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# Day Care Who Cares?

corporate  
and government  
child care plans

by Vicki Breitbart



L.N.S. Women's Collective





RAT/ LNS

Child-care is a crucial issue in the struggle to move from women's oppression to women's liberation. If we are to be free to develop our potential as human beings, we must be free from our primary identification as mothers and from the sole responsibility for child-rearing. We, in Women's Liberation, see demands for child care as a way of challenging the limiting roles in the nuclear family—roles that oppress children as well as women. "Parenthood," writes Juliet Mitchell, "becomes a kind of substitute for work, an activity in which the child is seen as an object created by the mother in the same way a commodity is created by a worker. The child as an autonomous person inevitably threatens the activity which claims it continually, merely as a possession of the parent." In the nuclear family, love for children is forced to compete with women's other abilities. Children become the focus of unfulfilled desires and the anger women feel towards an oppressive system. We, therefore, not only see child-care as one step in the liberation of women, but as a chance to educate children in an atmosphere that encourages human development.

At the same time we in women's liberation are renewing our struggle for child-care, government and industry have also become increasingly concerned about providing these services. Day care centers were created during World War II when the labor market was tight and the corporations needed woman power. Now, as in the past, the programs being planned by government and industry are an attempt to increase business profits, to find new sources of cheap labor, and to extend their control over the lives of working people. Our demands for child care are a threat

to this system; to stop our struggles from being twisted to serve the corporation we must examine (1) the role child-care plays in the economy, (2) the Federal, State, and City programs in operation and the projected plans of industry.

### The Changing Economy

The latest report from the Dept. of Labor shows that there has been a massive upheaval in the labor market. Women now make up 48% of the labor market (surpassing the 1945 war year average of 36%). Women are not working for "pin money," but to meet the higher costs of education, health care, groceries—in short, to beat inflation. In poor families (husband's income—\$3,000) with school age children, 55% of the women work, and in poor families with pre-school age children 32% of the women work. Women are not going into heavy industrial work as they did during WWII, and not into highly skilled administrative jobs, as the media would have us believe. Women are now needed as cheap labor in the new semi-skilled technical jobs. New job categories in the electronics and service industries, and the growing need for clerical workers in this "paper age" has created new demands for women workers. As Vera Perella concludes in a U.S. Dept. of Labor report, "the industrial shift has been a vital force in fostering the growth of the female labor force." Needless to say, the wage scale is low, only little more than half the man's median income, and the jobs are often temporary, non-unionized, with little or no job benefits.

### The Need for Child-Care

Of the 10 million working women with children under 18, the number of women with pre-school age children has increased more rapidly than the number of women with school age children. By 1969 there were 5 million children of working women who were under the age of six. A 1968 survey estimated that facilities were available for only 500,000 of these children, and most of these facilities are run as profit-making enterprises where parents pay up to \$160 a month, and where the needs of children are the last concern.

Many women without day care facilities have to leave their children with babysitters. This drains their already low salaries, and means that children are often isolated in dangerous environments for a large part of the day. Without adequate day care facilities, corporations have trouble maintaining their cheap source of labor, and tapping new sources of woman-power.

In an attempt to meet the needs of the economy the Federal government has developed three programs that link child-care and employ-



ment in varying degree: Family Day-care, Group Care, and Head Start.

### Government Babysitting

The simplest form of public intervention is the Family Day-Care program: the government assumes the cost of babysitting services already available. In N.Y.C. 5,000 pre-school children, including some infants are cared for in people's homes. The government has also instituted a relatively new program called Family Day-Care and Careers Program, where the children are placed in "licensed" homes. The "licensed" mothers are "trained" to be educational aides, while the children's mothers are given counseling and job training.

### Group Day Care

A second model is Group Day Care run by the Dept. of Social Services with the help of philanthropic agencies. In N.Y.C. there are about 8,000 children in this program, 80% of whom are from low income families where the woman works. A majority of these are families headed by females. Welfare families where no one is working are eligible for day care only if they are declared "hardship" cases by the investigator from the Dept. of Social Services. The programs are one step more socialized than the in-home model, but are essentially minimum babysitting for poor working mothers.\*



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\*N.Y.C. is unusual in the number of state and city-funded day-care centers. In contrast with N.Y.C.'s 117 centers, Chicago operated only one publicly funded center for 85 children. Only slightly more than half the states and territories now budget for day care.

