, knowing the limits of the current system of loans and bursaries for women with dependent children, we can assert that this policy will considerably limit the access of these women to qualifying job training. *[Translation]*

Box 16: Categories of Eligibility for Social Assistance, Ontario (1981-1987)¹³ (excerpt from Ontario 1988, p. 28)

Family Benefits (FBA)

People 65 years old or over who are ineligible for old age security (usually immigrants)
 People with disabilities
 People who are blind
 People deemed “permanently unemployable”
 Single women 60 to 64 years old
 Spouses of FBA recipients
 Single parents, widows or widowers
 Single parents, deserted
 Single parents, divorced
 Single parents, separated
 Single parents, unwed
 Single parents whose spouses are in institutions
 Participants in Vocational Rehabilitation Services
 Foster parents
 Parents of handicapped children
 Persons whose circumstances do not fit the rules; benefits can be granted by Cabinet under the Order-in-Council provision

General Welfare Assistance (GWA)

People unable to obtain regular employment (known as “unemployed employables”)
 Single parents
 People in temporary ill health
 People in permanent ill health
 Foster parents

Box 17: Ontario's Social Assistance System: A "Hierarchy of Deservingness"

In Ontario, the benefit rates are based on a "hierarchy of deservingness" (Ontario, 1988, p. 145), that is, the deserving poor are treated more favourably than are the undeserving poor. Thus, social assistance benefits are higher for those considered unemployable (family benefits) than for those considered employable: "From the evidence of actual benefits paid, blind and disabled persons, along with their families, are deemed most deserving, while young people and those who are considered employable rank as least deserving" (Ontario, 1988, p. 145).

Families headed by blind persons receive the highest level of benefits and enjoy the highest asset limits and the highest earnings exemptions. Blind people do not have to seek employment, although if they do work they are not automatically excluded from assistance after an arbitrary number of hours worked, as are single parents. They are not subject to employability testing, as are employables, and 18- to 20-year-old blind recipients can live anywhere, unlike other 18- to 20-year-olds, who cannot receive benefits if they live at home. Self-employment does not disqualify blind people as it does other applicants; there are no waiting periods for eligibility, and no level of discretion can affect their entitlement.

Young, single employables, on the other hand, receive the lowest possible level of allowance, may retain only a low level of assets (if any), and are subject to the lowest earnings exemption (if any). They can be refused assistance if they show a poor work history and unwillingness to take training. To receive assistance they must look for work or go to school; or they may not be eligible at all if they are living at home.

We do not wish to suggest that disabled persons do not deserve a preferred status based on additional need. Rather our concern, as noted earlier, is that the minimum possible use should be made of approaches that involve mixing express or implied value-laden or moral judgements with the determination of need. To the extent that the needs of disabled persons - or any other group, for that matter - are demonstrably greater than those of another category, such recipients should have a presumptive entitlement to a higher level of benefits. The question becomes whether the higher benefits currently given to disabled persons accurately reflect their higher levels of need.

Many of the other differences reflected in the 'hierarchy of deservingness' are less amenable to rational explanation. A 60- to 64-year-old woman receives almost twice as high a benefit as a man in the same age category. This perhaps reflects the historical view that men have a greater obligation to work, but today the differentiation can only be described as overt sexual discrimination. As noted earlier, unwed, separated, and deserted mothers face a three-month waiting period for FBA, while there is no such requirement for divorced or widowed single mothers. Whatever social labelling may

have been thought appropriate in an earlier era to distinguish between circumstances over which it was felt one had control and those over which it was felt one did not, there is no longer any place in the social assistance system for such distinctions.” (Ontario, 1988, p. 145-147)

In view of the categorization of Ontario’s social assistance system, the Committee put forward recommendation 9: “In the short to medium term, the number of social assistance categories should be reduced to three: handicapped persons; people in need who must respond to an offer of opportunity planning; people in need who are encouraged but not required to respond to an offer of opportunity planning” (Ontario, 1988, p. 147).

Box 18: The Definition of “Spouse” as Amended in 1995 (Ontario Regulation 222/98, *Ontario Disability Support Program Act*, subsection 1(1))

“Spouse”, in relation to an applicant or recipient, means,

- (a) a person of the opposite sex to the applicant or recipient who together with the applicant or recipient have declared to the Director or an administrator under the *Ontario Works Act, 1997* that they are spouses,
- (b) a person who is required under a court order or domestic contract to support the applicant or recipient or any of his or her dependants,
- (c) a person who has an obligation to support the applicant or recipient or any of his or her dependants under section 30 or 31 of the *Family Law Act* whether or not there is a domestic contract or other agreement between the person and the applicant or recipient whereby they purport to waive or release such obligation to support,
- (d) subject to subsection (3), a person of the opposite sex to the applicant or recipient who is residing in the same dwelling place as the applicant or recipient if the social and familial aspects of the relationship between the person and the applicant or recipient amount to cohabitation and,
 - (i) the person is providing financial support to the applicant or recipient,
 - (ii) the applicant or recipient is providing financial support to the person, or
 - (iii) the person and the applicant or recipient have a mutual agreement or arrangement regarding their financial affairs.

Box 19: The Ontario Works Program: Goals, Participation

The Goals of Ontario Works (adapted from CCDS, 1998b, p. 125)

- Reduce the social assistance caseload
- Reduce the overall costs of social assistance
- Get people off social assistance
- Help social assistance recipients find employment
- Develop the short-term work skills of program participants
- Make employment more attractive financially than social assistance

- Reduce the rate at which people return to social assistance and increase the rate at which they return to employment
- Reduce long-term dependence on social assistance

To this statement of goals should be added that of making “a contribution to your community,” as the Ministry put it in its presentation of community placements: these placements provide “an opportunity for you to make a contribution to your community while you learn basic work and life skills, gain experience and make contacts for future employment. Community placement projects and activities must benefit the community” (MCSS, 1997).

“What does it mean to be part of Ontario Works?”

You will be required to take active steps to find a job in order to receive your social assistance cheque. This means you could be asked to work at a community placement, train for a job, take a job or look for work. And, you must take any paid job offered to you for which you are physically capable. Your caseworker will work with you to determine which parts of Ontario Works will best help you find the fastest way back to work” (Ontario, 1997, p. 1).

Box 20: The Ontario Works Program: The Path of Recipients (CCDS, 1998b)

Before an applicant participates in workfare measures, the first step of the Ontario Works process is to determine whether they meet the needs-based test for social assistance. If so, the service delivery officer determines whether the recipient is employable. In the service delivery process set in motion once these two conditions are met, the service delivery officer (municipal employee) seems to be the one who determines the direction the recipient should follow. The driving principle on which the officer makes this determination is to find “the shortest route to paid employment.” From this perspective, any job is a good job.¹⁴ Persons participating in the program sign a “participation agreement” with the caseworker. This agreement sets out the steps the recipient “will take to find a paid job.”¹⁵ An administrative leaflet is a form of “notice.”¹⁶

Participants can propose either a community placement or an employment placement. As a rule, however, during the first four months of assistance, before being referred to community participation or a training or vocational guidance activity, recipients must conduct an active self-directed or structured job search. They may also have access to basic education, such as enrolment in French or English language classes. Not all activities are compulsory.¹⁷ Participants in workfare activities may, in addition to receiving the usual benefit, be reimbursed the expenses incurred to purchase work clothes or for transportation.

If these four months of looking for work prove fruitless, the case manager refers the recipient to a placement agency whose mandate is to facilitate his job search by helping him “find employment and get off social assistance,” or even support participants interested in establishing their own business.¹⁸ The agency is paid only if the “joint efforts” bear fruit. Registration with a placement agency is for a maximum of 10 months.

