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# STATEMENT ON DAY CARE

The care of our children is an issue which deeply affects all of us. Because we value our children so highly, we value the care which they receive. We must ensure that day care is made a priority issue for it underpins the home and working lives of both men and women. We must begin as trade unionists, to plan strategies *collectively* around our children's care, rather than coping individually with frustrating problems in attaining good care, and adjusting hours and schedules.

Unfortunately, the demands of the work place and policies of governments have never seriously taken into consideration the needs of families. It was assumed that women were in the home with the children and that child-rearing was a private responsibility that belonged to individual parents alone.

Somehow the two exceptions to this rule were always overlooked: working class women, who had to work and could not raise their own children, and as a result were pitied and stigmatized and it was assumed their children would become delinquents and criminals; and, the aristocracy, who never raised their own children and as a result were envied their free time and the good care afforded their children by nannies and boarding schools.

Working people today, both women and men, are still plagued by the long-lasting results of these class assumptions. We are victims of the government dictum that your children are yours, you take care of them. And how well you take care of them still largely

depends on how much money you have.

But while we cherish our relationships with our children and our right to raise them the way we think best, we are realizing that the transformation of the family is necessitating that society as a whole play a part in the raising of our future citizens.

The theory of private responsibility, a theory promoted and fostered by Ontario Community and Social Services Minister Keith Norton, is rooted in a family structure which doesn't exist, if it ever did. It is based on the existence of the average family as a self-sufficient and self-governing unit well equipped to provide for children and their development. It is based on the idea of husband working, wife at home, and several children. However only 7 percent of families now fill this image.

Today the "average" family is much more likely to be one of the following: single parent families led by the mother or sometimes the father, two-parent families where both husband and wife work, unmarried couples with children, young girls with children living at home, two women or two men relationships with children, or a variety of these families living together to help share the load.

Many factors contribute to new patterns of work and family life. Families are much smaller out of economic necessity and due to advancements in birth control methods. Aunts, uncles and grandparents are now scattered across cities and continents so that the support of the extended family is limited to occasional

visits or annual Christmas get-togethers.

Add to these changes the disruptions of urbanization and industrialization, the alienation and isolation of city-living, the inflation crisis, and we can begin to understand the strains on the nuclear family which result in daily newspaper accounts of alcoholism, wife-beating, and child abuse. These severe stresses and strains, both economical and psychological on the modern family demand external, public support.

We must develop new approaches which consider and respond to the needs of the new family.

#### Needs

The most important force behind the expansion of the need for day care has been the large-scale entrance of women into the work force. Women are taking on another job outside the home out of economic necessity. Few women would be masochistic enough to fight for a dead end, low wage, low status job and still have to come home to all the responsibilities of housekeeping, cooking and child care, unless they really needed the money. Single parents must work and two-parent families increasingly rely on the women's earnings to meet basic needs, such as food and housing. Buying a home these days is no longer possible on a single wage, reduced as that wage is by inflation.

Laudable efforts have been made over the years to present day care as a family need, but it is inevitably the mother who stays at home when care is not available; the mother who leaves work to look after sick children; the mother who takes part-time jobs to be home after school; the mothers who are the majority of single parents. The lack of accessible free day care is inextricably tied up with the unequal position of women in our society. For many women no day care means no job. For other women inadequate or hard-to-get-to day care means added stress and guilt and poor performance on the job. For still other women, the limited hours of most day care means they must settle for part-time work, or cannot take jobs which require overtime, shiftwork or travel. And this dilemma for women of juggling home and work responsibilities has given employers the excuse to pay women less, and to limit their employment opportunities. There can be no real equality for women until day care becomes a social right.

However day care is not just a service to working parents, important as that may be. A comprehensive, accessible system of day care services is as important to children today, as the extended family was to the children of former times.

The needs of children, in light of changes in the family mentioned earlier, must be a key

consideration in the debate on day care. Children need love, warmth, freedom from neglect and cruelty, good nutrition, stimulation of body and mind. It seems astounding that during all the discussions and public relations campaigns during International Year of the Child, very little was done to promote universal quality day care. A comprehensive system of day care would provide for the needs of children in a warm, caring environment while at the same time relieving the stresses on the over-burdened nuclear family.

#### The Present Crisis in Care

At this time, the system of care for our children is fragmented, inconsistent, underfunded and inadequate in the extreme. Legislation differs across the country. Standards, funding, types of care, administration, delivery of services, all vary from one province to the next.

