Life and Work at the Margins:

(Un)employment, Poverty and Activism in Canada's Disability Community Since 1966

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Contents

> "The poor are not homogenous, nor are the causes of poverty singular. At the same
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> time, what unites all forms of poverty is that they result from social, economic and
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> political inequities."[1]

Living in poverty has been common for people with disabilities in Canada during the last century up to the present. Circumstances that give rise to and surround life with disability are incredibly varied, making the disability community one of the most diverse populations in Canada. Whether one acquires a disability from birth or later in life directly influences labour market outcomes, including whether an individual qualifies for workers' compensation, private insurance, public pension, social assistance or other forms of income support. Despite the varied policy environments that shape these income support systems, many men and women living with disability have experienced chronic and extreme poverty due to the inability to secure gainful employment owing to a confluence of socially-constructed barriers that block labour market participation. Since the 1960s, disabled men and women have organized themselves to confront barriers to the labour market as part of a wider struggle against the traditional belief that disability equated a lifetime of poverty and unemployment. The emergence of poor peoples' movements across North America in the postwar period coincided with a period of intense change and policy reform affecting disabled people. Disability activists and their allies railed against institutionalized exclusion from mainstream society as radical anti-poverty activists and their allies awakened the collective consciousness of Canadians to the experiences of poor and disabled people. Seeking various reforms to lift marginalized populations out of poverty, disability and anti-poverty activists in Canada pursued a shared agenda to improve mechanisms of

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[1] Coulter, K. (2012). Anti-poverty work: unions, poor workers and collective action in Canada. Rethinking the politics of labour in Canada. S. Ross and L. Savage. Halifax, Fernwood: 159.

income support while breaking down social and political barriers to the labour market. Collaboration between these distinct social movements contain important lessons for activists and policymakers, while the factors that have historically undermined their success inform the present and future state of disability policy and activism.

Dynamic partnerships between disability rights and anti-poverty movements and their relationships with policymakers beg a number of questions. How has disability policy split the Canadian disability community in terms of labour market participation? What public and private sector policies and programs have worked (or not) to reduce poverty and improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities? How have people with disabilities organized themselves to confront poverty and precarious employment? The following report examines these and other questions about poverty and activism in the Canadian disability community since the 1960s. The first section reviews historical patterns of unemployment and poverty in the disability community in the latter half of the twentieth century up to the present. The discussion moves beyond these troubling statistics to glimpse at how poverty and unemployment played a central role in the lives of individuals with disabilities. The second section tracks the evolution of the disability rights and anti-poverty movements in Canada, analyzing points of convergence and disunity between key organizations and activists. This discussion will also consider the influence of injured workers activism which, despite shared interests fit uneasily alongside disability and anti-poverty activism during this period. The third section considers the impact of social movement activism on the disability community and policymaking process. Commentators have been critical of the direct outcomes of social movement activism, but disability and anti-poverty activism undeniably influenced major policy developments and created broader public awareness about the causes and consequences of poverty. While "influence" is perhaps harder to measure than changes in unemployment statistics, social activism played an important role in the complex political process as

well as the dismantling of discriminatory attitudes and practices. The concluding section will sum up

these observations, taking stock to consider whether disabled poor people are any better off today

than they were fifty years ago and how historiography can be used to inform current policy decision

making.

Patterns of unemployment and poverty

Numerous studies since the 1960s have documented the prevalence of unemployment and

poverty among disabled Canadians. Sociologists and political scientists have repeatedly pointed to

high unemployment rates that contribute to disproportionate levels of poverty among people with

disabilities across Canada.[2] These studies indicate disabled Canadians have consistently been nearly

twice as likely as non-disabled Canadians to live below the poverty line and rely on social assistance

for income support. During this period, most of the total income of poor people with disabilities has

come from various kinds of government transfers.[3] When disabled people find employment, they

have tended to earn less money and have been concentrated in entry-level and low-wage jobs.[4]

Recent statistics for 2009 indicate average annual incomes among working-age poor disabled people

were highest in Alberta at only $11,482 and lowest in Nova Scotia at $8,565.[5] At the upper end of

working disabled people, it was estimated in 1993 that only 7.6% made over $30,000 compared to

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[2] Ravi Malhotra, "The Politics of the Disability Rights Movements," *New Politics* 8:3 (Summer 2001), accessed 17 August 2013: 2; Sarah Armstrong, "Disability Advocacy in the Charter Era," *Journal of Law & Equality* 2:1 (Spring 2003): 38-40.; Fawcett, G. (2000). Bringing down the barriers : the labour market and women with disabilities in Ontario, Canadian Council on Social Development.; Roeher Institute, (2001). Disability-related support arrangements : policy options and implications for women's equality. Ottawa, Status of Women Canada.; Harn, H. (1987). "Advertising the acceptably employable image: disability and capitalism." Policy Studies Journal 15(3): 552.

[3] Crawford, C. (2013). Looking into Poverty: Income Sources of Poor People with Disabilities in Canada. [S.l.], Institute for Research on Inclusion and Society.

[4] Hum, D. and W. Simpson (1996). "Canadians with Disabilities and the Labour Market." Canadian Public Policy / Analyse de Politiques 22(3): pp.-285-299.

[5] Crawford, 2013

15.1% of non-disabled workers.[6] Total employment of people with disabilities during this period

averaged between forty and fifty percent, with a high of 51.3% in 2006 and low of 40.3% in 1986.[7]

Disabled women in particular have been at an even higher risk of living in poverty. While

disability doubles the chances of living in poverty, young disabled women are nearly twice as likely to

receive social assistance than disabled men and three times more likely than non-disabled young

women.[8] The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCED) reported in 2000 that the poverty

rate among disabled women was a staggering 40% compared to 8% for non-disabled women.

Disabled women are more likely to live alone, experience hunger, rely on income support and

experience longer periods of unemployment. When they do find jobs, disabled women are often

concentrated in the lowest-paid unskilled jobs.[9]

Disabled people in Canada confronted a number of obstacles in the attempt to participate in

the labour market since the 1960s, including pervasive physical inaccessibility, employer resistance

and a welfare "poverty trap." These barriers perpetuated exclusion from opportunities to gain

conventional work and life experiences which often set disabled jobseekers on a separate track than

non-disabled workers. Successive policy and statistical reports demonstrated a disturbing pattern of

similar conclusions regarding chronic poverty and unemployment in the disability community

coupled with a recurring set of recommendations for improvement. These studies largely indicate

social assistance and disability benefits have (ironically) played a significant role in reinforcing

poverty in the disability community as many disabled people are forced to declare themselves

unemployable in order to continue receiving necessary benefits, consequently trapping them in a

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[6] Hum and Simpson, 1996.
[7] Crawford, 2013; Statistics Canada. (2007). Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Tables
Ottawa: Minister of Industry.; Statistics Canada. (2008). Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006: Labour
force experience of people with disabilities in Canada. Ottawa: Minister of Industry.; Cameron Crawford, "How Persons
with Disabilities Are Faring in the Canadian Labour Market and Economy: Considerations for Ongoing Monitoring and
Reporting," Toronto: Roeher Institute (1998).
[8] Crawford 2013
[9] Fawcett, 2000: 4-18

state of chronic unemployment.[10] These reports document a variety of barriers that have blocked

disabled people from participating in mainstream education, job training, affordable housing,

healthcare and other services, forcing many people to live in poverty and isolation.[11] A secondary

result of this status quo means disabled Canadians have been systematically stigmatized as recipients

of social assistance which, since at least the 1960s, have forced them to live in poverty join order to

receive benefits.[12]

Experiences of poverty and unemployment

In 2008 the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) initiated a major research and

outreach project called *Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship* that examines the impact of various

political institutions and programs on the economic opportunities of people with disabilities.[13] The

project spawned an annual community forum and "End Exclusion" rally, building on longstanding

efforts by disability activists to address widespread poverty and unemployment in the disability

community. Disability rights activists' continued focus on this message indicates that this ideological

work is far from over. Nova Scotia resident Calvin Wood was invited to speak at the project's

conference in Ottawa in early November 2010 on behalf of People First, an activist organization of

people with intellectual disabilities. Calvin said that there are many people like him who are trapped

in poverty by the social assistance he relies upon. In his case, he earns fifty dollars a month in

stipendiary wages at his part-time job to avoid cutting into his disability pension, which undermines

his attempts to work himself out of impoverishment. Calvin argues this system keeps people with

intellectual disabilities "poor and dependent." It was these conditions that led him to join People

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[10] Coulter, 2012: 159

[11] David Lepofsky, "The Long, Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario for People with Disabilities: The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*—The First Chapter," *National Journal of Constitutional Law* 15 (2004): 134

[12] Stapleton, J. (2013). The welfareization of disability incomes in Ontario : what are the factors causing this trend?: 7

[13] Crawford, C. (2010). Disabling Poverty and Enabling Citizenship: Understanding the Poverty and Exclusion of Canadians with Disabilities. Canada, Community–University Research Alliance.

First over fifteen years ago. He says that others like him "need jobs that will help us to be helpful in our communities and that will help us to live with some respect." He has learned "that we have rights like all Canadians, [though] I'm not sure is if having rights will help us come out of poverty."[14]

Individual narratives such as Calvin's demonstrate the ways in which unemployment and poverty shape the experience of disability. The following section provides key findings from semi-structured, in-depth oral interviews conducted with thirty people with disabilities in Toronto and other locations in southern Ontario regarding individual engagement with the labour market.[15] Three generations of work experiences from the 1960s to early 2000s reveal significant insights into the important role of poverty and unemployment and precarious work in the lives of disabled people.[16] Many people with disabilities in Canada during the late twentieth century did not exempt themselves from the conventional cultural expectation to work. Disabled people generally shared the mainstream ethos that participation in the competitive workforce constituted a primary feature of their identity and undertook opportunities to develop themselves through paid employment.

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[14] Wood, C. (2010). Poverty and Disability: My Lived Experience, Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

[15] Interview data was collected as part of a study into the work histories of people with disabilities in Canada. Participants signed waivers endorsed by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board approving use of this data for current and future studies by this author. Study participants include the narratives of individuals living with one or more experiences of visual impairment or blindness, hearing impairment, D/deafness, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, polio and post-polio syndrome, muscular dystrophy, spinal cord injury, scoliosis, back injuries, paraplegia, quadriplegia, fibromyalgia, brain injury, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disabilities, chronic depression, schizophrenia, autism, other mental health issues, and a number of concurrent disorders. Eleven male and nineteen female participants ranged in age from twenty-six to seventy-three, with an average age of fifty-three years old. The average age of participants entering the workforce was seventeen-years-old, with the youngest at eleven-years-old and the eldest at twenty-nine-years-old. Approximately fifty per cent of participants had entered the workforce before 1980 and another thirty percent between 1980 and 1984, indicating that the participant population was weighted comparatively in favour of the eldest generation followed by middle-aged workers. Of the seven participants who were retired or had stopped working at the time of the interview, most had retired after the year 2000 at an average age of fifty-five. The vast majority (ninety-three per cent) of participants identified as "white," "Caucasian," "European," or "Anglo Saxon."