Once registered with an agency providing self-employment assistance, the recipient has 18 weeks to prepare a “business plan” describing in detail the future activities of the company and the means established to guarantee its success. Once the business plan is approved, the recipient-entrepreneur has eight more weeks to “prove” that the business is generating income. The recipient can register for up to 60 weeks, or about 14 months, with an agency providing self-employment assistance. For certain types of company, up to three additional months may be granted.¹⁹

The person who is referred to a training program may be exempt from participating in other components of the Ontario Works program. However, it is made clear that during holiday periods, the individual must look for work, accept temporary employment if it is offered to him, or agree to work up to 17 hours a week, or 70 hours a month, in the context of a community placement.

Box 21: Activities of the Ontario Works Program (Ontario, 1996)

Employment Support

Job search services, referral to basic education and job-specific skills training. These activities are intended to prepare recipients for employment and support them in their search for paid employment “by the shortest possible route.” Examples are job banks or job clubs.

Community Participation

Community service projects sponsored by communities and public and non-profit organizations. The purpose is to enable participants to contribute to their community, to build basic networks, to provide them with valuable experience and job skills to help them move into the paid labour force. Placements are for a maximum of 6 months; they may last up to 11 months if they include skills training. Recipients must work no more than 17 hours a week (70 hours a month), which corresponds to the recipient’s benefit level divided by the minimum wage. Recipients have the rest of the week to look for paid employment. Placements may be proposed by community groups and non-profit organizations or by the recipients. Recipients may suggest volunteer work as a community participation.

Employment Placement

This is a specific measure for job-ready recipients. It may consist in self-employment or development of the recipient’s own business. Placement agencies can play an important role in the employment integration process of recipients. In fact, the government pays certain bonuses to an agency when it places a recipient and again if they are still in the job after six months. For-profit placement agencies are not disqualified from the service delivery process.

Box 22: Ontario’s Zero Tolerance Policy on Social Assistance Cheats

On April 1, 2000, “Ontario’s zero tolerance policy on social assistance cheats” took effect. Anyone convicted of social assistance fraud was permanently banned from receiving benefits in the future. These tough measures were aimed at ending social assistance fraud in Ontario (MCSS, 2000b). “Speaking in front of the presses where social assistance cheques are printed, Harris said, ‘Welfare cheaters aren’t beating the system. They’re cheating their neighbours

and the hard-working taxpayers of Ontario. Even worse, they're cheating those on welfare who play by the rules and are truly in need" (MSSC, 2000b). "We will not sit by and let fraud artists rip off the people of our province," said John Baird, Minister of Community and Social Services. "In Ontario, welfare is meant for the men, women and families who really need it. Not for the cheats" (MSSC, 2000b). "Mr. Harris also stated: 'We have a simple message for those who have been cheating the system and that message is enough is enough. Welfare fraud will not be tolerated in Ontario. (...) [I]f you are convicted then you will be cut off. (...) We're just saying zero tolerance. That's it'"²⁰ (Brennan, 2000). "Our welfare fraud measures serve as a deterrent," said Baird. "We will not tolerate anyone cheating the social assistance system and the hardworking taxpayers who support it" (MSSC, 2000c). "I don't like the prospect of cutting any person off social assistance, but we can't allow people to rip off a system designed to help those truly in need," said Baird. "This policy is not about saving money – it's about preserving the integrity of the system" (MSSC, 2000d). Disqualification for life of those individuals identified as cheaters was the radicalization of a strategy followed for several years by the Harris government. An anti-fraud program includes notably a provincial hot-line the public can call to report cheaters and known instances of abuse. The NDP government had also undertaken similar initiatives (Morrison, 1998, p. 4).

Consultation Plan for Mandatory Drug Treatment

In November 2000, Minister John Baird unveiled a "consultation plan for mandatory drug treatment," whose goal is to "help [addicts] to get off drugs, off welfare and back on their feet again." (MCSS 2000e). "I've heard stories of people using their welfare cheques to fee their drug habit - instead of feeding their own children," the Minister said at a news conference (MCSS, 2000f). The government's action was presented as a humanitarian intervention (MSSC, 2000f). The content of the policy is still uncertain, but the Ontario government has already opted for a compulsory approach to drug treatment and for the imposition of stiff penalties for those who fail to comply with the new obligations that are to be issued: "[T]hose who refuse treatment or who won't take tests on request will lose their benefits."

Box 23: Objectives and Evolution of the New Brunswick Works Program (HRD-NB, n/a)

Objectives and Activities

The purpose of the project was to help participants (for a maximum of three years) as they moved through the various stages from financial support to self-sufficiency. This included an initial job placement, academic upgrading, summer internships, skills training and the transition to employment. Participants could receive HRDC income support in the form of a training allowance and compensation for child care expenses, if applicable, for a maximum of 156 weeks. The participants were then considered non-clients. They could, however, be entitled to the health card and special benefits, including any necessary top-up of the basic rate. They were not entitled to child care services.

The amount saved by HRD-NB in not paying assistance to the participants was reallocated to a training development fund. In turn, this fund was used to pay the expenses related to the acquisition of new skills and other services. HRD-NB case managers played a key role in identifying services and ensuring that they were well suited to the participants; in maintaining links during the transition between employment, educational services and occupational training;

in facilitating all necessary interventions at each step of the way; in developing case plans; in updating information about participants for the full range of services; in supporting project evaluation; and in ensuring the follow-up of participants.

Participants could earn their high-school diploma and acquire post-secondary training. Counselling was also provided on family violence or stress management related to the balancing of employment and family conflicts. Information on sexual harassment in the workplace was also among the activities related to employment integration (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998b, p. 72).

Evolution of the Program

The first group completed the initial phase of academic upgrading in June 1993 and then began a seven-week training period, before returning to school in September. It became apparent the year before that not all participants could earn their high-school diploma within the prescribed time. New programs for occupational skills development were therefore set up to help participants pursue their career goals. A work orientation course was added to the program to prepare the participants in the second group for this major life change. In addition to learning more about employers' expectations, the participants acquired various life skills, such as the balancing of family and work responsibilities and budgeting.

Program funding was 177 million dollars over six years. Some 2,800 people participated, 80 percent of whom were women (Gorlick, Brethour, 1999, p. 7-8). During the development of the program, "consideration was given to promoting well-paid jobs for women, primarily low-income female lone parents" (Gorlick, Brethour, 1999, p. 8). The evaluative aspect of this program was preponderant given its pilot-project status. The results of the evaluation were to be available in 2001 (Gorlick, Brethour, 1998a, p. 13).

Box 24: Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP): Key Features of the Earnings Supplement for Applicants (excerpt from Michalopoulos *et al.*, 1999, p. ES-2)

Full-Time Work Requirement

Supplement payments are made only to eligible single parents who work full time (an average of at least 30 hours per week over a four-week or monthly accounting period, whether in one or more jobs) and who are not receiving Income Assistance.

Substantial Financial Incentive

The supplement is calculated as half the difference between a participant's earnings from employment and an "earnings benchmark" set by SSP for each province. The benchmark for each province was set at a level that would make full-time work pay better than Income Assistance for most recipients. During the first year of operations, the benchmark was \$37,000 in British Columbia [and \$30,000 in New Brunswick²¹]. The benchmark, which was \$37,625 in 1996, has been adjusted over time to reflect changes in the cost of living and generosity of Income Assistance. The supplement is reduced by 50 cents for every dollar of increased earnings. Unearned income (such as child support), earnings of other family members, and number of children do not affect the amount of the supplement. The supplement is roughly equal to the earnings of many low-income earners (before taxes and work-related expenses).

Targeted at Long-Term Recipients

Eligibility for the supplement is limited to long-term social assistance recipients (with at least one year of IA receipt). As a result, members of the applicant experiment had to stay on Income Assistance for the first year after entering the study to establish eligibility for the supplement.

One Year to Take Advantage of the Offer

If an IA recipient became eligible to receive the supplement at the end of the first year, she was informed that she could sign up for the supplement if she found full-time work within the next 12 months (in other words, in the second year). If she did not sign up within 12 months, she could never receive the supplement.

