

Introduction

Changing Child Care Looking Back, Moving Forward

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A “formidable force,” *Ottawa Citizen* editorialists deem the contemporary Canadian child care lobby.¹ They claim the movement’s power and undue political influence rests in the convergence of staff, parents, teachers, researchers and an array of other players. The lobby, warns the newspaper, is a “steamroller” that governments must mightily resist. Other observers might query the purported power of advocates, given Canada’s piecemeal and patchwork child care system. In fact, it might more reasonably be concluded that the very existence of a child care movement is a direct result of political neglect—certainly advocates’ efforts would be unneeded had governments implemented progressive policy and comprehensive services. Still, the *Ottawa Citizen* rightly observes that the child care lobby is a player with which politicians must reckon.

There has been a child care movement in Canada for over half a century—yet surprisingly little has been written about how and by whom child care advocacy has been organized, what the movement has done and tried to do, or what effects it has had on social policy or social change. In this book, we set out to begin to remedy some of these gaps. This project is by, for and about the role of advocacy in the making of a place for child care in the Canadian welfare state. Over the last half century, child care policy and services have changed—quite dramatically—and the child care movement has played a role in that complex, interactive process. Individually, these chapters name some of the particulars of this process; in concert, these case studies accomplish something more.

As a collection, this book makes two significant contributions. First, it explores the history of child care advocacy and policy in Canada from World War II to the present. All too often, these stories have been hidden from history. There are many reasons why child care has been neglected in

historical and scholarly studies. One reason is that child care advocacy (in Canada, as elsewhere) has largely been a project of women—and the chapters in this anthology variously propose why this is so. In general, much of women’s history has been ignored or has failed to be included in history books. History is usually written from the perspective of the mainstream, and the advocacy groups whose stories are told in this book are still campaigning from the margins to have child care declared an entitlement of the Canadian welfare state. Additionally, this is an anthology about a social movement, and the history of social movements in Canada is still being written. As such, this book directly contributes to the active project of history-making.

The second contribution of this anthology builds directly on the first: the authors work towards developing history as a tool—making the past usable and relevant today.² The idea of a “usable past” is sometimes looked down on by those historians who scorn such concerns as “presentist.” However, understanding history is essential if the goal is to increase the effectiveness of child care advocates or to specify when and under what conditions advocacy impacts (or fails to impact) on public policy. Exactly *how* a social movement makes a difference is complicated and contested. Strategies and tactics used by advocates have varied enormously over the past five decades: sometimes activists have worked “with” or even “inside” governments, sometimes they have worked “against” governments. At some points, child care advocates have developed broad alliances and messages; other times they have focused tightly on child care services. Sometimes a feminist concern with women has predominated; at other times, the focus has been elsewhere, such as on poverty or children’s needs. All social movements struggle with similar questions. Women’s groups, for example, must consider the benefits of “going mainstream” as insiders versus the advantages of being unfettered outsiders, free to criticize without fear of biting the hand that feeds them.³ Tactics, strategies, positions and alliances are perennial questions for all social change groups—and the child care movement is in good company as it debates these questions, and disagrees on the answers.

When and why do some strategies work? When and why do they fail? Since more often than not, advocates are unable to enact the policy they want, assessments of “failures” are especially common and painful. These are the moments when advocates must consider if they could have done things differently or ponder whether their political activity ever has a chance of prevailing. Contributors to this anthology explicitly take up these questions, attempting to not only *describe* child care advocacy (a hard

enough job in itself) but also to *evaluate and assess* it. In this way, historical inquiry has value for contemporary political discussion.

There are some clear conclusions that emerge from this collection, despite the many differences between the contributors and the histories they analyze. One overall observation is that advocacy really does matter. It sometimes appears that the small actions of advocates—writing a letter to the editor, planning an educational forum, meeting with politicians, creating an election brochure and so on—make no difference. On the contrary, the long-term view provided by history shows that advocacy does have demonstrable effects. The child care movement, slowly, sometimes almost imperceptibly, helps to shape how parents, politicians, decision makers, bureaucrats, researchers, social justice groups and not least of all, “the public” think about child care. Advocacy contributes to how child care is conceptualized, developed and delivered. However, as these chapters show, the movement does not always make the impact that advocates intend.

