first reading

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Child Care

To have the freedom of choice in selecting both structured and unstructured play experiences, to have access to stimulating and creative play spaces and competent leadership are the rights of every child.

- Canadian Council on Children and Youth

The program will recognize child care as a social and economic priority for Canadian families. The goals of the strategy will give parents choices in caring for their children and will improve the availability, affordability and quality of child care offered.

- The Honourable Jake Epp, Minister of Health and Welfare, 3 December 1987

There are approximately 195 000 licensed day care spaces in Canada (1986 figure) and about 1.2 million pre-school age children with mothers in the labour force. This leaves a lot of kids spending their days outside of a licensed day care facility and with someone other than their mothers.

Maybe this is okay. I really don't know. What I do know, however, is that single parents must, or at least want to, work or go to school, and that the same is true for the majority of two-parent families with pre-school age children.

What sort of care are these children, about one-million of them, receiving? What sort of care do they deserve? We can be sure that some are receiving wonderful care, and that some are not. But they all deserve the best of care, and in the type of surrounding their parents prefer.

How children and parents might get what they need and desire in the way of child care is a matter of much debate -- it has been for many years. Jake Epp and his government have made their proposals and statements on this subject. The writers appearing on the following pages have some points to make as well. You should find them interesting.

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Included in this edition of *First Reading* is issue number four of *Alberta Facts*. Its subject is "Poverty in our Province - Taxing the Poor."

CHILD CARE: A HISTORY
Marilyn McCord

Child care is a service that the majority of Canadian pre-school children need. Who should provide the service, what the service should be, who should pay for it and whose responsibility it is are concerns that have been debated at length, and by many. Child care is now a major political issue in Canada. The long awaited, recently released federal child care strategy - an intended solution to the present child care crisis - has primarily served to demonstrate that, after a century of debate, Canadian child care policy remains rudimentary.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, Canadians have recognized child care needs, demonstrated by the children of the working poor, and child care programs originated in attempts to service those needs. Access to early child care programs, traditionally provided through the auspices of charitable or religious organizations, was limited to children of families demonstrating an economic need. The national attitude, which upheld the traditional family as the foundation of the social structure, severely restricted those women who chose to work from securing quality, affordable care for their children. Governments and society were not involved in supporting working women and, in fact, extolled the belief that working women contributed to juvenile delinquency because children reared at home received superior care and were better adjusted.

Child care did become a national concern during Canada's period of industrialization, as well as during the First and Second World Wars. Women were encouraged to work and the welfare of their children was accepted as a societal responsibility. In response, the federal and provincial governments entered into cost sharing agreements to provide child care for the nation's children. By 1946, Canada no longer needed female labour and the government removed all financial support for child care programs. The attempt was to re-establish the traditional Canadian family and to give back the responsibility of child care to parents.

Child care, however, continued to be an issue in Canada. Charitable organizations serving poor and disadvantaged children were not able to supply the demand presented by the number of families either unable or unwilling to be forced back into the home by the government.

Societal attitudes continued to directly affect the definition of child care and its development in Canada. From 1940 to 1960 Canadians struggled to come to a consensus of opinion on child care. The population vacillated between supporting residual versus institutional care, private versus public delivery of care, positive versus negative effects of care and public versus parental responsibility for care. Believing strongly in the family, motherhood and the responsibility of parents to provide for their children, the country was still reluctant to either acknowledge or accept that women were no longer at home, that a lack of support was not acting as a deterrent to women working and that statistics and research were demonstrating that children being cared for outside the home was indeed an issue.

Gradually attitudes towards users of child care softened, as the Canadian lifestyle sustained the irreversible impact of the 1960's "baby boom" generation. Reflecting changes in ideals and values, baby boom parents began making lifestyle changes that demanded societal acceptance of alternative family composition and parental roles. Women increasingly chose to combine career and family aspirations and the number of children needing care continued to increase.

Canadians complacently allowed the child care crisis to worsen. It was not until 1964 that the Women's Bureau at the Federal Department of Labour demonstrated to the federal government that working women of two-parent families were of significant numbers to warrant immediate attention. The federal government responded. In 1966 the Canada Assistance Plan was implemented, marking the re-enactment of federal participation in the funding of child care centres. The federal government

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agreed to share equally with the provinces the cost of providing child care to Canadian children.

At this time child care was no longer just a preventive service provided to the poor, but was a service used by a majority of families, either by choice or out of economic need.

