

The early settlers, their descendants and those who have continued to migrate to Canada to the present day have found themselves in possession of a land of great natural resources. But between the resources and their conversion into wealth have stood enormous obstacles of distance, climate and terrain. Thus Canada has been intensely preoccupied with the development of its resources through much of its history. Its people have had to find ways of developing its fisheries, the important fur trade of the early days, lumbering, and diverse forms of agriculture, mining and manufacturing. Though now concurrent elements in the structure of Canada's economy, these various types of industrial activity have often called for different social organizations and responses. Transition from one type of economic activity to another has, from the earliest times, produced human casualties. Countless individuals and families and some social groups have often been unable to meet the challenge of change.

At all times, however, there have been attempts to respond to the needs of the poor, the ill, the aged, the dependent child, the delinquent and the misfit. Accounts of the charitable work of the early missionaries and of the religious orders form a luminous chapter in the chronicles of New France and in the subsequent history of the Province of Quebec. In the Atlantic provinces efforts, never wholly successful, were made to adapt the Poor Law of Elizabethan England to the very different conditions of North American life. In Ontario, during the later decades of the nineteenth century, public and voluntary social welfare programmes formed a complementary structure of services that the province felt could bear favourable comparison with that of any jurisdiction in Europe or America.

However, even where institutional programmes were developed which met, with reasonable effectiveness, conditions of the rural society characteristic of most of nineteenth century Canada (and, in some provinces, of the early decades of the twentieth century), they proved gravely inadequate to meet the demands of the urban industrial society which has been developing at an ever accelerating pace since the 1880s.

While industrialization and urbanization have been dominant in determining the social facts to which Canada's health and welfare programmes have had to be related, a multitude of other factors have strongly influenced their development. Some of these have been mentioned; others should be identified.

Some have to do with broad economic, political and demographic questions: Canada's part in two world wars necessitating special provisions for the disabled and the dependent survivors; the seasonal nature of important sectors of the Canadian economy, the vulnerability of other sectors to fluctuations in the export market and to the terms of trade; the wide differences between the provinces in terms of size, population, per capita income and degree of industrialization; the division of powers between the Federal Government and the provinces in the fields of health, welfare, and corrections; the differing attitudes of the provinces to the development or support of social welfare programmes by the Federal Government; the problems of bringing the native peoples - Indians and Eskimos - into participation in the economic and social life of the nation, especially in ways which meet the defferent needs of different groups across Canada.