

Family Policy in Ontario and Québec: Different from afar or far from different?
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INTRODUCTION

On October 22, 2008, Parti Québécois leader Pauline Marois was fêted, of all places, in Toronto. The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC) decided to honour Ms. Marois for being a champion for childcare on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the introduction of Québec's universal low-cost childcare program. The distinction between Québec, with its innovative child care program to support early learning and high rates of parental labour force participation, and neighbouring Ontario, where middle-class working parents need to make difficult trade-offs about cost and quality, may seem stark. Even in proximate areas, such as parental leaves and child benefits, meaningful distinctions can be made between the provinces. For instance, Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay (2009) argues that Québec's family policies provide an interesting model for English Canadian feminists to champion given their ability to deliver better maternity benefits and to encourage a more egalitarian sharing of infant-care between parents.

This chapter has two aims. First, it seeks to compare recent developments in family policies in Ontario and Québec. While it is tempting to highlight divergences, as we have above, it is easy to overlook convergences between the two provinces, particularly in the social pressures motivating family policy and in the conceptions of policy makers about social risks and social architecture. Indeed, while Québec exceptionalism has a long pedigree in this area, it is notable how quickly the area of exception can change. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, observers might emphasize the pro-natalist features of Québec policy, especially in the design of child benefits and birth bonuses, while ignoring commonalities in childcare. In giving an award to Marois, the OCBCC was recognizing Québec's 1997 family policy which greatly stripped out explicit pro-natalist goals, aligned the tax/transfer system closer to the approaches of the federal government, but pushed childcare into a qualitatively different place than in the other provinces (Jenson, 2002; Dandurand and Saint-Pierre, 2000). In other words, while we find divergence in policies, we need to be aware of the fluidity of policy differences, on the one hand, and of the existence of some convergence in the social forms giving rise to the policies and in the ideational frameworks shaping them, on the other. Our second aim is to explain the observed commonalities and differences, particularly using existing secondary accounts. While there are many different conceptual frameworks used to create typologies of family policies, the drive to typologize in itself privileges finding differences across countries, so as to fill out the boxes. We instead employ geographic theories that have been used in an attempt to understand the spatialities and temporalities of neoliberalism, as they seek to both hold onto the structural forces driving state policies and strategies in all places, even while accounting for variability and seeking to understand the causes for that variability.

To this end, the chapter starts with a brief discussion of how one might define family policy. Family policy has received a new importance in policy discussions due to the way it interacts with the "new social risks" of post-industrial economies, and thus for how it can become a cornerstone for a new social architecture. As such, similarities and

differences in policies can be grasped with a political economy framework that relates childcare policies to broader struggles within polities over production and reproduction. This framework is then applied to policy developments in this field in Ontario and Québec over the past 15-20 years, and a discussion of the policy drivers that account for the different policies. In general, we find that the differences between the provinces are driven by the presence of the women's movement and a family movement in the Québec case compared to the dominance of child development experts in Ontario.

DEFINING FAMILY POLICY

Delimitating the field of family policy for this study is difficult for two reasons. First, on an empirical level, Québec provides a series of programs that it defines as comprising its "family policy" and that gives rise to studies and reports within and outside the government in terms of how family policy is succeeding or failing in its ambitions. There is no parallel construction of a family policy field in Ontario (or elsewhere in North American – see Dandurand and St-Pierre, 2000), with at best rhetorical claims to specific policies helping "working families". So a pure empirical comparison of what these provincial communities define as constituting "family policy" is not possible. As a result, we must rely on social scientific constructions of what family policy is, but even here there are problems.

Maureen Baker, in her magisterial book *Restructuring Family Policy* (2006: 15), defines family policy as "official decisions to implement certain state-sponsored social programs, services, regulations, and laws relating to families". This is a problematic place to start because the grounds for excluding policies are very weak. Everything from the level of minimum wages through to immigration provisions affecting the organization of transnational care chains can be seen as affecting the manner in which families at different points on the income distribution organize their work and caring activities. In practice, work on family policy tends to focus on policies at the interface of the labour market and child bearing/rearing. The usual suspects include child benefits, parental leaves and childcare policies. This reflects an early definition of the field around the problematic of women's increased labour force participation, and how this put pressure on "two of the most central institutions in society: the family and the workplace" (Kamerman and Kahn, 1981). A second strand of family policy research, about how policies promote particular "model" families in terms of sexuality and parentage, intersects with this first one, particularly in developing multidimensional typologies.