[16] Vosko, L. (2009). Precarious Employment and the Challenges for Employment Policy. Public policy for women: the state, income security and labour market issues. M. G. Cohen and J. Pulkingham. Toronto, University Of Toronto Press.; Wilton, R. (2006). Working at the Margins: Disabled People and the Growth of Precarious Employment. Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy and Law. D. Pothier and R. F. Devlin. Vancouver, UBC Press: 129-150.

Born in the late 1940s, "Dan" lost most of his sight when a common medical practice at the time for premature infants resulted in overexposure to oxygen which irreparably damaged his eyesight. By age fourteen, Dan worked for a short time in an industrial workplace but soon found it was too dangerous given his visual impairment. He completed his high school years working summers at the CNIB's Caterplan tuck shops in various places throughout Toronto for $60 a week.[17] After a stint at a machine shop, he began a contract position with the provincial government that led into permanent full-time employment for the following five years. He returned to the non-profit sector where he acquired managerial experience that eventually led him to find various management positions in the federal government where he stayed for the remainder of his career. While Dan qualified as having a Bachelor of Arts, it was the result of an equivalency rating based on his extensive work experience and in-house training to which he attributed years of hard work and professional advancement. Dan asserted that his employment defined his personal identity. "Being employed for me it has meant that I can raise a family, enjoy a glass of wine, go to the theatre, have access to technology and do the normal things everybody else does. If I had been on social assistance all my life I would not have had those opportunities."[18]

"Rachel" entered the workforce as a seemingly able-bodied teenager in the early 1980s working at a variety of service sector jobs. She learned the value of paid employment at an early age when her father's physical disability removed him from the workforce and her family lived below the poverty line. "My uncle … was an engineer and he was middle class; much wealthier than us … So their income and socioeconomic status was really good and we were below the poverty line."[19] An intelligent young woman, she attended university and completed a series of internships that qualified her to work in a traditionally male-dominated field. Determined to succeed, she devoted all her

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[17] Approximately $370 when adjusted for inflation.
[18] "Dan." Interview with Author. 10 June 2011.
[19] "Rachel." Interview with Author. 27 November 2011.

mental and physical energy to advancing herself within her field, taking on increasingly responsible and stressful jobs that caused longstanding mental health issues to escalate. "When I was looking at how [poverty] shaped me, I decided at a young age (11 or 12) that I would get a university degree and that it would be practical. I decided I was always going to be able to earn my money, even if I stayed at home like my Mom. I was going to get that degree so I could always go back into the workforce and use my mind to earn a high enough wage so I would not be in the same position as my parents."

A young woman in the early 1970s, "Emily" was determined to "get out in the workforce" as soon as possible, having been raised and educated in mainstream environments all her life. "I was from a very poor family and my parents frowned on welfare and any form of it. So it was, "Get off your butt and do something kid!" It was expectations on the part of my parents that I had the opportunity to do these things."[20] As a Braille reader and user of assistive technologies from a young age due to a congenital visual impairment, Emily became interested in the technical aspects of producing Braille and other accessible information prior to the proliferation of computer technology. She adopted a philosophy regarding employment accommodations to "as for as little as I need and get the most out of it" as a personal challenge and to avoid presenting employers with too many demands. Emily began working during her early twenties at various summer projects for employers in the education sector before moving into full-time employment with the CNIB where she held a series of positions that utilized her skills and training.

Inspired by the growing disability rights movement in the United States, "David" entered the workforce in the mid-1970s in the area of nonprofit community services where he became involved in various aspects of disability activism. David argues "Disability is the one equity seeking group that everyone could join tonight and there's a good chance will join either temporarily or permanently,

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[20] "Emily." Interview with Author. 28 June 2011.

especially as one gets older."[21] As a person with a visual impairment, David collaborated with others in the blind community and helped to establish coalitions with other disability activists motivated to forge an effective discourse on disability rights in Ontario. As a young activist, David poured his energy and talent into organizational development and cultivating networks of activists to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people. Ironically, but like many other activists in North America, David caught the attention of public sector employers. Encouraged by the deinstitutionalization movement, disability activism, and international developments in disability rights, various levels of government hired many disability activists to supply expertise in the area of disability issues. In his years as an activist, David observed that "people complain about the number of people on social assistance. Well put us to work! Many of us want to work. With the issue of purchasing power, people who are poor tend to make use of their disposable income because they have to."

Growing up in a residential institution, "Olivia" defied low expectations of her by others as a result of her muscular dystrophy and enrolled in a local university. She argues, "If I was on a disability pension I would still need those things and I wouldn't be contributing to the tax base, helping to earn my keep by not only paying a larger share of taxes by having a larger income, but contributing to society through the work I've done."[22] Working summers as a student to build an employment history denied her as a result of her institutionalization, she landed a job in the public sector after finishing school despite intense competition during a time of government downsizing. Olivia described entering the workforce during a unique period. "At the time in the 1980s there was a lot of interest in trying to hire people with disability … If you had a visible disability, employers seemed welcoming and more interested in hiring you so they could show off that they were more

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[21] "David." Interview with Author. 27 June 2011.
[22] "Olivia." Interview with Author. 5 July 2011.

welcoming of people with disabilities." Confident, competent and presentable, Olivia enjoyed upward advancement in her career, owing to an increasingly acceptable workplace culture, fewer physical barriers, and a greater accommodation as her mobility and dexterity needs shifted. She argues, "Paid work is important because I don't want to live in poverty. If I was on a disability pension I would be living in poverty for the rest of my days. Subsidized apartments which now have huge waiting lists like 8 years or more, you just cannot do very many things when you're on disability pension … I want to support myself, I want to be financially independent. I don't want to be depending on other people to support me. That being said, a lot of the supports I rely on are covered through government efforts that are taxpayer supported."

"A new breed of disabled person:" a growing culture of protest in Canada

In the early 1970s, representatives of the federal Department of Health and Welfare pondered in a government periodical, "Why is it so difficult for the disabled to organize?" The article answered that disabled people lacked a clear constituency in which to organize and asserted that individuals with disabilities were preoccupied with their own experiences and challenges dealing with the many obstacles to social and economic participation. It was asserted that "the '60s was a time when the traditional minority groups organized to fight for peace, civil rights, and an end to poverty, but disabled people (physically handicapped in particular) were the last group to be activated by this kind of activism." While local groups of disability rights activists across the country worked toward similar goals around accessibility and inclusion, the federal government believed these activists were largely disconnected from one another and did not represent a genuine social movement compared to other civil rights movements of the time. Nonetheless, the authors acknowledged a "new breed of handicapped person," characterized by acquired physical disabilities,

middle or working-class status, youthful, while fully expecting to "return to their former jobs, schooling, and pursuits" after a period of therapy and training.[23]

Awareness of this "new breed" of disabled people reflected social and political developments during the 1970s that quickly transformed the discourse around disability issues. As in the United States, a new kind of disability rights activism emerged during this time that differed from previous forms of disability advocacy. Disability rights groups were animated by identity politics and engaged in direct and indirect strategies to promote practical changes in the way disabled people lived and worked.[24] New political organizations in Canada led by disabled people were rooted in a youth-based culture of protest and identity politics that focused on dismantling physical and attitudinal barriers to greater economic participation.[25]

Canadian historians have examined the intersection of "rebellious" groups of youth and new political ideas that emerged in the postwar period.[26] A cohort of "rebel youth" from the mid-1960s to early 1970s was energized by a culture of protest and forged a movement of New Left activists and young workers.[27] Labour was a defining feature in these social, political and cultural developments, including a new wave of labour militancy and radicalism shaped by a defiance of existing conditions and systems of belief.[28] This emerging youth-based movement of disabled people dovetailed with other social movements in Canada during the late twentieth century. The decades of the 1960s and 1970s reflected an upsurge in social movement activism, characterized by the

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[23] AO, RG 7-148, Box B335968, File "Employment Practices," Article, Department of National Health and Welfare, *Action Group—The Disabled*, c.1975.

[24] Renée Anspach, "From Stigma to Identity Politics: Political Activism Among the Physically Disabled and Former Mental Patients," *Social Science and Medicine, Part A Medical: Psychology and Medical Sociology* 13 (1979): 766.

[25] Michael Oliver, *The Politics of Disablement* (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan, 1990).

[26] Ian Milligan, "Rebel Youth: Young Workers, New Leftists, and Labour in English Canada, 1964-1973" (PhD diss., York University, 2011).; Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

[27] Milligan, "Rebel Youth," iv.

[28] Milligan, "Rebel Youth," 1-2.

introduction of varied new activist groups representing particular interests.[29] In contrast to the previous generation of parent advocates and professional-dominated lobby groups, disability rights activists forged new social movement organizations alongside their nondisabled peers.[30] Canada's "rights revolution" was comprised of women's liberationists, gay rights activists, and other civil rights activists who advanced a new discourse and culture of respect for social rights.[31] Disability rights organizations lagged behind other civil rights groups, but social activism by disabled people emerged directly out of an ongoing culture of protest that engulfed the 1970s political discourse of human rights in Canada.[32]

Disability rights movement and poverty issues

From the 1970s, Canadian disability rights activists were influenced by a developing poor peoples' movement in Canada and the United States. The emergence of disability rights activism in Canada was partly based on combating various forms of marginalization as activists recognized early on that it was necessary to address "the intense unemployment and poverty experienced by a majority of disabled people."[33] Disability rights activists in Canada encouraged disabled people to assert their rights as consumers of social and community services, following the example of poor peoples' movements in Canada and the US.[34] The development of independent living centres in Canada and the US from the 1970s onward echoed the views of anti-poverty activists by advocating

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[29] Dominique Clement, *Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937-82* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 200.
[30] Dustin Galer, "'Hire the Handicapped!:' Disability Rights, Economic Integration and Working Lives in Toronto, Ontario 1962-2005," (PhD Diss., Toronto: University of Toronto, 2014).
[31] Clement, *Canada's Rights Revolution,* 56-60
[32] Jennifer Ruth Hosek, "The Canadian National Security War on Queers and the Left," in *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness*, ed. Karen Dubinsky (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009).
[33] Malhotra, 2001
[34] Ruth O'Brien, "From a Doctor's to a Judge's Gaze: Epistemic Communities and the History of Disability Rights Policy in the Workplace," *Polity* 35:3 (2003): 108-110

"that people with disabilities were 'clients' who had the right to determine their own treatment." The Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH), forerunner to the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and the leading national organization of disability activists in Canada, pointed to the influence of American anti-poverty organizing on Canadian disability activism. In a 1987 position paper on fiscal arrangements affecting disabled Canadians, COPOH stated to the federal Department of Health and Welfare that the American "War on Poverty" had greatly impacted Canadian approaches to social assistance. COPOH cited the implementation and continued support of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) federal-provincial cost-sharing program as a major outcome of this cross-border influence and a major tactic in its own war on poverty.[35]

New activist groups composed and controlled by people with disabilities emerged during the 1970s, articulating a vision of self-determination and civil rights in addition to promoting new philosophies of self-help and consumer control in their engagement with advocacy organizations and the rehabilitation industry. Employment figured centrally in the early development of these groups as exclusion from the labour market was seen to perpetuate widespread poverty, including ideologically problematic reliance on systems of charitable support. Consumer activists discovered they could use their status as citizens and consumers of disability-related services to press for political reform while creating a public discourse around chronic poverty and unemployment in the disability community. Grassroots disability rights groups at the local level engineered provincial and national coalitions of volunteer activists who shared a common purpose in retooling the rehabilitation industry to increase the level of consumer control and input.

