

# *Platonic Interests? The Canada Pension Plan, Policy Reform Processes, and the De-Democratization of Politics*

---

*Michael J. Prince*

Remarks at the Dobell Symposium

“A Fine Balance: Expertise, Evidence and Democracy  
in Policy and Governance”

University of Victoria

August 19, 2011



University  
of Victoria

British Columbia  
Canada



# **Rod Dobell, the CPP and Pension Reform**

---

- ❑ 1960s to today
- ❑ Social insurance, income security, intergenerational relations
- ❑ Parliamentary Task Force, 1983: study director
- ❑ Issues of sustainability, equity and efficiency, analysis and consultation



# *Concept of de-democratization*

---

- Tilly (2000; 2003): categorical inequalities, trust networks, public policies
- Brown (2003; 2006): devaluation of liberty, equality, substantive citizenship; saturation of the state with market rationalities
- Young (1990): de-politicization of public spheres, public issues and public identities



# ***CPP policy history: 1966-2011***

---

- Reform is about manufacturing ideas and practices of risk, security, balance and responsibility, and managing interrelations among public and private interests
- Program expansions and contractions in certain benefits
- A reduction in democratic spaces for public dialogue and participation on pension reforms



# The government of pension reform

---

- A shift from *governance* in pension policy making in the 1960s and 1970s
- Toward the *government of pension reform* in more recent decades
- A decline in role of social policy ministers and departments and social groups vis-à-vis finance ministers and portfolios and economic interests



# *Democratic meanings of pension reform exercises*

---

- Instrumental: to review and possibly change pension rules, program design and benefits, producing tangible resources
- Symbolic: taking leadership, seen listening, to reassure public, to be thinking long-term
- Disciplinary: political management of various kinds of knowledge and political opportunity structures



# *Some Platonic questions....*

---

- Is the idea of retirement income security for all Canadians to remain elusive in reality, like shadows on a wall and echoes in the caverns of a cave?
- Must many be resigned to the darkness?
- What is the role, if any, of democratic reform in future social policy reform?
- What might Rod say?