Challenging National Regimes From Below: Toronto Child-Care Politics

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In Canada, as in the United States, the postwar welfare regime recognized the citizenship of the male breadwinner while women, for the most part, remained second-class citizens. This was reflected, inter alia, in Canada's child-care policy, a federal-provincial cost-sharing arrangement that provided subsidies to low-income families able to demonstrate their need, rather than as a public service available to all those who want and need it. While this meant that the Canadian state did not guarantee the right to affordable child care, these intergovernmental arrangements also offered feminists opportunities to challenge federal policy at the provincial and local level. This article examines child-care politics in Toronto, Canada's largest city and the first one in Canada to have a municipal child-care program. It shows how, in the 1970s, Toronto began to break with the liberal assumptions that characterized its past policies. Toronto's child-care program also posed a potential challenge to the national and provincial regimes. This, however, required the movement to secure changes at the provincial and/or federal level, which it thus far has failed to do.

S econd-wave feminists in Canada recognized that access to child care was important for women's economic equality with men, for without it, women would, at best, remain secondary workers. State support was also essential if affordable, high quality–child care were to be available to all who wanted it and if child-care workers, most of whom are women, were to receive fair wages. In Canada, as in the United States and the UK, however, second-wave feminists failed to secure a national child-care policy that would do this. Only lower-income or "at risk" families were eligible for state subsidies, and the federal government offered only modest tax relief for the majority, who purchased the care they could

afford on the market. Canadian child-care policy thus conformed to the broader liberal social policy regime in which it was embedded.[1]

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that social regimes are automatically self-reproducing and ignore the possibility of path-shifting agency. Certainly the thesis that countries will respond to new challenges, such as the need for nonparental care, in path dependent ways has proved quite fruitful (Esping-Andersen 1999; Pierson 2001). Yet, as recent contributions to historical institutionalism suggest, seemingly incremental modifications—or even simple policy drift—can result in regime-altering outcomes (Cox 2001; Streeck and Thelen 2005). Thus, policymakers can develop path-shifting responses, either by drawing reflexively on traditions that had been suppressed by the dominant regime (Crouch 2001) and/or by looking "outside" for new policy ideas (Visser and Hemerijck 2001; Zeitlin and Trubek 2003). What has yet to be acknowledged, however, is that regimes can also be challenged, perhaps successfully, from below.

Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith, and Dieter Rucht (2003) open up such a possibility. They argue that states have been undergoing (contested) processes of reconfiguration, which involve shifting some capacities not only "upward" to continental or global levels, but also "downward" to subnational levels and "outward" to civil society. While they associate reconfiguration with welfare state retrenchment—downloading to lower levels, offloading to the private sector—and thus a real threat to feminist gains, they also recognize that it opens opportunities for advancing (certain) feminist agendas (Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht 2003, 3). Such opportunities arise at subnational—provincial or local—levels. This article focuses on child-care politics in Canada's largest city, Toronto,[2] asking whether feminists and their allies, organizing at the local level, were able to pose an effective challenge from below to Canada's liberal welfare regime, at least in this important policy field.

1. The concept of social policy or welfare regime plays a key role in the field of comparative social policy. Social policy regimes may be defined as "institutionalised patterns in welfare state provision establishing systematic relations between the state and social structures of conflict, domination and accommodation. Such patterns refer to the terms and conditions under which claims may be made on the resources of the state, and, reciprocally, the terms and conditions of economic, social and political obligation to the state" (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 12).

2. The research on which this analysis is based involved a systematic search of the key newspaper (*Toronto Star* and the *Globe and Mail*) archives for the period covered, government archives (both Metropolitan Toronto and the City of Toronto), interviews with key figures, and as relevant secondary literature. It was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Council of Canada.

Although the pressure for public support for nonfamilial child-care arrangements is now being felt across Canada, it started earlier in major metropolitan areas such as Toronto, the urban center of Canada's postwar economy. Toronto was also the first municipality to become involved in child-care programs, and it long stood as the model for Canada's most populous province, Ontario. Perhaps in part because of this, Ontario did not follow the other provinces in centralizing control over child-care to the provincial level. Its municipalities retained a critical role in planning, managing, and even financing (20%) child-care programs. Most importantly, in Toronto during the 1970s, the heyday of radical second-wave feminism (Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht 2003), feminist activists helped lay the foundations for a cross-class coalition of child-care providers, parents, trade unionists, city bureaucrats, and politicians that gave voice to the rapidly growing need for universally accessible child-care. Through a series of confrontations, a new model of child-care as a social service, available to all citizens, emerged. This article first analyzes the construction of this alliance and then examines the opportunities and constraints posed by broader moves to reconfigure the Canadian state in a manner favorable to the Toronto model.

CHILD CARE IN TORONTO/ONTARIO/CANADA

For 30 critical years—from 1966 to 1996—Canada's child-care policy was implemented through a system of intergovernmental arrangements, the centerpiece of which was the federal Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), which allowed the federal government to cost-share subsidies, on a 50-50 basis with the provinces. These arrangements reinforced the liberal view that child care was a "welfare" service, targeting those in financial or "moral" need. For the first time, federal funds were available for the support of lone mothers.[3] In recognizing their "right to care," the federal government also nodded in the direction of their "right to choose" employment in the form of federal contributions to subsidized child care.

