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Pressure for Day-Care

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Brian C. Robertson, *Day-Care Deception* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003, 214 pages).
Family Policy Review, *The Child-Care "Crisis" and Its Remedies* (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, Fall 2003, 139 pages).

In *Day-Care Deception*, Brian Robertson presents a well-documented review of institutional day care for young children, its promotion and its problems. One frequently hears that there is an urgent need for more quality child-care centers. Robertson's study challenges this. He points out that child psychiatrists and pediatricians have consistently testified for years that healthy child development depends crucially on the amount of time and attention that the child receives from parents during the first three or four years. Social research has reported poor and unhealthy environments in most day-care centers that correlate with behavioral and relational problems in many children.

There is a serious question about whether even "quality" day-care centers are appropriate for young children. Polling among parents reveals that most prefer to care for young children themselves if they can, or to choose relatives, friends or neighbors to care for their child when necessary. Most would avoid institutional day-care centers if they could. Yet the loudest voices are those claiming that more such centers are desperately needed. Clearly this is not resulting from a demand by a large majority of parents. So whose are the voices raising this cry?

Day Care Advocates

A disturbing body of evidence has been collected by Robertson revealing that a coalition of feminist groups, a professional day-care industry, and large corporations have been lobbying for an increase in the number and quality of day-care centers, even though this "lacked any substantial grass root support." Robertson provides a history of this debate, beginning with early twentieth-century "maternal feminists" who maintained that aid to poor women should not force mothers to work outside the home, right down to the social engineering of the 1970s which called for day-care provision from "6 months to 6 years to teach the child values, fears, beliefs and behaviors," and was continued by the welfare reform of the 1990s which made mothers work outside the home, while marriage, which would provide some support for mothers, was left an uneconomical choice.

Early on in the 60s, big business realized that it would benefit from more women in the labor force, and supported the addition of women's rights to civil rights legislation. Radical feminists allied themselves to this encroaching capitalism to replace family bonds with loyalty to the workplace and a pay-check. As some said, "marriage and parenting get in the way of the most efficient allocation of labor." So the corporate world and government family policy joined in what some describe as "national social progress" toward a "brave new world." Now paternalistic corporations are attempting to provide

everything for their employees, including day-care centers and family counseling. However, these “family friendly” provisions are actually replacing family loyalty with company loyalty. So “patriarchy” is now practiced by corporations instead of husbands, according to Robertson’s analysis.

Tax Credits for Use of Institutional Day Care

A particular focus of Robertson’s study is the federal tax credit for parents using commercial day care: an incentive to move families from home care to impersonal institutional care, which was begun in the 70s and expanded in 1984 and 1990. The irony is that the majority using this tax credit are well-off, college-educated, two-income couples, while low and middle-income families, who most often prefer to either care for their children themselves or have relatives or friends provide care, end up with a greater tax burden. Thus the tax credit appears to be a subsidy for the wealthy and a tax cost for parents who are spending their own time and money in raising children.

President George W. Bush did propose a \$1,000 per child tax credit to let families decide themselves how to care for a child, but this failed to get support. This seems like an obvious inequity from an objective point of view, but the political pressures on this issue are anything but objective. The historical record is revealing. In 1948, three per cent of income tax was paid by a family with children; in 2003 it was 25 per cent and, if state and local tax is included, it was 46 per cent. If policy makers were convinced of the political and economic benefits, they could move back toward a better kind of tax adjustment for raising children. Most parents would support this. If children could vote, they would ask for the right to be cared for by their parents. But the part of the population that is most affected does not have a powerful lobby to counteract the day care lobby.

Children’s Psychological Development

What is happening to so many children growing up in institutional care? There has been a steep increase in child pathologies over the same period in which the use of day-care has risen sharply. Various studies have related the mental illnesses in children to lack of parental attention. Dr Edward Zigler, a specialist in child development, asserted that “the years children spend in low-quality day-care is a major cause of the biggest increase in the rate of child violence and depression that our country has ever witnessed.” Further research confirmed that long hours spent in care, whatever the quality, resulted in increased problem behavior and signs of physiological stress in children. Only 10 to 15 per cent of day-care is “even adequate quality,” while good quality care is less available than this.

