

unjust management practices. What will happen in cases of, for instance, sexual harassment and abuse, which are common problems for home health care workers? The government's privatization is a major blow to health care workers, and to their representative unions. It is certainly a regressive step for Manitoba's health care system.



Saskatchewan

Ken Collier
University of Regina

The Impact of the Federal CHST

As euphemisms go, "retrenchment" serves in Saskatchewan as the government's description, while "slash and trash" are the words of choice from the opposition, legislative and otherwise. Saskatchewan trumpeted its "first balanced budget in over a decade" early in 1995, only to gasp in desperation by year's end that Paul Martin was chopping serious dollars out of transfer payments and thus the province would have to cut social programs (more). The feds responded with reminders that Saskatchewan holds more than a billion dollars in shares in Uranium companies. Why cry poverty when you could sell these shares? Why flaunt the butterflies in the wallet when manufacturing, mining, wholesale and agricultural sectors are all up over 1995, and unemployment is down?

The province responded by saying that, while tax and other revenues are up by \$50 million, federal transfers will go down by \$220 million, so the arithmetic is plain. In February, the Saskatchewan government announced that they would sell most of their shares in Cameco to bring down the provincial debt. Federal transfers go down because Saskatchewan is doing so well, said the feds. Repartee, parry and thrust.

But the end result is cuts to social programs, emphasis on work-readiness, retraining, getting people off welfare and unemployment insurance—sorry, "employment" insurance. Particularly painful is the plan to savage rural government and services.

Since the federal government is off-loading monetary and policy responsibilities to the provinces, while at the same time cutting transfers, the provinces look to local governments to take up some of the slack. Consolidation of the local level of government is now in the news. This may take the form of a return of proposals for a county system, first bruited about in the late 1950s. More than 600 rural municipalities would be replaced by a presumably smaller number of large counties. Those who hate the idea counter with proposals forcing municipalities to co-operate to maintain roads, do bulk ordering for hospitals and schools, and establish larger

units within which to hire staff that single municipalities could not afford themselves. There is a gloss of good sense in these ideas, until one realizes they are cutbacks in yet another guise. The toll on jobs, viability of rural towns and family farms, not to mention the infrastructure (roads, communications, utilities) would be significant, and the rural nature of much of Saskatchewan life would be threatened. Youth are being driven out in record numbers, much as in Newfoundland. Many of those displaced persons would depend on social assistance in the final analysis.

Which brings us to the Saskatchewan Social Services discussion paper entitled *Redesigning Social Assistance*, published in January 1996. Its main proposals are

- a) a Child Benefit, aimed at reducing child poverty;
- b) a working income supplement for low wage-earners;
- c) a Youth Futures program which is a double-edged sword. It emphasizes parental responsibility for youth under 22, but will subsidize those remaining with the family if income is low. It requires these youth to attend school, work, engage in community service or some combination of these.
- d) Provincial Training Allowance is the big foray of Saskatchewan into labour market restructuring.
- e) Child Maintenance provides "an incentive to pursue payments by delinquent parents."
- f) And the old standby — tighter auditing of assistance payments by the fraud squad, computer matching with other provinces and more enthusiastic collection of overpayments.

Saskatchewan, along with the other provinces, is taking advantage of federal weakness to bring many of these responsibilities home to the provincial level. The government makes no mention of the desirability of federal standards, especially any that could be enforced. The only voice for those kinds of federal engagements and labour standards rests with the voluntary sector — the Federation of Labour, the Coalition for Social Justice, the Council on Social Development, which have equivalents in each of the cities. That seems to be the level at which opposition to the CHST is growing. A series of actions lasting thirty days is planned to culminate in a large rally to protest the end of federal commitments to social welfare, health and education.

The fact that the CHST does not contain the letter "E" for Education is significant in Saskatchewan. Universities, regional colleges and the Saskatchewan Institute of Arts, Science and Technology (SIAST, several locations) all look to cutbacks in the coming year — again. While the idea of combining the two universities is with us again, most observers view this

as unlikely. Rather, program cuts seem the only remaining avenue after ten years of hacking. The Regional Colleges and Saskatchewan Institutes of Arts and Science face reductions as well, in programs, locations and size of staff. Only the details need to be filled in as federal and provincial budgeters decide how deeply to plunge the knife.



Alberta

Marjorie Bencz
Edmonton Food Bank

More than Money

Since 1993, residents of Alberta have seen numerous changes to social welfare programs. Some of these changes include:

- eligibility conditions and benefit levels have been restricted;
- some benefits, such as transportation allowances, have been dropped entirely;
- appeal panels have been given less ability to make decisions which support the needs of a particular client;
- clients are no longer informed about their right to appeal;
- in October of 1993, rates were cut. A single person receives \$394 per month to cover rent, food, clothing, telephone and transportation costs.

By 1995, Alberta's welfare caseload had dropped to 49,000, down by 48% from January, 1993. This slashing of welfare loads is viewed as nothing short of miraculous in many parts of the country and is considered as a model for reforms. But there has not been any evaluation of the human impact of these changes. The goals of the welfare program, called Supports for Independence, have not been reviewed or publicly discussed. However, Social service agencies cite growing numbers of people needing food banks and foregoing other necessities such as children's winter clothing and baby formula.

In April of 1996, the new Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) Plan will replace the Canada Assistance Plan. Some have expressed concern that welfare programs in other parts of Canada will start to look more like Alberta's. After all the planning and discussions in Canada about income security programs, it is important to remember that social policy is about people. It is about real people with hopes and dreams.

Darryl Martin is a young man with hopes and dreams who lost his small network marketing business in Ontario. He moved to Edmonton looking for work, but found himself on Welfare, living at the Y. This is an excerpt from