In this chapter, we will adopt this narrow view of family policy, defined by policies immediately conceived around this nexus, albeit while admitting that it is very problematic to call this "family policy" *tout court*. For while it certainly considers how public policies affect the relationships between parents and the labour market, and can sometimes touch on aspects of gender relations in the family related to care work and income sharing, it ignores how many other policies shape families and the possibilities available to those within families. Thus, when we write about family policy, we are conscious of not touching on a whole realm of policies affecting women's autonomy to freely choose familial attachments, such as spouse-in-the-house rules in social assistance or the panoply of measures relating to familial violence. This tendency to take a partial view of women in families (see Brush, 2002) no doubt owes something to the emphasis

on children, an emphasis that also hides care pressures on families related to the care for elderly relatives.

FAMILY POLICY: INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Numerous classificatory typologies exist for comparing family policies across the western welfare democracies. Existing typologies tend to place Canada in a liberal/market category with low levels of investment and a fairly laissez-faire approach to normative family forms (providing no sustained support to either traditional family forms or to time-strapped dual earner families) (Ferrarini, 2006), although some argue that Québec's more generous parental leaves and its universal child care program push it towards a Scandinavian model of higher investment and greater support for dual earner families (and by extension working women) (Tremblay, 2009). There are nevertheless a number of reasons why this chapter does not simply place Ontario and Québec within one (or a few) of these typologies, and instead applies a different set of theoretical lenses to organize the comparison.

First, while the cultural importance of notions of the family should make for relatively stable distinctions between countries over the long term, especially given the durability of the broader welfare state and production regime frames within which they are embedded, the multiplication of taxonomies and the lack of consensus around a smaller number of them suggests otherwise. Part of the explanation resides in the difficulty of assembling data across jurisdictions: the service intensity of some family policy makes it hard to quantify; the decentralization of provision makes it hard to get reliable aggregate totals (Ferrarini, 2006: 4-6); relatively specific aspects of policy design can have strong implications about ideal family forms; and individual policies may have slightly different aims and goals (cf. Jenson, 2002's discussion of Québec's family policy), which can either lead to conflicting placements in typologies, or the need to consider the overall package of policies when determining a country's placement (see also Baker, 2006 for the potential and limits of existing typologies).

An additional problem with comparative typologies is that they are comparing a moving target given substantial recent innovations and investments across the Western post-industrial countries. This raises the twin dangers that typological analysis is insufficiently diachronic, on the one hand, and too prone to emphasize differences between political units at the expense of considering areas where they converge or at least undergo parallel developments. The discourse of international organizations, including the OECD, tilts strongly towards investing in child-focused family policies. Within this discourse community, it is worth noting, Canada outside Québec (including Ontario) is seen as a laggard, especially in terms of childcare. There are a variety of rationales for investment coming from different actors. These include effects on human capital formation, the potential for life-long learning, the prevention of future social problems, and encouraging greater gender equity (Mahon, 2009).

The most widely known take on child and family policy across the post-industrial economies nevertheless remains the one focussed on the "new social risks" of the modern knowledge-based economy. Drawing heavily on the work of Gosta Esping-Andersen (2002), this view argues that the family is at the centre of viable and competitive welfare states for a variety of interacting reasons. First, the two-earner household is central to reducing the risk of poverty, and especially child-poverty, and so needs to be supported

with transfers and services in order to be able to combine paid work with child rearing. This support has a spin-off effect of creating new service jobs, thus contributing to the achievement of full employment. However, given what epistemic communities in child brain science have been saying about the importance of the early years, it is not enough to warehouse children while their parents work – instead, children need access to forms of education and early learning as part of their care if they are to fully develop their capacities for life-long learning. For similar reasons, child poverty needs to be combated given its demonstrated impact over the life course in terms of imposing higher costs on the state, which again favours policies supporting low-income parents, be they supportive services or income transfers. Variations on this story have been taken up by social policy advocates in Canada (e.g. Jenson, 2004; Maxwell, 2003) in discussions of new social risks and of the necessary social architecture to manage them, and are certainly visible and discernable in the political-speak of the Ontario and Québec governments.

