

PRESENTATION

TO THE

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

ON

BILL C-144

"ONE IN FOUR IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH"

SEPTEMBER 8, 1988.

The Ontario Federation of Labour represents 800,000 workers in Ontario. We have a long and proud history in the struggle for quality child care. We have lobbied the Ontario Government for changes and improvements in the delivery of child care. We played a key role in the formation of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, an umbrella group composed of teachers, social service workers, unions, women's groups, early childhood educators, students and parents and our affiliated unions have led the way in negotiating child care and parental rights provisions in their collective agreements.

This Federation has conducted two campaigns in Ontario, "Sharing the Caring" 1981, and "Campaign Child Care" 1987, where we travelled across the province hearing from parents and child care advocates on the kind of child care system that is required to meet the needs of children and parents.

Child care is a critical issue for all workers. We are first and foremost here today to stress the fact that any new child care act must ensure a comprehensive quality, non-profit child care system. As with medicare and pension benefits, we believe child care should be federally mandated, universally available,

well funded and sensitive to those who need the service. Accompanying legislation dealing with enhanced maternity leave, parental leaves and family responsibility leaves should also form part of any comprehensive national child care plan.

In this presentation to the Committee, we will raise a few key points which outline our opposition to the Bill. We also submit to the Committee that this Federation fully supports the presentations of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Canadian Labour Congress.

Four major national studies have documented the need for dramatic and immediate changes to funding and provision of child care: Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1970; Royal Commission on Equality in Employment, 1984; Katie Cook's Report of the Task Force on Child Care, 1985; and the Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care, 1987.

Any proposal for a national child care act must measure up against four key criteria: the building of a comprehensive system, the provision of high quality

care, with decent wages for the care-givers, equitable access for all Canadian families and public accountability.

We suggest that Bill C-144 is fundamentally flawed and will be a major step backwards for children, families and women in Canada. In 1986, some 1.9 million children had parents working or studying full-time or working more than 20 hours per week. Even if the need for non-parental care does not continue to increase as it has done consistently in the past, this plan will create spaces to accommodate less than 1 child in 4 needing non-parental care.

Historically, the federal government has taken an active and strong leadership role in providing the impetus and ongoing fiscal support for other important social programs, for example, pensions, health care, post-secondary education and social services. This was done to ensure that all Canadians, regardless of where they live or work, level of income, or racial or cultural background, would have access to approximately the same level of essential public services.

12

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144 shows this government's lack of leadership by its refusal to set national objectives and federal criteria for federal participation in cost-sharing. Federal leadership in establishing criteria for the quality of and accessibility to child care is critical. Without the inclusion of strong guiding principles setting out a long-term vision for a national child care system, Bill C-144 will only entrench the current fragmented approach to child care in Canada.

Further, it is inconceivable that a national strategy for child care could be brought forward without clear provisions for public accountability for public funds, or for the monitoring and enforcement of minimum provincial standards.

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, fails to recognize or support the diversity of needs for high quality child care across the country. Although provinces may choose to offer a variety of child care services (for example, regulated family day care, infant care, school-age care, care for ill children, nursery school, programs to accommodate special needs children, extended hours care and parent-child centres) there is no assurance that those will become available

to parents across the country nor is there sufficient funding to allow them to develop broadly. In addition, Bill C-144 omits recognition of the unique considerations of native Canadians regarding child care.

The Canada Child Care Act limits spending on child care by imposing a funding ceiling. The Canada Assistance Plan was open-ended; the federal government paid one dollar for every dollar of provincial child care expenditures. Provinces which replace the open-ended cost sharing of the Canada Assistance Plan with participation in the Child Care Act will be moving from an open-end mechanism to a limited fund.

Ontario's Minister of Community and Social Services, John Sweeney, has stated that child care planning will have to be cut by 15 per cent because Ontario's funding under the Canada Child Care Act is limited. The impact of these funding restrictions is already being seen in Toronto. There are over 5,000 children approved and waiting for child care spaces that Minister Sweeney says there is no funding for. Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton has publicly stated that Metro had planned to add 2,000 spaces this year but, due to funding limits under Bill C-144, the province will only cost share

1,000. We believe this will become an increasing problem, instead of expanding the system this bill will impose limitations on the development of child care.

The \$4 billion dollar fund currently allotted as the maximum federal contribution over the next seven years is not assured, as actual expenditures are subject to annual appropriation by Parliament.

The Canada Child Care Act fails to guarantee that even current levels of financial assistance available under The Canada Assistance Plan to help low income families meet their child care needs will remain in place, let alone be enhanced. As we have stated earlier, we are seeing parents who qualify with little or no hope of obtaining a subsidized space. These parents will be given no other option but to find their own solutions with unlicensed, unregulated babysitting arrangements.

The Canada Child Care Act will limit the number of child care spaces below normal expected growth. Child Care advocates have argued that health department figures show that the number of day-care spaces has grown 12-1/2 per cent per year over the past four years under the present C.A.P. system. The federal

government's target of 200,00 additional spaces over the next seven year period will not even ensure a rate of growth equivalent to what we have been experiencing.

Capital costs under Bill C-144 are not provided after 1995, limiting continued development.

