

## Two Sides of the Same Coin?

"The Growing Role of Voluntary Sector Social Services and the Criminalization of the Poor in Canada."

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### Context

- Growing role of voluntary sector as a key social service domain
  - Food banks emerge in early 1980s
  - Major cuts to social programs in 1980s and 1990s
- Federal, provincial, and municipal governments begin to push for a larger role for charities, non-profit and voluntary organizations

### Research Question

Can we ascertain interconnections between the rationales and sensibilities underlying the growing promotion of voluntary welfare services and the criminalization of the poor?

### Analytical tools

- Discursive Institutionalism
- Ethnography

### Major Initiatives

- Social Union Framework Agreement
- Voluntary sector Initiative
- New Deal for Cities and Communities
- National Homelessness Initiative
- Canadian Strategy on HIV/AIDs
- Social Development Partnerships Initiative
- Community Action Program for Children
- National Crime Prevention Strategy

...we are showcasing today the special value of the voluntary sector. A sector that engages Canadians across the country in the life of their communities, providing services and giving voice to shared concerns. A sector that is, in short, *essential to our collective well being*. Emphasis added.

Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, 2001.

What makes our communities strong is the willingness of men and women from all walks of life to take responsibility for their future and for one another. We can see this in the number of voluntary organizations and social economy enterprises that are finding *local solutions to local problems*. The Government is determined to foster the social economy – the myriad not-for-profit activities and enterprises that harness civic and entrepreneurial energies for community benefit right across Canada. Emphasis added.

Speech from the Throne, October 5, 2004.

The social economy refers to those enterprises and organizations which use the tools and some of the methods of business, on a not-for-profit basis, to provide social, cultural, economic and health services to communities that need them. *The social economy is characterized by cooperative enterprises, based on principles of community solidarity, that respond to new needs in social and health services, typically at the community or regional level.* Emphasis added.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Strategic Initiative, The Social Economy, 2005.

#### Growing Criminalization of the Poor

- Panhandling (City by-laws)
- Squeegee kids (City by-laws)
- Scavengers (City by-laws)
- Welfare snitch lines (Provincial policy)

#### Case Study: Fredericton, New Brunswick

Population: 81,355

Unemployment rate 9.7: “single digit”

Province shifts from resource to service based economy

Federalism: “have not” province

#### New Brunswick Government

- Early 1980s begins to push for larger role of voluntary sector as a cost-cutting measure
- Proliferation of voluntary organizations
- Cuts to programs
- Single employable receives \$264 per month
  - Not enough to pay rent
  - “Economic unit” policy
  - Context of 10 percent unemployment

#### Assumptions of Voluntary Sector Initiatives

- Emphasis on individual responsibility
- Poverty construed as a problem of lack of self-responsibility
- Programs geared towards promoting “active citizenship”
- Some programs closely regulate individual conduct
  - Example: Homeless Shelter

## Assumptions of Criminalization

- Not “truly needy” if a person is panhandling
  - Police track “The King” and others to assess whether they live on the streets
- The “truly needy” rely on voluntary welfare services (shelters, community kitchens), etc.
- People undertaking more entrepreneurial activities to meet basic needs are, consequently, viewed as deviant and potentially criminal.

## Implications

- Normalization of more extreme forms of poverty
- Voluntary organizations become managers and regulators of the margins
- For those unwilling or unable to keep their poverty and disadvantage invisible, the police and the courts are prepared to ensure that they don't disrupt mainstream norms
- The existence of the voluntary services allows police and public officials to maintain a veneer of social responsibility.