If we abstract from the language of policy practitioners, though, we can see that the language of “new social risks” points to the inadequation between existing social policies and emerging economic practices, leading to problems of social reproduction. In other words, the forms of neoliberal capitalism practiced in the Western countries have squeezed the time and resources that families have to provide or purchase care, which opens a debate about appropriate public policy responses to close the gap. The work on New Social Risks is strongly conditioned by the realization that the neoliberal policy paradigm either lacks compelling answers to the new social risks, or provides answers that are ineffective and inefficient in building competitive post-industrial economies. Phrased in a more critical view, it speaks to a crisis of social reproduction, in the sense that current forms of economic competition are reliant on extra-economic inputs that are consumed faster than they are reproduced (Jessop, 2000; Vosko, 2006), including the caring capacity of families, social cohesion and skilling. The response in the more liberal market economies like Canada has been to attempt to re-embed the economic in the social in an effort to realize the gains of neoliberalism while dampening instabilities around social reproduction. This can be seen in a fairly pure Polanyian sense as a re-embedding moment of “inclusive neoliberalism” (Craig and Cotterell, 2007), or as a more complicated debate between varieties of liberalism, wherein a more social or egalitarian strain of liberalism has successfully challenged aspects of neoliberalism, leading to an “inclusive liberalism” with a slightly thicker sense of ensuring equality of opportunity to individuals in developing their capacities (Mahon, 2008).

In considering family policies in this perspective, one means of distinguishing between them is not on the dimensions of existing typologies (although these retain their interest and value), but on how family policies are reinvented within the new policy context, and the broader context of economic change. If we are in a new period of social policy making where the child and the family take on more importance as objects of policy, then one angle of comparison is to understand how this perspective is taken up and implemented in different contexts. Following Klodawsky (2009) we can consider three ideal-typical responses: one where family policies are *rolled-out* in the goal of extending market metrics deeper into the life world; a second where family policies act as *flanking mechanisms* by ameliorating the worst damages of neoliberalism without challenging the core of the neoliberal project, and a third where they act as *countervailing measures*, opening possibilities beyond neoliberalism. While the level of abstraction

involved in such analysis means that policies could relate to more than one response (e.g. a universal childcare program could both encourage the greater commodification of parental labour, even as its universality reflected a countervailing break with neoliberalism), this three-pronged distinction allows us to distinguish neoliberal policies from inclusive liberal ones, and indeed to consider policies that push beyond inclusive liberalism towards social democracy. In placing Ontario and Québec policies against this backdrop, we will also give some consideration to the forces that account for their placement: much work on new social risks gives pride of place to the experts in epistemic communities who identify the risks and solutions to them, but work on inclusive liberalism (e.g. Craig and Cotterell, 2007) also suggests that political parties, particularly those trying to appeal to middle-class female voters, have an important role to play in developing such policy responses. Finally, more historical-institutionalist readings suggest we need also look at a broader range of social movement actors in accounting for policy shifts in the area (e.g. Jenson, 2002). Thus, if we observe differences, we will attempt to understand these in terms of the agency of actors.

ONTARIO

Ontario has never had a defined family policy, but in the child-care sector, it was for some time a leader among the provinces. As Mahon has demonstrated in a series of articles (e.g. 2010), childcare activism has long been vibrant in Toronto, starting with municipal efforts to retain nonparental childcare facilities after the Second World War and extended in the 1970s and 1980s with organizing by second wave feminists seeking an affordable and high quality system. The political organization of this sector has remained a little unusual, however, in being based around the Toronto municipal government and seeking to scale up its model through supportive policies at the provincial and federal levels. Through to the late 1980s, the narrative around this advocacy would be one of provincial success and federal failure. While childcare policy proposed by the federal conservative government in 1988 was roundly deemed insufficient and was then jettisoned, the Liberal provincial government of David Peterson announced its willingness to push forward in the late 1980s with the expansion of junior kindergarten, income-tested (rather than needs-tested) childcare subsidies, and direct operating grants to childcare centres, although it backed off when federal support was not forthcoming (Mahon, 2010).

If we move outside childcare to child benefits and parental leaves, however, Ontario has traditionally been reliant on federal initiatives, with parental leaves being delivered through the unemployment insurance system, and child benefits through federal family allowances. The possibility of an Ontario child benefit nevertheless did crop up during the Peterson government, specifically in the *Transitions* report of the Social Assistance Review Committee. Here it figured as a means of equalizing the treatment of social assistance recipients (who received benefits for their children) and the working poor (who did not), so as to aid transitions from social assistance to work.

