

ROXIE

CHILD CARE FOR WORKING PEOPLE

UAW POSITION ON CHILD CARE PRESENTED  
TO THE ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR'S  
CHILD CARE FORUM - TORONTO, ONTARIO

UAW IN CANADA  
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Although delegates representing 140,000 UAW members in Canada included child care as part of the union's collective bargaining priorities at its triennial bargaining conference in 1979, the UAW in Canada sees child care as a social -- that is, government responsibility.

We are able and willing to negotiate child care from our employers in the absence of adequate public child care just as we have bargained medical insurance, pensions, health and safety committees, equal pay and voluntary overtime before they were publicly guaranteed. In many of these cases the pressure mounted on government because these bargaining breakthroughs led to legislation as business looked to government for relief.

In other words, our collective bargaining strategy is part of our legislative strategy to win decent child care for our families.

To the extent that women still bear the major responsibility for child rearing, child care is a "women's issue". But as the incident of two-income families and single fathers increase, it is becoming clear to our male membership that child care is not so much a women's issue as an issue of all working people.

The long term layoffs in Windsor, for example, have brought that point cruelly home. The pressure of being without work for months, sometimes years, has led to the breakdown of many marriages in Windsor. In a number of instances the fathers have custody of their children, have been recalled to work and have no child care at hand. UAW unions are helping these parents out individually but support is mounting for public child care.

These days most mothers have to work. The economic squeeze of the last several years has forced the majority of married women back into the labour force, many of whom have children. Other women because of separation, divorce or widowhood are raising children on their own, often with little or no financial support.

These women are not abandoning home and hearth for personal fulfillment. Personal fulfillment is not found working in variously horrible conditions at 58% of the wages made by men. These women are working to feed their families. If they did not work, the number of Canadian families living below the poverty line would jump 60%.

But the same economic squeeze that has forced mothers to work has failed to supply adequate child care. Working people are footing the bill for economic mismanagement -- just as they are in the auto industry. Except this time it is the lives of little children which are being affected as never before in history.

The result is that only one in eight kids who needs government child care gets it. The parents of the others are making do with private home care, relatives, expensive private day care. For the under-two-year-olds, only one in twenty children get government-licensed care.

And a terrifying 6% of all kids under 10 are left alone, with no care at all. That figure includes babies.

The UAW represents working people and for working people child care must go far beyond the 9-to-5 framework.

Working people work shifts. They work overtime and on weekends. They face job insecurity. Often their jobs are dirty and back-breaking. Consequently child care must be designed to fit these conditions if it's going to fill the needs of UAW members and other working people.

Shift work and overtime should be eliminated or minimized. And failing that, provision must be made for 24-hour, seven days a week child care.

Industrial workers toiling at heavy jobs, often on shift, find it almost impossible to breast-feed their babies beyond the few weeks covered by UIC. Maternity leave must be extended to give working mothers the opportunity to nurse their infants. The UAW recommends that paid maternity leave and further unpaid leave be seen as part of a child care package.

Child care must be at least affordable in the absence of a fair wage structure and ideally, free, just like the public school system is as well as being universally accessible.

The UAW wants to thank the OFL for the opportunity to appear before this forum and express its view on this crucial issue. We want to congratulate the Ontario Federation of Labour for bringing the issue front and centre to the public and we want to ensure you that this union will be with you every step of the way in the fight for free, universal child care.