Three-Year Limit on Supplement Receipt

A person may collect the supplement for up to three calendar years from the time she began receiving it, as long as she is working full time and not receiving Income Assistance.

Voluntary Alternative to Social Assistance

People cannot receive IA payments while receiving the supplement. No one is required to participate in the supplement program; however, after beginning supplement receipt, people may decide at any time to return to Income Assistance, as long as they give up supplement receipt and meet the eligibility requirements for Income Assistance. They can also renew their supplement receipt by going back to work full time at any point during the three-year period in which they are eligible to receive the supplement.

Box 25: Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP): The Findings in Brief (excerpt from Michalopoulos *et al.*, 1999, p. ES-3-4)

In the applicant study,²² SSP's supplement offer resulted in significant changes in full-time employment, earnings, income, and poverty. Furthermore, at the end of the follow-up period covered in this report, the cost of supplement payments was more than offset by reduced IA payments and increased tax revenues.

The major findings of this report are as follows:

- **By supplementing earnings to make work pay, SSP substantially increased employment.** During the last six months of the 30-month follow-up period, SSP's supplement offer increased both full-time employment and employment overall by about 12 percentage points. There was little change in part-time employment. Thus, SSP appears to have encouraged people who would not otherwise have worked to work full time but had little discernible effect on the work effort of people who would have worked part time.
- **Because many new social assistance recipients are relatively skilled, SSP resulted in numerous high-wage jobs.** About one-third of the additional employment generated by SSP paid \$10 or more per hour, considerably above the statutory minimum wage of \$7 per hour; about half the additional employment paid close to the minimum wage.

- **By requiring full-time work, SSP increased earnings by more than a third.** Because SSP requires people to work full time to receive the supplement (and because SSP had such a large effect on employment at high-wage jobs), SSP generated large increases in earnings. During the last six months of the follow-up period, program group members earned on average \$836 per month, compared with \$613 per month for control group members, an increase of \$223 per month, or \$1,338 over the six-month period.
- **Most supplement payments are going to people who would have remained on Income Assistance without the supplement offer.** In the last six months of the follow-up period, SSP reduced the proportion of program group members receiving Income Assistance by 11 percentage points. During this same period, however, 19 percent of the program group received a supplement payment. The fact that the proportion of program group members receiving SSP payments is greater than SSP's impact on the proportion receiving Income Assistance suggests that some people receiving supplement payments would have left Income Assistance even without SSP's incentives. The fact that substantially fewer program group members than control group members received Income Assistance implies that SSP payments are also going to many people who would have continued receiving Income Assistance without the SSP offer.
- **SSP led to no increase in net public transfer payments.** To qualify for supplement payments, program group members had to leave Income Assistance and work full time. Furthermore, they had to pay income and payroll taxes on their earnings and income taxes on their supplement payments. Because of SSP's large impact on earnings, the combination of increased tax revenues and reduced IA payments more than offset the cost of SSP supplement payments.
- **SSP reduced poverty by a substantial amount.** SSP encouraged people to work by using the "carrot" of financial incentives, not the "stick" of reduced welfare benefits. As a result, SSP's large effect on earnings reduced by 11 percentage points the proportion of families below Statistics Canada's low income cut-off. This is a substantial reduction in poverty, perhaps the largest reduction in poverty ever resulting from a program that does not increase government transfer payments.

Box 26: New Brunswick's Learnfare Program (HRD-NB, n/a)

Since September 1995, young recipients under age 21 have been required to attend school or participate in training, retraining or upgrading measures.²³ Those who fail to do so are penalized: they lose either their benefits or their eligibility for assistance. This new set of rules is grouped into what the government calls the *Youth Policy*.²⁴

The *Youth Policy* is for applicants or clients ages 16 to 20 inclusive who are no longer living in their parents' home. It is intended "to support and encourage youth in obtaining their high school diploma and/or in acquiring additional education or training." Through the Youth Futures program and "in partnership with the public school system," the persons concerned receive counselling and career advice essential in order for them to stay in or go back to

school. All youth must have an “active case plan which is to be approved and monitored by HRD-NB.”

The *Youth Policy* provides different benefit rates according, essentially, to participation or non-participation in training or upgrading programs (participation and non-participation benefit rate). This adjustment of benefit rates according to the criterion of participation in measures is, in itself, a disguised job transition requirement. The recipient is classified as “participating” if they are an applicant (not client) and have a Medical Report which states the youth cannot participate in training; if they are attending school or a training institution; if they are participating in a rehabilitation program; or if they are participating in a remedial program, or are “willing to participate but are not capable of participating or there is no opportunity available to them at the present time.” Youth who do not meet the above criteria are considered “non-participating.” Certain groups are not subject to the *Youth Policy*, including “single parents” age 19 years or over.

The rates vary greatly according to participation status. Thus, a single person receives a monthly allowance of 300 dollars if considered “participating,” and 50 dollars if considered “non-participating.” For “single parents” ages 16 to 18, the rates for participation and non-participation are 700 dollars and 300 dollars, respectively.

The *Youth Policy* sets out the rules applicable to difficult situations. Thus, in cases of drug or alcohol addiction, participation in a rehabilitation program or in therapeutic services is considered part of the case plan. The recipient is then considered “active.” Also, in certain cases of family violence, a youth who is already attending school may be eligible for the participating rate. Finally, for students with learning disabilities, the Case Manager “will discuss each case individually with the school before a decision is made regarding the appropriate rate for the Youth.”²⁵

While participating in measures, the recipient must meet a number of requirements, defined in terms of attendance and grades:

Youth are expected to maintain full attendance during all components of training. Service provider(s) may determine an acceptable absenteeism rate and grade point average. In the absence of a policy on absenteeism, absences in excess of 10% per month and/or habitual tardiness will not be tolerated and will be subject to review and action. Case conferencing with school personnel will be used to jointly make decisions regarding suspensions etc. Solutions should be explored to ensure students remain in active programs.

Participating youth who decide to quit school or training “will have their assistance reduced to the non-participating rate immediately.” In the case of a suspension from school, the policy states that “the case manager will determine when assistance will be reduced but only after consultation with the school.” After age 21, youth receiving assistance will have their rates adjusted to the appropriate rate of assistance and remain eligible for the services they were previously receiving.

| Rates of Social Assistance for Recipients Aged 16 to 21 Years, According to Status of Participation, 1995 | |
|---|-----------------|
| SINGLE | |
| Participating | \$300 per month |
| Non-participating | \$50 per month |
| TWO OR MORE PERSONS (ALL YOUTH) | |
| All members participating | \$600 per month |
| Not all members participating | \$100 per month |
| TWO OR MORE PERSONS (NOT ALL YOUTH) | |
| Youth (16-18 years old) are considered a separate economic household if they are living with someone who is 21 years of age or older. The same applies to youth 19-20 years old living with someone who is 21 years of age or older. Participating and non-participating rates. | |
| SINGLE PARENTS AGED 16-18 ¹ | |
| Participating | \$700 per month |
| Non-participating | \$300 per month |

Note:

¹ All parents aged 16-18 years of age inclusive are required to participate in parenting classes, “based on availability.”

It is worth noting that single parents are entitled to the participating rate for six months following the birth of their child. However, it is stipulated that “the social assessment from Community Social Services (CSS) should indicate whether or not the responsibility for the child(ren) is shared by both parents.” This assessment therefore indicates whether or not the household is a single-parent or a two-parent household (HRD-NB, p. 199).

Box 27: The New Hope Project: The Voluntary Approach to Combatting Poverty and “Dependence” ²⁶ (adapted from Bloom, D., 1997, p. 86)

The New Hope project of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was intended to address the structural problems underlying poverty and social assistance dependence (job shortage, low wages, reduced work hours, no medical insurance or child care services). The program was based on the idea that employment was the solution to these problems and would be preferred to assistance if wages were high enough to provide a comfortable living.