Madly off in two directions

The election of an NDP majority government in 1990 promised to see a further development of family policies, especially as it tried to accelerate the reformism of the Peterson government in a period where some of the new social risk talk was making progress, especially around measures to activate social assistance recipients and to promote healthy child development in the early years. The NDP government planned to introduce universal childcare in Ontario by February 1994. The government planned to grant funds to day care centres directly, organize funding regionally, and set a maximum fee level (White, 1997). However, in 1994, responding to a deep recession of Ontario's economy in the early 1990s, the NDP deferred its longer-term strategy for a universal system, including the conversion of private operations to non-profit status and the development of pre-school for three to five year-olds. It instead moved to creating new subsidized child care spaces (with supporting funds for capital expenses) to support its activation policies (Mahon, 2010), and even here the signals around social assistance reform, such as the 1993 *Turning Point* proposals, pointed to the creation of child benefits as the main line of attack, rather than developing child care services. In its longer-term strategizing, the government nevertheless brought together a coalition of child care advocates with a strong rooting in the women's movement, along with child development experts focused on early learning and prevention, to sketch out an early childhood education system that responded to a wide range of agendas. This would be swept off the table with the 1995-2003 Conservative government, and would come back with much of the feminist content shorn off.

The Conservative party that won the 1995 election nevertheless remained unconvinced by such long term strategies and tried to roll back NDP initiatives such as pay equity in the child care sector, capital and start up funds, funding for junior kindergarten, funds for child care in new schools, and privileging non-profit providers (Mahon, 2010). In total, during the Conservative reign, expenditures for child care fell from roughly 600 million in 1994-95 to 516.4 million in 2001 (Cleveland and Colley, 2003).

The story of child policy is nevertheless a bit more complicated than a simple rolling back of preceding initiatives. It could not escape the influence of thinking around the early years, at least as this was channelled through federal-provincial processes such as the creation of the National Child Benefit (NCB) Supplement. Because this benefit was treated as income, the province was allowed to claw-back an equivalent amount from social assistance recipients provided it invested it elsewhere. In 1998 Ontario introduced its own Child Care Supplement for Working Families to help offset the claw-back for low-income working families with non-regulated child care expenses, there nevertheless was no mechanism to ensure it was spent on childcare, let alone regulated child care. The impetus of federal government interest in early childhood policies again pushed the provincial government to action in 2000, when Ontario signed an Early Childhood Development Agreement (ECDA) with the federal government. Initiated in 2001 and inspired by the National Children's Agenda, the agreement entailed four key programs targeting pregnancy, birth and infancy; parental training and supports; community supports; and, early childhood learning, development and care. The premise of the Plan was to encourage and support the health and intellectual development of the child from zero to age 6 years. To this end, Early Years Centres were created across the province to serve as a clearinghouse for parents, communities and eventually child care providers.

Services included, lending libraries, breastfeeding support, child behavioural counselling, literacy and outreach services and child-centred activities.

The Early Years Centres were Ontario's main means of channelling new federal funds, but their origins looked back to the Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard *Early Years Study*, submitted to the provincial government in 1999. The report synthesized much of the neuroscience behind the inclusive liberal case for investments in children, namely that the full development of individuals is greatly related to healthy brain development at a young age. It recommended the creation of early childhood development and parenting centres, with an educational focus and the provision of non-parental care. Yet the implementation of the report, mirroring the provincial response to new federal early childhood programming, was to steer clear of supporting non-parental childcare and to instead fund a series of drop-in and resource centres across the province. Indifference to the changing structure of families and social diversity along with the lack of concentrated funding, some argue, resulted in the Plan "failing to support high-quality, accessible, regulated child care" (Vosko, 2006). The result of the Early Years Plan in general and the Early Years Centres in particular was to exacerbate inequalities and escalate tensions in social reproduction because of the ideology of individualization, privatization and familialization underpinning the Plan. As Mahon (2010) notes more broadly of the ECDA, the Ontario government received \$844M from the federal government without creating (or being obliged to create) a single childcare space.

This set of policies was not greatly attuned with new social risks. The Role of Government Panel commissioned by Premier Harris in his last days in office, underlined that Ontario's policies were out of touch with social changes such as very high rates (70%+) of labour market participation by women with preschool children, reduced economic security for workers, and increased rates of in-work poverty. As Judith Maxwell's (2003) big picture overview underlined, families and individuals were being asked to carry more risk on their shoulders without the development of new supports to reconcile work and care, to mitigate risks, or to aid moves out of low pay. The thrust of the argument was that neoliberalism had led to an efficiency drive, but one that simply tightened post-war programs rather than retooling them for a changed society. More specifically, the failure to deal with new social risks could be seen in several areas. As of 2008, for instance, Ontario had regulated childcare spaces for only 13.6% of children 0-12 (and 19.6% for 0-5) versus 36% in Québec (25% for Québec) (Mahon, 2010). Similarly, income inequality in Ontario for families raising children, which used to be more closely clustered than in other provinces, increased dramatically more quickly over the 1990s, at least when measured in terms of the ratio of the top and bottom deciles. The bottom 40% of families saw their incomes stall since the 1970s despite increasing their annual number of weeks of work (Yalnizyan, 2007).