In Canada today, there are over five million children aged twelve and under. Close to 95 percent of fathers with children under the age of fifteen are in the labour force, as are more than three-quarters of mothers with children aged six to fourteen and 70 percent of mothers of preschoolers.⁴ More than 3,323,000 Canadian children have mothers in the paid labour force.⁵ For the country’s children, there 516,734 licensed child care spaces (in group centres and licensed homes).⁶ Quality, accessibility and affordability vary wildly within and between provinces and territories. The cost of child care and the scarcity of public fee subsidies put the service out of reach for nearly every low-income and most middle-income families. Although much is known about the positive impacts on child development of high-quality early childhood care and education, few children have access to good care. The vast and growing majority of children in Canada need nonparental care—yet our country fails to meet their needs and the needs of their parents. Canadian early childhood education today is characterized by “inadequacy, fragmentation and incoherence.”⁷ Child care provision in Canada has actually worsened in recent years.⁸ From this broad context, one question emerges: How are we to make sense of this scenario?

History and Politics of Child Care Advocacy

Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman have argued there is a great deal of promise in rethinking history to understand the participation and significance of groups and areas previously slighted.⁹ This is especially true

for those who seek to understand child care. Historical work can reassign value, identifying the impact of the welfare state on women, making women visible in welfare state analysis and detailing the role of women as political activists in welfare state development.¹⁰

In recent years, historians and other researchers have shown how social services vary from country to country. Some countries (such as France and Sweden, for example) have well-developed and generous provisions for children; others (such as Canada and the United States), delegate care arrangements to the market and the family. Within a given country there may also be marked differences: Quebec, for example, has its renowned five-dollar-a-day, publicly funded child care system, while the rest of the country organizes child care largely as a private matter for the free market. Without a sophisticated understanding of how and why such different political choices are made, it can simply appear “natural” that Canadian parents should take care of their own children and equally “normal” that public policy fails to provide child care services just as it provides education, pensions or health care.

The confidence that such political arrangements are “natural” or “normal” has been seriously shaken by recent historical scholarship. New research and new perspectives have enabled historians and activists to look at their national and local arrangements with fresh eyes.¹¹ Researchers, for example, may now explain how and why Sweden’s welfare state differs from that of Canada, why Canada is again different from the United States and how variations within countries develop.¹² In these analyses, scholars examine how political power is created outside the state in social movements—women’s groups, environmental groups, advocacy organizations, trade unions and other community associations. Activists, we are learning, intervene in political development—even though, in a strictly formal sense, they are not a part of the policy process. These insights are animating both historical and contemporary studies.

Further, social movement theory posits that conventional understanding of how policy is made and implemented has historically been too narrowly conceived.¹³ Social movement theory attends to both *how* and *why* movements form and act. Some social movement analysts focus on resource mobilization, past and present. Resource mobilization is the process through which resources—human and material—are deployed, through collective control, to meet shared goals. This mobilization requires planning and coordination, drawing on social networks of supporters with shared consciousness, alongside human and material resources. Out of such activity, social movement organizations grow, often

becoming institutionalized into more formal structures. Their repertoire of action grows.¹⁴ As increasingly structured groups, activist organizations are better able to create and respond to opportunities for action and mobilization. Thus, in lieu of a static focus on structure, social movement analysis introduces a language of agency and strategy.¹⁵ This language of agency and strategy is key to understanding social change.

Although conventional political science assumes that internal institutional arrangements are the decisive factor in welfare state formation, new evidence conclusively demonstrates that factors outside the formal political and bureaucratic system have an important role to play. Social movements are one such group: although their focus is often extra-parliamentary—aiming, for example, to change public consciousness or social attitudes rather than governments)—activists regularly make the state a key target. Well-known historian Charles Tilly, in fact, describes social movements as “a sustained challenge to state authorities in the name of a population that has little formal power with respect to the state.”¹⁶ Building on this insight, one wing of social movement researchers has shown how mobilization outside the state influences what happens inside the state, thus revealing how nonstate actors shape public policy and public process. In this literature, class-based identities and trade union organizing often play a starring role.¹⁷ However, social movements are bigger than labour alone, and they include constituencies mobilized on the basis of gender and other affiliations. The women’s movement, in fact, is one of the more strikingly effective new social movements, and both its praxis and research branches have been exceptionally active.

The theoretical insights of new social movement analysis have combined with, and been influenced by, feminism. Feminists with both contemporary and historical concerns have sought to connect how women have been, and are, active agents for social change. Their lens has turned to a range of topics that have been traditionally neglected. One topic which has been central to feminists is uncovering the political and public dimensions of “private” life. Tracking this line of inquiry, they have illuminated many aspects of domestic life which were previously ignored. In doing so, they have shown the history of social construction behind gender relations.