The Quest For Consensus

Canadians were now forced to acknowledge child care as an issue. Research, experience, education and changing attitudes served to stimulate national concern for the safety and security of the nation's children in care. Issues of affordability, accessibility, availability, quality, licensing and financing were finally given attention. Canada has subsequently spent the past 20 years attempting to reach a consensus on the issues, and deal with the growing crisis.

The federal government has continued to keep a low profile, maintaining that child care remains within provincial jurisdiction, is primarily a parental concern and should not be governed nationally. The lack of national standards and objectives to define child care services in Canada has resulted in a fragmented network of programs and services. Throughout the country, assorted arrangements including relatives, neighbours, nannies, licensed homes, charitable and commercial centres provide varying levels of quality care to Canadian children. Quality and availability of care varies not only from province to province but from city to city. The provinces have now had 20 years of federal funding with which to develop comprehensive child care systems. Their efforts to date have been generally unsuccessful.

The Alberta Case

Alberta has struggled throughout the last two decades to develop its present child care system. The current system ranks as the most expensive in Canada and one of the poorest in delivery of quality care.

In a province that has historically been a strong supporter of private enterprise as a solution to most supply and demand situations, the Alberta child care system has been fostered by the same philosophy. Alberta's early child care history correlates with Canadian history. The first centres in the province opened in the early 1900s, were started and operated by charitable organizations, and served the poor. The City of Edmonton benefitted during the Second World War from government support for child care, but soon suffered, as did the rest of the country, from the loss of this support. Working women provided for their own child care needs through the operation of a Creche, and with some financial support from the Community Chest.

Societal roadblocks in Alberta continued to impede the development of a strong child care system. The socio-political status of women and children in the province dramatically deterred societal or governmental support. The free enterprise philosophy, promoting child care as a marketable rather than community responsibility, encouraged entrepreneurs to enter the child care profession with financial motives, rather than children's welfare, as their priority. Commercial centres became numerous and consequently played a major role in meeting the child care needs of working women.

In 1960, Edmonton's charitable Creche suffered a loss of support from the Community Chest. The University Women's Club, the Family Services Bureau and the Junior League joined forces to secure the future of the Creche. This initial community effort defined the beginnings of the non-profit, municipally funded child care system that exists in Edmonton today. The City of Edmonton recognized that community child care efforts were in need of support and committed annual funds to first one and, eventually, 13 child care centres. From 1965 to 1970 the city developed objectives and standards of care to be met in the funded centres, and assumed the roles of educating the public and advocating for non-profit, community based, board-governed child care.

By 1970, the city and concerned participants had developed a strong non-profit child care system and, committed to future support and development, proposed that a training program for child care workers be implemented at the college level.

Provincially, government support was slower to come. Funding was being provided through the Canada Assistance Plan and centres were licensed, but it was not until 1976 that the then Department of Social Services and Community Health produced a position paper on Day Care Standards and Licensing. By 1977, a task force on day care had reported to the provincial government, making recommendations and paying special attention to standards and subsidies. In April 1978 the province introduced the Provincial Day Care Subsidy Program, which allowed all families attending a licensed centre to receive a subsidy if need could be demonstrated.

In the same year the Government of Alberta produced the Day Care Regulation under the Social Care Facilities Act. The regulation contained the first enforceable standards for day care facilities in Alberta. Its emphasis was on physical and custodial concerns, and it did not address quality or developmental issues.

A Day Care Unit was established and the province entered into an 80/20 cost-shared municipal/provincial partnership. The Day Care Unit ensured a provincial focus, and provided consultation services and a licensing unit which functioned to monitor compliance with the regulation.

The Issues Heat Up

Child care in Alberta experienced a disruptive and volatile year in 1980. The issues of child care as a non-essential service versus a disruptive influence on family life, and commercial versus non-profit community based care were debated at length. Child care was again an issue, both provincially and nationally, and media attention helped to reveal a great deal of public discontent and political controversy.

The Alberta government responded to cries of unequal treatment of private and non-profit centres and the lack of available child care spaces by initiating the "operating allowance." This allowance, paid to all centres that met space and child/staff ratios, was seen as a further subsidy, but payable to *all* parents using care.

In 1982, an amendment to the regulation enforced a new child/staff ratio that, at that time, was unequalled across Canada.

