

Canada's new shame: Cheating its children with two-bit child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

It didn't take long for the voices of denial to kick in when Canada was labelled this week as a world loser in providing child care.

The great white north has fallen far behind child care standards in other western democracies with a "dismal" junkyard of starving, unregulated programs, said a startling review from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Other developed nations invest more than twice the amount Canada spends, in terms of economic output, on early childhood education.

British Columbia was singled out as having more pathetic child care than Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, with a "lack of clarity about policy, strategies and implementation."

By any measure this is shocking business for a nation that would rather hide behind a false sense of moral superiority than give its youngsters the same opportunities available elsewhere.

But not to the voices of tax cuts, free enterprise and less government, who see investing in essential social programs as wasteful mollycoddling of whiners too lazy to become entrepreneurial millionaires.

In an editorial yesterday that represents the best of "I'm Alright Jack" thinking, The National Post rained scorn on the "Paris-based" report:

"This reflects the now-fashionable view among the elites that the job of raising children should be taken as much as possible out of the hands of mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, neighbours and friends, and transferred to government-regulated and subsidized professionals with graduate degrees in early childhood education."

Parents should depend on "relatives and friends," the Post argued, then suggested "parents should have a wide range of options" in child care, and Canada's "priority should be to preserve existing options."

This is a fine attitude for well-heeled families that can afford the best in private child care, but exactly what options are available to Canada's working poor?

Not many if they live outside Quebec or Manitoba, where child care fees are regulated. The OECD says that in other provinces, parents pay an "excessive" share of child care costs.

Single parents and low-income families had the lowest rates of access to subsidized programs in Canada, a maze of complex rules and uneven standards.

Why would we want to preserve such a shambles?

We don't, and there is a modest glimmer of hope in the \$5-billion child care package promised by federal Liberals. Social Development Minister Ken Dryden will meet next week with the provinces to coax them aboard an upgraded national system.

Better late than never. It is time to re-invest in our children and put this national disgrace to bed.

- reprinted from the Vancouver Province

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