The program was for low-income individuals and families whose income was equal to or less than 150 percent of the poverty line. It did not target social assistance recipients: also eligible were wage-earners and the unemployed not receiving social assistance. The measures were designed to encourage employment and represent, in this regard, an alternative to traditional social assistance. *New Hope* provided job search assistance to the unemployed or to wage-earners wanting to make a career transition. Individuals unable to find employment on their own were offered minimum-wage jobs with non-profit organizations. Monthly wage subsidies were provided to people who worked less than 30 hours a week and whose income was below the poverty line and, when combined with the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC),²⁷ brought the yearly family income above this line. These wage-earners could also benefit, through a financial contribution (based on their income and size of household), from medical insurance when they were not covered by their employer or Medicaid. Financial assistance intended to cover a portion of the expenses related to the care of children under age 13 was also provided.

Notes

¹ According to the individual who evaluated our report on the Saskatchewan government.

² According to the comments of the individual who evaluated our report on the government of Newfoundland & Labrador.

³ The rest of our comment is based on MSSC, 1998b.

⁴ We have already shown how, in the past, insurance and assistance institutions followed a trend towards reciprocal interaction, in France, as well as in Quebec and Canada (Morel, 1994).

⁵ Income support is provided through a combination of cash transfers and fiscal measures.

⁶ Credit for a child over age 18 who is not enrolled in studies.

⁷ Deduction of a portion of child care costs excluding 5-dollar daycare places.

⁸ When net income is below a certain level.

⁹ This measure raising the no tax threshold of families.

¹⁰ Initially, the program was to become effective January 1, 1998.

¹¹ The Quebec government bases its claim on section 69 of the *Employment Insurance Act*, which states that “employers and employees who participate in a provincial parental leave program that is at least as generous as the federal program are entitled to a reduction in the premiums they pay to the employment insurance fund” [*translation*] (Dutrisac, 2000b).

¹² In February, the Quebec minister tried to restart the negotiations. In April, Minister Jane Stewart announced she would wait until the enhanced federal program was in place in late December and subsequently evaluated, before proceeding (Dutrisac, 2000c).

¹³ Some categories encompass subcategories not shown in this box.

¹⁴ In the late 1990s, Alberta’s minister of Family and Social Services adopted the same watchword.

¹⁵ MSSC, 1997, “What does it mean to be part of Ontario Works?” site of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (<http://www.gov.on.ca/CSS/page/brochure/owiaf.html>).

¹⁶ We have little information about the nature of the agreement.

¹⁷ This was in fact the decision of the Social Assistance Review Committee with respect to counselling sessions.

¹⁸ To be referred to the job placement component, participants have to meet certain conditions. They have to have been receiving social assistance for four months, to have been engaged in a self-directed job search for at least four months, and to have not been placed by a placement agency in the last 18 months.

¹⁹ The recipient can have an exemption on business assets of about 10,000 dollars, calculated according to the type of business created. A business development loan may, in some cases, be deducted from the recipient's income and assets for the calculation of benefits.

²⁰ In the case of parents, only the children would be able to receive the social assistance.

²¹ This level is high as it actually represents double the gross earnings of the vast majority of recipients (Berlin *et al.*, 1998m, p. vii).

²² Many evaluation studies have been published: Bancroft, Currie, Vernon, 1995; Berlin *et al.*, 1998; Bloom *et al.*, 1997; Card, Robins, 1996; Linn *et al.*, 1998; Mijanovitch, Long, 1995.

²³ Youth ages 16 to 20 may also be covered by the policy governing youth in this age group "who are living outside of their parental home." ([http:// www.gnb.ca/Fos-sfc/ POL-E/ policy1.htm#youth-policy](http://www.gnb.ca/Fos-sfc/POL-E/policy1.htm#youth-policy)).

²⁴ Incentive measures have also been adopted with the increase in employment earnings exemptions and the introduction of exemptions for recipients who become self-employed (CNBS, 1997, p. 28).

²⁵ A policy for "incarcerated clients" has also been developed.

²⁶ See also Brock *et al.*, 1997.

²⁷ The EITC is a wage supplement paid to low-income earners.

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Table 1: Overview of the Situation in Canada, Eligibility for Mothers' Allowance, 1958

| | B.C. | Alta. | Sask. | Man. | Ont. | Que. | N.B. | N.S. | P.E.I. |
|---|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|--------|
| RECIPIENTS | | | | | | | | | |
| Mother with one or more children | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ELIGIBILITY: (A) CONDITIONS | | | | | | | | | |
| Character | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Nationality | ✓ | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Residency | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Means test | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| ELIGIBILITY: (B) CATEGORIES | | | | | | | | | |
| Widow | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Husband disabled | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Physical disability | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Mental institution | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Penal institution | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | |
| Divorced | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Separated | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Deserted | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Unwed mother | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Foster parent | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Exceptions not otherwise eligible | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| ELIGIBLE CHILDREN | | | | | | | | | |
| Basic: | | | | | | | | | |
| Under age 15 | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Over age 16 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Special circumstances: | | | | | | | | | |
| Age 16, and attending school until end of school year | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| Age 16 to 18, and attending school | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Under age 18, physically or mentally disadvantaged | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| Under age 19, physically or mentally unable to work | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Age 16 to 21, disabled and unable to support self | | | ✓ | | | | | | |

Source: Laroche, Bernadette. *L'assistance aux mères nécessiteuses dans la province de Québec*, 1950. Thesis in Social Work, Laval University, Appendice VI, based on the monthly bulletin of the Information Services Division, Department of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa, January 1950.

Table 2: Canada Assistance Plan, Total Federal-Provincial Cost-Shared Expenditures for General Assistance, by Province and for Canada, 1980-1981 to 1994-1995 (in \$000)

| Year ¹ | Quebec | Ontario | New Brunswick | Canada |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------|-----------|
| 1995-96 | 3,179,488 | n/a | 252,798 | n/a |
| 1994-95 | 3,476,704 | n/a | 263,874 | n/a |
| 1993-94 | 3,485,347 | n/a | 284,962 | n/a |
| 1992-93 | 3,204,512 | n/a | 308,592 | n/a |
| 1991-92 | 2,836,088 | n/a | 259,374 | n/a |
| 1990-91 | 2,408,579 | 3,639,189 | 261,052 | 8,882,801 |
| 1989-90 | 2,143,957 | 2,425,147 | 236,185 | 7,146,312 |
| 1988-89 | 2,121,456 | 2,163,820 | 227,535 | 6,825,719 |
| 1987-88 | 2,118,102 | 1,831,461 | 235,034 | 6,393,927 |
| 1986-87 | 2,146,744 | 1,642,812 | 229,282 | 6,123,980 |
| 1985-86 | 2,221,906 | 1,479,479 | 206,714 | 5,880,410 |
| 1984-85 | 2,055,285 | 1,406,421 | 192,857 | 5,521,736 |
| 1983-84 | 1,851,769 | 1,200,805 | 174,614 | 4,927,492 |
| 1982-83 | 1,472,324 | 1,047,128 | 170,377 | 4,154,831 |
| 1981-82 | 1,220,364 | 845,825 | 142,188 | 3,272,423 |
| 1980-81 | 1,080,067 | 737,762 | 126,191 | 2,838,161 |
| 1979-80 | 886,794 | 653,788 | 107,161 | 2,430,048 |
| 1978-79 | 780,316 | 605,934 | 104,788 | 2,178,996 |
| 1977-78 | 703,566 | 557,098 | 79,716 | 1,986,600 |
| 1976-77 | 625,524 | 494,906 | 106,036 | 1,808,330 |
| 1975-76 | 520,784 | 483,790 | 78,836 | 1,606,878 |
| 1974-75 | 427,826 | 411,706 | 55,644 | 1,374,850 |
| 1973-74 | 368,908 | 311,242 | 42,656 | 1,079,386 |
| 1972-73 | 367,380 | 280,468 | 34,756 | 1,027,206 |

Notes:

¹ Fiscal years ending March 31.