### Government Pacification

Head Start is the child-care aspect of the "War on Poverty," which grew out of the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act. The program differs from the family and group care in that it is geared towards education of children. While not designed primarily as a day-care program, \$70 million of the \$425 million budget was allocated for long-day, full-year programs.

Unlike state-run group day care, Head Start has no work requirement, and 90% of the children must come from the "hard-core" poor. There is also an opportunity for parent involvement, and revised staffing patterns. Inevitably, the program became a focus for community action all over the country, and just as inevitably, the funds were cut.

Like other "War on Poverty" programs, Head Start boomeranged; it was not a profitable program, the price of socializing and pacifying the poor was too high and the benefits too few. The program could not be used to channel women into specific areas of employment.

### The Latest Trend: Up from Headstart

However, the necessity for getting women into the job market remains: A 1968 Department of Labor survey of 10 high poverty areas found that 1 out of 5 women, who wanted a regular job, gave unavailability of day-care as the principal reason for not looking for work. A report of the Advisory Council on Public Welfare estimated that between 200,000 and 300,000 women receiving aid to dependent families might become self-sufficient with "appropriate" training, "appropriate" jobs, and day-care. In response to these statistics, the Federal Government is phasing out community action programs like Head Start, and developing combined day-care/job training and employment for the poor.

### Losing With WIN

In 1967, Congress amended the Social Security Act and created WIN, a Work Incentive Program. In an "effort to place all appropriate adult welfare recipients in jobs, or in training programs leading to employment and economic self-sufficiency." States were also required to provide day-care arrangements for women enrolled in WIN. Welfare recipients can receive training in such occupations as secretary, practical nurse, or auto mechanic. Recipients are never forced to accept unskilled jobs such as janitors or domestics, yet recipients who voluntarily accept them are entitled to incentive payments. In a New York City demonstration project, some 40% of the total working recip-



ients were holding unskilled jobs. Furthermore, the decision about who is "appropriate" to be employed is decided by the welfare caseworkers, not the clients, and the complicated process of contesting the recommendation has, in some cases, resulted in forced employment.

In 1968, amendments to the Economic Opportunities Act also expanded the funds for day care with training. Under CEP program (Concentrated Employment Program) funds totalling \$15 million were authorized for day-care services in conjunction with a work-training program for the unemployed poor.

The Nixon "family assistance" plan, like WIN and CEP, is directed to Welfare women and their children, and combines work and child-care. The plan will force mothers to train for and accept jobs, even at a distance from their homes and at exploitative wages. What was a work incentive under WIN and CEP, is now a work requirement. Although women with pre-school children are exempt from this plan, the substandard existence under the proposed plan will pressure ALL welfare women to take employment. Although women with young children are the last category under all these plans, they make up the largest proportion of the AFDC caseload, and it is expected that day care will be required early in the development of these programs.

The shift towards combined day-care and training will serve the needs of government and industry by reducing welfare rolls, generating more taxable income, and insuring a more efficient flow of cheap labor. Part of the Nixon plan included computerized job banks that will match the jobless to jobs, and reduce the possibilities for choice on the part of the welfare recipient looking for work. The banks will direct the recipient where business most needs him/her to be. The President's message on this plan states that the present Manpower effort was a terrible tangle of confusion and waste, and he promised to "organize and suit it to business demands."

The type of jobs that will be offered will continue to track women into low-paying jobs, and black and brown women into the *most* exploitative occupations. In a report on Day Care by the Social Administration Research Institute, it states that "an employer may be able to tap a new source of workers particularly if his production process involves repetitive or manipulative procedures of the type that can be *serviced best by females*. Usually, these employee skills, which are most often found in light manufacturing industries, require short time to learn, little if any prior experience, and do not necessarily require a high level of education. Such jobs are often the only kind that *dis-*