CAP funds did not, moreover, mark the start of a truly national child-care program. CAP entailed no obligation for provinces to develop child-care support programs, which meant that levels of regulated child-care

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3. Various provinces had begun to implement mothers' allowances in the interwar period, but it was not until the passage of CAP that the federal government recognized this right and began to cost-share social assistance with the provinces.

provision varied substantially across the country. Although it did provide some broad regulations should a province decide to participate, it also left it to the provinces to determine the number of child-care spaces to subsidize, as well as eligibility rules and levels of subsidy. In fact, CAP aimed to support the development of an effective welfare administration at the provincial level. Those who framed CAP were aware of moves in several provinces to centralize control over "community services" like child care, given the municipalities' limited resources for meeting growing demand. In the name of national equity, the federal government was concerned with ensuring that all provinces developed the capacity to support such services. The vehicle it chose—cost sharing with the provinces—was typical of the intergovernmental arrangements governing Canada's Keynesian welfare state. The effect was to support the establishment of provincial control over social services. CAP's province building also frequently meant centralization to the provincial level—at the expense of cities (Bradford 2002; Jenson and Mahon 2002). Ontario, however, continued to cost-share social assistance and related "welfare services," such as child care, with its municipalities.

The location of child care as part of CAP was soon contested in the name of women's equality. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967–70), which had become a sounding board for second-wave feminism, recognized that all women needed access to child care if they were to enjoy equal opportunity with men. Accordingly, it called for a national day care act.[4] Although the recommendations came at a time that seemed ripe for major policy innovation,[5] the femocrats within the federal bureaucracy faced stiff opposition to a child-care act. They were not helped by the conclusions of the first national conference on day care (1971), which opted for revisions to CAP as the surer route to securing improved child-care provision. Thus, child care remained in CAP, albeit at the price of some modest revisions: The provinces were given a new, less intrusive option for determining need. Provinces choosing the new option could also cost-share operating costs, but only for nonprofit providers. The range of potential eligibility was widened, but families

4. See Mahon (2000) for a more detailed account of the impact of the Royal Commission on child-care policy.

5. The sixties in Canada as in many other Western countries was a decade marked by the ascendancy of the New Left and second-wave feminism. It also witnessed the emergence of a social democratic party, the New Democratic Party, which was sufficiently strong by the early 1970s to push the minority Liberal government toward the center-left. It was also in this era that the federal government began to provide core funding for groups, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), which became an important umbrella organization for Canada's feminist movement.

earning more than the provincial average were not eligible—a proviso deliberately introduced to forestall the move toward universality in some provinces.

The foundations for Toronto's child-care policy were established in the 1940s, forged out of the ashes of an earlier intergovernmental arrangement. During World War II, the federal government offered (temporary) support to establish child-care centers in cities with substantial wartime industries. Toronto was one of two cities that benefited from federal support for day care for mothers working in essential industries. When the federal government withdrew funding, only in Toronto were parent groups and their supporters strong enough to win the battle to prevent demolition of the wartime child-care system—though they failed to establish the beginnings of an egalitarian policy (Prentice 1992). In 1946, the province passed the Day Nursery Act (DNA), which established an optional provincial-municipal cost-sharing arrangement.[6] As part of the broader trend toward the professionalization of social work, the Ontario DNA established high standards of care, defined in terms of staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications. No other province would establish an equivalent policy until the 1970s. The DNA, however, strongly favored the view that day nurseries were a service for the poor and those considered "at risk." Thus, Ontario shared the same "welfare service" approach that would later come to define the pan-Canadian system.

Toronto's child-care policy initially looked very much like Ontario's—in fact, it was the only municipality initially prepared to take advantage of the new arrangement. With provincial support, 12 of the 18 centers the municipality had established during the war were reopened (Prentice 1988, 7). Yet the new program reflected the second-class citizenship status of its beneficiaries. Fees were doubled to eliminate mothers who were "working from choice." As Prentice notes (1988, 13):

> By the early 1950s, the City's policies had winnowed childcare into a targeted program for only the neediest. "Need" was proven through means-testing, casework and investigation in a climate of restricted eligibility that ran counter to the new national emphasis on universal programs. By the early 1950s, civic politicians and welfare administrators were only willing to subsidize the cost of childcare for poor, single parent families. This was

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6. This meant that provincial funding would be available to municipalities that wished to support the expansion of regulated child care for those "in need." It was only in the 1990s that all municipalities were required to develop a child-care plan. As a result, child care developed unevenly across the province, concentrated primarily in the largest cities, Toronto and Ottawa.

a dramatic transition from a wartime acceptance of the principle of public service.

When the metropolitan government assumed primary responsibility for welfare services in 1967, it inherited a child-care system built on these principles.

By the mid-1980s, however, Toronto had established the foundations for a system that challenged these liberal principles, one based on the principle that "childcare is an essential public service which should meet high quality service standards and be accessible and affordable to those who need it" (Metropolitan Toronto 1990, ii). The City of Toronto staked out an even more egalitarian profile.[7] Thus, a clear bias in favor of public and nonprofit provision was established, in no small part due to the active role played by the Toronto Board of Education. From the 1970s on, the Toronto Board played a proactive role, providing free space in vacant classrooms and other forms of support for parent-run cooperatives and other nonprofit centers. The city also pioneered a crucial mechanism, the day-care grant, designed to make quality child care affordable even for those who were not eligible for a subsidy, without doing so at the expense of child-care workers' wages and working conditions.

