

Union move on profit daycare [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Some of Canada's most compassionate unions -- Canadian Auto Workers, Canadian Union of Postal Workers, United Steelworkers of America -- just finished sponsoring a national speaking tour by Australian daycare activist Lynne Wannan to warn Canadians of the dangers of raising kids without a union-made label.

Wannan took her message of baseless criticism of the private sector, a total rejection of parental choice in family policy and a fantastical misrepresentation of events in her own country from Vancouver to St. John's.

Wannan pines for the good old days in Australia when central planners controlled the entire child care industry. Federal subsidies were once handed out exclusively to the non-profit sector and operators were told where they could open. The result was a dysfunctional system incapable of meeting parent demands. But according to Wannan this was "one of the best child care systems in the world."

In 1991, the command-and-control system was scrapped. The federal child care subsidies were converted into a voucher system that flowed through the parents to the child-care centres of their choice, be they for profit or not for profit.

Within a year of the new policy, the number of day care centres in Australia more than doubled from 984 to 2,285. Within 10 years, it exceeded 4,000. And the vast majority of this growth -- driven by parental demand -- was from the private sector, which now accounts for about three-quarters of the market. The most recent survey of parents by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 94% were happy with the amount of child care they were getting. In other words, the Australian child care system is working fine from a parent's perspective. And yet Wannan calls it a policy disaster. Why?

Because it's not how happy parents are that really counts in the alternative world Wannan is promoting. It's how happy are the unions.

And unions are unhappy with the fact that the Australian daycare experience proves (once again) that the private sector is more efficient and effective than the public sector. To get around this troubling fact, Wannan and her union tour guides insist there is something "unethical" about serving child and mammon.

She spends a lot of time criticizing the role of corporate child care firms in her country; however it is small, private Mom and Pop operations that still comprise the bulk of the market. And what exactly is unethical about meeting parental demands, using government funds efficiently and boosting supply?

Of course the point of Wannan's tour is not to complain about Australia but to establish a beachhead in Canada for the canard that child care must be a publicly controlled, non-profit, union-made exercise.

Federal Social Development Minister Ken Dryden has been on his own cross-country tour of late. He's been handing out \$5-billion to the provinces that can only be spent on institutional daycare, and Wannan's union handlers are keen to see that money flow in ways that boost their membership. While several provinces have a long history of hostility toward private sector child care operators, only Saskatchewan has so far signed a deal that specifically excludes the for-profit sector from accessing these funds. (Interesting fact: Saskatchewan has the lowest level of child-care coverage in the country.)

In truth, no government should presume to make decisions about child care in the way Ottawa is doing. Dryden's \$5-billion is available only to parents who opt for daycare. If formal child care is the best choice for a family, then the Australian model that puts parents in control of a voucher is clearly the best option.

- reprinted from the National Post

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