Another child development expert, Dr Stanley Greenspan, notes that the essential needs of babies and young children depend on a kind of emotional interaction that is impossible in a day-care setting but is “almost automatic” in families. Commercial day-care centers have a high turnover of workers and a high ratio of children per worker, which cannot provide what young children need.

Social research has revealed that young children in these centers are frequently insecurely attached to their parents, become less competent than peers when they are toddlers, become withdrawn and/or aggressive in preschool, and have more problems as first graders. Young children who have experienced long hours in centers are less likely to develop a strong sense of selfhood and independence later in life, and exhibit a failure to trust relationships with others.

Psychologists who have measured “infant attachment” have found that the factor of secure attachment vs anxious or insecure attachment is an accurate predictor of “school performance, behavior, self-esteem, social competence, and ability to form relationships.” It is also correlated with the risk of mental illness, antisocial personality disorders and psychopathic behavior, with symptoms such as

emotional detachment and inner rage, which psychologists say have roots in disrupted early relationships and lack of care-giver consistency. Several studies document a deterioration in the mother-child bond in the children left in full-time care.

One large study found that almost 50 per cent of the children in day-care had an insecure attachment to their mothers, and another that 45 per cent of infants of mothers employed full-time were insecurely attached. Day-care workers observed that mothers picking up their children seemed less and less connected with them and tended to consider the center as having primary responsibility for their child's well-being. In contrast, children securely attached to parents were "more ego resilient, independent, empathetic, and socially competent" than those who were poorly attached. Advocates of day care have claimed that these centers provided an advantage in socialization; however, researchers found that "the only significant predictor of pro-social behavior was a lack of day-care experience."

The other advantage day-care advocates propose is greater cognitive development. But the research shows that this only occurs when a caregiver talks directly to a child in a frequent one-on-one relationship. However, this is more descriptive of a child's experience at home with parents, and is not a reality in most day care. For many years studies have found that the most important influence on academic achievement is family background and influence of parents.

Health Risks to Children

Day-care centers also involve a risk to the physical health of children. Physicians report that children in day-care are 18 per cent more likely to become ill than other children. Infants in care have twice the rate of inner ear infections and a 100 per cent higher rate of respiratory illness. Influenza, diarrhea, dysentery, bacterial meningitis, and hepatitis A are also much more prevalent among children in centers. Some children develop chronic inner ear infections and may suffer mild hearing loss – something that can hinder social, psychological, and educational development. One epidemiologist called day-care centers "the open sewers of the twentieth century," because illnesses there are reminiscent of the seventeenth century before sanitation practices developed. Pediatric researchers have warned that a major health issue is the massive over-prescription of antibiotics, "due in part to widespread day-care attendance," since parents are mostly concerned with getting the child back into care as quickly as possible.

Another concern physicians have is that day-care early in a child's life may discourage breastfeeding which is important for immune systems, as well as psychological development. Pediatricians recommend that infants be breastfed at least for the first year of life. One statistic indicated that only 21 per cent of mothers were nursing at six months – and this rate is undoubtedly even lower for infants in care.

Public Discussion

Despite all these risks, there is apparently very little public discussion about these problems. News media avoid publicizing anything critical of day-care centers for various reasons. Belief in day-care is a "tenet of faith" for feminists, so public criticism of day-care is taboo, and few in the media want to challenge this feminist view. Feminists want women in careers, not at home taking care of children. They will even assert that maternal love is a myth to keep women "imprisoned at home." Actually, many who would be reporting this are working mothers themselves using day-care, with a vested interest in defending themselves. Often they *are* the media. These reporters are most concerned with avoiding "gut wrench and guilt sweats," for women using day-care. They have a "no-bad-news mindset" about day-care information, so there is a specific blackout or control of accurate research about day-

care problems. This means that parents do not have access to crucial information they need to make good judgments about care for their children.