The field of feminist scholarship is enormous and growing exponentially. For the purpose of this review, it is particularly interesting to focus on work that examines gender at the intersection of history and social organizing, and to consider what this might have to say about child care. Feminist historians have developed a new and critical understanding

20 / *Changing Child Care*

of families, work and social welfare, generating a “voluminous literature” that addresses how the welfare state is gendered.¹⁸ Much of this work has focused on women and maternalism.¹⁹ Some feminist historians have shown how the welfare state can foster women’s political activism; others have documented how the state undermines women’s participation.²⁰ One of the remarkable findings about the welfare state is how much it has been shaped by women’s political activism—especially by elite women, but also by working-class and minority women.

Nevertheless, as Sonya Michel notes in her extraordinary history of child care in America, there is a “curious disjuncture” in historiographic writing that somehow filters out welfare state histories, mother’s work and children’s lives, with child care seldom appearing or relegated to a minor theme.²¹ Her observation applies equally well to Canada, where the grassroots child care movements and the place of child care in welfare state formation have received little scholarly attention. The relationship between the women’s movement and the child care movement (in Canada and elsewhere) is complex and contradictory, in part because feminists are still struggling with the vexing meaning and politics of motherhood. Nevertheless, it is clear that child care is a crucial element of a “woman friendly” welfare state—a society where injustice on the basis of gender is eliminated.²²

This anthology is the first book to focus on the historical relationship between child care mobilization and government policy in Canada. It provides, as a first step, select pieces of a large puzzle. As contributors, we are well aware that for all our work there remains a vast balance of stories to tell. Chapters in this book focus on Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, with little mention of Atlantic Canada. Some chapters provide national overviews or reviews of Canadian campaigns, but they too are not a complete telling. For example, there is still much work to be done to understand the meaning and practice of child care and advocacy for racialized communities, as well as for First Nations people, with their unique political relationship to the federal government. Metropolitan areas make up the main focus of this anthology, leaving work to be done on rural, northern and nonurban areas of Canada. Most of the historical focus of this anthology is on centre-based group care, leaving many opportunities for analyses of in-home or family home daycare services. There is a history of school-age care that goes untold in this anthology, just as there are unnarrated tales of caregivers and child care workers. There is more to learn about the role of the second wave women’s movement in child care advocacy and also of the work of other

social justice organizations (such as trade unions) in child care campaigns. This anthology, moreover, is country specific, and comparative analyses of child care movements awaits. We hope this anthology spurs more historical work on the complex, multifaceted experiences of child care advocacy and policy—and we believe this collection helps quilt together some pieces of that wider history.

Analyzing and Debating Child Care Advocacy

The chapters collected here offer different ways to think about child care policy and advocacy, in what can be thought of as a sampler of current work. The authors do not speak with one voice, and readers will notice differences in interpretation and method. In no small measure, authors disagree with each other. In doing so, they mirror the debates and questions that frame the contemporary child care movement, and in their variances they offer a rare and valuable opportunity for critical reflection. In part, these differences are inevitable in a divided and nonunitary movement. From a bird's-eye view, “the Canadian daycare movement” appears as a singular, cohesive social movement; yet on the ground and close-up, what often takes precedence is a dizzying range of groups, mandates and campaigns within and between cities, provinces and regions of this country.

Contributors to this anthology identify this variegated, nationwide child care mobilization's many contributors to the development of child care policy and services in Canada. They examine the infrastructure and processes of child care mobilization, and they assess the effects of advocacy on public-policy process. Uniting all authors is both a conviction that child care is a necessary element of social justice and a concern that current child care services and policy are inadequate. Unlike those who would claim that child care is primarily a private family matter, the authors argue that child care is better understood as a public responsibility and part of the public good. The contributors arrive, however, at very different conclusions about the work of changing child care, at times even confronting the child care movement itself, challenging advocates to reassess their campaigns, visions and tactics.

For example, the child care movement at the national level has long advanced what some critics see as a utopian vision: a universally accessible, publicly funded, high-quality, non-profit system of care, to which all children, parents and families are entitled. In her chapter, Linda White asks if such demands operate for or against the movement's long-term interests. Her example is the struggle in the mid-1980s over the federal

government's proposals to replace one general funding program (the Canada Assistance Plan) with a policy specific to child care. At the time, national advocacy organizations opposing the Mulroney government's 1988 Bill C-144 argued that a bad national policy would have been worse than no national policy at all. In contrast, Linda White critiques the advocates' campaign, pointing out that a "half loaf"—an imperfect, but institutionalized, federal child care policy—offered significant advantages over the status quo.

