

SUBMISSION
to the
PARLIAMENTARY TASK FORCE ON CHILD CARE
by the
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The Canadian Labour Congress welcomes this opportunity to present our views to the Parliamentary Task Force on Child Care.

The policy of the Canadian Labour Congress is established at our biennial conventions. In convention after convention, union members have repeatedly called for government initiatives to solve the child care crisis in this country. The policy of the Canadian Labour Congress, as set out by Convention, calls for universal access to a comprehensive, high-quality, non-profit, publicly funded, non-compulsory child care system. We also see the absolute need for complementary legislation that will provide all workers with essential parental rights.

Our members now have to simultaneously fulfill two of the most fundamental and demanding responsibilities of adulthood - earning a living and raising happy, healthy children. And yet, government legislation and funding for child care support remains tailored to antiquated, nineteenth century patterns of life.

We've already waited far too long for government action.

Child care support is not a new phenomenon in Canada. Indeed, the first daycare centres were established in the mid-1800's. But when we review the history of child care it becomes strikingly clear the need for child care support has never been adequately met.

Initially daycare was perceived as a form of charitable relief for poor, destitute working mothers. Subsequently, it became an

institutionalized form of welfare - totally insufficient government funding, user fees, and the application of stringent needs tests became the norm. Today's problems are obvious - prohibitive fees, demeaning needs or income tests; long waiting lists; uneven quality; and for child care workers, the present system means poverty level wages and inferior working conditions. These are some of the more glaring problems and inequities.

In the section which follows, we present you with our brief analysis of the child care crisis and why it exists.

Child Care Support and the Needs of the Modern Family

While it is true the decision to have children remains a personal one - one which enriches our society and the lives of parents - and while we extend our support to parents who wish to and can stay at home with their children - it is clear that the need for comprehensive family support systems grows more compelling with each day.

The social fabric and family patterns of our society have changed rapidly and dramatically.

Let's look at a few facts of life.

Today the extended family is the exception, not the norm.

Families are smaller and geographically dispersed, with aunts, uncles, and grandparents often scattered across cities and continents.

More mothers of young children now work for a wage or salary than those who are staying home full-time, and their numbers are increasing yearly.

Today, life in rural Canada has also changed. Whether rural women, for example, work on the farm or seek essential supplemental farm income elsewhere, child care support is now being called for. Today, fifteen per cent of Canadian families consist of a bread-winner father, a stay-at-home mother; indeed, a larger percentage of families are now headed by a single parent. The «nuclear family», previously portrayed as typical, is clearly not the norm.

Today, single teenage mothers are forced to forego schooling, training and personal opportunities for employment and security because reliable child care support is not available.

Today, surveys demonstrate that most parents requiring pre-school support for their children would prefer to use supervised, licensed group child care centres. Yet, most families could not afford group care, even if a place was available.

Today, because of a lack of choice, or access to information, or limitations of time, some 90 per cent of children of working parents are placed in private homes, the overwhelming majority of which are unsupervised, isolated, unregulated cottage industries of unknown quality. It's unfair to parents. It's unfair to children. And it's unfair to the workers, mainly women, providing this service. Too often cases of child neglect, poor nutrition, health and safety hazards, and endless hours of T.V. watching take place.

Today, the numbers of lunch-time and after school latch-key children are progressively growing larger.

Today, it is well understood that solving the child care crisis is an essential component in achieving equality between men and women (as guaranteed in Sections 15 and 28 of the Charter of Rights).

Today, parents from all walks of life are calling for a vastly expanded and improved child care support system; they have, in countless numbers, added their voices to those of daycare advocates, women's groups, federal commissions and trade unions who have, for more than a decade, said we need improved government funding and legislation.

Today, women make up 42 per cent of the official labour force. In 1984 approximately 54 per cent of women over the age of 15 were in the paid labour force. Compare this with a rate of 14 per cent at the turn of the century and 31 per cent in 1964.

In addition, in the twenty-year period between 1961 and 1981, federal government statistics show that one-earner couples have dropped from 65 per cent to 16 per cent of all Canadian families while two-earner couples have increased from 14 per cent to 49 per cent and single parent families went from almost six per cent to 11 per cent of all families.

All of these factors point to the undeniable conclusion that high-quality, reliable child care support are now issues of fundamental social importance.

Yet, regardless of these sweeping societal and family changes, regardless of the hardship suffered, unmet needs persist ... and become more intolerable.

The Inadequacies of Canada's Child Care Support System

In this section of our brief we summarize the underlying problems with Canada's child care support system and the unmet needs or problems it creates for children, parents and child care providers.

Our child care services remain fragmented and inconsistent and rest on a user-fee system. This means that to acquire subsidization parents must undergo a rigorous and demeaning means or needs test.

Average income earners cannot meet the criteria and are now obliged to pay between \$300 and \$800 per month for a daycare space depending on the age of the child and the political jurisdiction they live in.

