

Day-care walkout pressures, 22,000 kids affected [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

About 6,500 unionized day-care workers from across Quebec walked off the job yesterday, leaving about 22,000 children out on the street for one day.

About 3,000 day-care providers, affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, turned up for a "study day" in Quebec City to up the pressure on the government to resolve a pay-equity dispute.

Fewer than half of the families with children in \$7 day care were affected by the job action, but Carole Théberge, Quebec's junior family minister, said the walkout won't accelerate negotiations. "It concerns us that parents are deprived of day-care service because (the strike) is not going to serve any purpose."

But two day-care workers, who came all the way from Gatineau to protest in front of the National Assembly on one of the coldest days of the year, said the fight is about more than pay equity.

"We're here because we're worried about the future of the whole system," said Lynne Godard, an educator in a non-profit early-childhood centre.

"We're not turning our backs on parents," Julie Bisson added. "We're here for them because we don't want them to go back to the way it was a few years ago when they were paying \$200 a week."

For these reasons, said Jeff Begley, a spokesperson for the health and social services arm of the CSN, parents are squarely behind day-care workers.

Jonathan Valois, the Parti Québécois family critic, said parents are mainly supportive of the walkout. "They know first-hand what's going on. They aren't just clients; they're involved and know what cuts this government has been making."

Since taking office last April, the Liberal government of Premier Jean Charest has raised the popular \$5-a-day day-care program to \$7, told at-home day-care workers they can't unionize, and thrown open the doors for private centres to proliferate. On top of that is a complicated battle that is part of a larger pay-equity struggle affecting both public- and private-sector workers. The case of day-care workers is special since there is no readily apparent traditionally male job to serve as a basis for comparison with this female dominated sector.

A deal was struck last spring with the outgoing PQ government, but Begley said the Liberals are backing away from it.

The union is ready to talk money as well as set a date on which to base retroactive payments, but Théberge said the process has to follow due process, adding that a committee is going through the process of analyzing data from more than 600 surveys sent out to evaluate the tasks performed by day-care workers.

Claudette Carbonneau, president of the CSN, addressing the day-care workers at a noon-time rally, said the government's actions speak louder than its words and that the message seems to be the Liberals don't want to deal with pay equity.

"What we're hearing from the government is a guilty silence," she said.

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Quebec ^[2]

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