

Workers' helper [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child care has been off the national agenda for more than twenty years, until Paul Martin's Liberals recently rediscovered that Canadian families still need assistance. Will Ken Dryden finally bring in a universal program?

Since the 1980s, unions have led the way. Then, workplace child care was one of the rallying cries of Canadian trade unions, particularly those with a lot of women members. Despite those efforts, there are relatively few major collective agreements in Canada today that include provisions regarding child care centres. In June 1988, only 21 major agreements (1.7% of total agreements) contained such clauses. This expanded slightly by June 1993 to 28 major agreements (2.4%). According to the latest information from Human Resource and Development Canada, the number of collective agreements providing for child care facilities has actually decreased by one, to 27.

These agreements are mostly concentrated in the public sector, crown corporations, universities and the automobile industry. And even as the focus of collective bargaining has shifted to other issues, some unions and employers continue to commit time and money to meet the child care needs of their employees and members.

One such example is at Canada Post Corporation where the unions, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) and the smaller Union of Postal Communications Employees (UPCE) - a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, have negotiated a highly successful child care fund with their employer.

From 1995 to 1999, 11 projects have been initiated across the country which provide high quality child care services to postal workers' families. In 2003, the 12th project was unveiled, in Fredericton, New Brunswick. There, CUPW and UPCE allocated \$200,000 to open a non-profit cooperative child care centre.

The Child care Fund at Canada Post was initially negotiated by CUPW in 1991. Canada Post puts \$200,000 into the fund every three months and the fund is capped at \$2 million. From the union's perspective, Jamie Kass, National Child care Coordinator with CUPW, says that the union is more determined than ever to continue the work that it has begun on child care. In fact, CUPW is looking to expand even further, to support families whose children have disabilities.

Ms Kass says that the Child care Fund has enabled postal worker families to have quality, regulated child care for the very first time. For families with special needs, it has been a "godsend". She says, "It has allowed them to do something for the children that has made life a little bit easier. It has taken some of the stress out of their lives."

Let's hope that the Liberals and superstar Cabinet member Ken Dryden can do as well with providing the rest of Canadian families with assistance to meet their child care needs, as have Canada Post and their unions. We've certainly waited long enough.

- reprinted from Straight Goods

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/04/08/workers-helper-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8142> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/workplace-child-care>