Toronto's break with the child-care-as-welfare service model, a model sustained by the federal CAP and the Ontario DNA, can, in part, be understood as the result of prior policy. As we have seen, wartime arrangements allowed the establishment of a system of municipally run day-care centers, and municipal workers, child-care professionals and parent groups successfully defended the core after the federal government withdrew. By the time that CAP was passed, moreover, the province and the city had established a cost- (and jurisdiction-) sharing arrangement that neither wanted to alter.[8] The only change that occurred was that responsibility for social services shifted to the metropolitan level. This policy legacy, however, can only account for the fact that Toronto retained sufficient autonomy to deviate from the liberal-welfarist path. It cannot account for the path shifting that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. The next section tries to answer the question of why path shifting proved pos-

7. During the period with which this article is primarily concerned (1960s to the mid-1990s), Toronto had a two-tier government. Metropolitan Toronto assumed responsibility for social services in 1968, but the City of Toronto retained some capacity for independent action in this area, which it exercised on occasion.

8. The Alberta government was the only other province to develop a cost- and jurisdiction-sharing arrangement with its municipalities in this area, though this came later, coinciding with the passage of CAP. Moreover, the province decided to centralize control over child-care provision for preschool children in the late 1970s, leaving the municipalities a limited role (Hayden 1997).

sible in Toronto. Here it will be argued that feminist child-care advocates played an important role, helping to forge a network of support behind a different model, one which could support women's drive for equality.

THE EMERGENCE OF TORONTO'S NEW VISION OF CHILD CARE AS CITIZEN RIGHT

Part of the explanation for the transformation of Toronto's child-care policy can of course be linked to "need": The secular rise in women's labor-force participation rate happened earlier, faster, and with greater intensity in Toronto than in most of the rest of Canada.[9] The Metro Toronto Social Planning Council had in fact established a day-care committee in the mid-1960s, as part of the broader, big-city-centered effort to document rising needs coordinated by the Child and Family Welfare Division of the Canadian Welfare Council (Finkel 1995). Reporting in 1968, the Toronto Committee noted that the need to expand day-care facilities had already become "established fact." Its analysis reflected changes that were taking place in national political discourse: The hearings being held across the country by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women brought second-wave feminism's demand for equality with men to the fore, and Toronto was not oblivious to the change. The Toronto Committee noted that "there is little possibility that present trends will reverse themselves or that present services can be considered totally adequate. The mother outside the home is becoming more commonplace everyday *and women's right to be recognized as an equal is receiving more and more support*" (Metropolitan Toronto Social Planning Council 1968, 2; emphasis added). In other words, more child care was needed in order to meet the need for care generated by women's turn to paid work *and* in order to promote gender equality.

Child-care advocates in Toronto also faced a favorable local political opportunity structure.[10] A broad reform coalition, coalescing around

9. In 1971, the labor-force participation rate of women over 15 was 39.9 for Canada, 50.4 for Toronto, and only 41.8 for the rest of Ontario. By 1981, the rate for Canada had risen to 51% and Ontario's to 52.4%, but Toronto's stood at nearly 60%. I am grateful to Ann Pagnin, Department of Community Services, Toronto, for providing me with this data, derived from the relevant Statistics Canada catalogues and City of Toronto summary reports from Statistics Canada data.

10. The term "political opportunity structure" comes from the literature on social movements where it recognizes that the conditions for movement success cannot simply be explained in terms of internal resource mobilization but rather also depend on developments in "institutional politics," notably openings provided by the presence of influential allies, realignments in the party

issues like "Stop Spadina," [11] was successfully challenging the hege-
mony of the growth coalition that had dominated Metro Toronto's early
years. As Stefan Kipfer and Roger Keil note, "out of this struggle grew a
local political culture centred in downtown and midtown neighbour-
hoods that in the 1970s and 1980s welded social democratic currents
with a strong urbanist orientation of a liberal and 'Red-Tory' . . . consti-
uency" (2002, 239). The influential Social Planning Council, which
played such a crucial role in shaping social policy discourse within Metro,
also took a leftward turn at this time, embracing a "participative, urban
democratic approach" to social questions (McGrath 1999, 105). Thus,
new values and new voices gained admission to Toronto politics. As a
result, child-care advocates would find potential allies in the council, in
the social policy community, and among the New Left and feminist move-
ments that were raising the banner of (class, gender, and racial) equality.
It took conflictual encounters with the Province, however, to forge a broad
network of child-care advocates out of these potential allies.

   In fact, the feminist New Left–inspired child-care advocates initially
clashed with bureaucrats and politicians in the Department of Social Ser-
vices and the Social Services and Housing Committee of the Metro Coun-
cil, which oversaw the child-care program. The latter clearly retained the
view of child care as a welfare service for the poor: As late as 1974, its
priorities remained low-income single parents, low-income two-parent
families with both parents working, and families with special needs. Metro
officials thus came into conflict with the new generation of feminist activ-
ists regarding whom the municipality should support—those incapable
of supporting themselves and "at risk," or all "citizens" of Toronto—and
how the service should be delivered—a therapeutic service designed and
delivered by professionals, or a more communal approach to child rear-
ing (parent cooperatives).[12] Working from initial successes at the Univer-
sity of Toronto and York University, the young activists formed the Day
Care Organizing Committee to challenge existing structures from below

systems and elite cleavages (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996 and Tarrow 1994). It is similar to
Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht's concept, "configuration of power" (2003, 18).

   11. Stop Spadina was a popular movement whose aim was to stop the construction of the Spadina
Expressway, which would have destroyed many communities in the City of Toronto. It symbolized a
new willingness not to tolerate the technocratic developmentalism that had prevailed since the
creation of Metro in the 1950s (Magnusson 1983).