This assessment raises a related question: Should advocates work for and applaud incremental measures? Or ought they to struggle for wholesale policy reform and redesign? In other fields, this is sometimes termed the "reform or revolution" debate, but it is also relevant to child care advocates and their analysts. Various contributors treat this question in different ways: some explicitly approve of gradual, evolutionary developments, while others hold out for more sweeping and transformative change. Complicating this question is each different level of government's particular responsibilities for child care that campaigns must take into account. In Canada, child care is a provincial responsibility—although many advocates argue that this very fact is part of the problem. On the whole, the historical evidence collected here seems to suggest that local and provincial campaigns have pursued incremental goals; whereas national campaigns have held out for more far-reaching and systemic policy change.

Even when examining the same place and the same time, some authors in this collection arrive at different conclusions. For example, two chapters of this book focus on child care advocacy and policy in Alberta. Tom Langford and Sheila Campbell work from different positions, however, and their respective chapters offer a dialogue on how to think about child care in that province. Where Campbell sees the advantages of working with governments, in coalitions of elite or leading citizens motivated by altruism, Langford proposes that effective advocacy requires a social movement. Campbell's history of the gains made by insiders working behind the scenes with decision makers contrasts with Langford's observations that "special interest group" status weakens the political influence of advocates. Elsewhere in the anthology, Cheryl Collier and Vappu Tyyskä examine Ontario's recent experience, and like the western authors, they too arrive at different conclusions even as they study the same time and place.

Several chapters take up the issue of political parties and elected officials. Jane Jenson's analysis of the fascinating history of child care in

Quebec places considerable emphasis on progressive feminist politicians and “femocrats” (feminist bureaucrats) within the state. Cheryl Collier’s analysis of differences and similarities between left-wing and right-wing governments in B.C. and Ontario focuses on the governing party’s political platform, concluding that left-wing (NDP) governments are the stronger supporters of child care. Judith Martin, by contrast, is more skeptical about political parties and recommends that activists not be overconfident that the NDP is always an ally.

Is child care made stronger when its message is broader? Or does a less-focused message dilute the movement? This puzzle is taken up by several contributors. Vappu Tyyskää points out the gains and losses from highlighting child care alternately as a women’s issue, a children’s issue and a family issue. She asks if the benefits derived from successful appeals to conservative concerns about “families in need” outweigh the loss of a feminist social change message. Judith Martin points to a similar quandary: Have advocates been too accepting of a work/family divide and not creative enough in reimagining the workplace?

Even the questions, Who fights for child care? Who are the social actors? do not find unanimous agreement among contributors. Most chapters identify the main locus of political activity in groups and organizations. By contrast, Sharon Hope Irwin and Donna S. Lero’s piece points out that advocacy for the inclusion of children with special needs has come mainly from individual parents or pioneering child care directors. Even advocacy groups, they gently chide, have not made inclusion a major plank or significant focus of work. Wendy Atkin raises a parallel observation: the sexism that lies behind the organization of child care is attributable to the active work of women, as well as men. Leading women’s organizations, such as the ladies of the board of directors of Toronto’s West End Creche, were equally unfriendly to working mothers as were other segments of society. Moreover, Atkin’s race-sensitive analysis leads her to conclude that an overconcentration on gender led many to ignore the parallel project of “whiteness” that underpinned notions of child care policy and curriculum in the first half of the twentieth century—and perhaps today, as well. There are important divisions within the child care movement, and historians and analysts must be attentive to these differences. In America, Sonya Michel observes that feminists played a relatively minor role in the struggle for child care, and this collection’s contributors offer different assessments of the role of women’s groups and others in Canadian child care advocacy.²³

Some people attribute governments’ failure to enact good child care

policy to the fault of advocates. Some might read Linda White's critique of 1980s national advocacy efforts this way. Judith Martin underscores a different perspective, pointing out that structural features of Canadian society (chiefly the political and economic climate) have more power than do advocates to shape the landscape of political possibility. Many contributors agree on this point, arguing that although agency and activism make a difference, historical, social, economic and political factors prevail. One of these factors is the role of business and, in turn, government receptivity to for-profit care. Several chapters address the issue of commercial child care and the business lobby's influence in promoting policies favourable to privatized care.

Contributors differ on the relative importance they place on a political division of powers, although all recognize the pervasive effects of federalism. Jane Jenson develops a complex analysis of how and why Quebec has situated child care as a component of comprehensive family policy while other jurisdictions have not. Some authors prioritize the local government (for example, Sheila Campbell on Edmonton and Vappu Tyyskä on two Ontario municipalities). Others identify the provincial government as the key player. Rebecca Kelley Scherer and Linda White make the federal government their focus, Scherer's history chronicling a full half century. These different choices implicitly point to the need to clarify which levels of government have the most power to affect child care—all the while remembering, as the longitudinal stories show, that this "fact" can change with different historical conjunctures. For example, local control over child care had positive effects at some moments and quite regressive consequences at other points.