By the mid-1970s, a new organization stepped onto the national stage in Canada to lead a developing social movement of disabled people. COPOH was established in Winnipeg in November

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[35] MA, CCD fonds, Q012254, f.8 paper submitted to DNHW, "COPOH's preliminary position on fiscal arrangements affecting disabled Canadians", Sept 1987

1976 in order to "fill a specific need which was not being met at the time, namely for a

democratically structured national vehicle through which provincially based consumer groups of

handicapped people could speak to issues at the national level."[36] Led by Jim Derkson and Henry

Enns, both reflecting many of the characteristics of the supposed "new breed" of disability activist,

COPOH evolved out of a consumer-based subcommittee of the Canadian Rehabilitation Council

for the Disabled (CRCD). The consumer-led committee was established in 1973 to create an

organization that was led by people with disabilities instead of rehabilitation professionals or other

non-disabled authority figures.[37] COPOH brought together disparate groups of disability rights

activists operating locally across the country by organizing them into affiliated partnerships with

provincial organizations in order to share information and engage in coordinated action to push

forward a shared agenda on disability rights.[38] Though promoting policies of consumer control,

COPOH and its affiliate groups at the local indicated a willingness to work with existing

organizations to achieve its goals rather than assuming a more radical dogmatic stance.

The 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons (IYPD) and 1982 World Program of

Action Concerning Disabled Persons supported these developments, marking a shift away from

medical and worthy poor perspectives of disability toward the philosophy that disabled people are

citizens of communities with rights. In framing disability issues as matters of citizenship rights,

disability rights activists provided a means by which to re-evaluate social systems and services that

excluded disabled people.[39] The Canadian disability rights movement adopted a reformist position,

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[36] MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 1, Letter, COPOH to Credit Union Central, 9 Jan 1979.
[37] Enns, H. (2015). "The Role of Organizations of Disabled People: A DPI Discussion Paper." from http://www.independentliving.org/docs5/RoleofOrgDisPeople.html.
[38] MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5360, File 2, Paper, COPOH, "Challenge for the 80's: Partners in Planning and Independent Living," c.1979.
[39] Prince, M. (2009). Absent Citizens: Disability Politics and Policy in Canada. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.16-17.; See also: Prince, M. (2009). Wrestling With the Poor Cousin: Canada Pension Plan Disability Policy and Practice, 1964–2001. Ottawa.

working within existing political and economic systems to press for changes. A key plank of this

approach has included the struggle for access to paid labour and economic security.[40]

A rights-based approach to poverty issues has been promoted by disability activists since the

1970s, using human rights codes, equality rights legislation and public policy in order to protect the

social, political and economic rights of people with disabilities. This approach necessitates a re-

evaluation of the way that governments, the private sector and other major social institutions

operate, including their role in supporting unemployed or impoverished disabled people. One

definition of poverty promoted by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities and other researchers

and activists at the launch of the *Disabling Poverty, Enabling Citizenship* project in 2009, holds that

"'Poverty' means the condition of a human being who is deprived of the resources, means, choices

and power necessary to acquire and maintain economic self-sufficiency or to facilitate integration

and participation in society."[41] This definition applies the principles of substantive equality to

poverty conditions in which many disabled Canadians live. Instead of being treated equally,

substantive equality breaks down barriers to full participation by ensuring disabled people are able to

earn livable wages or are otherwise provided with a degree of financial security that limits their

dependence on social assistance or other forms of income support.

Anti-poverty activism and the poor peoples' movement in Canada

The poor peoples' movement in Canada was similarly animated by consumer activists in

pursuit of substantive equality provisions seen to support rather than penalize poor people. In their

landmark 1979 text *Poor Peoples' Movements*, Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward distinguished

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[40] Prince, <u>Absent Citizens</u>, 2009: 182
[41] Peters, Y. P., Michael (2009). Disability, Poverty and Citizenship: A Short Note | Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

between four principal poor peoples' movements in the United States: those involving unemployed workers, industrial workers, civil rights, and welfare rights.[42] Despite the American focus of the text, Piven and Cloward described important insights that applied to organizing among poor people in Canada, including the observation that insurgency flows from historically-contingent circumstances but is also limited by those circumstances. The authors argue mass movements have tended to focus on forming organizations because structured groups can be wielded as sources of power so that when elites respond to insurgency, they turn to leaders of organizations. In this way, anti-poverty activists cultivated and channel grievances into mainstream politics.

The introduction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1966 coincided with the proliferation of local welfare groups across Canada. The CAP motivated provinces to increase spending on social services because the federal government agreed to absorb fifty percent of the costs, while provinces and municipalities retained control over these services. These fiscal arrangements spurred anti-poverty activists to demand "improved assistance benefits and services, humane treatment from welfare administrators, and better representation on agency boards."[43] New examples of anti-poverty activism emerged during the 1960s which echoed disability activists' demands for consumer control over services as a matter of citizenship rights.

The Just Society Movement (JSM) was one such example, established in 1968 in response to Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson's announcement of a "war on poverty"—a political strategy and phrase borrowed from American political developments. The JSM was formed exclusively as an organization "by the poor, for the poor" in order to improve access and efficacy of the welfare system.[44] Similar to family-driven organizations of mothers of disabled children, JSM had its roots in

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[42] Piven, F. F. C., Richard (1979). Poor people's movements : why they succeed, how they fail, Vintage books.
[43] Smith, M. C. (2008). Group politics and social movements in Canada. Peterborough, Ont., Broadview Press.
[44] Little, M. H. (2007). "Militant Mothers Fight Poverty: The Just Society Movement, 1968-1971." Labour / Le Travail 59: 179-197.

the collective efforts of mothers. In 1966, fifty single mothers from Sarnia collectively addressed the

Prime Minister, which ushered in a new era of non-confrontational lobbying in anti-poverty

organizing. Funded by government transfers, JSM's strategy included setting up information booths

outside welfare offices and acting as advocates on behalf of clients in individual cases. By 1971, JSM

declined with the withdrawal of government funding.

In response to political pressure exerted by grassroots anti-poverty activism, the National

Council of Welfare (NCW) was restructured in 1970 to include poor people on the governing board.

These reforms to increase client representation laid the groundwork for further anti-poverty

organizing in Canada as frustration among poor Canadians grew due in part to widespread low rates

of social assistance and increasing bureaucratic complexity. In 1971, local welfare groups assembled

in Toronto at a conference that led to the establishment of the National Anti-Poverty Organization

(NAPO). In the 1970s, NAPO focused on issues such as telephone rates, tax rebates, veteran's

allowances and old age pensions.[45] A general economic downturn in Canada during the mid-1970s

forced NAPO to grapple with declining political interest in poverty and welfare issues compared to a

growing deficit and escalating program costs.

By the 1980s, NAPO assumed a stronger position as the national voice of anti-poverty

activism and worked steadily at building relationships with other social movements. NAPO

addressed many issues that directly impacted the disability community, including family allowances,

social assistance, medicare, pension reform and changes to un/employment insurance.[46] Focus on

these issues increasingly carried anti-poverty activism into the orbit of disability organizations. "The"

disability rights movement led by COPOH did not yet speak with a unified voice during this period

as consumer activists struggled to define a distinct consumer vision separate from professional

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[45] Neal, R. (2004). <u>Voices women, poverty, and homelessness</u>, National Anti-Poverty Organization.
[46] Neal, 2004

advocates and parents groups. While it is unclear whether other social movements chose to avoid becoming mired in the contested ideological territory that engulfed the disability community, NAPO naturally gravitated toward COPOH due to their shared constitutions as consumer-led organizations. By the 1990s, anti-poverty activists focused on changes to unemployment insurance policy, the gap between the rich and the poor, affordable housing, the rise of food banks and the inadequacy of welfare rates.[47] However, NAPO suffered from its own internal divisions during this time, struggling to influence meaningful changes to national poverty policy.[48]

Disability and anti-poverty activism: collaboration and overlap

The Canadian disability rights and anti-poverty movements overlapped significantly in ideology, goals and activities since the 1960s. As noted above, many disabled Canadians lived in poverty and both poor and disabled people in Canada were stigmatized for a reliance on social assistance benefits. Poor working and unemployed women, racial minorities, immigrant, Aboriginal and people with disabilities were forced into low-wage "job ghettoes" or out of the labour market entirely. As a result of their shared experience of marginalization, activists and allies from disparate social groups were propelled along similar lobby and reform agendas. Disabled and Aboriginal people in particular have been rated among the most severely marginalized due to the many barriers in gaining access to the labour market. Activist organizations such as Colour of Poverty and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance arose to address discriminatory pay gaps.[49]

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[47] Neal, 2004
[48] Greene, J. (2009). Boardrooms and Barricades: Anti-Poverty Organizing in Canada. Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada. M. Smith. Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 110-114.; See also: Greene, J. (2009). ""Whatever It Takes": Poor People's Organizing, OCAP, and Social Struggle." Studies in Political Economy 75.;
[49] Cornish, M. (2012). A Living Wage As a Human Right. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: 13

Anti-poverty activists in Canada defined their movement and its priorities in a way that includes disability rights activism. In his study of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), one of the leading anti-poverty groups in Canada, Jonathan Greene argues that beyond dedicated anti-poverty activist groups, the Canadian anti-poverty movement has often included other organizations that "advocate on behalf of poor people" as well as activist groups from other social movements that mobilize people to political action.[50] Disability rights groups in Canada were certainly included in this definition of anti-poverty activism as they advocated on behalf of working and unemployed disabled people, demonstrating the extent of poverty in the disability community while seeking to extend to them certain rights and protections to resist segregation. Disability rights activists recognized the importance of an activist agenda that addresses labour security and work incentives in social policy while condemning income programs and public services that block people with disabilities from opportunities in the labour market.[51]

Disability and anti-poverty activists also worked together in the mid-1980s in the development of the Ontario Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (CEEPD). Led by disability activist Beryl Potter, CEEPD was an historical alliance of disability activists, women, visible minorities, anti-poverty activists and labour organizations that included leading consumer and service agencies in Canada. CEEPD argued that many disabled people who can and want to work are forced to unemployed due to discriminatory hiring and employment practices. Coalition members prioritized poverty in its work to promote employment equity, which it defined as a "process for identifying and removing barriers to employment." CEEPD named income support systems among the principal barriers to employment, echoing sentiment from anti-poverty groups. In response to the fallout of a massive economic recession in Canada during the early 1980s,

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[50] Greene, 2009: 108
[51] Prince, 2009: 182

the provincial government was poised to enact deep cuts to welfare and social services. CEEPD

enlisted its allies in the anti-poverty movement to help it produce a submission to the 1986 Social

Assistance Review Commission of Ontario. The coalition sought to promote ways to ameliorate

poverty in the disability community, stating "Poverty is a fact of life for many PWD [persons with

disabilities]. This is most often because they depend on social assistance for their income."[52] In

connecting disability issues with anti-poverty activism, the coalition eventually swelled to include

more than twenty organizations, building alliances between multiple social movements to address

discriminatory labour policies.[53]

Disability rights and anti-poverty groups also shared a common outlook on necessary

reforms to the welfare system in Canada, particularly in regard to the effect on welfare recipients of

restrictive eligibility criteria. Eligibility for social assistance in Canada, specifically disability benefits,

have been conditional on a means test that evaluates an individual's inability to work, a process that

forces people to prove their disabilities rendered them "unemployable." The postwar welfare state

was largely constructed on the basis of this distinction between "employable" and "unemployable,"

compelling people unable to find work to declare that they were in fact *incapable* of competitive

employment in order to qualify for welfare benefits.[54] By most accounts, people with disabilities

were not only among the disadvantaged population, but also the most deserving recipients of social

welfare due to the inherent nature of their limitations preventing them from acquiring paid work. As

historian Paul Longmore explains, "Because disease and disability seem so self-evidently matters of

biology, rather than sociology or public policy, the disadvantaging social and economic

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[52] AO, RG 74-30, box B173677, CEEPD to SARC, 27 Nov 1986.