   12. In fact, the Toronto child-care movement was very similar to the Women's Action Alliance
and Resources for Community Change described in Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht (2003, 1).
Both focused on supporting the establishment of cooperative, parent-run child-care centers with
curricula stressing an egalitarian view of sex roles. For more detail on Toronto's feminist child-care
activists, see Atken 1998.

by providing resources to others who shared their egalitarian and democratic ideals (Atkin 1998; Kyle 1992; Prentice 1988).

The first step toward the forging of a broader child-care network was taken in response to the province's attempt to reform the child-care system, claiming to make it more accessible, but at the price of lowering standards. From the province's perspective, Metro-run centers were simply too expensive. If capacity were to expand to meet growing demand, there would have to be increasing reliance on purchase-of-service agreements with nonprofit and commercial centers, which were cheaper than Metro's. This approach permeated the 1974 "White Paper on Day Care Services to Children," tabled in the legislature by then–Provincial Secretary for Social Development Margaret Birch. While Birch rejected the young activists' demand for free universal day care, the report seemed to support them in their fight against the standard bearers of professionalism in the provincial and Metro bureaucracies.[13] Thus, the equation of quality with professionalism was attacked in the white paper, which argued that "applied to day care programs, this assumption has been carried to the extreme of acting as though parents themselves were not competent." [14]

If this move was designed to forge a de facto alliance among the province, commercial providers, and activists in the cooperative day-care movement, it backfired. Instead, the activists joined with traditional child-care voices to form the Day Care Reform Action Alliance, which worked successfully to defeat most of the Birch reforms. Although the "welfare vs. social service for citizens" question would remain an issue within the alliance, the struggle to defeat the Birch reforms taught a new generation of activists to recognize the importance of quality care and the skills involved in providing early childhood education and care. At the same time, new philosophies of education were stressing age-appropriate, child-centered learning, bringing the professionals closer to the activists. The emerging consensus between them held even as pressure mounted to increase the supply of affordable child care at the price of quality, not to mention wages.

An important test of the strength of the alliance between the traditional day-care community in Metro and the New Left–feminist-inspired

13. The parent-run co-ops at the two universities had run afoul of the Day Nurseries Branch on precisely this point (Atkin 1998).
14. A *Toronto Star* editorial dated March 12, 1974, also identified an "unidentified Ministry spokesman" as recognizing that middle-class parents needed day care too, but this should be in the form of parent cooperatives.

activists came over the Summers report to Metro's Social Services and Housing Committee in 1976–77. Asked to compare the costs of Metro-run centers to those of nonprofits and commercial centers, Summers found that costs for the latter were lower, especially in commercial centers, and, not surprisingly, wage rates were the major factor. For Rob Summers, a conservative, the answer was clear: Day care should be treated as a business, not a public service, and Metro should shift from being a supplier to acting as purchaser. Contracts should accordingly be awarded to the lowest bidder. When the province tried to use the Summers report to force Metro to change its policy, however, the opposition quickly mobilized against it.

At the same time, the Metro Day Care Advisory Committee, which brought representatives of all forms of provision together with child-care advocates, began to map out a new approach, one that would bear fruit in the next decade.[15] The recommendations emanating from the workshop it organized defended the principle of quality care and went on to tackle the thorny issue of how to secure affordability and quality, while maintaining decent salaries for staff. Its recommendation identified the mechanism—special day-care grants—that would subsequently be adopted in Toronto and, ultimately, the Province of Ontario: "[T]he principle of fair wages, as they apply to wages in centres with purchase of service agreements, as compared to metro-operated centres, [should] be applied beginning with a minimum acceptable salary level, which would come up to the Metro level within three years; and that *a cash grant to achieve this be set up separately from the regular per diem levels*" (Metro Toronto Day Care Advisory Committee 1977, 12; emphasis added). It took the entry of new actors, with strong links to the trade union movement, however, to establish sufficient political pressure to make the wage subsidy part of Toronto's policy.

The issue of affordability was placed squarely on the agenda through a series of studies sponsored by the Metro Toronto Social Planning Council, which documented the heavy reliance on informal, unregulated care arrangements by middle-class and even poor families, especially immigrants who tended to rely primarily on relatives. Increased public awareness of the affordability crisis might have strengthened the hands of those who looked to cheaper care (i.e., lower wage, lower staff ratios, and even

15. The emergent child-care network understood the need to "jump level" and were able to do so. The workshop was held at Queen's Park, the site of the provincial legislature in Ontario, and its recommendations were simultaneously addressed to the provincial ministry and Metro's department of social services.

fewer regulations). To some extent it did. Both the province and Metro responded by moving to support "informed parental choice" through the provision of information to parents on choosing good informal care arrangements, the establishment of a child-care registry, and modest support for informal care providers.

Yet the question of wages simmered below the surface. The 1981 Metro Task Force on Day Care noted that "little flexibility exists in day care centres which must operate competitively in a 'free market' milieu, and it is generally accepted that it is staff who are the major subsidizers of childcare" (Metropolitan Toronto 1981, 40). The only mechanism that the department then had at its disposal for improving wages in the purchase-of-service sector was to raise per diems, which would lead to higher fees for parents at a time when centres were struggling to fill vacancies for unsubsidized places, even while waiting lists for subsidized spots ballooned. It took the emergence of a new set of forces within the child-care network—the Ontario Coalition for Better Day Care (OCBDC) and its Metro counterpart, the Day Care Coalition of Metro Toronto—to advance a solution that made it possible to combine affordability, quality, and fair wages.