The Ontario government's avowed policy of cutbacks in the social service field has forced day care centres to close, or be shabbily maintained because of lack of funds. Children are being placed in unsupervised, unlicensed family care arrangements. Corporate enterprise is turning child care into a profit-making, marketable "product". Day care workers are earning poverty-level wages. And the need for day care spaces has been increasing at an alarming rate. In 1978 almost 50% of mothers with children aged 3-5 were working and almost 40% of mothers of children below the age of 3. Further, female-headed single-parent families now account for 8.1% of all Canadian families, and an incredible 68% of low-income single parent mothers under the age of 35 have incomes below the poverty line. In Metro Toronto, *each month*, more than 3500 inquiries are made to the day care centres — in vain. The vacancies are not there, the long waiting lists are. In northern Ontario the almost complete lack of day care services adds to the ever-increasing incidence of child abuse, and the excessive unemployment levels.

The most recent statistics from Health & Welfare Canada detail a dismal picture — only 4.08% of children under the age of 2 with mothers in the labour force are in group care or approved family day care; only 15.46% of children aged 2-6 receive daycare services. Compare this to France where 95% of children aged 3 to 6 attend *free* pre-school programs, and 32% of children under the age of 3 are cared for in a variety of day care services. In addition, care programs designed for the older child, aged 6-12 are virtually non-existent in Canada. Many of these children who may need care in the early morning, at lunch and after school, are required to fend for themselves.

#### Cost and Quality of Care

The average cost of a space in a day care

centre in Canada is \$35-\$100 a week per child. The typical cost for a year is \$2600.00 per child. Parent fees basically pay for the operating costs of day care centres. The only relief available to parents is the subsidy system. But in order to qualify for subsidy you must undergo a rigorous needs or means test which is a complicated examination of your family's resources and expenses, usually administered at the local welfare office. This can be a humiliating and demeaning experience to which we are totally opposed. Further, public assistance or welfare rates are used as the ceiling for subsidy so that only the very poor can qualify. This means that only the wealthy or the poor can afford the costs of public centre care, when it is available. Middle income earners are forced to use home care providers or commercial centres out of economic necessity.

Unfortunately, at this time, the majority of private home care providers are not registered, not supervised, not trained, and as a result the quality of much home care has come under serious scrutiny. Studies have shown that children in such settings often lack proper nutritional diets, and lack stimulating programmes and activities. This type of care, however, is accessible and inexpensive.

The quality of care in group day care centres has also been shown to be less stable than previously believed. Because these centres are licensed, and good standards legislated in terms of staff/child ratios, staff qualifications, and proper space, high calibre care has been taken for granted. However a recent research study in Toronto has shown that government cutbacks in funds are creating severe repercussions: staff members are being laid off and vacancies left unfilled; staff hired to work with children are doubling as cooks and cleaners; old furniture and equipment isn't replaced and important repairs aren't made.

It is not surprising then that corporate or commercial day care ventures are creeping into the gap created by government neglect. These groups have experienced a phenomenal growth rate of 28% in the past year. Government non-involvement has encouraged corporations to open up chains of day care centres as a business - hamburger day care. A number of these operations have been shown to lower standards in order to increase profit, and have also lobbied the government for a lowering of staff-child ratios. Corporate day care notoriously resists the unionization of workers and pays very low wages.

Quality care is also adversely affected by the high turnover of day care workers. In the same way that women in the home receive little recognition for raising children, day care work is seen as unimportant, unskilled, and inferior. The realities of this work could not be further

from such a description. Day care workers are trained and knowledgeable and work under extremely arduous conditions for paltry wages. With budget tightening in Ontario, short-staffing and broken equipment adds to the responsibilities of workers and takes their time away from the children. No wonder day care workers often seek alternative employment.

These workers are performing a vital role in our society. They must no longer be forced to subsidize Ontario's day care system.

#### Sharing the Caring — Labour's Perspective

Our country is at a virtual standstill when it comes to the critical social service of day care.

The struggle for day care in the 80's is no less important than the earlier struggle for public education. And we must fight for it with the same determination. Day care, like public education, can only become a stable and high quality service if it is funded through public monies.

The OFL is seeking a variety of services which will enable parents to freely choose. Group care might appeal to parents who want their child to receive the benefits of contact with other children and the resources of a good centre; private home care might be most suitable for after-school care, or the children of shift workers; workplace day care might be a convenient solution to transportation problems for some parents.