*advantaged parents can cope with and hold under current conditions."*

### The Trouble With Matched Funds

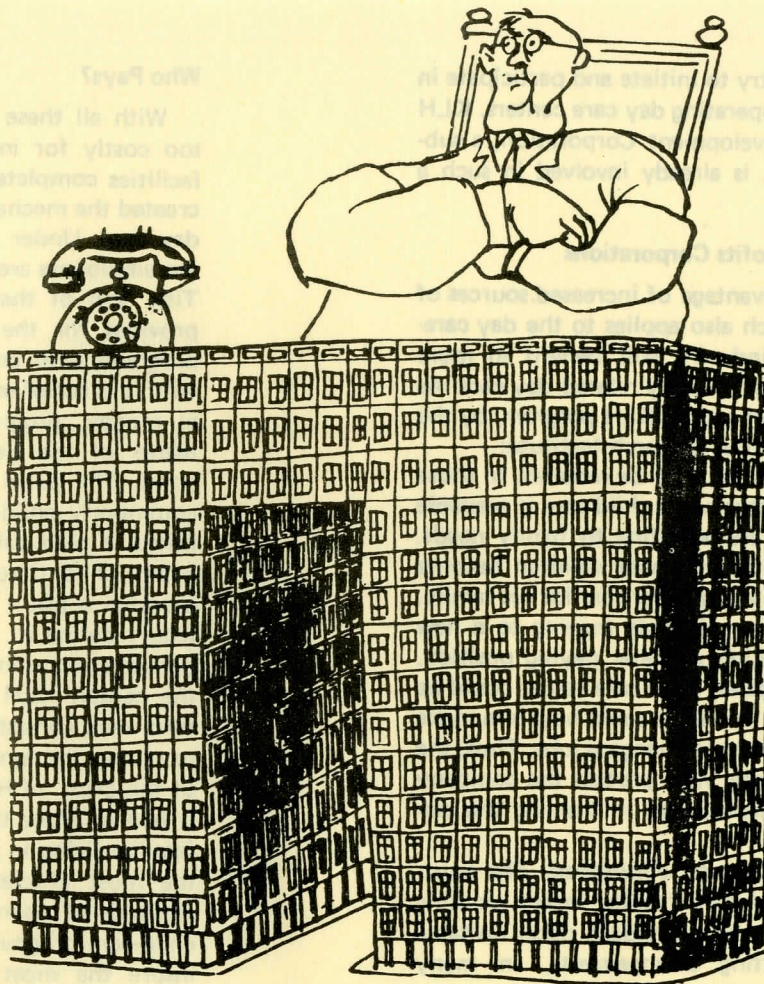
Ironically, recent legislation increases day-care possibilities, but the red tape of municipal bureaucracies and inability of cities and states to make use of federal funds slows down their organization. In many cases, states don't come up with the necessary 25% to pull in Federal funds. Even when they do, prohibitive licensing and building requirements prevent centers from opening. In 1969 Congress allocated \$22.6 million for nationwide day-care, the states used only \$4 million. In New York City, where only 10% of day-care needs are being met, where waiting lists are more than double the actual enrollment, an allocated \$5 million went unspent in 1968. Although the city has a \$360 million day-care budget, with a possible \$27 million from the federal government (N.Y. Times, 2/14/70), there is no guarantee that the money will be transformed into centers. Even if the centers are set up, there is little chance that they will represent peoples' needs any more than the present Social Service centers.

Like the Post Office and public transportation, day-care has become one more social service that the government is unable to administer. The government's inefficiency is hindering industry's use of woman-power, and they have no recourse but to "efficiently" run the day-care programs themselves. Industry is interested in administering public interest programs as long as the government pays and the corporations continue to benefit.

### The Chicken Delight Model

The need for day-care has motivated individual businessmen to create new companies dealing exclusively with day care. As described in the N.Y. Times (Dec. 26, 1969), the new companies intend "to package and sell franchises for day care centers in much the same way others have sold franchises for fried chicken, hamburgers and root beer." The cost of the franchise ranges from \$18,000 to \$30,000 plus a continuing fee of 6% of the "gross sales," but the purchasers of these franchises are told that they can earn \$25,000 to \$50,000 annually. The recent and proposed legislation like the Comprehensive Preschool Education and Child Day Care Act will provide funds specifically for "disadvantaged children of working mothers." While these franchises are now directed at those who can pay \$20 to \$40 a week most of the companies "are either already collecting some





Guardian/Ins

Federal and state funds or courting Government agencies for funds from several existing Federal programs." As one businessman put it "when the government is ready to pay for it, we will be set up to provide it."