The driving forces behind the coalition were Action Day Care (ADC) and feminists within the Ontario Federation of Labour. Drawing on the New Left and feminist ideals that had inspired the Day Care Organizing Committee of the early 1970s, but seasoned by a decade of involvement in child-care politics, Action Day Care demanded universal, high-quality day care by the end of the decade, but it also proposed interim measures. One of these was a direct grant to licensed, nonprofit providers in order to increase salaries and reduce fees. At around the same time, ADC began to work with Ontario Working Women (OWW), an organization of trade union women. Action Day Care supported the drive to unionize child-care workers in the purchase-of-service sector, while the OWW got the Ontario Federation of Labour to endorse ADC-organized forums designed to garner broader public support. By 1982, the two had joined together to form OCBDC[16] and, shortly thereafter, its Metro counterpart, the Day Care Coalition of Metro Toronto.

Like the earlier alliance against the Birch reforms, the new coalition brought together representatives of a wide range of forces, from feminist

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16. Collier (2001, 125) suggests that OCBDC initially was centered in the main urban areas but increased its provincial reach in 1986, when it also changed its name to the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare (OCBCC).

groups like the International Women's Day committee, individual unions, and student associations to more mainstream elements like the Association of Early Childhood Education of Ontario and the Ontario Welfare Council. The Metro group drew together the grassroots activists associated with the same array of forces. Both the Toronto and Ontario branches shared the longer-term goal of universally accessible day care, even while working for short-term solutions to the affordability-quality-fair-wages dilemma. ADC's idea of a direct grant seemed a workable interim solution.

While the OCBDC focused its efforts at the provincial level, its Metro counterpart took aim at Metro and, when that failed, shifted its focus to the City of Toronto's Neighbourhoods Committee. The committee's request for a report on the "crisis in day care" from the Planning Department provided the opening, and its report confirmed their diagnosis: The current subsidy system made it impossible to simultaneously achieve affordability and fair wages, leading to a "universal day care crisis" (Toronto Commissioner of Planning and Development 1983). On the basis of the committee's recommendations, the City Council approved the establishment of a special day-care fund. It hoped that its action would persuade Metro and the province to follow suit. It took another year, and a more receptive political opportunity structure, for the province to introduce its own program of direct operating grants to non-profit centers.

NEW OPENINGS—AND CLOSURES—AT THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL LEVELS

Prospects for a successful challenge from below to the liberal assumptions of provincial and federal child-care policy looked promising in the early 1980s. In the mid-1980s, gender equality had become an important part of the national political discourse, and this provided an important opening for child-care advocates. The 1984 Abella Commission on Employment Equity gave the demand for universal child care a new federal prominence, and this was reinforced that same year by the appointment of the Cooke Task Force on Childcare. Feminist issues were also given particular prominence in the 1984 election, when the leaders agreed to participate in a special national debate on gender-equality issues. Child-care advocates seemed poised to take advantage of this, having recently developed pan-Canadian organizational capacity with the creation of a new national organization, the Canadian Day Care Advo-

cacy Association (CDCAA). This, in turn, coincided with the creation of the OCBDC and its Metro counterpart—not surprisingly since Toronto activists had played an important part in pushing for the creation of a new national organization (Friendly 1994; Prentice 1988).

Child care as an indispensable means for achieving women's place in the paid labor force was also high on the agenda of federal and provincial ministers responsible for the Status of Women. At the 1984 meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee, which began to examine the need for child care, the then-minister for the Status of Women in Ontario, and host of the conference, went so far as to proclaim:

> Childcare is no longer a welfare issue, concerning only the needy. It is as well an employment and an economic issue concerning all working parents of all income levels. Either we take the action required to ensure the provision of a range of reliable childcare services at an affordable price or we risk losing many of the gains women have won, and endangering the economic independence of the family. (Welch 1984, 9–10)

The subsequently established federal-provincial-territorial working group on child care submitted its report to the 1985 meeting of ministers, pointing out the limitations of the CAP funding framework. The provinces remained divided on the critical issue of auspice: Should public support be restricted to nonprofit providers or should commercial centers also be included? Nevertheless, they did agree that "any new cost sharing arrangement for childcare services should recognize that childcare is a necessary service for all working parents, not just those in need" (Federal, Provincial, Territorial Working Group on Childcare 1985, 38).

This favorable development in federal-provincial relations was reinforced by changes in Ontario itself. The OCBDC used proposed changes to the province's Child and Family Services Act to raise questions about the continued treatment of child care as a welfare service. Public hearings across the province persuaded the Standing Committee on Social Development that more child care was needed in part in order to promote women's rights to "full and equal employment opportunities," although the cabinet had yet to be convinced (Kyle 1992, 380). The prospects for a change in provincial policy were further improved when the Tories were defeated in 1985 by a minority Liberal Party government, which would hold office for two years under a pact with the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP). Both parties had been exposed to the demands of the Toronto child-care network through earlier mobilizations at Queen's Park, and both were officially committed

to a substantial expansion of the system. Not surprisingly, then, the Liberal-NDP Accord included a commitment "to recognize childcare as a basic public service and not a form of welfare" (Kyle 1992, 381). "New Directions for Childcare," announced in 1987, suggested that the government was poised to implement this policy.

