

Editorial on child care missed crucial facts [CA] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

I am writing in response to your April 11 editorial, "The cost of child care," about what you perceive to be the evils of the child-care movement as represented by Campaign 2000's recent paper "A vision for early childhood development services in Ontario."

Although you are entitled to use your editorials to express opinion, the conventions of fair journalism require reasonable accuracy in doing so. Sadly, your editorial contains at least six factual errors:

-The document that has inflamed you was prepared in response to the Ontario government's silence regarding the fate of federal dollars transferred to it to pay for a range of children's services. It was a joint effort of representatives from Campaign 2000, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs, Toronto Public Health, Metro Association of Family Resource Programs, and Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care;

-Contrary to your suggestion that Campaign 2000 is silent about the issue of family income, it (and many advocates in the child-care movement) have advocated quite strenuously for improved child benefits for some years;

-Your characterization of "public good, family bad" as describing the sentiments of Canada's child-care advocates is absurd in the extreme;

-If what you mean by institutional care is full-day centre-based early learning and care, your assertion that the "day-care industry" (I assume this means child-care advocates) is silent on other options is false: The child-care movement has long advocated for a range of early learning, care and family support options for all children regardless of their parents' labour force status;

-Regarding infants: the child-care movement has been actively involved in advocating for improved maternity and parental leaves and benefits, including and exceeding the recent federal government increase in the length of the benefit period;

-Campaign 2000 and its allies have never advocated a "one-size-fits-all" children's policy. In fact, Campaign 2000's proposals have always included a "best policy mix" or a package of policies and programs for children and families including adequate income, early learning and child-care services, family supports and housing.

These points are all well documented and easy to find in print.

It's not at all heartening that your newspaper is exhorting the Ontario government to "resist this steamroller." Does this mean that you support the government's resistance to spending the people's money on children and families? Tsk tsk.

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Ottawa Citizen EDITORIAL - Wednesday April 11, 2001

The Canadian child-care lobby is a formidable force, bringing together teachers, child-care workers, parents, academics, federal and municipal public servants and an array of government-funded groups that claim to speak for parents.

The objective, as this week's Campaign 2000 consultation paper on early childhood development makes clear, is universal state-funded and supervised care for Canada's pre-school children. Never mind that what many parents want, particularly for under-tuos, is the ability to look after their own children, at home or through family and friends.

The latest consultation paper is full of proposals for publicly financed institutional care, but is entirely silent on any measures that might allow parents to make their own choices. For Canada's child-care advocates, like Orwell's farm animals, complex issues are more easily understood if we agree on a few simple principles: "Public good, family bad" might be an apt one.

But increased child benefits and greater recognition of children in the tax system (particularly children younger than five) would give parents greater choice. Some will choose to access a range of formal and informal care, while others will adjust work and child care so that

the parents are able to provide it. In contrast, the day-care industry sees only one option, institutional care.

Whatever the potential benefits of formal child care for older pre-schoolers (benefits that can be matched by parents who involve their children in a range of activities), no similar case can be made for infants, who require more costly care and may benefit most from the intimate attention of a parent.

Child-care advocates are endlessly eager to spend public money, but rather less vocal when it comes to explaining who is going to pay. The latest proposal will require the Ontario government to commit a minimum of \$800 million annually to increase child care, this in addition to money already committed by the federal government. Additional money is proposed for health initiatives and family resource programs. The provincial cost alone would add five per cent to provincial personal income taxes.

The increased taxes will reduce the choices of parents who seek to provide their own care and who will attract no public subsidy, but will be compelled to share the costs of those who prefer institutional care. Public policy should allow responsible choice, not the "one-size-fits-all" approach advocated by Campaign 2000 and its allies. The Ontario government should resist this steamroller.

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