

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women and child care ^[1]

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Excerpts from Introduction

PERHAPS ONE OF THE BEST-KNOWN recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) was the one calling for a national Day-Care Act. Or, at least, it is the one receiving a lot of attention these days because of the federal government's recent promise to devote more than \$30 billion to an early learning and child care (ELCC) system. Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland, who announced the government's ELCC plans in her April 2021 budget speech, invoked the RCSW as the beginning of the movement for universal child care in Canada and promised that her government would be the one to realize the demands of "this half-century of struggle." As Freeland's speech signals, the RCSW shifted the terrain of Canadian childcare politics fundamentally and permanently. Fuelled by feminist demands, it gave legitimacy to the idea of child care as something to which all women, not just the deserving poor working out of economic desperation, were entitled. The RCSW was the first in a long line of national studies and task forces to recommend a national approach to daycare and a major feminist reorientation in what Rianne Mahon has called the "neverending story" of the struggle for universal child care in Canada. The call for a national daycare program, in other words, looms large as an as-yet-unrealized legacy of the RCSW.

Less often acknowledged, however, is that the RCSW daycare proposals were embedded in a comprehensive set of reforms to family policy that included changes to both taxation and social security. The commissioners saw daycare legislation, tax reform, and enhanced social security as moving parts in a greater whole, the whole being mothers' rights to a meaningful choice between paid work and caregiving. Meaningful choice meant public support for both options. The commissioners insisted on public funding for daycare to create more, and more affordable, spaces, but their daycare proposals also hinged on new "compensatory measures that combine[d] specific allowances with a revised taxation system." Specifically, they proposed a \$500 per child "child-care allowance," which, combined with tax reforms, would put more cash in mothers' hands, thereby allowing them to pay, on a sliding scale, their fair share into the new daycare system. The allowance would also give mothers who wanted to remain home to care for their children the security to do so without being entirely dependent on a husband. Thus, with public support for both paid work and caregiving, leveraged through an interlinked package of social programs and tax reform, the commissioners hoped mothers would be free to follow whichever path they desired.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

status of women ^[5]

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