[53] AO, RG 74-30, box B162582, news release CEEPD, "New alliance criticizes federal EE bill", 1985; AO, RG 74-30, box B170102, submission CEEPD to Legislative committee on Bill C-62, 12 Dec 1985.

[54] Robert Wilton and Stephanie Schuer, "Towards Socio-Spatial Inclusion? Disabled People, Neoliberalism and the Contemporary Labour Market," *Area* 32:2 (2006): 187.

consequences endured by sick or disabled individuals are perceived as 'natural,' the inevitable social

outcomes of biological 'facts.'"[55]

The development of the welfare state in Canada separated disabled people from the

"employable," "able-bodied" population. As James Struthers documents, the establishment of

Houses of Refuge run by local municipalities and other measures to support the elderly reflected the

belief that old age was linked with sickness and disability and had the effect of removing people

from mainstream society.[56] The formulation of categorical distinctions between the "undeserving"

able-bodied and "deserving" disabled, elderly, and single or widowed mothers relieved people with

disabilities from the moral conditioning that regularly accompanied welfare initiatives.[57] It was widely

believed during the twentieth century that idleness and dependency among able-bodied unemployed

and poor people was the result of a diseased state of mind. As Richard Splane explains, "The poor,

or at any rate the able-bodied poor, were accordingly thought to be in need of correction and

discipline."[58]

The introduction of welfare benefits promised to remedy the moral defects of the poor by

setting benefit rates well below minimum wages or forcing "undeserving" (normally non-disabled)

recipients into work schemes where they laboured on public projects in exchange for minimal levels

of support. During the early 1930s Ontario Welfare Minister David Croll and Liberal Premier Mitch

Hepburn mandated "All *able-bodied* married men to perform work in municipal woodyards or on

other city projects as a condition for maintaining their families' eligibility for assistance" [emphasis

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[55] Paul Longmore, "Conspicuous Contribution and American Cultural Dilemmas: Telethon Rituals of Cleansing and Renewal," in *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchkosky (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2009), 147.

[56] James Struthers, *No Fault of their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).; Richard Splane, *Social Welfare in Ontario, 1791-1893: A Study of Public Welfare Administration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 96.

[57] Struthers, *No Fault of their Own*, 2000: 429-153.

[58] Splane, *Social Welfare in Canada*, 69.

added]. [59] From the Second World War to the mid-1950s able-bodied unemployed people were prohibited from receiving government assistance in an effort to remedy acute labour shortages while preserving assistance to unemployable disabled people.[60] The exemption of the "deserving" poor from welfare restrictions coupled with strict welfare regulations reveal that disabled people were not expected to work and considered separate from other poor people. In 1966, the introduction of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) expanded the promise of the welfare state but maintained the traditional means test as a way of distinguishing "unemployable" disabled people from the traditional working poor.[61] Eligibility for programs to promote training and job skill development, such as "workfare" reforms to unemployment insurance introduced in the late 1980s, was often out of reach to unemployed recipients of disability benefits given their designation as "unemployables."

COPOH and NAPO both advocated guaranteed equal access to social assistance by reducing or eliminating systems of categorization. NAPO argued that so-called "first-tier" and "second-tier" income support perpetuated a classist society where "people called 'unemployable' will be made to feel they are a useless burden on society."[62] Disability rights scholars have similarly noted that the term "disability" was originally an employment term referring to declarative work limitations such that people were only "disabled" insofar as they were unable to work or deemed unemployable.[63] In response, NAPO promoted the introduction of guaranteed income for all

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[59] Struthers, "No Fault of their Own," 431.
[60] Struthers, "No Fault of their Own," 435.
[61] Osborne, John, "The Evolution of the Canada Assistance Plan," Development National Health and Welfare, 1985.
[62] Hartling, M. (1975). <u>A New Tomorrow for Canada's Poor?: Brief on guaranteed income & social services for presentation to the Honourable Marc Lalonde, Minister of National Health and Welfare</u>, National Anti-Poverty Organization.; Hartling, M. (1975). <u>Toward a guaranteed income for Canadians : an analysis of the three choices now being considered by the federal-provincial review</u>, National Anti-poverty Organization.
[63] Peter Blanck, "Right to Live in the World: Disability Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow: The Jacobus tenBroek Law Symposium," *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties & Civil Rights* 13 (2007): 370.; Barbara Wolfe and Robert Haveman, "Trends in the Prevalence of Work Disability From 1962 to 1984 and Their Correlates," *The Milbank Quarterly* 68:1 (1990): 74.; Ian Morris, "Technology and Disabled People: A Global View" in *The Future of Work for Disabled People: Employment and the New Technology*, ed. American Foundation for the Blind (Washington, D.C.: President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped,1986), 12.

Canadians regardless of ability. A resolution was passed at the Poor People's Conference in Toronto in January 1971 supporting a "guaranteed adequate income subsidy permitting people to live at a decent standard of living."[64]

During the 1970s and 1980s, overlap between disability and anti-poverty groups on significant policy approaches such as access to social assistance led NAPO and other anti-poverty groups to strengthen connections to the disability rights movement. In 1987, NAPO reached out to COPOH, seeking to form a "mutually beneficial" partnership between the anti-poverty movement and disability rights movement. NAPO described itself as a voluntary non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of *all* low-income Canadians, including thousands of disabled Canadians who find themselves in poverty. With a consumer-based board of at least seventy-five percent low income people, NAPO appealed to COPOH as a fellow consumer organization based on grassroots community activism. NAPO believed COPOH would expand NAPO's contacts and give more consideration to disability issues, while NAPO would provide the disability rights movement with a coordinated voice in Ottawa, a resource for statistical information and other data, and a more powerful critique of federal initiatives.[65] NAPO argued that based on their shared outlook on health, housing and education policy, an alliance with disability rights activists was highly desirable and practical to achieve outcomes that benefited both constituencies.

Relationships between disability and anti-poverty activists were further strengthened with the emergence of other disability organizations focusing on poverty issues. The DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN) was established with a mission to "end the poverty, isolation, discrimination and violence experienced by women with disabilities."[66] Although many mainstream disability activists in

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[64] Hartling, 1975: 1

[65] MA CCD fonds, Q012254, f.2 letter NAPO to COPOH, 24 Apr 1987, letter NAPO to COPOH, "Federal policies on health, housing and education", 8 Jul 1987

[66] Vanhala, L. (2011). Making rights a reality?: disability rights activists and legal mobilization. New York, Cambridge University Press: 12.

Canada were women, disabled women came together in the mid-1980s to form their own

organization in order to advance issues pertaining specifically disabled women, including

disproportionately high rates of poverty. Following a conference in Winnipeg in 1985, the DisAbled

Women's Network (DAWN) was formed, dedicated to addressing poverty, violence and

discrimination experienced by disabled women.[67] In 1989, DAWN published "Different Therefore

Unequal," presenting various troubling statistics that demonstrated the ways in which disabled

women were much more likely to be unemployed and live in poverty relative to disabled men.[68]

Throughout the 1980s and into the 21st century, DAWN sponsored several research and outreach

projects concerning poverty issues, working with other activist organizations to stimulate change.

In 1989, representatives of the anti-poverty group Campaign Against Poverty wrote to

People United for Self Help (PUSH), a leading disability rights organization in Canada, inviting them

to join a sixteen day trek to a rally at Queen's Park.[69] The rally was called to encourage the Ontario

government to implement proposed reforms to social assistance policy in the forthcoming budget

and move poverty issues to the top of the agenda. Led by John Clarke of Campaign Against Poverty

(later renamed the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty or OCAP), the rally drew 3,000 supporters

focused on "stamping out hunger, homelessness and poverty." PUSH agreed to participate and

coverage of the event noted trekkers included social activists, church leaders, politicians,

professional people and disabled people.[70] In an era of austerity, the combined effort demonstrated

the disability rights movements' commitment to direct action and anti-poverty reform as well as the

continued overlap between these social movements in the area of policy reform.

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[67] DisAbled Women's Network, "Our History," (accessed 10 July 2015) http://www.dawncanada.net/about/about/our-history/

[68] DAWN, "Different Therefore Unequal: Employment and Women with Disabilities," Winnipeg: DAWN, 1989.

[69] MA CCD fonds, Q012243, f.26 letter Campaign Against Poverty to PUSH, 23 Mar 1989.

[70] Mike Funston, T. S. (1989, Apr 08). Anti-poverty marchers have message for Ontario: Act fast. *Toronto Star*; 3,000 rally against poverty. (1989, Apr 10). *The Windsor Star;* Lazaruk, S. (1989, Apr 10). Anti-poverty marchers call for welfare reforms. *The Globe and Mail*

Disability and anti-poverty groups also collaborated in the mid-1990s mass movement

known as the "Ontario Days of Action" that sought to bring down the conservative government in

that province. Elected on a platform to reduce the size and scope of government as part of an effort

to reduce the runaway provincial deficit, the newly-elected Conservative government under Premier

Mike Harris cut deeply into existing programming affecting people with disabilities and poor people.

Dubbed a "Common Sense Revolution" by the Tories, the extensive cutbacks involved rolling back

most existing disability programming and employment initiatives introduced since the mid-1980s by

the previous NDP and Liberal provincial governments.[71] Harris introduced an "Equal Opportunity

Plan" (EOP) as part of an attempt to "restore the merit principle to Ontario's workplaces."[72] Tory

policy under Harris shifted markedly toward unfettered deregulation of the economy which could

only offer "equal treatment" to disabled people and other disadvantaged minorities in the labour

market.[73] Facing massive and sudden cuts to social assistance rates up to 21.6%, the government also

revoked the Employment Equity Act and other labour legislation that directly benefited disabled

workers and the working poor in general. In response, various social movements across Canada

banded together to fight the destructive spread of these neoliberal policies that threatened to

devastate the Canadian social policy landscape. The Days of Action campaign involved a coalition of

unionists and social activists leading massive general strikes designed to bring public services to a

standstill.[74] Many carried placards or wore buttons exposing the harm these policy reforms inflicted

on poor. Disabled people as well as women, visible minorities, students, and unionized workers

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[71] Vera Chouinard and Valorie Crooks, "Negotiating Neoliberal Environments in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada: Restructuring of State-Voluntary Sector Relations and Disability Organizations' Struggles to Survive," *Environment & Planning* 26 (2008): 176; Robert Storey, "Social Assistance or a Worker's Right: Workmen's Compensation and the Struggle of Injured Workers in Ontario, 1970-1985," *Studies in Political Economy* 78 (2006): 87; Lepofsky, "The Long, Arduous Road to a Barrier-Free Ontario for People with Disabilities," 150.