Conflicts of Interest

Media prejudice is also a problem for science. Even though 90 per cent of child-care professionals agree that full-time substitute care is not good for children under three years, they are timid about saying so publicly because they would come under strong attack – and anecdotal evidence suggests that some have been blackballed for simply reporting research findings accurately. Rebuttals by day-care advocates are used to debunk results of scientifically-conducted studies. Academia is particularly guilty of cover-up: journals have chosen to use political rather than scientific criteria in accepting or rejecting a study for publication. For science, giving in to politically correct pressures is a major problem, contradicting principles of objectivity.

Robertson also points out that there is a conflict of interest in reports about day-care. For example, Sandra Scare – a recognized child development research expert who has written four books and 200 articles on the subject – has been since 1990 on the board of directors of KinderCare Inc., the largest chain of day-care centers in the country. Her publications are propaganda for day-care, yet few seem to remark on this. Another example is Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute, which is funded by big corporate donors to do studies of day-care and promote business investment in day-care centers. There are many other examples of these kinds of connections in Robertson's book. The corporate world supports institutional day care because it is more economical for them to have women in the labor force than men, and because working mothers are a market for many convenience products. The day-care lobby raises a cry about a "crisis" of insufficient "affordable high-quality day care," but for-profit day care centers work against "quality" because their profit margin for shareholders requires a high ratio of child-care givers and skimping on funding.

What Parents Think

In the meantime, a survey by Public Agenda revealed that 70 per cent of parents prefer having one parent stay home over "quality" day-care; 78 per cent prefer a grandparent or relative for child-care; and 79 per cent said "no one can do as good a job of raising a child as the parents." Among low-income parents, 80 per cent "desire to have the mother stay home." A University of Connecticut survey found that low-income parents were more likely to say it was "lack of trust," not expense, that was the reason they did not use day-care centers. Sometimes it is husbands that are interested in day-care because they like the idea of a second income. But this has proved to be short-sighted, because over time men's income has declined and prices have risen in response to two-income families.

The pressures on families are as much cultural as financial. Feminists have given women a romantic notion of the job reality and have demeaned the work of a mother raising children, as though education and intelligence were wasted in such an endeavor. Even in the best of jobs, women (like men) are often obeying someone else's orders or policies, whereas at home they have the power of being in charge of a household and family. Robertson (p. 134) quotes from Jennifer Roback Morse: "Instead of introducing their own children to great literature and world history, bright women are sequestered in university offices, grading piles of illegible midterms written by other people's children. How did we forget that guiding our offspring requires knowledge far more subtle, and pays bounties far richer than most jobs?"

Some General Observations

How does this issue relate to broader culture and foundational values? Day-care advocates present a narrow idea of education and seem to have no understanding of character development. They often seem to be oriented to a “training for the workplace” approach. Robertson has a quote from the late cultural critic Christopher Lasch (pp. 150, 152):

Instead of building our economy around the needs of families, we have allowed economic imperatives to govern the structure of the family, the school, and every other agency of cultural transmission.... [The true result] has been to weaken the ties between the generations, to reduce the emotional intensity of the parent-child connection, to deprive children of direct access to adult experience, and to produce a generation of young people who are morally and emotionally at sea, lacking any sense of participation in their culture’s tradition or in its ongoing development.

Day-care’s effect on character and personality has a cumulative impact which is “altering the cultural fabric.” Some of the effects that have been observed include: a stultifying standardization; little individual development; little critical thinking or creativity; conformism; a defective sense of self; incapacity for commitment; increased self-centeredness; polarized thinking rather than subtle or reflective thinking; a manipulative type of character; lack of internalization of rules of conduct that transcend the environment; pragmatism that does what is fashionable or expedient rather than developing a sense of right and wrong.

When discipline is separated from the consistent love of a close relationship, some adolescents can develop a mood either of nihilistic rage, or anomie: that is, they lack in moral character, are uninterested in ideas and values, and focus only on success. A Smithsonian Institution project looking for the sources of human creativity and leadership found that the most important influence was a “consistently close parental connection, minimal time spent with peers, and many opportunities to explore the world freely with parental encouragement.” None of these realities exist in institutional day-care.