The child care systems which were operating in Alberta by the end of 1982 have been maintained to this day. The crescendo of concern reached in 1981 has yet to subside, and continues to build. Canadians, Albertans and Edmontonians, from across the social spectrum, have joined forces to demand financial and philosophical involvement at the federal, provincial and municipal levels.

Governments have spent millions of dollars on task forces and publications presenting the child care situation and its inherent needs, but they have yet to offer objectives, strategy or plans that come anywhere close to satisfying Canadians.

The issues have not changed. We still debate daily how best to provide accessibility, affordability and quality, and under whose auspices service should be provided.

In Canada in 1988, we are encouraged one day by a province's strong commitment to a non-profit, community-based mandate, and then discouraged the next when a male postal employee complains on national radio that a female, who belongs at home, holds a full-time position that he has aspired to for several years.

Child care in Canada has come a long way. But it has farther to go before the future of our children is secure. Canadian child care does not have an impressive record. It appears lethargic compared to advances made, during the same period, in systems such as medicare.

Canadians, Albertans and Edmontonians must accept that child care needs are a reality. A commitment is needed to the resolution of complex issues if we are to ensure that the future record of child care reads better than the past.

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A CAREGIVER'S EXPERIENCE
Sharon Laton

If you have a genuine love for children and want to care for them full-time, in day care, no other qualifications are necessary, right? I accepted this as true when the opportunity arose for me to open a private day care. I had a background in business management, a love for children, a desire to stay home with my thirteen-month old daughter and a desire to go back to work. What a perfect situation. I certainly was current on child-rearing, fresh from reading all the "perfect parenting" books I could lay my hands on. I did some research, visited some good child care centres, learned a few key phrases (quality care, appropriate developmental activities, learning through play) and within a few months I was in business.

Of course, I had definitely planned on hiring trained staff, because during my visits to centres, I did notice a remarkable difference between centres which hired only trained staff and those which did not have a training standard. It became very obvious to me that all the centres which I liked insisted on trained staff. The children seemed more settled, the activities seemed very interesting and the atmosphere was consistently one that reflected joy as well as order.

If this were a fairy tale, I would be able to say that my deep love for children and natural abilities as a mother, in addition to hiring staff trained in early childhood development as extra insurance, were all that were necessary to provide a stimulating quality environment for the children entrusted to me...HA!

Trained staff were difficult to hire in a small, rural community. Group care is nothing like being at home with two or three children. Certainly the children were happy and secure, but I had been given a glimpse of something more elusive during my visits to other centres. Something was missing, and the staff that I had hired (two British Columbia women with one-year college courses and two women with experience as mothers) did not seem to be able to produce this.

During the ensuing months and years I completed my two year Early Childhood Development Diploma; through night courses, weekend courses and finally daytime outreach courses. Eventually the majority of staff working for me also completed their diplomas.

I eventually closed my centre. I found it extremely difficulty to maintain high quality standards in a commercial venture. My commitment to children and children's rights conflicted with owning a private centre. I came to the realization that, personally, I had a contribution to make in the field, but that it had to be in a non-profit centre.

I do still work with pre-school children, but in a non-profit centre with a staff training standard. I can look back now and see very clearly the differences between each of the staffing combinations I have experienced: no trained staff, mixture of trained and untrained, and fully qualified staff.

Untrained Staff

With untrained staff, there tends to be exist "supervisory attitude." Quite often the children are grouped by age and are not divided into small groups. This means that some centres have 25 to 35 children in one area, under the direction of three or four staff. This situation leaves little chance for individual attention, and the day care worker finds herself frazzled trying to supervise so many children. I know that adults would have a difficult time choosing activities and forming relationships in such a setting. It becomes even more difficult for the child.

Added to the supervisory nature of the work is the lack of disciplinary skills the child care worker might have. Generally, untrained staff tend to raise children as they themselves were raised. In most cases this becomes "behavior modification" or "punishment," as opposed to discipline. Instead of helping the child indentify his feelings and a more appropriate way of communicating wants, he is told that he is bad and sent to sit on a chair for an unspecified length of time. (This is the modern interpretation of being sent to the corner.)

Another major drawback for the children in this setting is that their caregivers do not understand the importance of encouraging the development of self-esteem in children. The development of self-esteem is very critical, in that it can permanently affect personality development. Children with poor self-esteem can be low achievers, discipline problems and introspective.

To be fair, I believe most people, with and without training, must have a genuine love and dedication for the work. Certainly, they are doing the best that they can, but how do you entertain eight children for eight or nine hours a day? Love is not enough.