[72] "Untapped Resource," *Financial Post* (2 May 1981).

[73] "Untapped Resource"

[74] Goldfield, M. and B. D. Palmer (2007). "Canada's Workers Movement: Uneven Developments." Labour / Le Travail 59: 167

stood together, indicating the broad array of communities and interests struggling against the policy direction taken by the provincial government.[75]

By the turn of the twenty-first century, disabled Canadians continued to experience high rates of poverty, encouraging the disability rights movement to engage in new initiatives to ameliorate these conditions. In 2005, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) and the Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL) called on the federal government to implement measures to achieve its vision of full citizenship for people with disabilities, including increased employment opportunities and progressive social assistance reforms.[76] A major component of this vision included support to study the state of poverty among disabled Canadians and viable measures to end poverty. Initially named "End to Poverty," the scope of the project expanded and was launched in 2008 as the Disabling Poverty, Enabling Citizenship project. The project, slated for completion in 2016, takes a four-pronged approach to study poverty and exclusion, income security and social policy, equality issues, and social and political roles around policy reform.[77] Building on past relationships cultivated with the anti-poverty movement, the project actively involves NAPO and other community and research partners to investigate the causes and consequences of poverty as it affects disabled people while searching for solutions that benefit all Canadians living in poverty.

Injured workers movement and anti-poverty activism

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[75] Graphic History Collective: Project #9 The Days of Action, accessed September 23, 2015. http://graphichistorycollective.com/projects/graphic-history-project/doa/
[76] Prince, Michael. "Canadian Disability Activism and Political Ideas: In and Between Neo-Liberalism and Social Liberalism." *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* 1:2 (2012). 221-222
[77] Council of Canadians with Disabilities, "Social Policy," accessed September 23, 2015. http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship

Injured workers also shared many of the concerns raised by anti-poverty activists and the disability rights movement. For most of the late twentieth century, however, injured workers did not fully collaborate with either social movement due in part to policy silos that distinguished workers injured on the job and other people with disabilities and the working poor.[78] Unlike injured workers who used the medical model to highlight their demands, people with pre-existing or congenital disabilities within and outside unions sought to redirect attention to the impact of systemic barriers in the workplace and broader society. Such distinctions created a gulf between emerging social movements and injured workers that inhibited the cultivation of effective partnerships. Yet, people with acquired disabilities were more likely to be militant because they hadn't been "gradually socialized into existing conditions of poverty and discrimination but rather suddenly had it forced upon them, chiefly by industrial or automobile accidents."[79]

The injured workers movement in the late 1970s and 1980s was generally more willing to engage in direct action initiatives than disability rights activists. Injured workers in Toronto led a social movement composed primarily of Italian Canadians during the late 1970s and early 1980s against perceived attempts to dismantle an existing system of pensions for disabled workers.[80] A precipitous rise in workplace accident rates during the 1970s put pressure on the workers' compensation system leading to a stiffening of payment and benefit structures, which provoked protest from a vocal cohort of injured workers. In one incident captured in the documentary film *A Right To Live*, injured workers led a protest to the Ontario Legislature at Queen's Park on October 28, 1975 where protestors threw themselves on the floor of the legislature in a desperate attempt to attract attention to their movement for greater entitlement to adequate levels of compensation,

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[78] "Lisa"; "David"

[79] Wright, P. D. (1990). The status of disabled persons in Canada: A historical analysis of the evolution of social policy to develop effective change strategies directed toward achieving equality. Canada, Carleton University (Canada): 104

[80] Robert Storey, "'Their Only Power Was Moral': The Injured Workers' Movement in Toronto, 1970–1985," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 41:81 (2009): 99-131.

accommodation and measures to reintegrate in the paid workforce.[81] Organizations such as the

Union of Injured Workers (UIW) and other injured workers groups were established to fight for

policy reforms that improved job security while protecting injured workers from slipping into

poverty.[82]

By the late 1980s and 1990s, injured workers' groups engaged in more coordinated efforts to

raise concerns about poverty, but continued to work separately from other social movements. The

archetypal injured worker was represented as a "proud but beaten man who, because of a disabling

workplace injury, could no longer provide for his family as he wanted and was supposed to do."

This representation was openly presented in policy documents by injured workers organizations

during this period. In a submission to the federal standing committee on resource development in

1988, injured workers argued "The poverty imposed on the injured worker and his family often

result in problems not only in the family, but in the community as well."[83] For example, one worker

interviewed in *A Right To Live* named Manuel, who lost his job at a mattress manufacturing company

after sustaining a back injury, spoke to the "physical and emotional side effects" of his injury where

he tearfully exclaimed that he did not "feel like a man" or "useful" to his family.[84] Preoccupied with

personal experiences of disease or injury and drawing strength from their peers in the union

movement and other injured workers' associations, injured workers struggled against poverty but

aligned themselves with a collective outlook that was quite distinct from either disability rights or

anti-poverty activism.

Influence of disability and anti-poverty activism on major policy developments

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[81] *A Right to Live: The Union of Injured Workers*, VHS (Toronto, ON: Right Now Films, 1977).
[82] *A Right to Live*
[83] Storey, "Their Only Power Was Moral," 114.
[84] *A Right to Live*

The historical relationship between disability rights and anti-poverty activism produced a number of outcomes in social policy, labour policy and human rights legislation that impacted broader communities of disabled and poor people in Canada. Despite resistance to change among policymakers, activists still organized themselves to confront threats to roll back past gains and advocate for progressive policy reform. Many of these outcomes reveal the ways in which social movements, working alone or in tandem, can produce significant policy change to combat persistent patterns of high unemployment and poverty in the disability community. These outcomes reveal patterns of prejudice and lack of political will which undermined the ability of disability rights or poor peoples' movements to make a significant impact on the broader course of social and labour policy in Canada. Enthusiasm about disability and anti-poverty activism concealed widespread disillusion within and outside these social movements about actual influence on the policymaking process as neither social movement achieved adequate leverage to realize their goals. Nevertheless, anti-poverty and disability activists did help change the discourse surrounding disability rights and poverty issues in this country while supporting concrete progressive policy developments. The rise and evolution of both social movements coincided with a "greater willingness in providing income support services that favour low-income groups," though this approach was increasingly challenged from the 1980s on with the rise of neoliberalism and waves of austerity.[85]

The growth of anti-poverty activism and disability advocacy from the 1960s led to the introduction of new measures to finance the development and expansion of the social welfare safety net in Canada. While the middle-class benefited from Canada's postwar prosperity many working poor, disabled people, recent immigrants and racial minorities continued to be marginalized in the Canadian economy. A growing chorus of social activism demanded greater access to Canada's

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[85] Jongbloed, L. (2006). Disability Income and Employment Policies in Canada: Historical Development. <u>Disability and Social Policy in Canada</u>. M. A. J. Mccoll, Lyn. Concord, ON, Captus Press.

prosperity, forcing postwar governments to devise new ways to spread the wealth more equitably.

The introduction of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1966 was one such response to these

social and political pressures, streamlining cost sharing arrangements between the federal and

provincial governments to deliver critical social and community services to disadvantaged segments

of the population. Anti-poverty activists in particular had been calling for improvements to the

welfare state throughout the 1960s to boost welfare rates and improve employment training and

education subsidies. These pressures to grow the welfare state led to the introduction of the CAP

with its goal of creating "a consistent national welfare apparatus and the extension of assistance to

anyone who might need it, with need being the only criterion."[86]

By the 1970s, however, anti-poverty and disability activists were virtually powerless to halt

the retraction of the welfare state in response to a major recession and dwindling support of

Keynesian economics in Canada.[87] To prepare for the introduction of austerity measures in this new

economic context, the federal government conducted a Social Security Review to determine priority

areas to cut services. The federal Finance department endeavoured to restrict the scope of the

review, but a deepening recession put pressure on the government to reduce expenditures on the

welfare system. This political context jeopardized the future of the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)

and other measures to support disabled and poor people. The effect of poor people's organizations

on this process was apparently insignificant. Poor people's organizations did not actively participate

in the review process nor were they able to seriously undermine its sweeping impact on social policy.

Anti-poverty organizations were unable to mount an effective campaign against these changes due

to limited resources and financial dependence on the federal government.[88] NAPO was not able to

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[86] Jongbloed, 2006: 245
[87] Campbell, R. M. (1987). *Grand Illusions: The Politics of the Keynesian Experience in Canada, 1945-1975*. Broadview Pr.;
Weintraub, Sidney. *Capitalism's inflation and unemployment crisis: beyond monetarism and keynesianism*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-
Wesley, 1978.; Goldfield: 163
[88] Goldfield: 165

adopt a strong position on the Review nor were they able to convince policymakers to adopt an

approach to poverty reform that did not involve progressive cutbacks.[89]

Disability organizations took more of a consistent position on poverty issues during the

review than poor people's organizations. Similar to NAPO, disability rights groups such as COPOH

and PUSH were largely dependent on federal funding. Disability activists also did not have adequate

influence on policymakers at this stage of their development nor did they always speak with a unified

voice. For example, some special assistance programs for disabled workers were unilaterally

eliminated in 1966 with the introduction of the CAP without much protest from the disability

community. The Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled (CRCD), a leading disability

organization in the 1970s, prepared a policy statement on the review committee's Orange Paper

which mainly endorsed its recommendations, "but the council's views were vague and not actively

pursued."[90] Since neither disability organizations nor anti-poverty activists appeared to have reached

out to one another during this period, there was no coordinated action to speak out against policy

changes leading to a reduction in welfare supports and services. As a result, the social security review

marked a shift in the political terrain away from active expansion of the welfare system, which

forced activists to increasingly focus on maintaining past gains.

By 1980, social policy goals in Canada had shifted from funding the "welfare state" to the

new concept of a "welfare society" where anti-discrimination and equity legislation replaced income

support.[91] As provincial and federal governments withdrew from a comprehensive welfare system,

disability rights activists led a movement that was increasingly focused on combating poverty and

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[89] Goldfield: 180
[90] Goldfield: 180
[91] Jongbloed, 2006

exclusion with civil rights legislation.[92] The ground-breaking 1981 report of the Special Parliamentary

Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped (*Obstacles*) reflected this evolving climate of social

change regarding disability in public policy. The *Obstacles* committee, which included Vice-Chairman

MP Walter Dinsdale who was also the father of a child with various disabilities and a particularly

energetic ally of the disability rights movement, was created in 1980 to develop realistic proposals

for new initiatives to improve the social and economic integration of disabled people in Canada.[93]

The *Obstacles* committee travelled the country soliciting feedback from the disability community,

inciting members to participate in emerging initiatives to advance disability rights in Canada.