Current economic analysis rarely, if ever, considers the contributions families make to the economy and general well-being by raising stable children capable of contributing their talents to a prosperous and peaceful society. Some have described this as “the stork theory of economics,” assuming individuals are delivered to society as full-grown well-developed adults, never asking where such stable, productive individuals come from and at what cost. A household of mother and father makes a huge investment to raise children who contribute positively to society. At-home moms are looked upon as useless economically, which is far from the reality.

Contemporary feminists see women’s interests as separate from husbands and family. This affects values by stressing individualistic self-interest over self-giving love, their main goal being equal power between the sexes in public life. This ignores the fact that women have a lot of power in private life. Feminists also overlook the fact that it is mostly women who are being asked to take care of other women’s children, often for unimpressive salaries, and who sometimes have to pay for someone else to take care of their own children. This is an absurd situation. Moreover, day-care employees usually are not your highly educated women who could provide a child with an educationally enriched input. This betrays a feminist bias toward certain kinds of career-minded women, which does not include all women.

Some Suggestions

Robertson proposes ending subsidies to commercial day-care centers as a first step. Other options are: employers allowing more work-at-home options, tele-commuting, flexitime, or part-time work, and

perhaps giving tax benefits for employers who offer these options; and raising the tax exemption for parents with young children. Culturally there needs to be a movement to restore public acknowledgment that married parents raising children make a critical contribution to positive economic and social order, and that a society that makes an investment in “human capital” helps future growth and stability in a society. Above all there needs to be a focus on the needs of children, rather than adults. The big question must be asked: Why are we doing this to our children?

A complement to Robertson’s book is the series of articles in the *Family Policy Review*. There are nine articles on topics related to the issue of institutional day-care. In the first, Allan Carlson reviews the history of “social parenting” or “collective child care,” from the eras of the Bolsheviks, industrial progressives, Swedish experiments, and American feminists and progressives. These experiments have been largely failures, dehumanizing and generally harmful for children’s psychological health and development. Moreover, Carlson asserts, institutionalized day-care in the United States in practice depends on class exploitation, in which wealthy two-income parents get tax subsidies for use of child-care centers staffed by low-wage women, “commonly the poorest of the poor who distort their own lives to serve their betters.” Nevertheless, despite economic and political pressures, many low and middle-income families choose to give their children full-time care. Carlson perceives an enduring American resistance to social engineering.

Professor Jay Belsky, a social scientist now at the University of London, has had a long career of research in child development and day-care centers. In the second article of this issue, Belsky relates how his earliest research in the 1980s, which reported positive aspects of child care, was well received, but that he was lambasted when he reported emerging evidence that revealed disturbing risks in extensive day-care for children in their first year of life. When in 2003 a large study by the US National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), conducted by Belsky and several other investigators confirmed some of the risks reported earlier, Belsky took the brunt of criticism, even though the validity of the conclusions were affirmed by the other researchers involved. He found that both his own colleagues as well as reporters criticized him, even though he was only conveying what a scientifically conducted investigation revealed. Professor Belsky could only conclude that a politically correct bias was at work blocking information with anything negative about day-care centers. Social policy and politics, he sadly observed, was corrupting the process of science. The discovery of factual evidence should be guiding social policy rather than the other way around.

Heidi Brennan, who founded the Family and Home Network, focuses her article on the tax burden on families raising children. She makes suggestions for changing tax policy to support rather than burden these families who are already making sacrifices to raise children well. She provides several examples of ways taxes bear more heavily on families with children than on single persons or couples without children. She quotes the testimony of respected child psychiatrists and of social research that asserts the need of children for on-going, consistently nurturing relationships and for communication of spiritual/moral meaning, which are not found in institutional child-care. Her suggestions for action include: a Family-Friendly Tax Task Force; universalization of the child-care tax credit to include at-home care, simpler regulations for home-based businesses, and the importance of listening to parents.

