

# The fight for day care [CA-QC] <sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Rabble news

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 5 Sep 2003

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

The confrontation between the Liberal government elected last April and Quebec's popular movement has started. It was expected, it was announced, we all knew it was coming and now, it's happening. The issue: the future of the \$5-a-day popular community-owned day-care centres, which were launched under the Parti Quebecois government two years ago.

The Liberal Party in Quebec is, indeed, a conservative party, led by ex-Conservative minister Jean Charest and supported by a rainbow coalition representing reactionary and conservative forces in Quebec. In this context, the April election was not just an election. A roll-back of everything that came about from the revolution tranquille - the quiet revolution - is on the agenda, from the scrapping of Quebec's social services in health and education to the marginalization of the large public sector that had dared to tame private capital.

Currently, confrontation is building up around the day-care business. In the last term of the PQ government, a day-care program was launched, allowing community-owned day-care centres to function with state subsidies. Parents pay the small fee of \$5 per day, and day-care centres are supported with various programs including infrastructure and training of employees.

Day-care workers were rapidly unionized, gaining access to standardized working conditions, pension plans and other benefits. In brief, it was a situation where basic financial needs were assured by the state, while day-to-day control and administration were given to the community and the day-care centres. In brief, it was a win-win situation, resulting from 30 years of hard struggle by day-care organizations and community movements.

This is what the Liberal government wants to destroy. First, it wants to terminate a universal program that does not fit with its users-oriented projects. Secondly, it wants to smash a program that contradicts its pro-private sector neoliberal ideology, where commercial day-care centres are supposed to take over. And finally, it clashes with a social consensus that was built around the PQ government involving trade unions and community groups.

Tactically, the Liberal government says that this program is too expensive. Fundamentally, it wants to terminate it and pass the burden to community (by increasing fees) and the private sector, which will offer cheaper but less significant services.

The \$5-a-day day care is therefore a point of confrontation representing larger, more fundamental interests. If the Liberal government wins on this, it is likely that the next step will include an all-out assault against the public sector, with massive privatization and deregulation. It is also likely that the government will want to dismantle the jewels in the crown of the Quebec public sector, like Hydro Quebec, the Caisse de depots et de placements (the largest financial institution controlled by the State), the autonomous Mouvement Desjardins (credit cooperatives) and the Fonds de solidarité de la FTQ - union funds directed at saving jobs in declining firms.

But Quebec is not like other Canadian provinces. Here there is a strong social movement. The \$5-a-day day-care centres were not a gift, but were the result of prolonged community and trade union struggles. Other social institutions came about not because of an enlightened option from the ruling class but as a response to mass social and national struggle.

So resistance will be swift. Already around the day-care issues, the Liberal government will find a large coalition blocking the way as it attempts to dismantle the system. The deal is not done. The popular movement is struggling, on the one hand, to keep its momentum, and on the other hand to digest the fall of the PQ to which it was linked in many ways.

Around the \$5-a-day day-care centres are shaping up the battles that will define Quebec in its next political phase. Will popular movements be able to stand up to the neoliberal aggressive government? Will they be able to launch new social alliances and forces? Or are we doomed to face the discouraging setbacks that affected the Ontario and B.C. social movements under the governments of Mike Harris and Gordon Campbell?

- reprinted from Rabble news

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** affordability <sup>[3]</sup>

funding <sup>[4]</sup>

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