Committee members collaborated with disability rights activists in Ontario to fight separate disability

rights legislation and lobbied officials in Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government to include disability in

the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.[94] Following hundreds of submissions across the country, the

Obstacles report included a number of recommendations aimed at alleviating barriers to disabled

people's employment opportunities caused by employer policies and practices.

A major outcome of this report and concurrent activism included the inclusion of disability

in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Charter gave disability activists a powerful tool to

combat discrimination and support the development of progressive human rights protections for

disabled people. An atmosphere of enthusiasm surrounded the release of the *Obstacles* report, partly

due to the "last minute" inclusion of disability in section fifteen of the Charter of Rights and

Freedoms. Trudeau's announcement that new human rights protections would accompany the

patriation of the Canadian constitution led disability activists to believe that the disability community

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[92] Marcia Rioux and Fraser Valentine, "Does Theory Matter: Exploring the Nexus Between Disability, Human Rights, and Public Policy," in *Critical Disability Theory: Essays in Philosophy, Politics, Policy and Law*, ed. Diane Pothier and Robert Devlin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 47-69.
[93] Government of Canada, *Obstacles: Report of the Special Committee on the Disabled and the Handicapped* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1981).
[94] AO, RG 7-148, Box B217563, File "Publications," OMOD, "Bill 188 Stopped by Coalition," *Advocate* (January/February 1980).

would benefit from the introduction of new human rights protections. When news broke that

Trudeau did not include disability as a protected category in the draft Charter, an intensive lobbying

campaign erupted to force Trudeau's hand. Members of the *Obstacles* committee, disability rights

activists, and their allies initiated a letter-writing campaign and staged protests across the country to

demand inclusion in the Charter.[95] Trudeau and Minister of Justice Jean Chrétien resisted the

inclusion of disability as a protected category for fear it would create an enormous financial burden

on each level of government that would be required to retrofit existing infrastructure in order to

meet new accessibility standards.[96] Trudeau finally relented to the pressure of disability activists,

writing disability into the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms as a protected category. David

Lepofsky asserted that it was disability activists' reference to "Canada's international obligations"

and its support of the International Year of Disabled Persons that finally swayed Trudeau to live up

to his promise of a more participatory democracy.[97] This concession represented a major outcome

of the disability rights movement during this period and paved the way for future rights based

approaches to the problem of poverty and exclusion.

In the mid-1980s, anti-poverty activists joined disability activists in the campaign for federal

employment equity legislation. After a series of consultations with disabled people across Canada,

Justice Rosalie Abella, the sole commissioner of the federal Commission on Equality in

Employment, issued a number of recommendations to promote the improvement of employment

opportunities for people with disabilities across Canada.[98] However, disability activists argued the

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[95] Virtual Museum, "Disability Rights in Canada: A Virtual Museum," accessed 28 May 2013, http://disabilityrights.freeculture.ca/exhibits_th_p_idc.php

[96] "Disability Rights in Canada: A Virtual Museum"

[97] David Lepofsky, "The *Charter's* Guarantee of Equality to People with Disabilities: How Well is it Working?" *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 16 (1998): 168.; Sally Chivers, "Barrier by Barrier: The Canadian Disability Movement and the Fight for Equal Rights," in *Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada*, ed. Miriam Catherine Smith (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2008): 318.

[98] The term "employment equity," based on the American conceptualization of affirmative action, laid the foundations for future employment equity legislation. See: *Report of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment;* "The Legal Genealogy of the Duty to Accommodate"

proposed Bill C-62 did "little to force federally regulated employers and Crown corporations to hire

and promote disabled people."[99] To ensure such legislation was introduced, disability activist Beryl

Potter founded the Coalition on Employment Equity for Persons with Disabilities (CEEPD).[100]

Under the CEEPD banner, Potter led disability and anti-poverty activists from across the country to

Ottawa in April 1986 to protest the introduction of federal employment equity legislation. Images

from the protest featured protestors amid placards that read "Dead like Bill C-62"; "No penalties,

no justice"; "Jobs when?"; "Black Monday, disabled person, no equality, no jobs, no justice."[101]

During the protest, Minister of Labour Flora MacDonald addressed the Speaker of the House on

behalf of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, denying that the government had ignored disabled groups'

attempts to discuss the bill with the Prime Minister and that he had personally written to Beryl

Potter explaining the situation. In an extraordinary outburst, Potter, sitting in the back row of the

public gallery, yelled out: "My name is Beryl Potter and I've received no such letter!"[102] The *Toronto

Star* reported that the rest of her words were drowned out by calls from the Speaker for order before

Potter was forcibly removed from the gallery. Individual acts, such as Potter's parliamentary

outburst, represented a larger spectrum of disability activism that included alliances with anti-poverty

activists. The employment equity act was eventually passed in 1986 without the enforcement

language desired by activists, but the episode provided an opportunity for disability and anti-poverty

activists to further collaborate in the pursuit of their shared agenda.

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[99] "150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa to Protest Job Bill with 'No Teeth,'" *Toronto Star* (15 April 1986).; "Disabled Protest Hits House," *Montreal Gazette* (15 April 1986).

[100] AO, RG 74-30, Box B167563, File "Labour study (1)," Paper, Ontario Advisory Council for the Handicapped (hereafter OACPH), "Background Information," 1985.

[101] "150 Disabled Travel to Ottawa"

[102] AO, RG 74-49, Box B299294, File "Beryl Potter," Ontario Action Awareness, "Work Plan," 1991.; Minutes of the Council of the City of Toronto 712 (13 May 1998), 865-866. Potter subsequently ran an awareness program during the late 1980s and early 1990s that toured Ontario, establishing connections with local schools, policymakers, media, consumer groups, and other disability organizations. For these and other activities, Potter's profile as a leading activist also earned her an Order of Canada medal and formal recognition by the City of Toronto Council upon her death on 1 May 1998 for her contribution to the promotion of disability rights in the city.

Alliances between disability and poor peoples' movements increased by the end of the 1980s as both social movements continued to grow and extend their influence on the national stage. NAPO hosted a conference in 1988 on Poverty and Disability that involved disability activists to develop policy recommendations for common problems faced in the poor and disabled communities. In October 1990, NAPO and COPOH struck a Study Group on Employment and Disability in order to continue work started at the conference. The objective was to establish a group led by "disabled consumers and low-income advocates" to identify barriers in employment programs and services and provide forums for collaboration. The group secured seed funding from the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC) and struck a steering committee consisting of representatives from both social movements, including NAPO, COPOH, the DisAbled Women's Network (DAWN), National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS), Canadian Association for Community Living (CACL), Confederation des Organismes de Personnes Handicapes du Quebec (COPHAN), ARCH Disability Law Centre, and the National Aboriginal Network on Disability (NAND). In 1992, the study group submitted their report compiled by Havi Echenberg entitled *Willing to Work…Together.*[103] The report examined income security and training supports including barriers within these systems that prevented consumers from using them as a springboard to employment. In particular, the Canadian Jobs Strategy was singled out in terms of its failure to coordinate five programs that served disabled people, strict eligibility, and underfunded supports. Through the production of the report, anti-poverty and disability groups demonstrated their movements could collaborate to develop effective policy recommendations to government.

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[103] Echenberg, H. (1991). Willing to work-- together : final report of the Study Group on Employment and Disability, Study Group on Employment and Disability.

Willing to Work…Together attracted considerable attention arriving as it did at the end of the

Decade of Disabled Persons which led to the creation of a permanent committee to combat

unemployment and poverty in the disability community. In April 1992, the Minister of Employment

& Immigration Bernard Valcourt announced $20 million over the next five years to support a

National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities (NSIPD). Minister Valcourt

announced the government would establish a Canadian Committee on Employment and Disabilities

(CCED) overseen by the CEIC and Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB). The

CCED was tasked with finding ways to implement the *Willing to Work…Together* report's fifty-seven

recommendations for improving access to programs and services.[104] An ambitious agenda was drawn

up to address barrier reduction in architectural planning, public education, job training and

accommodation, transition of the federal Outreach program, promotion of employment equity,

disability training for Canadian Employment Centre staff, parallel transportation services, and

eliminating sheltered workshops.[105] Four working groups were set up to tackle communications,

barrier-free access, programs and services, and staff training. These groups worked under a steering

committee comprised of CEIC officials, rehabilitation officials and representatives from various

disability rights groups.

By the end of the year, however, disability activists had withdrawn their participation in CCED,

complaining that the recommendations and spirit of the *Willing to Work…Together* report were not

being honoured. In June 1992 COPOH complained to the committee of their frustration with the

lack of progress on recommendations from the original study group. COPOH complained the

committee had been restructured so that it was not consumer-driven but instead dominated by

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[104] MA, CCD fonds, box T1282, f.23 Employment & Immigration, "Minister Valcourt announces $20 million in support of National Strategy for the Integration of Persons with Disabilities," 15 Apr 1992.
[105] MA, CCD fonds, box T1282, f.11 Canadian Committee on Employment and Disabilities, CCED "Proposed actions", Jan to Sept 1992.

administrators and non-consumer professionals from CEIC and the CLFDB. COPOH also wrote to senior officials at CEIC, stating CCED actions to date have focused on further study or establishment of more working groups and committees and that COPOH was seldom asked to contribute in the development or implementation of action plans.[106] The CEIC responded to COPOH, agreeing that the "environment has changed" since the establishment of the CLFDB and other changes within Employment and Immigration Canada, but argued that the "CCED is attempting to bring about changes which require time and patience."[107] As a result, COPOH wrote to Minister of Human Resources Lloyd Axworthy in November 1992, stating their organization had withdrawn from CCED due to "a lack of resources to be effective participants."[108] In response, COPOH proposed the development of a "Canadian *Consumer* Committee on Employment and Disability (CCCED)" [emphasis added], though it appears no such committee was ever established. The CCED continued to provide input to the CEIC and CLFDB and published a quarterly newsletter called *Employability* until the expiration of the NSIPD funds in 1997 when the HRDC assumed the functions of the committee.