Total federal-provincial expenditures are calculated by doubling the federal amount paid each year to reflect the 50/50 cost-shared basis. The federal expenditure is the actual payment made for claims received each fiscal year, and may include amounts in respect of previous years. Contributions to Quebec include the value of income tax points transferred to the province under the *Federal-Provincial Fiscal Arrangements and Federal Post-Secondary Education and Health Contributions Act, 1977*. Under the federal *Government Expenditures Restraint Act*, figures for federal-provincial expenditures by program component are not available for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. The federal contributions for these provinces were limited to an annual growth rate of 5% higher than those made over the 1989-90 base year. The expenditures for 1990-91 include 50/50 federal contributions and any overpayments were recovered in 1991-92.

Expenditures shown are the actual payments made during the fiscal year regardless of when the expenditures were incurred. Programs, definitions and reporting systems vary considerably among provinces or within a given province over time; data are not comparable and should be used as estimates only.

Source: The data are taken from Human Resources Development Canada. *Social Security Statistics Canada and Provinces 1972-73 to 1996-97*, HRDC, Hull, 1997, Table 362.

Table 3: Canada Health and Social Transfer, by Province and for Canada, 1996-1997 to 1998-1999 (in \$000)

| | Quebec | Ontario | New Brunswick | Canada |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|---------------|------------|
| 2003-04 | 7,709,000 | 12,527,000 | 773,000 | n/a |
| 2002-03 | 7,584,000 | 12,211,000 | 765,000 | n/a |
| 2001-02 | 7,474,000 | 11,921,000 | 758,000 | n/a |
| 2000-01 | 7,557,000 | 11,571,000 | 754,000 | 30,800,000 |
| 1999-2000 | 7,284,000 | 10,968,000 | 728,000 | 29,400,000 |
| 1998-99 ¹ | 6,944,000 | 9,546,000 | 655,000 | 26,251,000 |
| 1997-98 ¹ | 6,749,521 | 9,044,150 | 632,226 | 25,044,441 |
| 1996-97 ¹ | 7,358,161 | 9,681,958 | 691,562 | 26,900,000 |

Notes:

¹ Fiscal year ending March 31.

On April 1996, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) replaced the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and Established Programs Financing (EPF). The CHST is a federal block-fund transfer to provinces and territories to provide financial support for the provision of health, post-secondary education, social assistance and social services. The total includes a combination of cash and tax point transfers. The amounts provided for 1998-99 are the amounts to which the provinces were entitled, as the actual amounts were not available. For 1998-99, the total does not include the \$3.5 billion entitlement to provinces and territories for the CHST Supplement for Health Care. The amounts provided for 1999-2000 and subsequent years are approximate. They may also include some tax points provided under the equalization system.

Source: Human Resources Development Canada. *Social Security Statistics Canada and Provinces 1974-75 to 1998-99*, Table 440, 1999 (<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/socpol/statistics/74-75/tabfig/tab440f.html>, consulted February 15, 2002). For 1999-2000 and subsequent years, see Finance Canada. *Major Federal Transfers to Provinces and Territories (1999-2000 to 2003-2004)*, 2000 (<http://www.fin.gc.ca/FEDPROV/mtpe.html>).

Table 4: Canada Assistance Plan, Number of Beneficiaries of General Assistance, by Province and for Canada, 1970-1971 to 1998-1999

| | Quebec | Ontario | New Brunswick | Canada |
|---------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|
| 1998-99 | 661,300 (29%) | 910,100 (39.9%) | 61,800 | 2,279,200 |
| 1997-98 | 725,700 | 1,091,300 | 67,100 | 2,577,500 |
| 1996-97 | 793,300 | 1,149,600 | 70,600 | 2,774,900 |
| 1995-96 | 813,200 | 1,214,600 | 67,100 | 2,937,100 |
| 1994-95 | 802,200 | 1,344,600 | 67,400 | 3,070,900 |
| 1993-94 | 787,200 | 1,379,300 | 73,500 | 3,100,200 |
| 1992-93 | 741,400 | 1,287,000 | 78,100 | 2,975,000 |
| 1991-92 | 674,900 | 1,184,700 | 78,200 | 2,723,000 |
| 1990-91 | 594,900 | 929,900 | 71,900 | 2,282,200 |
| 1989-90 | 555,900 | 675,700 | 67,200 | 1,930,100 |
| 1988-89 | 559,300 | 588,200 | 67,700 | 1,856,100 |
| 1987-88 | 594,000 | 533,500 | 70,600 | 1,853,000 |
| 1986-87 | 649,600 | 518,400 | 73,700 | 1,904,900 |
| 1985-86 | 693,900 | 485,800 | 68,800 | 1,892,900 |
| 1984-85 | 708,700 | 485,800 | 69,100 | 1,923,300 |
| 1983-84 | 705,900 | 484,600 | 68,600 | 1,894,900 |
| 1982-83 | 675,800 | 471,200 | 70,100 | 1,832,900 |
| 1981-82 | 561,900 | 406,800 | 62,700 | 1,502,800 |
| 1980-81 | 532,900 | 389,800 | 67,400 | 1,418,400 |
| 1979-80 | 511,925 | 354,798 | 66,312 | 1,334,330 |
| 1978-79 | 478,277 | 382,224 | 65,040 | 1,347,180 |
| 1977-78 | 464,503 | 356,324 | 63,432 | 1,321,676 |
| 1976-77 | 457,053 | 338,909 | 67,130 | 1,327,984 |
| 1975-76 | 428,713 | 367,943 | 52,521 | 1,322,918 |
| 1974-75 | 416,558 | 336,415 | 55,604 | 1,280,441 |
| 1973-74 | 395,820 | 317,283 | 51,879 | 1,208,629 |
| 1972-73 | 406,452 | 307,880 | 58,575 | 1,221,413 |
| 1971-72 | 462,571 | 333,584 | 61,717 | 1,379,257 |
| 1970-71 | 489,073 | 364,046 | 65,756 | 1,460,064 |

Note: Programs, definitions and reporting systems vary considerably among provinces or within a given province over time; data are not comparable and should be used as estimates only.

Source: The data for the years 1970-71 to 1994-95 are taken from Human Resources Development Canada. *Social Security Statistics Canada and Provinces 1970-71 to 1994-95*, HRDC, Hull, 1995, Table 361. For the year 1995-96, the data are taken from Human Resources Development Canada. *Social Security Statistics Canada and Provinces 1972-73 to 1996-97*, HRDC, Hull, 1997, Table 361. For the years 1996-97 to 1998-99, the data are taken from Human Resources Development Canada. *Social Security Statistics Canada and Provinces 1974-75 to 1998-99*, HRDC, Hull, 1999, Table 435 (*Number of Beneficiaries of Provincial and Municipal Social Assistance*).

Table 5: Distribution of Social Assistance Cases and Recipients by Family Type, Canada, March 1998

| | Cases | | Recipients | |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| Singles | 778,600 | 55.6 | 778,600 | 30.2 |
| Couples, no children | 73,400 | 5.2 | 146,800 | 5.7 |
| Couples with children | 147,300 | 10.5 | 294,600 | 11.4 |
| Single parents | 402,100 | 28.7 | 402,100 | 15.6 |
| Children | --- | --- | 955,400 | 37.1 |
| Total | 1,401,600 | 100 | 2,577,500 | 100 |

Note: The first four categories (for both cases and recipients) include adults only. The fifth includes children only.

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development, (<http://www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/sadis98.htm>, consulté le 15 février 2002). Data from Human Resources Development Canada, December 1998.

