

Increase in daycare fees riles Quebec unions [CA-QC]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The rage of Quebec's powerful labour movement poured onto Premier Jean Charest's government yesterday after the Liberals moved to increase the cost of public daycare and allow government jobs to be subcontracted to the private sector.

"This is truly black Thursday for the Quebec National Assembly," said Claudette Carbonneau, president of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux. "We are not just becoming a province like the others, we will be worse than the others."

The government announced that as of Jan. 1, parents will pay \$7 a day for the popular universal daycare program, which currently costs \$5.

The program, which was introduced in 1997, had become a symbol of Quebec's progressive approach to families and was the envy of many community groups across the country.

Quebec labour organizations called the measure another right-wing Liberal policy that threatens the social fabric of Quebec, and a concession to the demands of the private sector. Earlier this week, one labour leader promised that workers would "fight like pigs" against the government's policies, promising not just a war but "a nuclear war."

The junior minister for the family, Carole Théberge, said those on welfare will continue to pay a lower fee for daycare and get at least 23 free hours a week. Nonetheless, the increase will hit lower-income working families the hardest. A family with two children in daycare will pay nearly \$1,000 more a year.

The Minister of Employment, Family and Social Solidarity, Claude Béchar, said the government had to either increase rates or cut services, even though the Liberals promised to maintain \$5-a-day daycare during last spring's election campaign.

Without the increase, the government projected a deficit of \$366-million for daycare by 2005-2006. The new measure will help save as much as \$100-million a year on a program that costs taxpayers about \$1.3-billion annually.

The government introduced changes to Article 45 of the Quebec Labour Code, which protects salaries and working conditions of unionized employees whose jobs are subcontracted to another company. Under the proposed changes, a hospital or a manufacturer could subcontract part of its operations without having to transfer provisions of the collective agreement that protects the workers.

Labour leaders say the government is trying to reduce the number of unionized workers in Quebec to a level that exists in other provinces. They contend that means public-sector jobs would be transferred to private companies, where a new collective agreement would have to be negotiated.

- reprinted from The Globe and Mail

Region: Quebec^[2]

Tags: privatization^[3]

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