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THE MONDALE-FERRARO PLAN FOR FEDERALLY-RAISED CHILDREN

Prior to the time when Jimmy Carter chose his Veep in 1976, Walter Mondale was known outside of his own state of Minnesota principally as the author of the Mondale-Brademas Child and Family Services Bill of 1975. This bill would have created a new Federal office of Child and Family Services within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare to supervise a network of Federal day-care centers for children.

This bill was killed by a tremendous uproar at the grassroots on a scale comparable to last-year's letter-writing campaign against the proposal to tax interest and dividends. The resentment against the Child and Family Services Bill lingered until finally, in 1980, Mondale was defeated in his bid for reelection as Vice President and John Brademas (D-IN) was defeated in his bid for reelection to Congress.

The reason parents were upset about this bill was that it created a new philosophy of child-rearing. It stated that "it is essential" that childrearing be done by a "partnership" of Federal, state, local governments, parents, and community agencies. Most parents didn't care to be "partners" with the Federal Government in child-rearing because such a "partnership" would erode the parental role and set the precedent that the child is a ward of the state rather than the responsibility of the parent.

The Child and Family Services Bill redefined "parent" as "any person who has primary day-to-day responsibility for any child." That language would have transferred the rights of real parents (whom the dictionary defines as fathers and mothers) into the hands of Federal bureaucrats, social workers, or teachers who have supervision over the children put in their care.

Mondale told his Minnesota constituents that his bill was based on the recommendation of the 1970 White House Conference on Children that "Federally supported public education be made available for children at age three." That Conference explained: "Day care is a powerful institution. A day care program that ministers to a child from six months to six years of age has over 8,000 hours to teach him values, fears, beliefs, and behaviors."

A first step toward achievement of the same discredited proposal, which is now called the School Facilities Child Care Act (H.R. 4193), passed the House in May 1984 with only a handful of Congressmen on the floor. Guess who turns up as the sponsor? Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro, along with other liberals including Patricia Schroeder (D-CO).

Mondale and Ferraro are hoping that public sentiment has changed, that Americans will now more easily accept the notion that child care is not an individual or a family problem or responsibility, but that children are a collective responsibility to be assumed by the Federal Government. They are also hoping that their Federal goal can be realized by playing on the economics of the increasing percentage of mothers in the labor force and on public concern about the problem called "latchkey children."

The Ferraro bill authorizes $30 million per year for three years to help community groups, local government agencies and educators set up before- and after-school child-care programs, preferably in government schools. The bill mandates sliding fees so that part of the $30 million would subsidize care for children of low-income families.

Back in 1975, the New York Times reported that Mondale's Child and Family Services Bill was "considered by educational groups to be the opening wedge in their attempt to establish a universal education program beginning with 3-year-olds." The same news report explained that this program was supported by both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as "the first step toward opening the nation's public schools to millions of additional children."

The Times news account, written on the occasion of a national AFT convention in Honolulu, explained that the placement of 3- and 4-year-old children in government schools "is viewed not only as a vehicle to help teachers in a shrinking job market, but also [because] a substantial portion of intelligence is permanently shaped before a child enters kindergarten."

So there are two reasons why powerful forces want to push little children into government institutions at the age of three: (a) to find jobs for unemployed teachers, and (b) to mold the "values, fears, beliefs, and behaviors" of the children.

That's what Mondale and Ferraro want. But most parents want to be more than mere part-time custodians of their own children in "partnership" with the government.