Across the chapters we can find different conceptions of the state. Authors have different views on whether government is a level playing field in which all voices have an equal chance to be heard or if, to the contrary, government is an unequal playing field where some perspectives predominate and others are systematically marginalized. Some authors see the state as a site of political struggle; others conceive of government as a place of consensus and conciliation in the service of the general good. Thus, contributors recommend different kinds of activities, and they advise different alliances and tactics. Judith Martin, in particular, makes a unique contribution to this collection; like other authors, she identifies the need for political and policy change, yet she simultaneously urges child care advocates to focus on extra-parliamentary sites for social change.

Taken together, the authors provide a mix of analytic tools and insights. Their careful and considered arguments enrich our capacity to

understand how and why child care advocacy and policy unfold as they do—their arguments illuminate the possibilities and limitations of future politics.

Changing Child Care

The contributors to *Changing Child Care* debate child care as a political enterprise. The book is an historical retrospective, but as child care advocacy is a still unfinished campaign, this collection inevitably raises questions about the future. What can be gleaned about child care activism in the coming years?

The child care movement confronts significant challenges. In an era of welfare state restructuring, the prospects of comprehensive child care are uncertain. Some of the “debt and deficit” mania is abating in light of a national budget surplus, but there seems to be little political will for public spending on new programs at the federal level, and signals are mixed across the provinces. As I write in this introduction, the progressive legislation passed in 2001 in British Columbia by the NDP looks vulnerable to repeal by the newly elected Liberal government. In Manitoba, over 22,000 people have just responded to a government consultation on a new “vision” for child care, but the provincial NDP appears unwilling to implement fundamental change. Ontario’s Conservative government has slashed its child care budget and downloaded costs onto municipalities, fragmenting provincial advocacy into small scale battles with local city councils. On the good news front, Nova Scotia has recently announced new spending of \$66 million on early childhood development services, and Quebec seems determined to proceed with its comprehensive policy.

In the era of a Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) and a new federal Early Childhood Development Services Agreement, does a campaign for a national child care program make any sense? Should advocates abandon a federal campaign targeting the Canadian government and regroup in provincial or local lobbies? Should they seek broad alliances around a range of family policies, or do they need to continue to make child care a strong focus? Across the country, advocates are struggling with these and other questions. In the meantime, parents who want and need child care can rarely find or afford licensed, high-quality care. The child care workers who care for Canada’s children are still paid on a par with zoo-keepers and parking lot attendants.²⁴ Most Canadians support the idea that governments should actively help parents with their caregiving responsibilities; yet in all of Canada, only in Quebec are child care policy, funding and services are not seriously underdeveloped.²⁵

How and why has such a huge gap between public needs, public wants and child care service developed? This collection offers some historical reflections, in ways that may be useful for the future.

Notes

1. *Ottawa Citizen* 2001.
2. Bouwsma 1990; Commager 1967.
3. Briskin 1991.
4. Vanier Institute of the Family 2000: 86–87.
5. Child Care Resource and Research Unit 1998, Tables 1 and 2: 83.
6. Child Care Resource and Research Unit 1998, Table 3: 84.
7. Friendly 2000: 8.
8. Prentice 1999.
9. Strong-Boag and Fellman 1997: 3.
10. Wilson 1977; Gordon 1994.
11. Boggs 1986; O'Connor and Olsen 1997; Olsen 1994; Scott 1990; Touraine 1988.
12. Esping-Anderson 1989; Fraser 1989; Sainsbury 1994.
13. I create a composite entity here out of varying strands, assembling under “new social movement” theory both “old” resource mobilization approaches as well as “new” interpretive identity-based approaches.
14. Tarrow 1998.
15. Carroll 1997: 7.
16. Tilly 1988: 1.
17. Moscovitch and Drover 1982; Moscovitch and Albert 1987; O'Connor and Olsen 1997.
18. Haney 1998: 748; Howe 1996; O'Connor 1996; Orloff 1993, 1996.
19. Brush 1996; Koven and Michel 1993.
20. Gordon 1990.
21. Michel 1999: 7–8.
22. Hernes 1977.
23. Michel 1999: 278.
24. Doherty et al. 2000.
25. Philip 1998, Rebick 1998.