By the mid-1990s, an era of austerity swept through Canada with damaging effects on social policy affecting disabled and poor people. Anti-poverty and disability activists were unable to halt the progression of a political "common sense revolution" that originated in Ontario but reached out across the country, resulting in extensive government restructuring, stricter eligibility for social assistance, cuts to various social programs and the introduction of new cost-sharing arrangements. Disabled people were partly shielded from this process due to the continuing influence of attitudes that distinguished "worthy" disabled from other poor people as equality rights had not substantially

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[106] MA, CCD fonds, box T1282, f.23 letter COPOH to CCED, 9 Jun 1992.
[107] MA, CCD fonds, box T12816, f.11 letter CEIC to COPOH, "COPOH employment committee evaluation of participation in CCED", 8 Dec 1992.
[108] MA, CCD fonds, box T1282, f.25 letter COPOH to Axworthy, Minister Human Resources, 12 Nov 1993.

changed perspectives of disability.[109] Along with the Charter's guarantee of certain civil and political

rights, advocacy groups were able to claim that certain social program cuts had a "discriminatory

impact."[110] In response to growing economic instability, the federal government had set a limit on

funding to the Canada Assistance Plan (so-called "cap on the CAP"). In 1995 a new program called

the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) was introduced which consolidated and reduced

overall funding through the CAP and health and education transfers.[111] While poor people

dependent on social assistance were negatively impacted by these developments, disabled people in

particular saw declining access to disability-related supports and services after the introduction of the

CHST.[112]

With the turn of the twenty-first century, disability activists continued to advocate for

legislation that protected their right to full access in the community. The Accessibility for Ontarians

with Disabilities Act Alliance (AODA Alliance; originally, Ontarians with Disabilities Act

Committee) pursued an agenda that held substantive rights flowed from human rights

commitments. AODA Alliance co-founder David Lepofsky argued that their group was a

"quintessential poor people's organization" since poverty was a pervasive experience in the disability

community and disability activist organizations in Canada have little to no money.[113] The federalist

structure of Canadian politics meant that seemingly major advances in disability rights, such as the

AODA, were ultimately restricted by jurisdictional limitations. Modelled on the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA) the introduction of the AODA was nationally significant in that it reflects

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[109] Marcia Rioux and Michael Prince, "The Canadian Political Landscape of Disability: Policy Perspectives, Social Status, Interest Groups and the Rights Movement," in *Federalism, Democracy and Disability Policy in Canada*, ed. Allan Puttee (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2002), 11-28.
[110] Jackman, M. P., Bruce (2014). Rights-Based Strategies to Address Homelessness and Poverty in Canada: The Charter Framework. Advancing social rights in Canada. M. Jackman and B. Porter. Toronto, Irwin Law: 66
[111] From $29.7 billion for 1995-6 to $25.1 billion in 1997-8.
[112] Roeher Institute, 2001: 32-33
[113] Lepofsky, 2010: 194

the latest outcome of the state-led approach to policy reform by disability rights activism to address the economic "problem" of disability in Canada. The AODA could not have the same impact as its model given it is a provincial statute, which has been roundly criticized for failing to produce substantive improvement in employment rates, though David Lepofsky and other activists have advocated for a similar Canadians with Disabilities Act.[114] In many ways, the AODA reflected the outcome of evolving strategies and perspectives held by disability rights activism and advocacy to address the economic problem of disability in contemporary Canada. However, the federalist structure of Canadian politics meant that major advances in social policy affecting disabled and poor people were ultimately restricted by jurisdictional limitations.

Anti-poverty groups also have a stake in policy outcomes associated with Canada's ratification in 2010 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). A major component of the CRPD includes "the eradication of poverty." The convention also focuses on "Highlighting the fact that the majority of persons with disabilities live in conditions of poverty, and in this regard recognizing the critical need to address the negative impact of poverty on persons with disabilities." Article 28 of the CRPD, which deals with adequate standard of living and social protection, seeks to "ensure access by persons with disabilities, in particular women and girls with disabilities and older persons with disabilities, to social protection programmes and poverty reduction programmes," as well as ensuring "access by persons with disabilities and their families living in situations of poverty to assistance from the State with disability-related expenses, including adequate training, counselling, financial assistance and respite care."[115] These measures play a role in

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[114] Mark Weber, "The Americans with Disabilities Act and Employment: A Non-Retrospective," *Alabama Law Review* 52:1 (2000): 375-418.
[115] Kanter, Arlene S. "Promise and Challenge of the United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities, The." *Syracuse J. Int'l L. & Com.* 34 (2006): 287.

lifting all poor people out of poverty by working ensure social policy in Canada remains consistent with international standards.

The problem with attitudes and political will

While Canadian disability and anti-poverty activists struggled since the 1960s to promote progressive legislation to combat poverty and unemployment, their success was ultimately limited by the attitudes of policymakers and the broader Canadian public. Social policy during this period was led not by visionary politicians but by an "activist state" marked by "an awareness that our society's existence depends upon a continuing flow of decisions made by politically accountable state officials."[116] An activist approach to policymaking included a commitment to spending money to support the development of organizations that contributed to active citizenship in a participatory democracy.[117] Organizations including COPOH and NAPO were driven by disabled and poor consumers but relied on public funds to finance their campaigns for policy reform and social change. Early disability rights activists resented the perceived conflict of interest of public funding but rationalized that the state had a role to play in supporting social movement activism.[118]

Special government bureaucracies were introduced during this time that were designed to address the economic dislocation of disabled and poor people. These offices were introduced to help improve social policy during a dynamic twenty-year period when disability rights and anti-poverty activists brought sustained attention to the causes and consequences of poverty and unemployment. Disabled and poor people were hired by various levels of government as paid advocates, coalition-builders, public sector workers, and advisory committee members committed to

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[116] Bruce Ackerman, "Foreword: Law in an Activist State," *The Yale Law Journal* 92:7 (1983): 1083.
[117] Fraser Valentine and Jill Vickers, "Released from the Yoke of Paternalism and 'Charity': Citizenship and the Rights of Canadians with Disabilities," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 14 (1996): 169.
[118] MA, CCD Fonds, Box P5364, File 2, Letter, COPOH to Secretary of State, 16 May 1978.

promoting greater participation in the labour market. These state offices focused on the

implementation of activities related to the social and employment integration of disabled people,

representing a vanguard for the promotion of disability rights within government bodies. As the

official liaisons between government, employers and the broader public sphere, special offices

educated employers and the wider public about the needs and abilities of disabled people in the

labour market. New initiatives to promote awareness of disability issues were often devised within

these offices and staffers exerted pressure on other parts of government to modify or eliminate

barriers to social and economic participation. Simultaneously acting as civil servants and paid

disability advocates, these offices worked with social movements to advance progressive policy

reform.

One such bureau, the Ontario Handicapped Employment Program (HEP), was established

in 1978 under Ontario Progressive Conservative Premier Bill Davis to promote and actively facilitate

the employment of disabled people in the private sector. In 1979 HEP undertook a joint project

with the Ontario March of Dimes to test the implementation of an affirmative action program in

Hamilton, Ontario.[119] HEP organizers explained that the impetus for the project was provided by

the 1975 Canadian Chamber of Commerce report on the effect of employer attitudes which

demonstrated that the cultivation of a team of progressive-minded employers would ripple outward

into the business community.[120] The pilot project approached the problem of creating positive role

models by pairing participant employers with service agencies and other sources of disabled

jobseekers that worked closely with human resources workers to reform their company's labour

relations policies and practices.[121] The forty-six million dollar project resulted in the placement of

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[119] Ontario Ministry of Labour, *The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project for the Physically Disabled*, Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1980.

[120] AO, RG 7-148, Box 100615, File "Speeches/TV," Conference Proceedings, Handicapped Employment Program, "A Conference on Education Now—Employment Later: The Hearing Impaired Job Candidate and the Changing Employment Scene," (10-11 November 1980).

[121] "The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project"

many disabled workers in Hamilton, cultivation of an innovative network of progressive employers

in the city and provided content for the fledgling HEP to produce promotional employer resource

kits to liaise with an increasingly large group of employers.[122]

The presence of formal vehicles of social advocacy within government such as HEP helped

ensure some continuity in the visibility of disability and poverty issues despite continuous shifts in

the political terrain. By the early 1970s greater emphasis at all levels of government on rationalizing

initiatives across departments to reduce expenditures undermined the development of the welfare

state, drawing resources and political will away from social movement activism. With the federal

New Democratic Party holding the balance of power during successive minority Liberal

governments through to the mid-1970s, there was consistent pressure on governments to tackle

poverty issues, including consideration of a Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI) proposed by

NAPO.[123] Special ministerial posts, bureaus, and advisory committees disguised little political action

to improve the labour market integration of disabled and poor people. Similarly, employers

embraced the rhetoric and values of disability rights but operated according to a different set of

business principles and social attitudes that inhibited the realization of equity and a 'level playing

field.' Employer attitudes were consistently identified by activists and policymakers as a critical

factor that prevented disabled and poor people from enjoying full citizenship. Public declarations of

support for disability policy issues by individual employers and business associations were ultimately

undermined by widespread reluctance at the local level to actually hire disabled people as workers.

Prejudicial attitudes were consistently identified in successive reports that demonstrated

patterns of deep-rooted attitudinal resistance to a platform of economic incentives offered by

disability activists and political authorities. In his landmark text *Handicapping America* published in

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[122] "The Hamilton Affirmative Action Project"

[123] Haddow, R. S. (1993). <u>Poverty reform in Canada, 1958-1978 state and class influences on policy making</u>, McGill-Queen's University Press: 99.

1978, Frank Bowe wrote, "Resistance to hiring disabled people is as emotional as it is cognitive."[124] Bowe asserted that attitudes can be remarkably inflexible even when people are presented with ample evidence regarding the prevalence of "disabling" attitudes and the result of socially and economically sidelining disabled people. Bowe discovered that attitudinal barriers were in many ways much more resilient than architectural barriers in that they could not be erased simply with legislation. Bowe concluded that more than thirty years of Hire the Handicapped Weeks and similar awareness campaigns across North America had resulted in little appreciable change in employer attitudes. The Roeher Institute similarly found in 1988 that most disabled Canadians lived in poverty because they were blocked from participating in the workforce mainly due to "attitudes that assume inability rather than employment potential," and these challenges in the labour market are directly related to dependence upon social assistance.[125] These findings reflect a circular logic whereby prejudice concerning disabled and poor people's association with dependency and social assistance contribute to attitudinal barriers that block their full participation in the labour market. Deprived of a diverse set of experiences with people with disabilities, many people in mainstream society relied upon stereotypes about disability that reinforced the ideological and actual separation of disabled people from normative settings.

A comprehensive study conducted by the Canadian Chamber of Commerce (CCC) in 1975 identified typical employer attitudes toward disability that provided a foundation for understanding how employer practices excluded people with disabilities from participation in the labour market. The CCC's ground-breaking report, released in 1975, marked the first comprehensive examination of the relationship between employer attitudes and the employment of people with disabilities in Canada. The report, entitled *Employability of the Handicapped*, concluded employers' attitudes were

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[124] Frank Bowe, *Handicapping America: Barriers to Disabled People* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 181.
[125] Roeher institute, "Income insecurity: the disability income system in Canada," 1988: 1

among the most important factors that shaped the exclusion of people with disabilities from

mainstream employment. Thirty per cent of survey respondents acknowledged they had never hired

nor considered hiring a disabled person and were unaware that the public sector might be a source

for new employees. Nearly seventy-five per cent of employers stated there was no job that disabled

workers could handle or that the nature of their business was inappropriate for disabled people, and

a further sixty-one per cent stated that a disabled person had never applied or contacted them about

available jobs. Many employers believed that disabled workers were inherently at greater risk of

accidents, that they may contravene fire regulations or generally result in increased insurance

premiums. Other employers believed that their workplace was inaccessible to many disabled people

and could not be adapted to become accessible. Additionally, many employers believed disabled

workers would be chronically absent, result in greater turnover, had emotional problems, require too

much supervision, or would ultimately negatively affect production rates.[126]

The report was highly influential within the business community in Canada, promoting

awareness and self-reflection about prejudices held against disabled people. The CCC and

Department of Health & Welfare built on positive feedback from the report by subsequently

organizing a Seminar on Employability of the Handicapped in Toronto in which key stakeholders

met to discuss the report's findings. The event brought together an unprecedented array of key

multi-sector stakeholders, including representatives from the Canadian Council of Rehabilitation

Workshops as well as municipal and provincial disability activist organizations and others in an

attempt to brainstorm strategies for increasing the employment of disabled people.[127] Employers of

major corporations sat alongside senior government officials, representatives from rehabilitation

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[126] LAC, RG-29, Box 238, File 4314-3-1-9(1), Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Health and Welfare Canada, "Employability of the Handicapped," Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1975.