Learning through play sounds too simple, and I have heard many child care workers insist that this is the philosophy of their quality program. Definitely, children will learn through play and pick up many skills just by being exposed to different activities. But what is often not understood by untrained staff is that children are learning from both their peers and their caregivers every minute of the day. An awareness of this condition is essential among child care workers.

Wages of Day Care Workers

• Average annual salary (1984) for all of Canada: $14,212.00
• Day care workers earn:
-30% less than the average industrial wage
-50% less than a teacher at the elementary level
-30% less than animal care workers on government farms

Trained Staff

A combination of trained and untrained staff is certainly better than the situation just discussed, but it is still far from ideal. I have seen many of these situations, and it is because of conflict among the staff that the children and the program continue to suffer. Trained staff may be paid more than untrained staff, regardless of experience. The trained staff is expected to be the "expert" and the untrained staff becomes the aide. This makes teamwork and co-operation difficult. Energy which should be directed towards the children is often used up in staff conflict.

As trained staff plan activities for their pre-school program they consistently strive to ensure that the children:

-will feel safe and secure in their care,
-are able to explore activities and concepts with as few restrictions as possible, (We want the children in our care to be curious and motivated to discover.)
-have an opportunity, and are encouraged to find solutions to their problems, (We help the children to find the words and identify their feelings, but allow them to come to their own conclusions.)
-have as many opportunities as possible to be independent and self-reliant, and to make choices,
-develop self-esteem, and
-are given the opportunity and encouragement to learn through playing with a wide range of activities and experiences.

Parents using day care are aware that the staff is the single most important factor in determining the quality of child care being provided. Unfortunately, the popular thinking is that day care is little more than babysitting, and that people have to be a little crazy or desperate to work with rug rats all day. Certainly there is little respect for the child care worker.

I have difficulty answering questions about my job title. I feel that I am a teacher. I know I have an impact on the children in my care, and I know I do teach. However, I don't have the right to use that title. The Early Childhood Professional Association of Alberta has designated people in my field as Early Childhood Educators. This may become a recognized title, but right now it doesn't mean much to people outside the field.

The part that is hardest for me is that we know how important the pre-school years are. We know that these are the formative years and that experiences at this time will be a foundation for learning and reacting in later life. Yet the popular attitude -- that it takes no extra skills to guide children in group care -- still prevails.

Sharon Laton, a graduate of the Early Childhood Development Program at Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton, is the Program Co-ordinator at the Norwood Community Service Centre.

FEDERAL STRATEGY ON CHILD CARE
Christine Macken

Under the recently announced National Strategy on Child Care the federal government will spend 5.4 billion dollars over the next seven years in an attempt to alleviate the growing crisis in child care. The hallmark of this crisis is an increasing demand, from all segments of society, for accessible, affordable child care. Demand for child care is a major concern in urban areas, but has also skyrocketed among families in rural areas, among shiftworkers, ethnic and native groups, and among families needing relief care on a casual basis.

The new strategy has been greeted with skepticism and concern from all corners. Central to the strategy is the term "parental choice" and the belief that direct financial assistance will give families the freedom to choose the type of care most conducive to individual needs.

In drafting the strategy the national government had to appease an array of conflicting demands from various segments of the public. Advocacy groups had lobbied long and hard for a national plan that would see a large injection of capital grants and operating funds to the child care system. The Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association argued that direct financial assistance would not translate into a greater supply of affordable, quality spaces, and evidence presented to two task forces on child care clearly showed that day care costs are beyond the reach of working and middle-class families.

Even when affordability is not an issue, there is the problem of locating an available space. Many families were beginning to feel that child care was solely for the rich and the poor. High income earners do not have to worry about a shortage of spaces since they can afford hired help, while the poor are perceived as having easier access to spaces because of provisions in the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) which permit provinces to cost-share the day care costs of the poor. But, of all Canadian families who recently qualified for assistance under CAP, less than 20 percent had been able to locate a space. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that provinces such as Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island lack the financial resources to develop basic services and, as a result, are unable to access CAP funds.

As well as the demand for an increase in the number of affordable spaces, Ottawa had to deal with the issue of quality. Since standards and regulations fall largely within the jurisdiction of provincial governments, quality of care differs from province to province. Alberta has some good standards, but is the only province which has yet to implement a training standard for child care workers. There is general consensus that much of Alberta's poor quality care is a direct result of a large number of centres hiring untrained staff. There is also concern that those standards currently in place are being jeopardized by a government unwilling to strengthen its licensing and monitoring system.