Table 6: Social Assistance Cases by Family Type, Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, March 1997

| | Quebec | Ontario | New Brunswick | Total |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Unattached persons | 299,511 (64%) | 273,588 (47%) | 17,115 (47%) | 793,990 (55%) |
| Couples without children | 25,947 (6%) | 28,816 (5%) | 2,944 (8%) | 75,013 (5%) |
| Couples with children | 46,806 (10%) | 73,491 (13%) | 4,926 (14%) | 157,675 (11%) |
| Single parents | 98,111 (21%) | 201,900 (35%) | 11,192 (31%) | 425,800 (29%) |
| Total cases | 470,375 (100%) | 577,795 (100%) | 36,177 (100%) | 1,452,779 (100%) |

Note: The data in this table include 97% of the total estimated national caseload as of March 1997.

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development (http://www.ccsd.ca/factsheets/fs_wfp98..htm, consulted February 15, 2002), *Welfare Cases by Family Type, March 1997*.

Table 7: Percentage Change in Social Assistance Benefits in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick Between 1986 and 1996 (in constant 1996 dollars)

| | 1986 | 1995 | 1996 | % Change 1995-96 | % Change 1986-95 |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Quebec | | | | | |
| Single employable | 3,254 | 6,096 | 6,000 | -1.6 | 84.4 |
| Disabled person | ... | 8,217 | 8,268 | 0.6 | ... |
| Single parent, one child | 10,951 | 11,713 | 11,528 | -1.6 | 5.3 |
| Couple, two children | 14,154 | 13,741 | 13,524 | -1.6 | -4.5 |
| Ontario | | | | | |
| Single employable | 6,955 | 8,024 | 6,584 | -17.9 | -5.3 |
| Disabled person | ... | 11,650 | 11,466 | -1.6 | ... |
| Single parent, one child | 12,456 | 14,535 | 11,940 | -17.9 | -4.1 |
| Couple, two children | 15,505 | 18,716 | 15,428 | -17.6 | -0.5 |
| New Brunswick | | | | | |
| Single employable | 3,092 | 3,146 | 3,132 | -0.4 | 1.3 |
| Disabled person | ... | 6,511 | 6,483 | -0.4 | ... |
| Single parent, one child | 9,286 | 9,628 | 9,573 | -0.6 | 3.1 |
| Couple, two children | 10,045 | 10,778 | 10,711 | -0.6 | 6.6 |

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development (http://www.ccsd.ca/98/fs_96wel.htm, consulted February 15, 2002), *Percentage Change in Welfare Benefits in Canada, by Province/Territory, Between 1986 and 1996 (in constant 1996 dollars)*. Data from the NCWC. *Welfare Incomes, 1996*, winter 1997-1998, 1998.

Table 8: Estimated Social Assistance Income, Selected Provinces, 1998

| | Basic Social Assistance | Additional Benefits | Federal Child Tax Benefit ¹ | Provincial Child Benefits | Federal GST Credit ² | Provincial Tax Credits | Total Income |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Quebec ³ | | | | | | | |
| Single employable ⁴ | 5,880 | | | | 199 | | 6,079 |
| Disabled person ⁵ | 8,544 | | | | 236 | | 8,780 |
| Single parent, one child ⁶ | 7,738 | 810 | 1,460 | 2,275 | 495 | | 12,778 |
| Couple, two children ⁷ | 10,602 | 139 | 2,511 | 1,950 | 608 | | 15,810 |
| Ontario ⁸ | | | | | | | |
| Single employable | 6,240 | | | | 199 | 383 | 6,822 |
| Disabled person ⁹ | 11,160 | | | | 293 | 306 | 11,759 |
| Single parent, one child ¹⁰ | 11,181 | 105 | 1,535 | | 501 | 373 | 13,695 |
| Couple, two children ¹¹ | 14,063 | 407 | 2,545 | | 608 | 483 | 18,106 |
| New Brunswick ¹² | | | | | | | |
| Single employable | 3,168 | | | | 199 | | 3,367 |
| Disabled person ¹³ | 6,696 | | | | 201 | | 6,897 |
| Single parent, one child ¹⁴ | 8,772 | 900 | 1,536 | 252 | 463 | | 11,923 |
| Couple, two children ¹⁵ | 9,828 | 1,000 | 2,545 | 504 | 608 | | 14,485 |

Notes:

¹ The Federal Child Tax Benefit column shows \$1,020 of the basic benefit and \$213 as a supplement for the child under 7 in the single-parent family. The two-parent family with two children aged 10 and 15 was eligible for \$2,040 (\$1,020 for each child). As of July 1, 1998, the single parent with one child received a supplement of \$605 a year (or \$50.42 monthly) and the couple with two children received a supplement of \$1,010 a year (\$84.17 monthly). All provinces and territories except Newfoundland and New Brunswick deducted the value of the supplement from the social assistance payments to families. Further changes to the supplement will appear in future editions of this report. Quebec and Alberta asked the federal government to vary the amount of the Child Tax Benefit, so the child benefit figures for these provinces differ.

² The GST credit is paid in quarterly instalments. The special GST supplement for single persons and single-parent families is included in the totals for the year.

³ The value of the Quebec Sales Tax Credit is included in basic welfare assistance. The single disabled person was classified under the Financial Support Program. The single-parent family is classified as "unavailable" under the Work and Employment Incentives Program, while the others were classified as "non-participating."

⁴ Rates dropped from \$500 a month to \$490 a month on April 1, 1997. The exemption rate for earned income rose by the same amount. The actual assistance could be lower than the rates indicated here if Quebec deemed the recipient eligible for a "parental contribution" as defined by Quebec law.

⁵ Basic social assistance for people with disabilities rose by two percent on January 1, 1997. Rates rose again on January 1, 1998.

⁶ Quebec reduced its social assistance payments for families with children by an amount equivalent to the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. The basic social assistance rate dropped from \$850 a month to \$839 a month on April 1, 1997. The exemption for earned income rose by the same amount, from \$60 a month to \$71 a month. Rates dropped again to \$671 on September 1, 1997, at the same time as provincial family allowances were increased. The additional benefits column shows the shelter subsidy for recipients with dependent children. The subsidy was \$60 a month until October 1, 1997, when it rose to \$66 a month. Quebec raised the shelter subsidy again on October 1, 1998, to \$72 a month. Quebec asked the federal government to vary the amount of the federal Child Tax Benefit according to the age of the child and the number of children in a family. The provincial child benefits column shows the Quebec family allowance, the Allowance for Young Children and the Single-Parent Supplement.

⁷ Quebec reduced its social assistance payments for families with children by an amount equivalent to the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. The basic social assistance rate dropped from \$1,000 a month to \$978 a month on April 1, 1997. The exemption for earned income rose by the same amount, from \$225 a month to \$247 a month. The rates dropped again to \$853 a month on September 1, 1997, when the provincial family allowances were increased. The additional benefits column includes the shelter subsidy for recipients with dependent children. The subsidy was \$60 a month until October 1, 1997, when it rose to \$66 a month. This column also includes the school expense allowance of \$46 for each dependent attending primary school and \$93 for each dependent in secondary school. Quebec asked the federal government to vary the amount of the federal Child Tax Benefit according to the age of the child and the number of children in a family. Provincial child benefits show the Quebec family allowance.

⁸ The provincial tax credits column shows the combined amount of the Ontario Sales Tax and Property Tax Credit for 1998 based on the recipients' shelter costs.

⁹ Assistance for a single disabled person is based on the Ontario Disability Support Program, formerly known as GAINS-D. Rates were last increased in April 1993.

¹⁰ Ontario deducts the value of the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit from basic social assistance. Additional benefits are the winter clothing allowance of \$105 for each dependent child.

¹¹ Ontario deducts the value of the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit from basic social assistance. The additional benefits column shows the combined amount of the back-to-school allowances (\$69 dollars for the 10-year-old child and \$128 dollars for the 15-year-old) and the winter clothing allowance of \$105 per child.

¹² Rates for all four family types of social assistance recipients increased by two percent on October 1, 1996.

¹³ New Brunswick increased benefits for the disabled by a further two percent on April 1, 1997.

