

Our kids are worth public child care [CA]^[1]

Author: Moist, Paul

Source: Financial Post

Format: Article

Publication Date: 29 Nov 2004

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

To build a new national child care program "for the kids", we need to lay a strong, public foundation. Unfortunately, some opponents of public child care see it as a business opportunity - or worse yet, something that should not be built at all.

Editorial vigour on issues like child care is admirable only when it is supported by facts. Recent comments in the National Post about union support for better child care were notably short on facts.

Some opponents of a national child care program attack the public sector, resorting to misrepresentation and crude union-bashing to make their case. But to do this is to dismiss the facts about child care and the workers who provide it.

Even with unions, child care wages are desperately low. Most earn less than the average parking lot attendant, itself a thankless task. But clearly, child care should be more than a place to "park" your kids. Quality care is worth it.

For two decades, public child care advocates, including unions, have been campaigning for a pan-Canadian, public and not-for-profit child care system. Their arguments have centred on the stability, quality and inclusion that are assured through a public system.

No advocate of public child care has ever argued that we need such a system because "parents are incapable of raising their own kids," as a Post writer did recently. Opponents of the public sector will need stronger straw men than that to stave off research from such groups as the OECD. It recently concluded that countries with public and not-for-profit child care programs are more successful.

The OECD slammed Canada for its patchwork jumble of uneven programs and levels of access and quality, a patchwork mess that will only get entrenched if greater commercialization is permitted.

Trade rules will ensure this, especially once American big-box chains like Kindercare get a piece of that \$5-billion federal pie finally earmarked for a national child care system. Yes, there are trade dangers if our new program lets for-profit providers muscle into the system.

Under powerful investment and services provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement and the World Trade Organization, big corporations would control the system and have their way with it. The only way to protect our children from those trade arrangements is to build a strong public system. If governments build a system that includes for-profit delivery, they could lose their ability to regulate and manage child care in the public interest.

Contrary to the Post's suggestion, there is significant public interest at stake in the development of this long-overdue program. Economists have demonstrated the enormous social and economic contributions that high-quality child care makes to society. The OECD report makes this clear -- universal, high-quality child care is the best investment a country can make in its future.

Lashing out at child care advocate groups is equally wrongheaded. They are not simply advocating for more union jobs -- although that is what it seems to take to improve child care. Advocates know from working in the field that the only way to deliver quality care is to hire highly trained, caring workers. They also know from experience that you have to pay them well to keep them.

Child care workers have chosen to unionize because they need decent wages and benefits to continue doing the work they love. The studies the Post tries to discredit consistently find that quality is lower in for-profit child care.

Like it or not, there are clear links between unionization and quality child care. If indeed we are to "do it for the kids", as the Post put it, then we should make sure any new expansion is public and not-for-profit.

Better still, let's do it for the kids, their parents and the child care workers who support and nurture these families.

- reprinted from the Financial Post

Region: Canada^[2]

Tags: privatization^[3]

international organizations^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/11/our-kids-are-worth-public-child-care-ca>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/11/our-kids-are-worth-public-child-care-ca> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/international-organizations>