The use of the child care deduction under Section 63 of the Income Tax Act serves to compound the problem. The deduction does, of course, put a limited amount of money in the hands of the average claimant, but it reinforces the user-fee model and does nothing to build an effective child care system. Many parents can't get receipts so they can't even use the deduction.

All of the problems associated with our child care system flow from a legislative and funding orientation that has entrenched and reinforced child care as a user-fee, welfare service.

The existing limited number of licensed child care spaces means that most Canadian children in need continue to be denied access.

According to federal statistics in 1984, there were merely 172,000 licensed child care spaces in the entire country. Yet in the same year, it was estimated that two million children, up to and

including twelve-year olds, had parents who worked or studied at least 20 hours each week.

It has also been found that when it comes to lunch and after-school programs, or support for the children of shift workers, the figures are hardly worth mentioning.

It should not, for example, be ignored that approximately one and a half million school age children between six and fourteen years of age now have mothers who are members of the official labour force.

The lack of adequate government funding - the major underlying problem - remains with us.

We are continually told by politicians that our children represent our most valuable resource for the future. Their actions, however, belie their words.

What this funding nightmare means is that existing daycare centres are forced to hold bake sales, organize rummage sales and sell raffle tickets merely to try and maintain a service which has been relegated to the basements of churches and old community centres. These daycare workers and board members have to live with the daily anguish of turning away parents and children in need; they simply cannot accommodate them.

In addition, because of these funding problems and the dependence on the market place to fill the vacuum, the commercial, profit-making component of the daycare system continues to grow, feeding on a captive market.

It is popularly recognized that good child care is a labour intensive service with limited, if any, opportunities for true productivity gains. Profits can only be made then by charging exorbitant fees or at the expense of critically important prerequisites for the provision of high-quality child care, such as limited group size, low child/adult ratios, good employee wages and working conditions, highly trained caregivers, and good health, safety and nutritional conditions.

We have had examples in Canada of profit-making daycare centres not adhesive to legally sanctioned space requirements for children and staff/child ratios. We have had examples of long strikes where profit centres fought tooth and nail to maintain sub-standard wages and working conditions. We even have the spectre now of profit-making centres using packaged learning programs, peddling tote bags, life insurance and imposing other sales gimmicks on their captive market.

If funding improved, we believe quality would improve in public centres, while profit-motivated centres would be looking to increase their profit margins at the expense of children, parents and workers. The disparities, we are convinced, would become more glaring.

The history of medicare and public education in Canada demonstrates profit-making and providing essential human services is not the way to proceed. The problems which now beset residents and workers at profit-making nursing homes reinforces this point.

Another major problem with our child care support system is the reliance or dependence it creates on informal, unlicensed child care, or «private arrangements».

Here we would simply like to refer you to the well documented book called «The Kin Trade», written by Laura C. Johnson and Janice Dineen. This is the most exhaustive study available on Canada's informal child care arrangements. Based on Project Child Care research, sponsored jointly by the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto and the Children's Day Care Coalition, the book shows that reliance on unregulated, informal child care has already resulted in a serious epidemic of child neglect in Canada.

One more major deficiency of our child care system is its subjugation of child care workers. Work in daycare centres continues to be treated as an extension of unpaid domestic service - and valued accordingly.

Child care workers, mainly women, are paid poverty level wages and are denied the job security, welfare benefits, career development opportunities and respect they deserve.

Child care is not - and never was intended to be - a babysitting or custodial service. On the contrary, child care is a service whose primary function is the stimulation of the emotional, physical and intellectual growth of children during a critically important formative stage in their lives. Anyone who enters a public daycare centre will witness the commitment, love and skills brought to their jobs by employees in the child care field. Parents with children in child care centres are fully cognizant of the contribution made by daycare workers. And yet, these same workers are treated as nothing more than cheap labour.

It is not atypical for graduates of two-year Early Childhood Education programs to be paid the minimum wage; average compensation is now \$7.00 an hour. Even where unionization has occurred, child care workers are not receiving compensation commensurate with the value of their work.

Daycare workers have been forced to subsidize a grossly underfunded service. Parents cannot afford increased user fees. And this leaves workers in an untenable situation. It is an explosive situation. And the blame must be laid at the feet of tight-fisted governments.

Today, parents, local municipal politicians, daycare boards, child care advocacy groups, unions, and daycare workers are saying this intolerable situation must end. We must show greater respect for workers who are entrusted to care for our children.

These, then, are the most obvious problems with our child care system.