¹⁴ New Brunswick allows families to keep the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. The additional benefits column shows the Income Supplement Benefit, a shelter subsidy that assists families with children paying high shelter costs. The maximum subsidy for eligible households is \$90 per month from November to April and \$60 per month from May to October. The provincial child benefits column shows the New Brunswick Child Tax Benefit of \$21 a month beginning in April 1997.

¹⁵ New Brunswick allows families to keep the supplement to the Canada Child Tax Benefit. The additional benefits column shows the combined amount of the Income Supplement Benefit and the School Supplement (\$50 a year per child). The provincial child benefits column shows the New Brunswick Child Tax Benefit of \$42 a month beginning in April 1997.

Source: Reproduced in its entirety from NCWC. *Welfare Incomes 1997 and 1998*, Ottawa, 2000.

Table 9: Proportion of Children in Female-Lone Parent Families Below the Low-Income Cut-Off, Before Tax, by Province and in Canada, 1980-1998

| | Proportion % | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 |
| Quebec | 64.8 | 57.0 | 71.7 | 68.0 | 70.7 | 68.3 | 63.4 | 70.2 | 60.2 | 57.4 | 60.9 | 63.0 | 65.8 | 62.1 | 63.6 | 55.7 | 56.6 | 63.4 | 62.1 |
| Ontario | 57.4 | 57.8 | 62.0 | 64.0 | 63.4 | 65.5 | 55.8 | 51.3 | 52.6 | 49.7 | 61.0 | 67.4 | 52.6 | 60.3 | 55.9 | 62.1 | 64.6 | 57.2 | 56.5 |
| New Brunswick | 59.1 | 78.1 | 73.6 | 70.1 | 80.5 | 72.8 | 73.7 | 76.6 | 70.6 | 70.2 | 67.6 | 65.6 | 69.7 | 74.3 | 62.2 | 74.8 | 73.6 | 69.1 | 60.8 |
| Canada | 58.9 | 58.2 | 64.2 | 64.8 | 66.6 | 65.9 | 61.1 | 63.3 | 59.4 | 57.5 | 62.9 | 64.2 | 60.0 | 63.3 | 59.9 | 61.9 | 61.8 | 59.8 | 56.3 |

Note: Children under age 18. Lone parent under age 65. 1992 LICOs base. For years before 1996, data are from the *Survey of Consumer Finances* (SCF); for later years, they are from the *Survey of Labour Income Dynamics* (SLID). Data for Canada and Quebec (1995 to 1998 inclusive) revised by Statistics Canada.

Source: For the years 1989 to 1995 inclusive, see Statistics Canada. *Low Income Persons, 1980 to 1997*, Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, April 1999, Catalogue no. 13-569-XIB, Table 5 (Persons in Low Income by Age, Sex and Province, 1980 to 1997). For subsequent years, see Statistics Canada. *Income in Canada 1998*, Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, June 2000, Catalogue no. 75-202-XPF, Table 8.5 (Persons in Low Income Before Tax (92 LICOs base), Showing Prevalence and Estimated Number, Canada and Provinces, 1989-1998).

Table 10: Labour Market Data, Single Mothers, Canada and Selected Provinces, 1996

| Status by Reference Week | | Total Single Mothers | Employed Persons | | | Unemployment | Non-Labour Force Participants |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | Total | Part-Time Employment | Full-Time Employment | | |
| Canada | Single mothers | 945,235 | 480,555 | 103,270 | 353,685 | 93,820 | 370,860 |
| | Children < age 6 | 237,535 | 96,925 | 26,510 | 64,130 | 34,055 | 106,550 |
| | Children ages 6 to 14 | 294,585 | 185,080 | 40,620 | 137,125 | 36,970 | 72,535 |
| | Children age 15 and + | 413,110 | 198,545 | 36,150 | 152,430 | 22,800 | 191,770 |
| Quebec | Single mothers | 252,515 | 119,500 | 23,635 | 89,970 | 23,485 | 109,530 |
| | Children < age 6 | 55,520 | 19,805 | 4,275 | 14,250 | 6,090 | 29,620 |
| | Children ages 6 to 14 | 77,270 | 46,575 | 9,150 | 35,490 | 9,985 | 20,710 |
| | Children age 15 and + | 119,725 | 53,115 | 10,205 | 40,230 | 7,405 | 59,200 |
| Ontario | Single mothers | 355,035 | 180,750 | 40,310 | 132,155 | 38,625 | 135,665 |
| | Children < age 6 | 91,835 | 37,665 | 11,095 | 24,175 | 15,485 | 38,685 |
| | Children ages 6 to 14 | 108,345 | 67,200 | 16,100 | 48,720 | 14,515 | 26,630 |
| | Children age 15 and + | 154,855 | 75,880 | 13,120 | 59,260 | 8,625 | 70,350 |
| New Brunswick | Single mothers | 24,585 | 11,220 | 2,550 | 8,085 | 2,695 | 10,680 |
| | Children < age 6 | 5,845 | 2,375 | 595 | 1,580 | 1,160 | 2,305 |
| | Children ages 6 to 14 | 7,475 | 4,395 | 995 | 3,220 | 935 | 2,145 |
| | Children age 15 and + | 11,275 | 4,445 | 960 | 3,285 | 600 | 6,230 |

Source: Data from the 1996 Census.

Table 11: WEIP: Financial Assistance
Assistance for Basic Needs

Assistance was paid on the basis of the monthly deficit between a household's resources and its needs. Thus, a person with no income received the full rate. Rates varied according to the size of the household and corresponded to the ordinary needs for shelter, food, clothing and other necessities.

The amount of the benefit as well as the level of work income excluded from the calculation of resources depended on the client's availability and their effective participation in measures supporting labour market integration.

| Family Composition | | Needs Scale / Excluding Employment Income, 1990 (\$) | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Adult(s) | One or More Dependent Children | Participation | Unavailability | Availability | Non-Participation |
| 1 | 0 | 545/84 | 532/56 | 504/84 | 441/147 |
| 1 | 1 | 755/84 | 724/73 | 713/84 | 650/147 |
| 1 | 2 | 862/84 | 831/73 | 820/84 | 757/147 |
| 2 | 0 | 892/53 | 845/40 | 808/53 | 682/178 |
| 2 | 1 | 1,012/53 | 913/68 | 928/53 | 802/178 |
| 2 | 2 | 1,093/53 | 988/73 | 1,009/53 | 883/178 |

Source: MMSRFP, 1991, p. 46.

The first category corresponded to persons “actually participating” in measures. For example, in 1990, an adult with no dependent children who was participating in such a measure received a monthly benefit of 545 dollars and was entitled to an exemption of 84 dollars of his employment income. At the other extreme were “non-participants,” persons who were looking for work and did not wish to participate in such a measure. The second group, given the status of “unavailability,” was made up of persons who, for reasons set out in the legislation, could not participate in such measures. A sole-support parent with one dependent child under age 6 fell into this category, as did pregnant women.¹ Finally, the category of “available persons” was made up of recipients who, although they wanted to, were unable to participate in a measure because of a lack of available spaces (the policy statement used the term “eligible” to refer to “available” persons). There was also a blended rate for spouses in the same family who did not fall into the same category.

In December 1991, 78.7 percent and 19.2 percent of adult recipients were registered in the WEIP and the Financial Support Program, respectively (2 percent were in a third category, “accommodated”). The distribution of WEIP recipients was as follows: 38.9 percent were non-participants, 13.8 percent were participants, 11.7 percent were available and 35.6 percent were unavailable (MMSRFP, 1992, p. 3).

¹ The Act stipulated that the scale based on unavailability “applies where [the person]: (1) proves (...) that his physical or mental condition prevents him from availing himself (...) of a measure (...); (2) applies therefor by reason of pregnancy, from the twentieth week, as attested by a medical certificate, until the fifth week after delivery; (3) has the care of a dependent child who does not attend school because he has not reached the age of mandatory school attendance or by reason of a physical or mental handicap” (*Act respecting income security*, Gazette officielle du Québec, February 1, 1989, Vol. 121, No. 5, Éditeur officiel du Québec, p. 220).