The situation changed when the Conservative Party won the 1984 federal election. The party came to office with a different economic and social agenda. It not only eschewed the "interventionist" economic policies pursued by the previous Liberal government, but also aimed to eliminate universal social programs, including the family allowance, while promising to be more attentive to "family values" as part of an antifeminist backlash (Teghtsoonian 1993). Without waiting for the Cooke task force report, the new government organized its own cross-Canada hearings on child care. Although the CDCAA, their allies in women's organizations, trade unions, and others managed to dominate the hearings, just as they had in Ontario, once again the results were disappointing. To be sure, the Conservatives did introduce stand-alone child-care legislation. Yet their Childcare Act reflected its agenda. Thus, for the first time, a ceiling was to be imposed on federal contributions. It would also have made funds available to commercial, as well as nonprofit operations, a move opposed by the child-care advocates and their allies in the feminist and labor movements. It also established a refundable Child Tax Credit, which provided tax relief for traditional male breadwinner families, in line with REAL Women's demands.[17]

Child-care advocates made clear their opposition to the Tories' legislation, and Toronto joined in. Metro released a memo that called on the federal government to withdraw the Canada Childcare Act and to introduce new legislation to cost-share operating grants, capital grants and special projects that are needed to ensure higher salaries for child-care workers, funds for expansion and new facilities, and lower fees for parents. It also urged the province not to enter into an agreement with the federal government under the act and, picking up on another of OCBDC's demands, it called on the province to establish an interministerial task force to develop a plan for a comprehensive, universal early childhood education/child-care system by the year 2000. Metro clearly had been convinced that child care should be under the auspices of nonprofit organizations.

17. REAL Women was an antifeminist group that had strong support in the Conservative Party caucus, including the minister responsible for the Childcare Act.

Toronto child-care advocates had clearly converted the City of Toronto to their vision. Unfortunately, that vision depended on support from the province and/or the federal government, and it was not to be forthcoming, even in the limited form envisaged in the act. With the exception of the Child Tax Credit, the Tory government's child-care legislation was allowed to die on the books when the 1988 election was called, and it was not revived. The federal government did, however, use its new majority to introduce other changes, such as placing a cap on CAP funds to the richest provinces, including Ontario. At the same time, the Ontario Liberal government scaled back its plans to expand child care within the province.

Faced with provincial intransigence, the Metro executive agreed to make up the shortfall. In justifying this historic break with the precedent of funding only as many spaces as the province was prepared to cost-share, Toronto Councillor Roger Hollander reiterated Metro's commitment to child care as a citizen right: "Metro Council has been uncharacteristically progressive on this issue and we can't afford to be bludgeoned by the province's narrow vision of day care as a welfare program. . . . Our objective is to move childcare out of the welfare system and into a public service."[18] By 1990, Metro's share of funding had risen from 20% to 30%.[19]

AUSTERITY, "ACTIVATION," AND CHILD POVERTY: NEW FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL OPENINGS

For child-care advocates in Toronto and elsewhere, federal and provincial opportunity structures seemed to open again in the early 1990s. The Liberals entered the 1993 federal election with child care prominently featured in their "Red Book" of promises, and following a Liberal victory, a minister sympathetic to their cause, Lloyd Axworthy, was appointed to the department responsible for child care. It looked even more promising in Ontario where the New Democratic Party, a "friend" of child care, had won the 1990 election. The NDP came to office planning to shift child care from Community Services, where the welfarist orientation prevailed, to Education, where services are provided on the

18. "Metro Votes to Pay Extra $3.6 Million for Day Care." *Toronto Star*, 19 April 1989.
19. In an effort to recoup its losses, Metro tried (unsuccessfully) to challenge the provincial government's ability to limit access to CAP funding, by trying the "CAP pass through" strategy that several Alberta cities had pioneered in the early 1980s (*Metro Toronto*, 1990).

basis of citizen right; to transform commercial into nonprofit provision; to boost the salaries of child-care workers; and to increase places so that child care would become available to all who want and need it.

Once again, however, these promising openings were to disappear. On both the federal and provincial levels, there was a sharp turn toward fiscal austerity. In social policy terms, this meant an increased emphasis on "activating" social assistance recipients, including lone parents, as the federal government moved to implement a softer version of Bill Clinton's plan to "end welfare as we know it" (Bashevkin 2002). All talk of universality was abandoned as targeted programs were seen to offer the best "value for money." These shifts reflected a change in state projects, from the Keynesian welfare era to the "social investment" concern of third-way liberalism (Jenson and Saint Martin 2003). Child care had a place on the new agendas, but one quite different from the past.

The political field had altered, too. A singular focus on the child replaced gender equality and other values that had held such a prominent place in the 1970s and 1980s (McKeen 2004). Moreover, the advocacy community had been severely wounded by cuts to core funding initiated by the Conservatives and sustained by the Liberals. New openings appeared for "consultation," but only with those groups prepared to argue their case in terms consistent with the government's new discourse (Mahon and Phillips 2002). This shift echoed developments in other countries where women's movements, as well as those articulating their traditional concerns, faced a reconfigured state. As Banaszak, Beckwith, and Rucht (2003, 23) argue: "While a moderate feminist discourse has gained a legitimate place within the political debate, the neoliberal, anticollectivist rhetoric of the reconfigured state also limits women's movements to issues that resonate with a wider public." Child-care activists in Canada learned to frame their arguments in terms of child poverty and later in terms of early child development. They joined two broad coalitions in order to promote their cause—Campaign 2000, whose critical view of government policy marginalized it politically, and the more moderate National Children's Alliance, who were seen as more "appropriate" partners (Mahon and Phillips 2002). Although the Alliance helped to keep child care on the federal and provincial agendas, the notion of child care as a support for gender equality largely disappeared.