With a clear limit on expansion of child care spaces and no provision for capital funding after 1995, this Act will reduce the rate of growth of child care across the country.

The Canada Child Care Act will entrench poor quality care. Extending federal funding to commercial child care services undermines the development of high quality child care. New public funding to for-profit child care will lead to rapid growth, including expansion by large American chains with substantial venture capital and the ability to move quickly into new markets.

There is ample evidence that the quality of commercial care is poorer than the quality of child care in the non-profit sector in important areas like staff child ratios, staff training, staff turnover, health & safety and wages and working conditions for staff.

A study produced for the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services released this year, concluded children in non-profit day-care centres receive better care than children in profit-making centres. The study reported that commercial centres have more violations of the Ontario's Day Nurseries Act and fail to meet minimum standards far more often than non-profit centres.

In the 1987 "Campaign Child Care" the Ontario Federation of Labour and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care travelled across Ontario hearing from child care advocates on profit versus non-profit child care.

Parents and workers reported that the only way to maximize profits is to cut corners in crucial areas such as: quality, staffing, nutrition, environment and provision of infant care. Cuts in staffing affect both the worker and the child. Low wages and heavy workloads cause burnout among the staff. Turnover is high and it is very difficult to obtain or retain trained, competent child care workers. Parents spoke

of there being no opportunity for significant parental involvement in the programs or the decision making in commercial centres.

In Guelph, Ontario a former child care worker in a commercial centre told us:

"Toys, equipment, books were broken, badly in need of repair or replacement, supplies were limited so that planned activities often couldn't be done, enrolment increased without additional staff being hired with the result being that teacher-child ratios were by no means within Day Nursery Act standards."

"Children were left unsupervised or with minimal supervision. At times, one teacher was responsible for the supervision of up to 40 children in outdoor play. In my last month working at the centre I was responsible for 11 to 17 three-year-olds, which is well above Day Nursery Act standards of one teacher to eight children for this age group.

"Programming was difficult to complete with only myself to set up, supervise the children and clean up. I was burnt out. I wasn't effective with the children. There wasn't enough of me to go around. I resigned along with four other staff. I struggled with the decision to leave for months... In the aftermath of this experience, I learned from previous and present employees of the centre that these conditions have existed for sometime and they continue to exist."

The government has argued that commercial centres are a viable option for child care and parents should be allowed to choose. The OFL does not advocate putting commercial operators out of business. Just as parents should be free to send their children to private schools, so should they have the choice to send their children to private child care programs. By extension, just as we do not fund private schools with public dollars, neither should we continue to fund private child care with public dollars. We propose instead that transition programs be put in place to assist for-profit centres to convert to non-profit centres in

which administrators would earn salaries. Those operators who do not wish to change over to non-profit operations would forfeit access to public funds.

Clearly the free market is not the best way to deliver an essential social service such as child care. Using scarce dollars to increase profits for commercial operators is an irresponsible use of public monies.

Bill C-144 fails to ensure that provinces will support existing or new non-profit services with direct operating funds. Without direct operating funds, not only will high fees make child care inaccessible for families but salaries for child care staff will remain shockingly low. The average child care worker earns less than zookeepers make for looking after animals. An early childhood instructor from Hamilton's Mohawk College, told an OFL Forum that the College has difficulty attracting students to early childhood programs because assistant managers make more for tending hamburgers at McDonalds. Canada's child care workers are among the worst paid people in the country. Bill C-144 does not in any way address this issue despite such a glaring need.

Direct operating funds are key to quality care. If not, services will continue to be plagued with existing financial problems and the high quality care children need will remain out of reach.

Clearly there is a fundamental problem with a Bill when it is praised enthusiastically only by its proposers and commercial child care entrepreneurs, and opposed by everyone who had advocated for a range of high quality child care options.

Accordingly, we make the following recommendations:

1. The federal government establish a set of national objectives and federal criteria for provincial participation in cost-sharing to set the standard for quality services across the country.
2. That a mechanism be developed to provide for public accountability of public funds and for the monitoring and enforcement of standards.
3. That such initiatives include a variety of services, including group day care, family home day care, parent resource centres, in-home care,

part-time care, emergency care, extended hours for shiftworkers, toy-lending libraries, children's drop-in programs, etc.

4. That the Act be an open-ended mechanism of cost-sharing.
5. That the government allow provinces and territories to continue using the Canada Assistance Plan for subsidies for low income families and to begin to use the Canada Child Care Act to build a publicly funded system.
6. That no new child care monies be available to commercial operators and that the government introduce a program for conversion to non-profit status for those commercial operators who wish to continue receiving public monies.
7. That there be no time limit to the commitment of capital funding.
8. That the Act ensure that the provinces will continue to support and develop new non-profit services with direct operating funds.

9. That the federal government ensure that the provision for maternity and parental leave be strengthened through U.I.C. by increasing benefits, extending lengths of leaves and reducing qualifying periods.

10. That child care funding be restructured to recognize the valuable work performed by child care workers and to ensure wages are raised to a decent living standard and to ensure the provision of benefits for child care workers.

Respectfully submitted,

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR

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