The Liberal victory in the 2003 election hinted at possible changes, in that McGuinty promised to re-invest in childcare by making early learning a priority. The federal Liberals were equally on board, and promised to tackle the issue comprehensively based on the QUAD principles (quality, universally accessible and developmental). However, before this initiative could adequately take root, the Harper Conservatives won the federal election of 2006, and with this victory announced plans to withdraw from federal funding arrangements. Instead, the Conservatives would launch their own "so called" universal child care benefit – a taxable benefit of \$100 a month for each child

under the age of six that families were not required to spend on child care. In spite of the Harper plan, the McGuinty government chose to go ahead and spend 105.7 million to help municipalities sustain childcare centres and 24.8 million to fund an average wage increase of 3% for child care workers (Mahon, 2010).

The recession of 2008 compelled the McGuinty government to focus on poverty-reductions strategies, of which reducing child poverty became the most critical. In 2009, Ontario commissioned the Pascal report, which recommended a “seamless day” (full day) for children from 4-5, and eventually after school care for 6-12 year olds. The government’s policy, which would be rolled out gradually, allocated \$200 million to achieve the “seamless day” for 4-5 year olds, and earmarked another \$700 million for 2011. This came on the heels of the Pascal report, which was heavily steeped in the worldview that early learning is an economic and social imperative in knowledge-based economies, as well as work on a poverty-reduction strategy that likewise supported early interventions as a form of prevention. Allocating 63.5 million to replace the federal QUAD funds, the McGuinty government continued to support child care spaces abandoned by the federal government, allowing some 1,000 child care workers to keep their jobs (“Ontario”, 2010). Moreover, the province has been working with local government to provide capital funding for centres and increase the number of subsidized spaces (Mahon, 2010). On this front, then, we see the renewal of initiatives to ramp up public funding and universal access, especially for four and five-year olds, but framed largely in terms of child development and prevention, with little in the way of policy design or rhetoric to respond to feminist agendas of gender equality and of job quality for the childcare workforce.

While Ontario is ever so slowly closing the gap with Québec in terms of early childhood education, it was slightly more aggressive in closing the gap with the launch of the Ontario Child Benefit in 2007. In 2010, it provides \$1100 per child per year in excess of federal child benefits to low-income parents. The adoption of the OCB places Ontario in the pack of other provinces who have used National Child Benefit Supplement monies clawed back from social assistance recipients to launch a provincial child benefit, and in the process will wind up the provincial child care subsidy for working parents. This sort of child benefit for low income Ontarians has a long pedigree, having been raised as part of the *Transitions* review of social assistance in the late 1980s (under the rubric of “taking children off welfare”) and again by the NDP government in 1993-1994, although it was abandoned at that point due to the cost and the lack of federal government cooperation. It resurfaced in the progressive social policy community after the 2003 provincial election (ex. Stapleton, 2004), and received additional credibility when put forward by the business-led Toronto City Summit Alliance as part of their report on Modernizing Income Support for Working Aged-Adults. By adding the OCB to federal child benefits and to various small tax credits, low-income parents now receive approximately \$6000 a year for a first child. While the OCB closes the gap with Québec in terms of support for low-income families, the phase-out point of benefits only reaches partway into the middle-class, and there is no transfer or tax credit with quasi-universal application like found in Québec. It seems almost entirely justified for its ability to break down the welfare-wall, as do several other small changes related to extending social assistance health and dental benefits to other low income earners.

In sum, family policies in Ontario are being introduced largely as flanking mechanisms. On the childcare side, there is a nod to universality in plans for full-day junior kindergarten, but within a broader context of underinvestment in childcare and education proper and weak supports for working parents of young children. Likewise, while child benefits do help close the gap between stagnant wages and family needs, their emphasis on the welfare wall means that they remain targeted and stingy and not a transformative game changer for time-strapped middle-income families.