Although the federal government did begin to deliver on its promise of a new child-care policy, child care soon became caught up in a social security review in which the main concerns were the reduction of child poverty and the activation of social assistance recipients. Now, child care

figured as a support for the activation of lone parents and as a long-term investment in the human capital of poor children, helping them to escape the "poverty cycle." Even this opening dramatically narrowed with the 1995 budget, which eliminated CAP, rolling a substantially reduced amount into a new block fund, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST). This meant that the provinces were no longer required to match federal funds. They were also free to decide how to allocate the substantially reduced federal transfers, with child care often the loser to high-profile areas like health. In addition, in the 1996 Speech from the Throne, the federal government promised not to use its spending power—the instrument on which it had relied to establish most pan-Canadian social programs—to mount new programs without the consent of the majority of provinces.

At the provincial level, the initial message was more positive. Despite the federally imposed cap on CAP funds going to Ontario and the depth of the recession, the NDP government increased spending on child care, included child-care workers under provincial pay equity legislation, established a wage-enhancement program for nonprofit centers, and introduced incentives for commercial providers to switch to nonprofit status. Nevertheless, faced with ballooning social assistance rolls and falling revenues, the NDP, too, began to focus on measures to support the employability of social assistance recipients, and additional child-care funds came as part of their "Jobs Ontario" package aimed at parents involved in training, in secondary or postsecondary education, or in exiting social assistance.

Still fighting to preserve the child-care system it had managed to establish, Metro tried a novel move in 1995, seeking federal financial support through the federal Childcare Initiatives fund to finance an experiment involving the elimination of the subsidy-based method in favor of grants to providers, backed by user fees on a sliding scale. Had it succeeded, Toronto might have come closer to its goal of making access to quality care, provided at fair wages, a universal right. Negotiations began, with provincial approval, while the NDP was still in office, and continued—with increasing urgency—after the election of the neoliberal Harris government, which eliminated provincial support for child care in the public school system (an important element of the Toronto nonprofit system) and canceled both the wage-enhancement grant and the inducement to conversion. While child-care advocates organized local protests, the Metro chairperson met with the Toronto member of Parliament who was secretary to the minister for human resources devel-

opment in order to garner support for the deal. The sticking point was that the federal government needed Ontario's approval. When the Harris government refused, this left Toronto's system vulnerable to the Tories' policies, which placed increasing emphasis on child care as a mediocre service to support the activation of lone parents on social assistance.

Although less draconian than Clinton's workfare reforms, Ontario's version of workfare—Ontario Works (1998)—raised the issue of the "right to care" or, at least, lone parents' right to quality child care, good training/educational opportunities, and a regulated labor market capable of delivering good jobs. From Toronto's standpoint, Ontario Works represented a new attack on its child-care system. The principle of "first come, first served," adopted in the early 1980s, was undermined by the province's insistence that Ontario Works participants had priority. Moreover, the province allowed workfare participants a minimal sum. This meant that the city lost revenue every time an Ontario Works participant replaced a regular subsidy client. Of course, the province made clear that the subsidy could be used to purchase cheaper care from the informal sector, but that violated Toronto's long-standing commitment to providing quality care. It thus tried to limit to three months the time a child spent in unlicensed care.

EPILOGUE: THE NEVER-ENDING STORY?

Despite these setbacks, Toronto maintained its commitment to high-quality, affordable, and accessible early childhood education and care as an integral part of a comprehensive system of children's services. It might have taken heart from federal initiatives launched through the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA), a new (1999) intergovernmental arrangement aimed at the "renewal" of social programs and the establishment of a stable basis for financing them. Children and child care were on SUFA's agenda from the outset, as SUFA took on the National Children's Agenda (1997), a federal-provincial agreement to formulate a comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategy to ensure that all Canada's children could develop to their full potential.

Part of the National Child Benefit (NCB)[20] was intended to encourage the provinces to invest in services, like child care, that would support

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20. The NCB, like the U.S. Earned Income Tax Credit, is designed to counter "welfare traps" by subsidizing low-wage jobs. Unlike the EITC, however, the NCB includes social assistance recipients and it reaches well up into middle-income brackets, with 80% of families with children receiving a modest benefit.

the transition from welfare to work. The Early Child Development initiative (2000), and the multilateral framework agreement on early child learning and care, shifted the focus from child poverty and the activation of social assistance recipients to "investment in early child development," a potentially more encompassing concept, albeit one that was silent on women's rights. Child care was but one of the four areas where the provinces and territories could spend their allocations under the Early Child Development initiative, however, and there was no requirement that a province spend any of this on child care. Thus, only six of the 12 provinces invested any of this money in child care and, under the Tories, Ontario was one of the ones that did not. Without provincial support, Toronto could not get access to Early Childhood Development money to fund registered child care spaces.

The city's commitment did not wane, however. If anything, the commitment grew stronger. As in national politics, however, child care was now presented not as a means to advance women's equality but as part of Toronto's "children's strategy." The children's advocate on the City Council and the Children's and Youth Action Committee (CYAC) thus has played a critical role in mobilizing resources for child care and, more broadly, for children's services.[21] As a result, although the city was forced to make some cuts, it continued to pay more than its 20% share—contributing as much as 40% in some years. On a broader front, it sought to address the problems posed by an intergovernmental arrangement by pushing for "a new deal for cities." Child care was very much part of that agenda.[22]

In 2005, the federal government launched a new initiative that aimed to establish a pan-Canadian child-care system built on the principles of quality, inclusiveness, accessibility, and a developmental approach. The vision, which it sought to implement via the negotiation of bilateral agreements with each of the 10 provinces, was very much in accord with Toronto's. Yet the 2006 federal election returned a minority Conservative government determined to withdraw from these agreements. The Conservative government plans to replace them with 1) a $1,200 tax-

21. Whereas during the formative years grassroots activists played a critical role, since the late 1990s, defense of the earlier achievements seems to have been left largely to the advocate, Olivia Chow, the CYAC, officials from Children's Services, public libraries, and the school boards, along with child-centered voluntary organizations. Feminists as such have not had a high profile in the city, as Bashevkin (2005) suggests.

