

A brief summary of the struggles of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada ^[1]

Author: Voices-voix: Defending advocacy and dissent in Canada

Source: Voices-voix: Defending advocacy and dissent in Canada

Publication Date: 27 Jun 2012

Excerpts:

What Happened?

Amidst numerous government cuts to groups that campaign on women's issues, the Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) saw its advocacy and lobbying funding decreased first in 2006, and its entire budget eliminated in 2009.

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Reversal of fortunes

Unfortunately, women have been losing ground on issues of equality. For instance, the wage gap between men and women was greater in 2001 than it was in 1981, according to Kathy Lahey, Professor of Law and Gender studies at Queen's University. On the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, Canada has fallen from 7th place in 2004 to 18th place in 2011.

A report drawn up for a special session of Parliament in March 2010 to discuss the status of women states that "women have lost ground due to the elimination of funding for advocacy groups, the scrapping of a national child-care program and a widening wage gap between men and women."

The Canadian government's policies also indirectly impacted women's advocacy, for instance by cutting funding for the Court Challenges Program.

Childcare hit hard

Since the 1970s, women's groups have campaigned for an effective national strategy on childcare. Numerous political parties promised it. None delivered, as late as 2004, when the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) was advising Canada to double its spending on childcare - to 0.4% of GDP. The Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) then suggested that even 1% of GDP would be appropriate.

However, in 2006, the CCAAC and other groups that campaigned for childcare and women's equality had their funding reduced or eliminated. The defunding resulted from budget cuts to Status of Women Canada, which provides funds to a variety of Canadian women's organizations.

The cuts to Status of Women Canada especially targeted federal funding for women's advocacy work and government lobbying.

Women's groups argue that the relatively small sums they received for lobbying had an important effect, and that with their lobbying and advocacy work handicapped, it will be impossible to make systematic changes and advance their cause of women's equality. "These cuts further undermine the ability of the Government to meet its obligations under international human rights law," said Kate McInturff, former Executive Director of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), which has since been forced to close due to funding cuts. "Cuts to service providers leave the most vulnerable women in Canada with nowhere safe to go and cuts to policy and advocacy organizations leave women in crisis with no democratic voice with which to cry for help."

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Implications and Consequences

Free Speech and Equality: The elimination of funding to CCAAC impacts the ability of an effective women's organization to lobby and advocate for publicly funded, affordable child-care. As Canadian women's organizations lose the ability to lobby for affordable childcare, fewer women have access to childcare, and are forced to leave the workforce, or take less demanding and well-paying jobs, thus further aggravating gender inequality in Canada.

Democracy: The Harper government's decision to defund CCAAC, along with other groups that advocated policies that contribute to women's equality, while the government simultaneously funds its ideological allies with taxpayer dollars, shows a deficit in democratic decision-making. No public consultations have taken place on the Harper government's direct or indirect funding of its corporate and ideological allies, whereas there is strong proven public support for Canada's former national childcare policy, and women's equality in general.

Region: Canada ^[2]

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