

# The kids are not alright <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Sayo, Charlene

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## EXCERPTS:

As British Columbians were getting ready to vote, childcare boldly, albeit briefly, shifted centre-stage last week when Adrian Dix promised--again--to reduce childcare costs at one of his final campaign blitzes in Sidney.

The kids, Mr. Dix proclaimed, are going to be alright.

Proclamations and election mania aside, families may have to hold their breath long after the party hats are put away, the platforms are dusted off, and campaign offensives are silenced into temporary stalemate before any genuine childcare programs are implemented.

Cynical? For sure, as childcare has been a latchkey affair since 1942 at the advent of WWII, when thousands of Canadian women entered the workforce. Although not technically a federally-funded childcare program, tax dollars were funnelled into daycares to benefit working mothers and the Canadian state.

It lasted all of three years.

And only for Ontario and Quebec.

Woe to childcare, a fickle and fiscal issue whose services are always in demand and always superficially low in supply. While the announcement of a new daycare to open in downtown Vancouver with 74 available spaces is a step forward, it's hardly a victory against the 2000-long waitlist for that facility alone. It's not that childcare advocates, from the animated Rethink Childcare Campaign to the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC have not been trying to keep the issue in the headlines beyond the ballot boxes. But despite the slick campaigns, informative videos, and a strong backing by the unions, their grinding efforts hit brick walls when the Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP), Canada's defacto childcare enterprise is not included within mainstream childcare movements.

Created in 1992, the LCP is the latest incarnation from a battery of programs bent on recruiting foreign nannies and caregivers. A sub-unit of the Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program, the LCP replaced the Foreign Domestic Movement (which replaced the Caribbean Domestic Scheme in 1982), expanding the scope and the duties of live-in caregivers, from baby-sitting and cleaning, to medical administration and light physiotherapy for the elderly. The expanded responsibilities and expectations upon the caregiver--for no wage increase, no guarantees for permanent status, no workers compensation--reflected the demands of an aging populations, and Canada's reluctance to invest in genuine child and elderly care.

The aggressive recruitment of foreign caregivers--the majority being women of Filipino ancestry, the Philippines being the top source country for recent immigrants--is completely in line with Canada's desire to make a quick buck through privatizing essential social services and acquiring the cheapest, most flexible labour force on the auction block. Not that recruiting foreign labour is anything new--lest we forget the over 600 recruited Chinese labourers who died constructing the CPR over a century ago--rather, it's a practice that's spiked since the recession. According to Statistics Canada, two million temporary foreign workers hit a record high last year, a triple growth in foreign labour since 2008. If you take into account the \$150 each foreign worker pays for a valid work permit (this does not include other fees such as medical examinations and temporary resident permits), the LCP is a sure-fire way to beef up profit for the Canadian state at the expense of working families--who cannot afford live-in caregivers--foreign workers, and Canadian children, who're supposed to be our future and all that stuff.

So much for teaching children them and letting them lead the way.

To the point, childcare is not so much about investing in children and giving working mothers a hand. It's not about which contending political party can dance and sing the promises of better post-secondary educational and childcare strategies. It's not even about eradicating poverty--Canada landed in the bottom third of childhood poverty rates in a recent UNICEF study. It's about an economy--and the political party elected to protect it--on the constant hunt to get rich quick by making use of well-oiled money-making institutions such as the LCP--among other gimmicks--to keep capital investments and wages at microscopic levels, while ensuring economic cosmic gains at the speed of light.

For mainstream childcare advocates, while the demand for subsidies and the building of childcare facilities are crucial in the crusade for universal childcare, so is the urgency to centre the LCP into the fore, and not simply boiling it down as an immigration or foreign labour problem. Failure to connect brown and white issues will only stymie childcare concerns and all the players involved.

Until then, the kids are not alright and neither is anyone else outside the gilt-edged 1%. Foreign-born or otherwise.

-reprinted from Huffington Post - The blog

**Region:** British Columbia <sup>[2]</sup>

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

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