Senator Lisa Murkowski in her article, “Eliminating the Parenthood Penalty,” also takes up the theme of tax pressures on parents of young children. “The basis of a healthy community is a healthy family,” she states at the beginning. She introduced legislation in the Senate establishing a universal tax credit for all parents with children up to age six. She reviews the financial realities for families raising children and summarizes the currently existing tax credits. The main question we must ask ourselves, she suggests, is “what is best for our children. Children are our future. When we put them first, we must

also change our tax code to reflect our priorities.” Senator Murkowski also insists that “government should not dictate the choices parents make about who to have care for their children. That decision remains with the parents.”

Tuve Skanberg, a Christian Democrat member of Parliament in Sweden, contributed a short article on the Child Maintenance Allowance of 1994 which was promoted and passed under the leadership of the Christian Democratic Party. Unfortunately, it was only implemented for half a year because of resistance by the Liberal Party, and overturned by the Social Democrats in January of 1995. Skanberg explains that “the socialist movement has rejected the concept of the family, that it is the family’s responsibility to raise and foster the children, and derides this concept as bourgeois.” This ideology has been the reigning philosophy since the 1930s, with the goal of abolishing the concepts of “housewife” and “husband.” It considers parents as being too “uneducated” to raise their own children. The ideology has been opposed by the non-socialist parties, but they have had difficulty maintaining a voting majority. Yet in the brief period in which the Child Maintenance Allowance existed, 70 per cent of eligible parents used the subsidy and the cost of day-care operated by municipalities dropped “dramatically,” while the quality of child-care improved, and this was accomplished at a lower cost to taxpayers. Another effect of the subsidy was lower unemployment and an increase in temporary jobs.

Charmaine Yoest reports on a national study of paid parental leave in the United States which was carried out at the University of Virginia. The question was raised about whether the assumptions made about the effectiveness of paid parental leave were based on empirical data. Two concerns are voiced: equal opportunity for women, and a child’s development needs. Are these concerns in competition? The study focused on parents in academia with children under two, judging this as representative of parents in other professions. It collected data about how many of the parents used this leave, how much external child care parents used, how much time these parents spent with their child, and what effect a parental leave policy had on the mother’s career plans.

Some of Yoest’s findings included the following: (1) most women used paid leave but only 12 per cent of men did; (2) those using parental leave tended to spend more time with their child than those not taking leave; (3) women taking paid leave were much more likely to say they would work part-time or drop out of the work force. It was apparent that first-time parents do not anticipate how hard it is to leave their baby. The majority of mothers of very young children do not choose to work full-time. Yoest raises the question of whether paid leave is a social construct used to provide an incentive to mothers to remain in the labor force full-time. Some possible negatives she observes in paid parental leave are: (1) it may not be used widely; (2) it may maximize the time very young children spend in child-care which can negatively affect child development; and (3) it could prejudice women in favor of full-time work when they might have chosen to care for their child full-time, or part-time.

“Is the workplace becoming a surrogate home?” questions David Wagner in his article on corporate child-care policies. As government faces the costs of subsidizing “quality” child-care, the focus is shifting from government raising children to businesses doing it. The workplace now sponsors various “family friendly” programs to retain employees who are mothers. Wagner raises three questions regarding this: (1) is day-care good for children? (2) whom does it benefit? (3) what are its effects? To answer the first question, Wagner refers to two studies. The Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) reported that extensive time spent by young children in child-care correlates with aggressiveness, disobedience, and difficulty in getting along with others. A University of Minnesota Institute of Child Development study found that “in children younger than three... stress rose in the afternoon at day-care, but fell as the hours passed on days they spent at home.”

On the second question, Wagner found that corporations had been sold the idea that day-care is an investment in “the future workforce.” More immediately, businesses realized that female employees usually cost less than male employees, so they would benefit by recruiting and retaining women. Since it has become a noticeable trend to offer workplace child-care, businesses feel they need to keep up with competitors. As regards the third question, the effects Wagner observed were that family was no longer a “haven in a heartless world” but was becoming simply a way-station for busy adults and children whose main center was outside the home. He considers some solutions such as a family wage or a head-of-household wage, but notes that these are not feasible in the current cultural and political realities. Wagner concludes that a cultural change needs to occur to restore in women the desire for husband, children, and home, and to restore to businesses the idea that it is worthy to be a source of support to families but not as “surrogate family.”