**To this end, the OFL proposes the following as a comprehensive child care plan:**

- 1. Access to a free, universal publicly-funded quality service of care for children aged 0-12 be recognized as an essential social right of every family wishing to use the service.**
- 2. Existing facilities should be developed into a pattern of local satellite child care centres which would fulfil the educational and developmental needs of young children in the community. Each centre would act as a training and resource point for registered private home care givers and playgroups in its area, and might also provide some child health services. Advantage should be taken of the falling numbers of school children caused by the drop in the birth rate to convert unused classrooms into centres. Provincial government funding must be made available to these neighbourhood centres to provide this wide range of services.**
- 3. Responsibility for the service should be removed from the Ministry of Community and Social Services where it will always be seen as a welfare service and not a universal right. An early childhood education division of the Ministry of Education must be established which ensures flexibility of approach combined with**

community control. We do not want day care services to be centrally controlled or become lost in a monolithic structure that parents cannot hope to influence. Day care must be responsive to the changing priorities of its users; it must also be available as a right to all. Only by creating an *autonomous* division of the Ministry of Education can we hope to combine these two principles.

4. The province be committed to fund and assist child care provision when 25 children within a school attendance area require care; such funding must be available only to non-profit and government-operated centres.
5. Private home day care could be organized as part of this system, with the neighbourhood group day care centre as the hub of the wheel, and the family homes as the spokes. Family caregivers would be registered as a condition of public funding.
6. The standards set down in the Day Nurseries Act should be regarded as the "minimum"; and persons with education and experience in early childhood education must continue to be the primary staff in day care centres.
7. Day care workers must receive salaries and benefits commensurate with the value of their work and on a par with workers in education, nursing and social work. Unions must make greater efforts to organize day care workers, and to this end, continue the fight for less restrictive labour laws.
8. The provision of day care facilities cannot be seen in isolation. Just as centres can offer parents the opportunity to return to work or education knowing their child is well looked after, it is equally necessary for society to offer a realistic opportunity for parents to remain at home and care for their child at birth and for a reasonable period afterwards. Present leave provisions fail to acknowledge the wish and right of the father to be involved in child rearing and do not account for the severe stress for parents when children are sick. Legislative amendments should include:
  - a) Paid parental leave available to either parent for the care of a child up to a joint total of one year after birth, or adoption. (Entitlement to leave comes under The Employment Standards Act/pay under the Unemployment Insurance Act.)
  - b) Employees receiving such leave will retain and accumulate seniority and have all benefits maintained during such leave.
  - c) Employees who have been employed with their employer for 6 months will be entitled to such leave.
  - d) Parents be guaranteed paid leave up to

10 days per year for the care of their children who are ill or who have special needs requiring parental attention.

The Ontario Federation of Labour, in proposing this system of universal, comprehensive day care, is making a radical departure from the minimal, piecemeal approaches of the past. Because it is our firm conviction that such a service must become a major priority for the country and this labour movement, we propose the following plan of action to achieve our goal:

**Political Action**

1. That a campaign to achieve the outlined day care service be undertaken as a major priority in the labour movement.
2. That day care be presented as a key item in labour's parallel campaign, and that candidates for election be encouraged to promote labour's position on day care in their campaigns.
3. That our policy proposals be presented to the Premier of Ontario and ministers responsible for this area, followed by a lobby of MPPs when the Legislature reconvenes in 1981.
4. That public forums be held in several key communities in Ontario to ascertain the problems in obtaining quality day care, and raise awareness of the issue.

**Union Action**

5. That affiliates push for day care to be provided at union meetings, conferences and conventions, or alternatively provide day care or babysitter allowances, up to a reasonable maximum.
6. That affiliates negotiate for family-related provisions which will enable parents to share the caring and more easily combine work and home responsibilities. These might include:
  - a) greater consideration be given to enabling parents with young children to work on a part-time basis, or to job-share, at the same time ensuring that their benefits, pay and working conditions are at least pro-rata to the full-time workers.
  - b) flexible working hours.
  - c) allowances to cover day care costs.
  - d) workplace day care, where health and safety standards can be maintained, and where the union controls the service.
  - e) overtime made voluntary and shiftwork severely limited.
7. That the OFL call on the CLC to produce written and audio-visual educational materials on day care.
8. That education programmes of affiliated unions and labour councils reflect the pressing need for day care services and that these affiliates become actively involved in the OFL campaign for universal, publicly-funded day care.