The most contentious issue facing Ottawa was the demand from advocacy groups, and provinces such as Manitoba, that Ottawa fund only non-profit child care. The Edmonton Coalition for Quality Child Care objected to Ottawa cost-sharing the operating and capital costs of commercial centres. Traditionally, the non-profit sector has operated under self-imposed standards and offered a level of care superior to that found in most commercial centres. Some advocates were opposed to commercial child care, because they believe it to be morally indefensible to profit from the care of young children, while most agreed that the profit motive encourages operators to cut corners, especially in terms of quality.

In conflict with the position of the above-mentioned advocacy groups was the demand, on the part of the provinces, that Ottawa cost-share the operating costs of commercial centres. Over 70 percent of Alberta's day cares are privately owned, and the provincial government had been subsidizing these to the tune of almost 25 million dollars annually. In order to cut its costs and reduce the provincial

The strategy carries a clear message. The Conservative government is prepared to tolerate only so much child care. For women, however, the message is even louder. Those who care for their children at home will receive a token pat on the back, while those who choose to pursue careers or education will continue to carry the burdens associated with shortages, increasing costs and poor quality child care.

deficit Alberta had a vested interest in ensuring that the new day care strategy reflected its demands.

Finally, the federal government had to answer to groups such as Real Women, who not only opposed any kind of child care plan but who had helped elect many Tory back benchers. The Mulroney government could not afford to alienate part of its constituency in a pre-election year.

It is no surprise that the final draft strategy turns out to be a hodge-podge attempt at pleasing all parties. The new plan is divided in two main areas: aspects that fall within federal jurisdiction, and a new federal-provincial agreement.

Federal Measures

The policy proposes tax assistance to families designed to recognize parental choice. Families using formal child care can claim an annual tax deduction of up to $4000 for pre-school aged children. Those using informal arrangements, such as friends or relatives, receive an increase of $200, for a total refundable child tax credit of just over $600 for each child under six years of age. Families who care for their children at home will receive the same tax credit as the latter group.

Increasing the tax credit for homemakers marks the first time a national government has formally acknowledged homemaking as a legitimate career choice and compensated it with what amounts to a guaranteed annual income -- albeit a token one. However, many women feel that the tax credit merely adds insult to injury. Groups such as Real Women feel they are subsidizing the costs of families who can take advantage of the increased tax deduction and who also receive indirect subsidies by way of provincial operating allowances. In essence, the effect of the tax measure has been to deflect criticism from the policymakers and focus attention on what is merely a red herring -- the so-called debate between homemakers and women who pursue careers outside the home.

When the conflict is posed in terms of the difference between tax assistance of $600 and $4000 there appears to be gross inequity. However, the real value of the tax assistance is generally ignored. Of the approximately 200 000 families using formal child care the majority do not have a high enough income to claim anywhere near the maximum deduction of $4000. Current figures show that families with an annual income of approximately $40 000 will gain an additional $525 by way of tax relief, and then only if they can provide receipts. Only 200 000 Canadian families are in this income position. Consequently the bulk of the 2.3 billion dollars allocated for tax assistance will go to families not using formal child care.

From Ottawa's perspective this will meet the demand for diversity of choice, the assumption being that most families do not want to use formal child care. While many families might prefer alternative options, it is equally true that child care centres across Canada have long waiting lists. Even in Alberta, where vacancy rates are estimated to be between 10 and 20 percent, families often have to wait longer than 12 months for a space in a top quality centre.

Families who cannot locate a space have no option but to use either poor quality centres or informal care. Even if they prefer informal arrangements they cannot, in the majority of cases, claim the increased tax deduction because they are unable to obtain receipts.

To meet the demand for alternative options, 100 million dollars has been allocated for research and special initiatives in child care. Since 1970, when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women documented the growing demand for child care and called for a national policy, hundreds of briefs have been submitted and millions of dollars spent on researching the needs of special groups such as rural women, native women and shift-workers. While 100 million dollars may result in improved

research, or in the development of innovative options, no money has been earmarked for the actual implementation of these options.