At a recent luncheon held in New York City, business executives discussed ways that established corporations could be involved more effectively in day care operations. Those at the luncheon included:

- Consolidated Edison
- Standard Oil of New Jersey
- United Fruit Co.
- Irving Trust Co.
- Bankers Trust Co.
- United States Steel Foundation
- Squibb Beach-Nut Inc.
- Chase Manhattan Bank Foundation
- Atlantic Richfield Co.
- Morgan Guaranty Trust Co.
- Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.
- Enjay Chemical Corp.

They heard representatives from Bank Street College of Education talk about the role that companies might play in establishing, funding,

planning and operating day care facilities. Bank Street has suggested that industry "provide space for centers" cities generally will pay high rent for space allocated for day care.

They have also suggested that industry set up a revolving fund for day care emergency underwriting. While almost any group of citizens is eligible to apply for Day Care operations, finding the funds for its share in establishing a center limits the possibilities of anyone who is interested. The lack of the available "seed money" to cover the initial cost of the incorporation, housing design, and renovation, makes the creation of Day Care by independent community groups almost impossible. While the sponsoring agency in N.Y.C. is required to pay only 2% of the funds, this is usually a large enough amount to prohibit many community groups from operating or expanding programs. Industry, on the other hand, would be able to use a revolving loan fund to aid centers; they would keep control, and speed up the establishment of centers.

A third and more direct means of involve-



ment is for industry to initiate and participate in establishing and operating day care centers. KLH Research and Development Corporation, a subsidiary of Singer, is already involved in such a venture.

### How Day Care Profits Corporations

Besides the advantage of increased sources of cheap labor—which also applies to the day care-training model—industry will benefit in more specific ways from industry-related day care. As stated in the report on the KLH program, by the Social Administration Research Institute:

*Employee turnover may be reduced.* In those cases where industry based child care is available to workers who are adjusting to family needs. For example, a father whose children become motherless, must seek proper care for his family. One alternative may include moving to a new location and seeking a higher paying position. But an industry-based child care center could be the answer to his needs. It could help him make the adjustment without changing jobs. Thus, the existence of a center may protect the company from loss of its investment in training the employee.

*Absenteeism may be diminished.* The existence of the child care facility means working mothers need not be dependent upon unstable sporadic babysitting arrangements. In many cases, if the babysitter is ill, the mother must remain home.\*

*Tardiness might be diminished.* In Massachusetts day care centers don't open before 7:00 a.m.—the time KLH day begins. This makes it very difficult for many single parents to get their children to a day care center and still be at work on time.

*Cost saving might be realized, if absenteeism is reduced.* The need to hire more expensive, less experienced substitute workers and the frequency of shutdown or slowdown of the manufacturing process may be reduced. Furthermore, a more stable work force might bring with it the benefit of lower costs related to employee turnover. The quantity and the quality of the work from these employees that otherwise would be adversely affected may be improved if day care facilities are provided. Clearly, when a worker has his mind on his family problems he cannot concentrate adequately on his task.

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\*This report reflects KLH job discrimination. Employee retention is discussed as it applies to men, while absenteeism and tardiness are industry's problems with women.