Hidden Agendas

Dr Bryce Christensen observes a “hidden ideological agenda” in day-care activists which he relates to Thomas Hobbes’ political philosophy. Hobbes, he says, “dismissed family ties as irrelevant in advocating an omnipotent state.” Day-care advocates may not be consciously Hobbesian, but some do intend to radically renew society by weakening attachment of children to parents and home – in this way advancing a different “social pattern,” and infusing “new values into the young” through day-care, so that parental values are no longer “imposed” on the developing child.

Christensen thinks the guiding logic of institutional day-care is based on the idea that state institutions should shape the future, and that the family is largely an irrelevant obstruction to this project. Hobbes described society as “a human war of each against all” in order to justify a powerful central government. He considered family, Church, the guilds, and other intermediary organizations as impediments to the absolute identification of state with individuals. Limited government, on the other hand, depends on strong family ties, which ensure harmony through social and moral principles and emotional bonds. When families disintegrate into combative individuals, a strong government must intervene.

Christensen, therefore, sees as Hobbesian logic the call of day-care proponents for “increase in centralized planning and quality control” in the nation’s day-care institutions. There are many in the professions of social science and journalism, he points out, that lean toward socialist politics. Some advocates of day-care, for example, praise communist countries such as China and Cuba for their child-care policies. Survey research has indicated that many young Americans with no strong family ties are “shifting their allegiance increasingly to themselves and to the State.” Is the use of day-care shrinking the capacity to sacrifice for one’s family? Some sociologists have observed a disappearance of the “language of sacrifice and love,” which is being replaced with utilitarian individualism, precisely the extreme individualism that, for Hobbes, justifies the centralization of the modern state.

“A Parental Bill of Rights” is suggested by economist Richard Gill and his son T. Grandon Gill in order to help young parents who want to care for their child themselves. Richard Gill first presents the view that our society cannot and should not choose between “quality” day-care and parental care regarding their effects on children, therefore we should not subsidize one pattern of care as opposed to the other, as the current child-care tax credit does. Gill, however, makes the point that there is a very deep reason to prefer parental care over non-parental care. Our present society is increasingly dominated by a short-term outlook, immediate gratification, and self-centeredness, without concern for posterity and the future. The closely-bonded family is what provides long-term continuity and a view that looks to the future; children who grow up in such families are more likely to adopt similar attitudes. Day-care

centers, on the other hand, subject the child to a succession of impermanent, changing care-givers with no permanent relationship to the child.

The concern of mothers who want to stay home with their child is that they risk not being able later to enter or re-enter the job market or career path they would like. To address this concern, Richard and T. Grandon Gill have proposed a Parental Bill of Rights, modeled on the G.I. Bill of Rights that has helped so many soldiers leaving service to retrain, obtain degrees, and have successful careers. Young parents are a group that has no program of assistance as do students, retirees, welfare recipients, and disabled people, yet this group makes a critical contribution to society. Such a program would benefit parents, children, future productivity, and social well-being in general. Gill sees this as a critically important constituency that needs support.

These two publications provide helpful research on a sensitive issue in our society. What do these studies reveal about this society – a culture that views the woman as an isolated economic individual that has nothing important to do with her child? Just as secular culture separates body and spirit in sexual acts, making them less than human, it wants to separate the child from the bodily presence of the mother and father and treat them as isolated individuals. The organic connection of child and parents includes their whole spiritual and historical being and their eternal future. The child inherits a particular biology, historical past, and relationships that are unique and irreplaceable. He needs *this* mother and *this* father to nurture and teach him. There are tragic circumstances in which these have to be replaced and the best alternative sought. But this should not be the norm that a society upholds. Ideologies or policies that treat these relationships as irrelevant or obstacles are insidious, inhuman, and destructive. The many who through ignorance or manipulation are drawn into cooperating with these policies are being betrayed. It is important to articulate this concern at the deepest level, and widen the discussion to help people see more clearly and fully a danger which most already instinctively recognize. A child pulled out of his family is vulnerable and at risk.