QUÉBEC

Background

Unlike in Ontario, family policy as an explicit area of public policy does have a pedigree in Québec, which is usually dated from the creation of the Ministère de la Famille et du Bien-être in 1961, the creation of the advisory Conseil supérieur de la famille in 1964, and the development of a separate system of family allowances in 1967 (Conseil, 2008, p. 10). Both the Ministère and the Conseil were closed as part of the integration of social policy functions into the Ministère des affaires sociales in the early 1970s, but the Conseil had succeeded in developing both a set of ideas about family policy and a supportive network of non-state organizations in the policy area such that the policy area did not entirely fall off the agenda in the shuffle. From the beginning, ideas about family policy were contested, with the emphasis on vertical redistribution ensuring the well being of individuals and families having the upper-hand, but not entirely displacing an interest in supporting natalism (Jenson, 1998, 204). The balance shifted towards natalism (but again, with alternative understandings remaining strong enough to contest the shift) under the Parti Québécois in the late 1970s, particularly in the context of developing demographic projections of the population needed to support the province's new industrial strategy, *Bâtir le Québec* (Jenson, 1998; Conseil, 2008). This fed into the Liberals' pro-natalist 1988 family policy, which included the famous "baby bonuses" which were set up to encourage families to have three or more children, as was an additional unpaid parental leave (Baker, 1990). There was more to this period than natalism, however, including a further development of concertation between state and non-state actors: the latter had called for state action in the early 1980s and engaged in a long consultative process which somewhat tempered the focus on birth rates. And in the aftermath of the 1988 strategy, state and non-state actors worked closely on three action plans, with the final one including commitments by both sets of actors. The re-creation of a *Conseil de la famille* and the creation of a *Secrétariat à la famille* in 1988 provided a renewed state capacity for such efforts (Conseil, 2008). The 1988 policy also reworked taxes and transfers, putting Québec ahead of the other provinces in delivering supports through the tax system.

Thus, while Baker (1990) emphasized natalism as what set Québec's policies apart in this period, the two more significant differences with Ontario leading into the current period of welfare state reform was the development of provincial tax/transfer policies (as compared to largely relying on federal efforts as in Ontario), and the structure of interests in the field with the development of a family policy network. While Ontario child care activists might look to Québec for inspiration in 2008, it had not been the

object of any family policy attention by the mid-1990s, and indeed was similarly developed or even less developed than Ontario's system if looked at in terms of spaces, profit/not-for-profit mix, or number of fee subsidies (CRRU, 1997).

Context for Recent Changes

Family policy making from the 1990s onward obviously built on this previous foundation, but also reflected a changed and changing environment. Consistent with other advanced industrial countries, Québec faced a period of budgetary austerity that encouraged the rationalization of existing programs and the shift of responsibility away from the state and towards families and the third sector (Dandurand and St.-Pierre, 2000). Neoliberal ideas were also present in several important policy discourses, mostly notably in the area of activation or workfare for social assistance recipients (Jenson, 2002), but it is also noteworthy that discourses of prevention were also well embedded in specialist discourses.

Family policy also had to respond to continued changes in the family, including the maturation of the trend to the dual earner family, as well as increased time-stress as the increased paid work-time supplied by families did not give rise to improved standard of living. The labour force participation rate for Québec women increased from 41% in 1976 to 61% in 2008, and the employment rate for women aged 25 to 44 increased from 48.4% in 1978 to 79.2% in 2008, outstripping the increase in Ontario from 63% to 77.8% over the same period. Despite this change in labour force participation, incomes have been largely stagnant, with family market incomes falling from 53900 in 1976 to 51900 in 2006 (in 2007 dollars) and post tax and transfer median family incomes trending up from 50600 to 54500 in the same time period. At the median, then, the main move has been a shift in the tax and transfer system making the median family a net beneficiary. The strength of the Québec tax and transfer system can also be seen in its ability to reduce inequalities between families, reducing the Gini coefficient (a common measure of income inequality) by 0.143 versus 0.109 in Ontario. Child benefits are no doubt part of the story here, and indeed transfers as a total account for 66% of the reduction in the Gini in Québec, versus 61% in Ontario (Godbout and Joanis, 2009). Despite this difference with Ontario, an equally important point is that labour markets absorbed the increase in women's paid labour supply, but failed to translate the per-capita GDP and productivity growth over the past quarter century into increased well-being, leaving it up to state to do the heavy lifting.