### Who Pays?

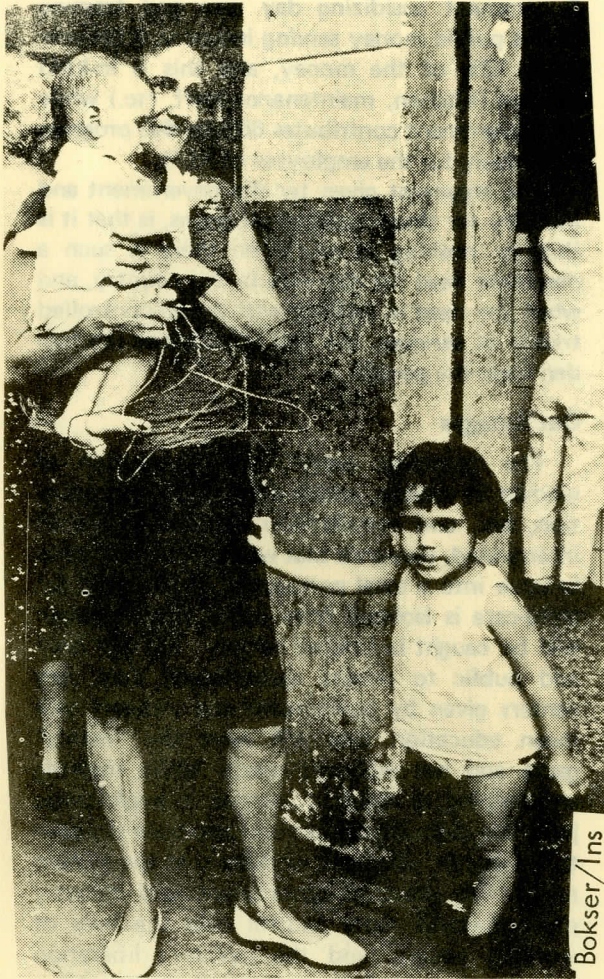
With all these advantages, it would still be too costly for industry to fund the day care facilities completely. So the government has created the mechanism to fund industry-related day care. Under the Social Security Act, private employees are listed as "eligible operators." Title V-B of the Economic Opportunity Act provides for the establishment of child care programs with employers at, or in association with, a place of employment. To receive Federal money, programs must meet the requirements of the Federal Panel on Early Childhood. The panel is primarily concerned with community child-care programs and has established a plan called the Community Coordinated Child Care, or 4-C program. The KLH program is not a "community" program as we would define it: the children from the neighboring community are in fact excluded from the center. KLH had to prove that its objectives were consistent with those of 4-C in order to receive the funds from the Children's Bureau of the Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare. It had to prove that priority would be given to families living in poverty, that it could develop the most efficient, effective and economical methods of coordinating the existing and new child-care programs, that it could mobilize and insure the most effective use of public and private agency and individual resources and that it could insure an effective voice in policy and program direction for parents of children receiving services. KLH proved all this, defining the industrial community as its "community" and received government funds. The myth of separation of government and industry was preserved.

Proving that the program would be "parent-controlled" was also an issue in receiving tax-exempt status, and therefore becoming eligible for large private donations. At first, the Internal Revenue Service felt that the KLH program was "a benefit to the corporation and not the community. It represented a fringe-benefit to the employee which would enhance the company's ability to compete more favorably in its product markets."\*\*\* The Board of Trustees proved to the satisfaction of the IRS that the program would be parent-controlled.

### Who Controls?

The design of the program as "parent-controlled" was essential to the company, because it ensured government and private funding. It was also important that the program not be defined as a fringe-benefit, and therefore not subject to union negotiation. In reality, however, KLH still remained in control.





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The program and the company were linked by use of the KLH trademark for the center and the presence of the KLH controller on the Board of Trustees. The interim board that set up the center had three parent employees, the controller, the founder of KLH, a member of the Personnel Dept., and as its President—Mrs. Gwen Morgan, wife of the President of KLH. As the research report on the center shows, low-income workers have never been in the majority, much less in control of, the board of the center.

When it was suggested that parent-workers had a long work day and that they be given time off from work to attend meetings of the board, it was considered a "violation of the spirit of an agreement that the center's activities would not interfere with production schedules and existing plant-employee relationships."

#### KLH and Others

KLH is just one program, but it represents a trend in industry-related day care. Other companies involved in similar projects are:

AVCO Corporation  
 Mr. Apparel, Inc.  
 Merit Clothing Co.  
 Rochester Clothing Co.  
 Vanderbilt Shirt Factory  
 Whirlpool Corp.

Other examples of employer-related centers include hospitals throughout the country that have set up 100 centers, the Dept. of Agriculture, and the Dept. of Labor. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the management in men's clothing have opened centers in Verona, Va., are constructing centers in Baltimore, Md., Chambersburg, Pa., and are planning several others in Pennsylvania and the Midwest. Illinois Bell Telephone Company is also involved in this type of program. Information available on the Bell Telephone proposed model points up certain differences in the amount of control and involvement on the part of industry. Bell Telephone is involved in setting up a demonstration project where they were advised to pledge a number of places in the centers for which, while not specifically designated, children of the Telephone Company would be given preference. While KLH has exclusive rights to the training and jobs for parents, a Bell Telephone ombudsman (supposedly a neutral go-between for the company and the parents) provides job counseling at the center. KLH indirectly controls the Board of Trustees, but in the Bell Telephone plan an ombudsman would sit on the Parent Advisory Boards. The degree of involvement determines the amount of benefit to the employer, and the extent to which the workers and children are supervised, controlled and exploited.

In all cases of industry-related day care, women are being tracked into work that is repetitive and low-paying. At KLH, for example, where the work is generally assembly line work for stereo equipment, 50% of all employees are women. 65% are black and brown. Most are employed at the lowest level jobs, which pay \$1.90 an hour—about \$3900 a year—and that doesn't bring anyone with children above the poverty level.

