

CHAPTER XX.—WELFARE SERVICES

CONSPECTUS

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From a historical as well as a constitutional point of view, the responsibility for social welfare in Canada has rested on the provinces, which, in turn, have delegated a large share of this responsibility to the municipalities. It is but recently, relatively speaking, that the concept of public welfare has grown to include more than poor relief, sanitation and institutions of confinement and that the provinces have undertaken to meet these expanding needs by maintaining institutions of one kind or another, child welfare services, and other specialized programs. Thus the provinces themselves have latterly assumed the major role in public welfare and, even though the municipalities have continued to carry substantial burdens, the Provincial Governments have taken a direct part in co-ordinating the work and assisting by subsidies and other means. At the same time, an increasing measure of responsibility on the part of the Dominion has been in evidence: this was especially noticeable, during the pre-war depression decade, in the fields of unemployment relief, agricultural relief and old age pensions. While constitutional authority has not changed, except with respect to unemployment insurance, the pressure of events in the depression decade obliged the Dominion Government to help the provinces to shoulder their financial burdens by grants-in-aid, etc. To-day, therefore, the responsibility of the Dominion Government for problems arising in these fields has become fairly well established by custom rather than constitutional change, although what remained of unemployment relief after the introduction of unemployment insurance was turned back in 1941 to the provinces. A real effort was made by the Rowell-Sirois Commission (see the Canada Year Book 1940, pp. 1157-1163) to bring about the necessary redistribution of administrative and financial responsibility essential to the proper functioning of the Dominion and Provincial authorities in the complicated economic circumstances that are an outgrowth of the present century. This effort has still to be carried forward to a conclusion and, meantime, some degree of constitutional friction and difficulty is perhaps unavoidable.

Historically, welfare work begins with the care of the most needy and the care of the indigent, aged and infirm, homeless orphans, dependent, neglected and delinquent children, and the dependent deaf and blind. These classes have been recognized as a public responsibility since the earliest days, but the actual work of caring for them was, in great degree, undertaken by religious and philanthropic bodies, of which many were incorporated during the latter part of the nineteenth