The 1997 family policy earthquake and after

In Québec, the big shift came with the 1997 family policy. The sources of this change are varied. Jenson (2002) emphasizes how the three elements of the family policy (discussed below) worked together as a package that could likewise stitch together a broad range of supporting constituencies. It brought together the emerging expert emphasis on prevention and child development with long-standing demands of the women's and family movements, and wedded them with a government concern with activating social assistance recipients (for a slightly different take, see Dandurand and Saint-Pierre, 2000). The ability to create this consensus owed something to the pre-existing family policy networks, and the presence of these networks explains why a policy crafted in a period of budgetary austerity and with a focus on activation

nevertheless has a strong flavour of equal opportunity, equity and solidarity (Jenson, 2002).

A first part of the family policy involved integrating three family allowances, including the famous baby bonuses, as well as child benefits within the social assistance system and packaging them into a single family allowance. These family allowances, which decreased with income, were coupled with the maintenance of a non-refundable family tax credit, the only such credit for families with children in Canada (Jenson, 2002; Conseil 2008). The second and best-known part of the family policy was the development of a low-cost, universal childcare programme, to be delivered by *Centres de la petite enfance*. These are non-profit centres set up under the program, which were responsible for offering care as well as supervising family day cares. This prong of the family policy thus encouraged the creation of non-profit and responsive community organizations with an emphasis on quality, and the subsidization of the spaces they created in order to keep the parental contribution to \$5 per day (Jenson, 2002). The final part of the 1997 strategy to be implemented was the parental leave policy, and this required negotiations with the federal government as well as an ultimately unsuccessful challenge of federal jurisdiction in the area. It went into effect in 2006, and has proved more popular than anticipated. The program stands apart from the federal one both in three ways: first, it offers better replacement rates; second, it hives off some time (3-5 weeks) that can only be used by the father; and third, it is based on earned income rather than employment insurance eligibility, thereby opening access to parents with little work income or who earn their income in atypical jobs that lack employment insurance protection (Chaussard *et al.*, 2008; Tremblay, 2009).

While the 1997-2003 period were marked by the implementation of the policy, and especially the difficult work of developing a large number of new regulated spaces in the face of parental expectations that they had a right to a space in the system, the post-2003 period has witnessed some changes in the policy that have changed its meaning. Early in its first mandate, the Liberals indicated a preference for raising rates, especially for families with higher incomes, but were pushed back by popular organization and instead only increased fees to \$7 per day. The more important changes were subtler and less evident. First, the Liberals showed a marked preference for providing access to state subsidies tied to the \$7/day programme for for-profit centres, ostensibly because their lack of democratic boards of directors meant they could bring new spaces on line more quickly. The result has been to favour for-profit providers and to increase the dosage of a day care philosophy over one centred on quality early childhood education (Jenson, 2009). Second, the governance of the system was changed to narrow the scope of authority of the *Centres de la petite enfance*, with their community boards and emphasis on educational quality, in favour of larger coordinating agencies. This trend has been accentuated with the 2010 provincial budget, which increased the tax credit for child care expenses rather than investing in creating new spaces in the public system (Roy and Robitaille, 2010).

At the same time, the Liberal government in 2005 consolidated and enriched child benefits, consolidating existing tax credits and allowances into the refundable *Soutien aux enfants* tax credit. Couples with children are guaranteed \$611 per year for a first child, while single parents receive no less than \$916. However, income-tested benefits bring those sums to \$2176 for couples earning under \$44,788 and \$2938 for single parents with

an income below \$32,856, which is roughly two to three times the rate of the Ontario Child Benefit but still \$1000-\$2000 below many other (Conseil, 2008). At the same time, the government set up another refundable tax credit, the *Prime au travail*, to replace the existing wage supplement for working parents.

In sum, while the universality and public sector emphasis of the 1997 policy, coupled with its empowerment of community-based organizations (the CPEs) seemingly looked beyond neoliberalism, the treatment of public sector funding as a means to subsidize private sector day care operations points to the further roll-out of neoliberalism, as does the capacity of private operators to resell day care licenses acquired at \$157 for a million dollars (Roy and Robitaille, 2010), or the relative impunity with which they can charge illegal supplementary fees. The point here is not that the Québec child-care policy has become a “commons” to be privatized as a new profit centre as neoliberalism is rolled out, but to note this countertrend. It still seems safe to present it as part of a flanking strategy, concerned with enabling high labour market participation and with nipping long-term problems in the bud during the early years, that verges towards serving as a countervailing strategy in its universalism, its interest in quality, its language around women’s equality, and its grounding in community. Nevertheless, changes under the post-2003 Liberal government have shifted the balance between flanking and countervailing elements towards the former.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If we were to place the provinces in terms of the categories discussed in section 3 above, we could see them as both as experimenting with flanking mechanisms, but where Québec practice to date has opened doors towards countervailing alternatives. This can be seen most clearly in the choice of a universal, developmental model of early childhood education, and its possibilities for higher quality work in the care sector. It can also be seen in a system of parental leaves with higher replacement rates and with incentives for fathers to share in the care.

