

Social Welfare in Canada

A Paper prepared for the International
Conference of Ministers Responsible for
Social Welfare held at the Headquarters
of the United Nations in New York
from September 3 to 12, 1968.

I. FACTORS AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES

In celebrating their centennial as citizens of a federal state in 1967, Canadians devoted unprecedented thought to their economic, social and cultural progress and to the strengths and weaknesses in the fabric of Canadian society. In reviewing their past, they looked back not only to their century of national life, but to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when French and English settlements were established in the Atlantic provinces and along the St. Lawrence waterway.

By the end of the period of colonial wars in 1763, French settlement, particularly in what is now the Province of Quebec, had made an indelible imprint not only on the physical development of the country, but also upon its social institutions. The arrival of the United Empire Loyalists following the American Revolution, the subsequent influx of other settlers from the United States of America and the large immigration, particularly from the British Isles, following the Napoleonic wars established a trend of settlement and development in which English influences were destined to become predominant in what are now the provinces west of Quebec and placed a similar stamp on three of the four Atlantic provinces, the exception being New Brunswick where the French-speaking Acadians were ultimately to equal their English-speaking neighbours in numbers and influence.

If the most powerful outside forces shaping the development of the Canadian society came initially from France and Britain (with lesser but important influence from other countries, mostly European), it is the United States, with which Canada shares 4,000 miles of common boundary, that has increasingly affected the economic and social life of the Canadian peoples.