The clothing industry is active in day care. The ILGWU just signed a three-year contract that brought the minimum wage for clothing workers from \$70 a week to \$84 with a 10 cent increase in the first year and a nickel in each of the following two years. The clothing industry is losing workers, and day care will act as that

"fringe-benefit" which can keep and attract women workers.



## Disadvantages to Workers

All these programs reduce workers' mobility. When a move to a new job means the loss of child care, a worker will have to think twice. These programs also increase the workers' vulnerability. Any militant workers struggle will be inhibited by the relation of the job to her/his child's education. Any action against the KLH factory, for example, would also mean the shutdown or removal of the day care facilities. KLH not only provides the printing, clerical, purchasing, auditing, and health facilities, but pays for the vital services of maintenance, kitchen facilities, and telephone and utilities. A strike action by the KLH workers would mean a removal of these services and the center would probably close. Any action at the center for better education would be known by the employer and would also increase a worker's vulnerability. Any fight for real control of the center might mean the arbitrary firing of the parent. The programs may be designed as parent-controlled, but where the vital services are controlled by management, when management sits on the Board, when the factory or service itself is not controlled by the workers, the people are not in control.

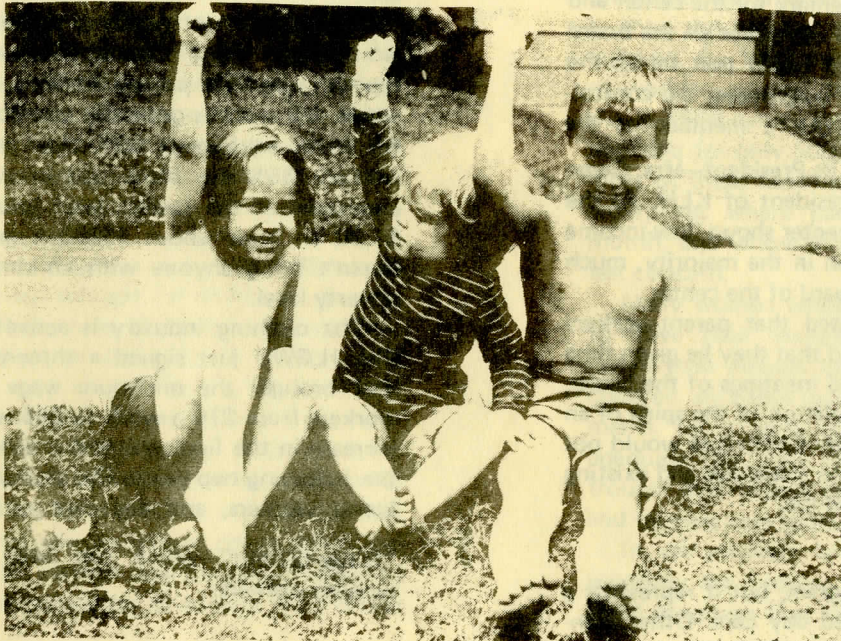
Industry and employer-related day care and training may be free to parents (in the case of the KLH program it was decided that the parents pay \$5 to \$20 a week so that they would "respect" the service) but even then the bulk of the funding will come from people's taxes.

Government subsidizing day care and training means public money serving industry. KLH provides 18% of the money, and this is in-kind services (kitchen, maintenance staff, etc.) while the government contributes 65% to this program exclusively for the employees of KLH.

The argument given by the government and industry for these types of programs, is that it is this, or nothing at all. When there is such a desperate need for day care in this country, and when the need is fulfilled with a well-controlled trickle of services, the real possibilities are hidden from the people.

## Our Struggle

The "complex unity" of the position of women in society, where production, reproduction, sex, and socialization of children are all interrelated, demands that women put each single issue into a total perspective. If the need for child-care is isolated from other needs, women will be caught in limited reform that will only add public to private exploitation. Day care centers given by government and industry will mean education that will serve the "man's" game and not women's needs. While tracking and helping to maintain women in exploitative jobs, the day care centers will also train children to be docile, obedient workers that the system needs. The plans of government and industry move towards more control over the lives of working people, and the women's liberation movement must fight to free all women from this oppression.



photo/Mad Trasher

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