Table 12: Financial Support Program: Financial Assistance

The Financial Support Program, for recipients “not fit to work,” was intended for “households where one of the consorts is, or for people who are, suffering from a significantly irregular state of mental or physical health likely to persist for a relatively long time, and consequently, unable to meet their needs” (MMSR, 1987, p. 19). Since “the needs of a permanent beneficiary differ from those of a temporary beneficiary” (MMSR, 1987, p. 13), the assistance ought to be adjusted accordingly. The reform also increased the level of benefits of these beneficiaries. For example, it suggested increasing the monthly benefit of a single person from 503 to 585 dollars or even, in the case of a single-parent family with one dependent child, from 684 to 785 dollars (MMSR, 1987, p. 21). We might add that the statute stipulated that a person registered in the Financial Support Program could be offered a measure provided for recipients under the WEIP, at their request (Assemblée nationale, 1989, p. 339).

Assistance for Basic Needs

The benefit scale of the Financial Support Program covered all recognized needs and was indexed automatically on January 1 of each year.

Assistance for Other Needs

Single persons and families eligible under the Financial Support Program had access to the same special benefits as persons and families eligible under the WEIP.

The needs scale of the Financial Support Program and the work income excluded from the calculation of the benefit were as follows:

| Adult(s) | One or More Dependent Children | Needs Scale (\$) | Excluded Work Income (\$) |
|----------|--------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | 0 | 585 | 100 |
| 1 | 1 | 785 | 100 |
| 1 | 2 or more | 887 | 100 |
| 2 | 0 | 845 | 100 |
| 2 | 1 | 960 | 100 |
| 2 | 2 or more | 1 037 | 100 |

Note: These levels came into effect August 1, 1990.

Source: MMSRFP, 1991, p. 53

Finally, as in the WEIP, families with minor dependent children benefitting under the Financial Support Program were eligible for the shelter subsidy.

Table 13: Change in Social Assistance Benefit Rates from 1988 to 1996 for Various Household Types, Quebec

| Household Composition | Benefit Rates | 1988 (\$) | 1996 (\$) | Variation % |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Single, disabled person | Financial Support | 608 | 689 | + 13 |
| Single person able to work, age 18-29 | Non-participant | 222 | 500 | + 125 |
| | Participant | 222 | 620 | + 179 |
| Single person able to work, age 30-64 | Non-participant | 608 | 500 | - 18 |
| | Participant | 608 | 620 | + 2 |
| Single parent able to work, one child | Non-participant | 826 | 750 | - 9 |
| | Participant | 826 | 870 | + 5 |
| Couple able to work, two children | Non-participant | 1,104 | 970 | - 12 |
| | Participant | 1,104 | 1,083 | - 2 |

Note: The Financial Support benefit rates apply to persons presenting severe, permanent limitations in their capacity for employment. The other rates illustrate the two types of recipients under the WEIP, aimed at people who are fit to hold employment. The “non-participant” is a recipient who does not intend to take advantage of a job preparation or job entry measure. The example used for a couple able to work with two children assumes that one of the two adults is a participant and the other a non-participant. The rates shown do not take into account the provisions relating to shelter. The table does not show the “unavailable” rate applicable to certain recipients exempt from participation in a measure. All 1988 rates are expressed in 1996 purchasing power units (constant dollars). The 1996 rates reflect the amendment to Bill 115 that came into force April 1, 1996.

Source: Fortin, Séguin, 1996, p. 45.

Table 14: Percentages of New Participations According to Participants' Status, Emploi-Québec, April 1 – October 24, 2000

| | Manpower Training | Job Preparation Projects | Employment Assistance Services | Wage Subsidies and Local Projects | Return to Work Supplement | Self-Employment support | Social Insertion (EXTRA) | Fonds de la lutte contre la pauvreté | Employment Assistance and Other Activities | Total ¹ |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| No income support | 4.4 | 24.5 | 15.0 | 14.0 | 1.9 | 2.3 | 0.5 | 18.2 | 8.5 | 9.0 |
| Employment Insurance | 70.3 | 29.4 | 60.9 | 62.6 | 37.5 | 84.1 | 12.0 | 46.5 | 61.3 | 58.6 |
| Employment Assistance | 35.7 | 56.5 | 35.6 | 36.8 | 87.9 | 20.8 | 99.1 | 51.4 | 46.0 | 46.5 |

Notes:

¹ In all, employment assistance recipients account for 46.5 percent of all new participations in active measures and 46.6 percent of participants.

Employment insurance participants account for 58.6 percent of all new participations in active measures and 58.1 percent of participants.

Finally, participants with no public income support account for 9.0 percent of all new participations in active measures and 9.6 percent of participants.

Note that the overall total exceeds 100 percent owing to the dual status of some participants. Thus, 14.1 percent of participations are by persons receiving employment assistance as well as employment insurance (3,961 active and 14,184 eligible).

Source: Emploi-Québec. *Faits saillants sur les individus, entreprises et organismes participant aux mesures actives d'Emploi-Québec*, cumulative data for the period April 1 to October 24, 2000.

Table 15: Distribution of New Participations According to Participants' Status, Quebec, 2000

| | | Manpower Training | Job Preparation Projects | Employment Assistance Services | Wage Subsidies and Local Projects | Return to Work Supplement | Self-Employment Support | Social Insertion (EXTRA) | Fonds de lutte contre la pauvreté | Employment Assistance and Other Activities |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| No income support ¹ | No. participations ⁴ | 1,158 | 1,032 | 3,518 | 1,571 | 193 | 52 | 25 | 335 | 3,729 |
| | Percentage | 10.0 | 8.9 | 30.3 | 13.5 | 1.7 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 2.9 | 32.1 |
| Empl. Insurance ² | No. participations ⁴ | 18,473 | 1,240 | 14,299 | 7,016 | 3,832 | 1,880 | 581 | 855 | 27,011 |
| | Percentage | 24.6 | 1.6 | 19.0 | 9.3 | 5.1 | 2.5 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 35.9 |
| Empl. Assistance ³ | No. participations ⁴ | 9,382 | 2,380 | 8,353 | 4,130 | 8,979 | 464 | 4,794 | 945 | 20,263 |
| | Percentage | 15.7 | 4.0 | 14.0 | 6.9 | 15.0 | 0.8 | 8.0 | 1.6 | 33.9 |

Notes:

¹ Emploi-Québec registered 11,613 new participations in active measures involving 10,336 adults between April 1 and October 24, 2000. If we add to this number the 3,970 participations begun in 1998-1999 that continued in 1999-2000, we get a total of 15,583 active participations since April 1, 2000.

² Emploi-Québec registered 75,187 new participations in active measures involving 62,351 adults between April 1 and October 24, 2000. However, 7,171 participations were not chargeable to the Employment Insurance Fund, for a total of 68,016 new participations that were chargeable. If we add to this number the 30,008 participations begun in 1998-1999 that continued in 1999-2000, we get a total of 105,195 active participations since April 1, 2000, of which 75,000 were chargeable to the Employment Insurance Fund.

³ Emploi-Québec registered 59,690 new participations in active measures involving 50,055 adults between April 1 and October 24, 2000. If we add to this number the 15,812 participations begun in 1998 that continued in 1999-2000, we get a total of 75,502 active participations since April 1, 2000.

⁴ To these figures must be added a number of the 1,700 new participations in "group sessions" that could not be accessed in the ministerial computer systems. The distribution of these participations by clientele is not currently known.

Source: Emploi-Québec. *Faits saillants sur les individus, entreprises et organismes participant aux mesures actives d'Emploi-Québec*, cumulative data for the period April 1 to October 24, 2000.

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