The strategy contains no provisions for encouraging private or public industry to create on-site child care facilities, nor does it encourage industries to support families who prefer flex-time or job sharing arrangements. Another omission is the failure to encourage private business to adopt improved policies for parental leave, a move that could have been complemented by increasing the maternity benefits available under the Unemployment Insurance Act. Infant care is the most cost-intensive area of child care, and families cannot afford the high fees. Increased parental leave benefits could deflect much of the need for this expensive care, but inadequate family policies leave parents with no choice but to place infants in care. The consequence is that infant care is often chosen with an eye more on cost than on quality.

Ottawa could have created a precedent and encouraged institutions, such as Canada Post, to develop on-site child care facilities, particularly for shift workers. Finally, the federal portion of the strategy contains no proposal for the development of community-based family support services that would ease the burden of rural families who need care on a seasonal or casual basis. The overwhelming response to the federal program is that direct tax assistance is of no avail unless there is first a system of quality alternatives from which to choose.

Federal-Provincial Agreement

A new Child Care Act is to be introduced. Under this Act three-billion dollars will be allocated towards cost-sharing the operating costs of both non-profit and commercial day care centres, and the capital costs of an additional 200 000 non-profit spaces. The new Act will not be tabled in the House of Commons until Ottawa has completed negotiations with each province, a process that could prove to be lengthy and contentious.

The strategy states that Ottawa will "work with" the provinces in developing necessary standards for quality care, but advocates are justified in fearing that standards will be set at the lowest common denominator. The Meech Lake Accord allows the provinces to opt out of the strategy and still access funds, providing they meet "national objectives," a term yet to be either tested or defined. National objectives may become the whittling down of all standards, whether for child care, education or health care, to the level of the province offering the poorest quality program.

While there has been some relief that the proposed capital grants will go only to the non-profit sector, advocacy groups are generally disappointed with not only the new ceiling set on cost-sharing during the initial seven year period, but also in future years. From 1995 onwards Ottawa will spend one-billion dollars annually on child care, but the entire amount will likely go towards cost-sharing operating costs, with no future funding for the creation of additional spaces. While spaces will increase to 400 000 by 1995, this figure will cover only 20 percent of current demand.

The strategy carries a clear message. The Conservative government is prepared to tolerate only so much child care. For women, however, the message is even louder. Those who care for their children at home will receive a token pat on the back, while those who choose to pursue careers or education will continue to carry the burdens associated with shortages, increasing costs and poor quality child care.

During the seven year plan limits will be placed on the amount each province will be able to access for operating costs. Alberta will likely receive the lion's share of the pie since it currently has more spaces per capita than any other province. While this may come as a relief to the provincial government there is real concern that Alberta will negotiate away the opportunity to create new, non-profit spaces, and with it the opportunity to offer high quality care.

Advocacy groups in Atlantic Canada and the Territories are the most disappointed since it is those provinces with a system already in place who will be the greatest beneficiaries of the policy. It is unlikely that poorer regions will ever be able to offer more than the most basic in child care services. In this respect the strategy is a further step in the move towards a decentralization and regionalization of social and economic power, a move that will create gross inequities on a regional basis.

The absence of clearly defined national standards proves that the Mulroney government will continue to be reluctant to provide leadership and take a decisive stance on social issues. The federal finance department will

maintain a tight hold on the purse-strings, since Meech Lake has ensured that the provinces will take the applause for programs which they will try to convince us they "won" from Ottawa.

Meanwhile the strategy contains no mechanism whereby parents can ensure that they receive value for their money, or that enables parents to call the system to account in cases where it fails to deliver.

The most revealing aspect of the new policy is that its silence on many issues speaks loudest to its position on women, the family and social policy in general. Despite the strategy's rhetoric on the family, on women and on quality child care, there is glaring evidence of the Mulroney government's inability to acknowledge the realities of a changing, complex society -- the reality within which the modern family is attempting to survive. The policy also demonstrates that our current government does not have the backbone to define national objectives or to stand up to the provinces in ensuring that quality care is not sacrificed to the vagaries of provincial politicians. Finally, the policy fails to back up its rhetoric with a comprehensive multi-faceted program. As a program for the future well-being of Canadian families and women the National Strategy on Child Care is a disappointment but, more unfortunately, it does our children a grave injustice.

Christine Macken is President of Parents for Quality Childcare, Vice-President of the Edmonton Coalition for Quality Child Care, a Member of the Board of the Alberta Association for Young Children and a user of child care services.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN CHILD CARE

Staff Training: Ask what training the staff care givers have completed. They should be graduates of a college or university program related to child care.Research with pre-school children who attend day care has shown that those with trained care givers make greater intellectual and emotional strides than those with untrained care givers.