Canada Needs a Comprehensive Child Care Support System

Child care support should, we believe, be a basic public service available to all citizens, a right of children, and a benefit to the future of our society. Therefore we propose the following:

- Universal access to government funded, non-profit, high-quality services of care for children zero to 12 to be recognized as an essential social right of all families wishing to use the services.
- The system should be comprehensive. Full-day infant and pre-school care, part-time programs, lunch time and before-and-after school services should be available. Moreover, the requirements of children with special needs and children whose parents are shift workers should be addressed.
- The services provided should reflect the requirements of urban and rural residents and be sensitive to linguistic and cultural differences within the country.
- Flexibility of approach, linked to user needs and accountable community input, should be strong features of the plan. Parental and employee participation should be seen as essential for quality child care services.
- Child care workers must receive wages, salaries and benefits commensurate with the value of their work. In-service training, full compensation

while attending early childhood education programs, built-in relief-substitute provisions and workshops on quality care are essential support programs.

- Public community-based group child care centres should be the hub around which satellite child resource programs can be integrated.

Here we envision the creation of neighbourhood child resource centres, providing all-day group care, part-time care, toy-lending, and training for group and supervised home care providers, etc. These neighbourhood resource centres would be the hub around which satellite programs can be integrated. These would include, for example, supervised private home care, work place day care, care for children of shift workers, and emergency care for families in crisis.

We believe child care should be seen primarily as an essential quality service offered to children and parents. At the same time, however, the extension of socially valuable public services must be seen as an integral part of an economic recovery program for Canada. High unemployment remains Canada's most serious problem. Hundreds of thousands of young people are unable to find work. And yet hundreds of thousands of Canadian parents are forced to resort to make-shift child care arrangements because high-quality licenced programs are simply not available. Giving child care the attention it deserves can help relieve Canada's unemployment problem. The employment of thousands of new child care providers should be a permanent feature of tomorrow's

society. And the construction of new centres and the renovation of existing or unused facilities will create badly needed construction jobs now.

Our country is suffering from an extreme case of child neglect. We believe the time for decisive and enlightened government action has arrived - action that will provide Canadians with a high-quality, comprehensive system of child care. The present forms of government financing are quite obviously inadequate and new dollars must be allocated to establish that system.

In March of this year, the Report of the Task Force on Child Care released their report. We find the phased-in approach to funding recommended by this Task Force to be an acceptable one and one that would meet the call for funding set out in this recent resolution on child care adopted by the 3,000 delegates attending our Convention in Toronto in April of this year:

WHEREAS quality child care services are a basic need for working parents; and

WHEREAS licensed spaces exist for 8% of the children who need daycare; and

WHEREAS the recent Cooke Task Force Report has confirmed the present child care crisis in Canada; and

WHEREAS the labour movement has continued to express concern about this lack of licensed child care, the increase in for-profit childcare, and the poor wages and working conditions of child care workers; and

WHEREAS problems exist with availability, accessibility, affordability, quality, and inflexibility in hours due to levels and methods of funding;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Canadian Labour Congress call for the federal government to bring in a child care financing act to provide funding to the provinces to develop a comprehensive, high-quality, non-profit child care system in Canada; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Canadian Labour Congress pressure the federal government to implement without delay the «good faith» grants recommended by the Cooke Task Force Report as an immediate step to help alleviate the present child care crisis.

We believe the time for decisive, progressive government action cannot be postponed any longer.

The federal government must act now if real concern is to be shown for our children.

The federal government must act now to help relieve the emotional, social and economic pressures impacting on families.

Parental Rights

Working people confront another set of related problems - those associated with their conditions of employment.

For example, existing legislation regarding parental leave for the birth or adoption of a child is inadequate. Most employees are not afforded paid leave of absence to fulfill other parental responsibilities.

These are serious problems which also need to be immediately addressed.

Complementing the provision of child care facilities, parental rights must be enshrined in legislation. Here we recommend the following provisions:

- (a) that the Canada Labour Code provisions for parental leave be amended to provide for a one-year leave following the birth or adoption of a child and that employees' seniority and the accumulation of benefits be fully protected during such leave; (In our submission to the Commission of Inquiry on Unemployment Insurance, we have strongly recommended that unemployment insurance benefits be immediately extended to cover the parental leave provisions currently provided for in the Canada Labour Code.)

(b) that parents be entitled to a minimum of 10 days leave with pay per year for family illnesses, emergencies, or other parental responsibilities;

(c) legislation that protects workers' reproductive capacities and the fetus from potential workplace health and safety hazards; this must include a woman's right to transfer to another job during pregnancy without loss of pay, seniority or benefits. In the event there is no other job available, legislation should guarantee that all pregnant women have the right in these circumstances to take leave from their work and receive payments from the Workers' Compensation funds.

Conclusion

Family and social patterns of life have changed rapidly and dramatically in our country. Yet governments have not adopted to meet emerging needs. It's time, we believe, for the federal government to display real leadership.

Under today's conditions of life and work, good child care support and legislated parental rights are no less important than equally accessible health care or public education.

We are confronted by a problem of immense proportions. Now is the time to implement funding and legislation needed to create improved, expanded and enriched services for our children. We want and expect to see tax dollars used for this worthwhile purpose.

We urge you to submit a report to Parliament which will call for immediate action to facilitate and advance the process of creating a child care system reflective of a modern twentieth century society.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the
CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS

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