[127] LAC, Box 238, File 4314-3-1-9 (1), Paper, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Ottawa Liaison Committee, "Role and Initiatives of the Federal Government Regarding Rehabilitation and Employment of the Handicapped," 31 May 1979.

agencies, and social activists to discuss strategies for improving job opportunities for disabled and poor people. In advance of the seminar, disability activists lobbied political officials to use the conference as an opportunity to make firm commitments to reforming policies that would effectively promote the inclusion of disabled people in the labour market.[128] In her keynote speech at the seminar, Ontario Minister of Labour Bette Stephenson expressed the general atmosphere of optimism at the seminar, noting the attendance of many business leaders gathered to work with government officials and voluntary agencies in order to create realistic job opportunities for disabled people seeking work.[129]

The Canadian Human Rights Commission similarly responded to the work of the CCC by delivering a nationwide series of seminars on employment that brought together private sector employers, various levels of government, unions, disabled people, and service agencies.[130] Subsequent seminars and training events, such as those conducted in conjunction with the annual National Access Awareness Week beginning in 1988 also reflected a constant effort to combat resilient employer attitudes with awareness-building activities in order to confront emerging trends and issues. However, repeated studies from the 1970s to 1990s demonstrated few substantive changes in the attitudes and practices of employers around disability despite ongoing campaigns across the country that raised awareness of disability issues in the workplace and specifically targeted employers that encouraged them to rethink their role in the objective of "full participation."[131] Disability and anti-poverty activism was a long-term project to challenge these prejudicial attitudes with various outcomes that educated policymakers and the wider public about disability and poverty

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[128] AO, RG 7-148, Box B100558, File "Publications," Newsletter, BOOST, *The Third Eye* 10 (10 December 1976): "A Letter to the Premier."

[129] AO, RG 7-149, Box B367312, File "Dr. Stephenson's Speech," Speech, 26 November 1976.

[130] MA, CCD Fonds, P5364, File 23, Paper, Canadian Human Rights Commission, "Employ - Ability: A Guide to the Employment of Persons with Physical Disabilities," 1982.

[131] AO RG 7148 B335962, report CCRW, "Industrial strategies for workshops of the future: proceedings of the 1978 CCRW national training seminar", 26 May 1978.; CCRW, *Ability & enterprise*, May/June 1987; Rioux & Prince, 2002: 12-25.

issues. With each new campaign and the addition of marginalized people to the workplace, ripples of awareness were created that reverberated back to the collective vision of these social movements to break down social barriers to meaningful inclusion.

Conclusion

The period from 1966 to present marked a period of major change in policies and programs for working and unemployed disabled: growth of services into 1970s, decline by late 1970s and 1980s, severe cuts in late 1980s and 1990s into 21st century. The decline of the federal-provincial cost-sharing program CAP in the mid-1970s was a watershed moment in the history of poverty and disability in Canada. The federal Social Security Review in 1973 marked a definite policy trend toward deregulation and declining support of Keynesian economics as a guide for public policy. Findings from the federal review provided the basis for the structured withdrawal of the state funding from the welfare system, particularly at the federal level. This trend intensified in the late 1980s and 1990s, forcing disabled and poor people to contend with rising job insecurity while growing gaps in the welfare system meant the state failed to live up to its promise to support people living in poverty. Employment insurance, job training, CPP-D benefits, and provincial social assistance programs were all negatively affected by the decline of CAP. Eligibility for EI was progressively tightened in the 1990s, while CPP-D pension rate increases were minimized.[132] Cutbacks at federal level meant more people reliant on provincial social assistance, but all services

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[132] Boyce, E. B., Will; Krogh, Kari (2006). Income Support and Employment Policy Reforms in the Early 1990s: Implications for People with Disabilities and Their Organizations. <u>Disability and Social Policy in Canada</u>. M. A. J. McColl, Lyn. Concord, ON, Captus Press: 254

suffered since the provinces and municipalities relied on federal cash flow through CAP. These developments placed greater demands on activists to protest these changes. However, disability and anti-poverty organizations were simultaneously weakened by dwindling transfer payments which meant fewer funds to support the activities of social movement activism. Federal policy reforms simultaneously undermined ability of disability organizations to respond to emergency and advocacy needs of disability community.[133]

Disability rights activists and anti-poverty advocates sometimes worked together, using legislative tools and direct action strategies to enlist allies and achieve policy outcomes. However, disability rights and poor people's organizations were largely unequipped to effect major change. The introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms had huge influence on bringing together different social movements by providing a common agenda to advance the rights of marginalized populations, including disabled and poor people. Disability rights and anti-poverty activists recognized the importance of building coalitions to encourage political will to address barriers to full economic participation, including income support, work incentives, and benefits for injured workers. Canadian disability rights activists tended to focus on lobbying efforts but also engaged in direct action to achieve desired legislative reforms. Direct activism was practiced by some disability activists and anti-poverty groups, including the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) which drew disability and injured workers' activists into protests against reductions to social assistance.

Disability and anti-poverty movements were unable to respond effectively to progressive changes to the anti-poverty policy environment due to subsidy cutbacks and organizational restructuring. The lack of united front on many issues affecting disabled and poor people could have effectively fought against policy developments. Outside organizations also often received mixed

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[133] Boyce, 261

messages from disability community given the tension between service and consumer organizations. Collaboration between disability organizations and other social movements was limited as activists steered around disability issues in order to avoid perceived internal politics that divided the disability community. Nevertheless, the Disabling Poverty/Enabling Citizenship project launched in 2008 provide evidence that disability rights and anti-poverty movements continue to move in similar directions and look to each other for support.

Are working and unemployed disabled poor people any better off today than they were fifty years ago? Disabled Canadians continue to experience high rates of unemployment, precarious work and poverty despite fifty intervening years of social activism and policy change. However, administrative structures and the legislative context governing disability issues and anti-poverty measures are different and in a state of perpetual change since the introduction of equality rights, while the eligibility and scope of social assistance has tightened considerably over time. These changes have occurred despite the influence of disability rights and anti-poverty movements seeking greater benefits and protections for working and unemployed disabled poor people. Most of the formal vehicles connecting policymakers to the disability and poor communities have changed markedly over time, including drastic cutbacks during 1990s which led to the dismantling of various offices, councils and committees. These changes resulted in less consultation with disability and anti-poverty activists who are in a key position to articulate the needs of these communities to policymakers. Political announcements have not always translated into policy changes. Canadian governments view international human rights commitments as "moral obligations" rather than actually enforceable rights. The Charter's "right to life, liberty, and security of the person" does not necessarily require governments to take positive measures to address poverty.[134] As a result, many

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[134] Jackman, 2014: 70

disabled people have continue to live in poverty in contravention to federal commitments to promote measures to alleviate poverty and unemployment in the disability community. The introduction of Charter rights transformed the legislative framework shaping disability and poverty issues but the momentum for progressive disability rights was not sustained. After the 1990s, there have only been sporadic advances for disability rights coupled with many losses associated with the growing influence of neo-liberal ideas and policies. The eligibility and scope of social assistance has also tightened over time. Unemployment insurance and other income support programs changed from the mid-1980s through the 1990s due to changing economic conditions and political priorities to include stricter eligibility rules in line with greater emphasis on returning people to work.[135] These changes had the effect of further marginalizing injured workers and other working and unemployed disabled people living in poverty.

Despite these changes, there is a continued dichotomy between outward expressions of public support and political will to improve accessibility and full participation against the reality of slow change in attitudes and practices of employers and policymakers. Disabled people continue to experience higher rates of chronic unemployment and poverty compared to non-disabled people just as they did in 1966 when the CAP was introduced to address gaps in services. These conditions and the overall lack of change over time in poverty and unemployment rates have been well-documented. While disability and anti-poverty activists have perhaps helped raise awareness, many of the same 'traps' still exist in social assistance. Recipients of social assistance who work are still subject to stringent income recovery provisions that force many disabled people to forgo work to avoid risking the loss of irreplaceable benefits and supports. Restructuring of welfare policy since the 1990s has focused on reducing caseloads and promoting labour market participation, but often this

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[135] Jongbloed, 2006: 248.

occurs at the expense of long-term cases including clients with disabilities and other impoverished clients with "substantial barriers to employment." In order to report positive results in the goal to reduce welfare rolls, many of these "harder-to place cases" have been directed into job training and transitional support programs. As a result, many disabled poor people are still trapped by social policy that does not provide adequate supports.

Historical studies such as this study provide policymakers and commentators important context to help understand past successes and failures since the best roadmap forward begins with knowing how we have arrived to the present. A lack of institutional memory due to constant administrative restructuring and turnover within activist organizations hinder the preservation of important details of change over time, a situation that calls for a more robust historiography to retain and retell some of this knowledge. It is critical that policymakers, activists and academics understand how social movements have worked separately and together in past campaigns to confront emergent threats to the policy framework and stimulate reform.

The present study raises a number of possibilities that can inform future developments in social movement activism and policy. There exists the possibility that disability and anti-poverty movements can find stronger connections through a shared commitment to "health activism," especially as it relates to homelessness issues. Health social movements (HSM) are inclusive belief systems, research and practice that include an array of formal and informal organizations, supporters, networks of co-operation and media that are particularly interested in contesting power and authority.[136] Poverty is an important determinant of health and has potentially "damaging effects" on physical and mental health, including lower life expectancy, injury, suicide, stroke, heart

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[136] Orsini, M. (2009). Health Social Movements: The Next Wave in Contentious Politics? Group Politics and Social Movements in Canada. M. Smith. Toronto, University of Toronto Press: 329-331

attack, infant mortality.[137] As this study has demonstrated, the dominant approach to poverty since the 1990s has been to make life harsher for poor and homeless people. As a result, health provides a "master frame" for diverse social movements such as disability rights and anti-poverty activism to coalesce around in response to collective challenges to medical policy and politics.

Social movement activism has also attempted to connect "moral commitments" to disability rights with enforceable policy. These efforts will continue with Canada's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as activists encourage policymakers to adopt holistic policy responses to disability and poverty. Both movements have struggled against the effects of policies that trap social assistance recipients and seek to eliminate "welfare traps" that keep disabled and poor people in poverty. Disability and anti-poverty organizations can collaborate more closely on efforts to address these issues in the future to support more collaborative ventures to promote progressive policy.

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[137] Jackman, 2014: 74.