



Peter Hsu photo

CHILD CARE:

By GRACE HARTMAN

During a recent labour dispute, two slightly embarrassed male library workers joined their female co-workers on the picket lines carrying signs demanding better maternity leave provisions in their new contract. The maternity leave clause was improved, the dispute was settled, and the men went back to work leaving the women virtually holding the baby. Having won the right to take time off to have a child, these employees now joined over half a million other working mothers in Canada who need daycare for their children.

A 1967 study by the Canadian Council for Social Development showed that 97 per cent of the children of working mothers had no access to daycare facilities. Things haven't improved in 1972. Of the one million children of working mothers, over half are under six. Only 12,000 of these 500,000 pre-schoolers are enrolled in daycare centres across the country. Despite a constant barrage of commissions, recommendations and proposals, there is little sign that the situation is improving.

Of course, not all of these children are going without care. Some stay with their fathers or other relatives while many go to a neighbour's home. But a shocking 10 per cent — 50,000 children — have no regular daycare arrangements at all, and statistics cannot reveal the dismal

quality of care that too many of the others receive.

Any mother who has looked for daycare for her child is familiar with the problems. The daycare centre is too far away to walk with a three year old. The child is too young. Most centres will not accept children under two and those that do have a waiting list. The woman who advertises under "baby services" in the newspaper thinks that child care means turning on a television set and putting your toddler in front of it. Perhaps the working mother is lucky enough to find an excellent centre nearby then discovers that it isn't open at the hours that coincide with her work shift. Always there is the enormous cost of daycare. In a private centre this often runs as high as \$1,800 a year and mothers are lucky to find any care for less than \$25 a week. Since the median wage earned by the mothers who need daycare is only \$60 a week, it is not surprising that many of them are forced to make less than adequate arrangements for their children.

Good solutions are possible to the complex problems of the daycare. Ironically one of the best and most comprehensive programs for child care in North America, set up in a shipyard in 1944, is now no longer open. Forced by the pressures of the second world war and a lack of manpower, the Kaiser Shipyards in Portland, Oregon began to use women to build their ships.

However, a high rate of absenteeism and employee turnover among these women led Peter Kaiser to investigate. His philosophy of meeting the needs of employees, whether at home or in the plant, resulted in the establishment of two daycare centres at the gates to the shipyards. These centres were planned by the most qualified early childhood educators available. Open every day, 24 hours a day, the centre took children from eighteen month old infants to school children on holidays. They were cared for by a loving and dedicated staff. Facilities were available for children who were mildly ill but required rest and nursing care. Kitchens were set up to provide dinners for the working mother to take home with her at the end of her shift, so she would not have the worry of preparing meals. Mending and shopping was done by the centre and counselling for all sorts of family problems was available. The war ended, the men came back to the shipyards and the mothers went home. No centre since then has provided, or attempted to provide, as comprehensive and successful a program for working mothers and their families.

On-site day nurseries are one answer to the daycare dilemma and many employers in the United States are finding this a profitable solution to the problems of high employee turnover. In the garment industry which employs large

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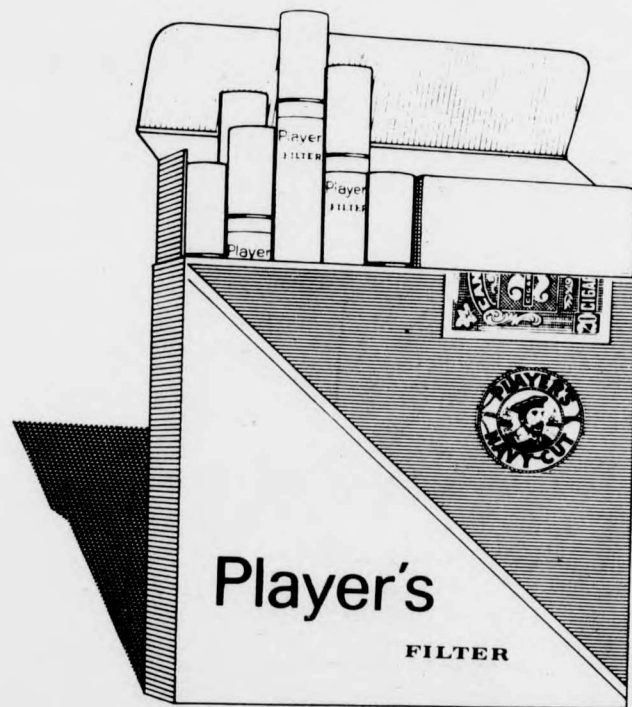
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