22. Among other things, it commissioned the McCain-Coffey report, which made the case for cities as key sites for organizing a strong, yet flexible, early learning and child-care network. It has also created a new financial instrument in the form of the Childcare Capital Reserve.

deductible payment to all parents with children under six years (a bow to
the social conservatives who are strongly represented in the party), and
2) tax incentives to business and "community organizations" interested
in establishing child-care operations. Opposition from some provinces,[23]
as well as the municipalities of Toronto and Vancouver,[24] is expected,
but this may not be sufficient to stop the destruction of the rudiments of
a pan-Canadian child-care framework. More broadly, the Conservatives
have promised a major fiscal adjustment in favor of the provinces, which
would undermine the whole basis for pan-Canadian social citizenship
more profoundly than the 1996 CHST.[25] Under these circumstances,
the prospects for federal support of Toronto's child-care vision look dim
indeed.

CONCLUSIONS

Comparative analyses of welfare regimes usually focus exclusively on the
national level. From this perspective, the Canadian welfare state re-
sponded to the appearance of the "working mother" in a predictably lib-
eral fashion, with modest tax deductions for the majority and targeted
assistance for the poor and "at risk." Yet Canada's postwar welfare regime
was implemented through a complex series of intergovernmental arrange-
ments that afforded feminists and their allies opportunities to establish
the foundations of a different child-care policy, at least at other levels.
This article has explored the conditions under which such an alternative
emerged in Toronto, Canada's largest city.

To some extent, Toronto's distinctive path can be seen as a result of
previous policies—the establishment of a core of municipal child-care
centers during World War II and the successful fight to secure continued
funding after the war, which resulted in a new cost-sharing arrangement
between the province and the municipality (later Metro). What made it
possible to break the liberal mold, however, was the formation of an al-
liance linking a new generation of feminists, child-care providers, city
bureaucrats, and politicians. Organizing at the metropolitan level, fem-

23. Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.
24. Vancouver adopted a policy similar to Toronto's in 1991 and has continued to build on that
basis, again despite support from the province that has waxed and waned. See Mahon et al. (2006)
for more detail.
25. In this, it would likely receive support in the House of Commons from the Bloc Québécois, a
separatist party. Together, the two parties hold enough seats to pass any such legislation. The major-
ity of provinces would likely welcome such a move.

inists and their allies were able to lay the foundations of a child-care system that posed a potential challenge to the liberal premises of Ontario's and Canada's child-care policies. For that challenge to be realized, however, Toronto child-care advocates had to be able to form alliances in order to secure changes at the provincial and/or federal levels. As we have seen, despite efforts to jump level, Toronto has not succeeded in becoming the model for the province nor for Canada as a whole. Moreover, its failure to do so has constrained the ability of Toronto actors fully to realize their vision. In fact, Toronto has only been able to support regulated child-care spaces for 19% of its preschool population (Mahon et al. 2006).

In the province of Quebec, feminists in civil society and the Parti Québecois[26] did succeed in developing support for a universal child-care program (Jenson 2002). Thus, in 1997, the provincial government began to implement its new "$5 a day" child-care program. It has proven so popular that the subsequent (neo)Liberal government has been unable to eliminate it—though it has managed to make it more expensive and to weaken quality controls (Jenson 2006). The multiscalar state structures provided by Canadian federalism have thus offered feminists and other child-care activists both opportunities and constraints.

Are feminists necessarily better off in unitary states? Research on the UK would suggest otherwise. Thus, even before devolution, England and Scotland had developed the foundations for quite distinct early childhood education systems (Cohen et al. 2004; Wincott 2006). Within England, Vicky Randall (2004) has shown how, in the absence of an effective national child-care policy, distinct local regimes have emerged, reflecting different legacies of provision and local party politics, including the role of feminists therein. As part of the embrace of a social investment project, the Blair government has developed a national early childhood education policy, but it has done so through local partnerships, which will allow the persistence of this pattern of local diversity, much as the Canadian bilateral agreements would have done.

In contrast, the Swedish case suggests that determined national governments can secure the conditions for generalizing policy gains, even when lower levels retain (or gain) greater autonomy. In Sweden, municipalities have long enjoyed considerable autonomy. To entrench access to child care as a national citizen right in the 1970s, therefore, the Swedish government had to offer substantial financial inducements. Even as

26. The Parti Québecois's primary goal is Quebec's independence, but it has always had a strong social democratic contingent.

it moved to further decentralize in the 1980s, it turned to national legislation, requiring all municipalities to provide a child-care space "without unreasonable delay" (Bergqvist and Nyberg 2002) and, later, the imposition of maximum fees (Mahon 2005). What this suggests is that while state reconfiguration may open opportunities at subnational levels, the struggle to entrench rights at the national level remains important. Local mobilization may help to establish the credibility of an egalitarian alternative, but these opportunities will remain but fragile local experiments if activists are not able to secure changes at higher levels.

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