While the account of this chapter is consistent with the idea of Québec’s difference, it remains that the context of increased labour force participation and stagnant incomes has led both Ontario and Québec families to respond by increasing hours worked. In this context, then, and despite evidence that family policies are working to change gender roles in a more egalitarian direction in Québec more quickly than in the Rest of Canada (Tremblay, 2008), Québec families are still under a great deal of stress in trying to reconcile caring and paid work responsibilities (Tézli and Gauthier, 2009). Moreover, with Ontario’s move to full-day junior kindergarten and the adoption of an Ontario Child Benefit, some of the distance between the two provinces on the income and child-care fronts is being narrowed, without much evidence that Québec is going to take a qualitative step that would distance itself from Ontario anew. As such, while there is good reason to portray Québec policies as a significant policy departure from the Canadian model (which Ontario exemplifies well), it remains a flanking mechanism for neoliberalism as much as a window into a non-neoliberal alternative.

Nevertheless, while the family policies largely sit in the same box, the placement of the provinces in these boxes varies. Consistent with Craig and Cotterell (2007), political parties do matter. Inclusive liberal departures are related to the presence of

parties of social reform, be it the PQ in Québec or the Ontario Liberals, while the progress of inclusive liberalism largely stalls under the right-of-centre Québec Liberals or is turned back under the right-of-centre Ontario Conservatives. Such an account is nevertheless not entirely satisfactory. It works better for Ontario, where the Harris Conservative government mobilized an angry working and middle-class male constituency, and where the Liberals were elected in 2003 on promises to clean up the dislocation and inequality created by the Conservatives. Even here, though, the Liberals only half fit the script, not fitting the mould of the social democratic party.

An additional explanation comes from the study of social movements interacting with the state. As we have seen, family policy in Québec has been elaborated in an ongoing discussion with actors outside the state, including a family movement and the women's movement. The reasons for the greater porosity of the Québec state to organized interests, also observed in other policy domains (Hamel and Jouve, 2006), remains to be fully explained, but no doubt owes something both to the strength and organization of advocacy groups in Québec (Laforest, 2007) and to nationalism's tendency to attempt to foster the appearance of inclusion (Béland and Lecours, 2008). By contrast, the Ontario state was slower to develop mechanisms to represent and engage such groups, and quicker to disband such mechanisms in the neoliberal nineties. This brings us back to the role of political parties, but also to recognize how institutions as congealments of power limit the freedom of parties, as the announced intent of the post-2003 Liberal party to strip such "corporatism" out of the state encountered significant resistance and has been only partially and stealthily implemented.

This difference in porosity therefore led to differences in who could be part of the inner circle of policy participation in the two cases. While similar ideas about the role of family policy in dealing with new social risks were in the air in both Ontario and Québec (Mahon, 2010), different sets of actors were closely involved in policy discussions leading to different policy outcomes. Of particular importance were the women's movement and the family movement in Québec. These actors took a discussion centred around new social risks and broadened the options to include additional values including vertical and horizontal redistribution in support of families, and the value of universal childcare as part of a woman-friendly development model.

These actors were not nearly as central to Ontario policy-making. The women's movement in Ontario was much weakened under the Harris Conservative government, and there was never anything like a family movement. As a result, when the policy community came around to the question of new social risks, there were no voices pushing either a social democratic agenda for childcare, or for a combination of universal and income-tested family benefits. As a result, the actors pushing family policies onto the agenda under the post-2003 Liberal government were much more tied to discourses on prevention in the Early Years, and to the importance of child benefits as a means of breaking down a purported welfare wall.

In the bigger picture of thinking about Ontario and Québec, the case of family policy demonstrates the salience of some well-entrenched differences around the porosity of the state and the strength of different social actors (such as the women's and community movements). However, differences also flowed from electoral choices between parties, giving more fluidity over time to the extent and sources of difference. Finally, the temptation when comparing the provinces is to look for differences, but, at

least in this policy area, commonalities arising from international policy thinking, the working of contemporary political economies, and broad philosophies about economics and politics, mean those differences are inscribed within important similarities that are also worth sounding out.

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