Programming: Children learn through their spontaneous play, not by following adult directions. Look for these kinds of equipment: blocks of various kinds and sizes, water and sand play tables, houseplay and dress-up accessories, books, music, large motor equipment and a variety of art materials. Check to see that your child will have the freedom to choose from among these activities for a large portion of the day.

Interactions: The centre should give you the impression of warmth and caring. You should see the staff interacting with the children, rather than each other.

Parent Involvement: To make the day care experience as beneficial as possible, there needs to be close communication between the home and the centre. Do you feel that parents are welcome at the centre?

Nutrition: Ask to see the menus when you visit the centre. Is the food that is provided nourishing, with very few high sugar content snacks?

Health and Safety: Are the toys and facilities clean and safe? Are the children taught good hygiene habits? Are staff trained in first aid and CPR?

Space and Child/Staff Ratios: Small group sizes and low child/staff ratios allow care givers to provide more open-ended programming and meet children's individual needs.

Integrated Handicapped Programs: A prerequisite to integration is that there are enough well-trained staff to meet the needs of all of the children in the group.

Adapted from *Be Aware of Quality Care*, a publication of the Edmonton Coalition for Quality Child Care.

To Receive or Not to Receive? This is the question...

Dear Reader,

In an effort to improve the influence and circulation of *First Reading*, we are asking "subscribers" to renew their "subscriptions." In early December 1987 a letter was mailed to all readers of the publication. This letter asked that readers respond if they wished to remain on the mailing list for *First Reading*. Our thanks to those of you who have already replied, but for those of you from whom we have yet to hear we are extending the response date to March 15, 1988.

If you wish to continue receiving *First Reading*, please respond by either completing and returning this form to The Edmonton Social Planning Council, #418, 10010-105 St., Edmonton T5J 1C4, or by phoning 403/423-2031. **If we have not heard from you by March 16, 1988 your name will be deleted from the *First Reading* mailing list.**

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FIRST READING *is published six times per year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council.* ***If you would like to receive the publication on a regular basis write to*** FIRST READING, *#418, 10010 - 105 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 1C4, or telephone (403) 423-2031. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council. The editor of* FIRST READING *is Joseph Miller. The financial assistance of the United Way is gratefully acknowledged.* **Second Class Mail Registration No. 6390** i.d. 02/88

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COUNCIL NEWS

New Publication

WELFARE IN CANADA:
The Tangled Safety Net
- a report by the National Council of Welfare

Several years of research and writing has produced this, "the first comprehensive national analysis of social assistance programs operated by the provincial, territorial and municipal governments." The report is intended to "promote a better understanding of social assistance in Canada and help make this crucial system of income support more accessible to those who operate it, study it and, most important of all, use it." The publication includes: an introduction and overview of the "welfare" system, the rules of the game, rates of assistance, enforcement, the appeals process and a summary of recommendations.

Welfare in Canada is available from the Edmonton Social Planning Council for $2.00 (postage & handling).

Brown Bag Forums

Date: February 17, 1988
Time: 12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.

Topic: "Distress Line Calls as a Reflection of Social Trends"
Speakers: Fran Smith, Executive Director, AID Service of Edmonton.
Bob Borreson, Casework Supervisor, Edmonton Emergency Services, Alberta Social Services.

Date: March 16, 1988
Time: 12:10 p.m. - 1:10 p.m.

Topic: "Getting the Ear of Government"
Speaker: Margaret Leahey, Chairperson, Alberta Advisory Council on Women's Issues.

All Brown Bag Forums are held at:
4th Floor Boardroom
10010-105 Street
Edmonton

Volunteer Required

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is seeking a volunteer to assist with day to day office duties. The "Office Assistant" position will require 7 hours/week and involve maintaining the library, receptionist duties, and computer data input. Library and computer experience are not necessary; a desire to become a team member is.

For more information contact Carmen Brady at 423-2031. Applications will be accepted until February 19, 1988.

A Quick Staff Update

When there's something wrong in your neighbourhood, who you gonna' call?

Peter Faid: Executive Director
Margaret Duncan: Senior Social Planner
Henry Dembicki: Social Planner
Diana Salomaa: Social Planner
Roger Laing: Social Planner
Linda Patriquin: Administrative Secretary
Carmen Brady: Publications and Membership
Joseph Miller: Editor
Robert Chometsky: Practicum Student
Juan Cereno: Practicum Student

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