

# Opinion

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## Children slipping through the cracks

Most of us believe we are a child-centred society. But are we?

In 1989 all federal parties committed to eradicating child poverty by the year 2000. No plan has been put into place.

In 1991 Canada ratified its commitment to the United Nations' Rights of the Child, yet was singled out in 1995 by the UN as needing to take immediate action to tackle the problem of child poverty. (Poverty is defined as \$22,000 income for a family of three living in a mid-sized Canadian city.)

Our focus is on children, as thousands of day care operators closed their doors yesterday to these young clients.



### Viewpoint

Jo Ann Stevenson

The protest stems from expected provincial cuts to subsidies for day care spaces. A few years ago it was the private day care operators who were protesting government interference with their market.

York Region had a waiting list of 3,017 children for subsidized child care as of September, 1995.

Campaign 2000 has a suggestion. This group of

social welfare and children's workers, nurses and teachers wants to see children protected by social investment the same way as the Canada Pension Plan protects the elderly and Unemployment Insurance protects the worker.

The merit is that it takes children out of the political realm.

In York Region we have the highest percentage of poor children from two-parent homes in Ontario. Junior Kindergarten and post secondary school funding is in crisis.

Is the funding problem tied to our societal attitude about children? We like to believe our children are our priority.

If they really are then working parents will choose the best private day care they can afford or stay home to raise children.

And those families who can prove they are using subsidy as a hand-up, not a hand-out, will have access to quality spaces.

The recent provincial suggestion to find a neighbor or a family member is out of touch with the times.

Preferable would be to encourage the creation of more private work-site day care programs for starters.

## Vikings predate Columbus

A body could get very depressed surveying the state of the world today, if a body had a mind to. There's AIDS And Bosnia, and Newt Gingrich. And Jacques Parizeau.

Not to mention depletion of the ozone layer, the rape of the rain forests and jock itch.

But whenever things start to get me down, I have a fail-safe mantra that I chant to buck my spirits up. I simply repeat, in a low voice, ten times:

"At least we have no Vikings." It's been close to a thousand years since anybody looked up from their sheep barn to see a swarm of wild-eyed marauders with swords in their hands and horns on their heads kicking in the front gate. I think they're gone for good.

But they had a pretty good run. Peasants first began whispering about the wingings (Old English: pirates, warriors) around 780 AD. For the next five centuries the Vikings raped and plundered the coasts of Eastern Europe, using their long, skinny, dragon-prowed knarrrs to unleash lightning raids. The Viking (ships were long, skinny, swift and remarkably maneuverable. The Vikings themselves were rapacious, fierce and utterly merciless.

And they didn't confine their predations to coastal towns and villages. Danish Vikings invaded France and Germany. Swedish Vikings smashed deep into what we know as Russia. In fact, some people claim they created Russia. For sure they established the city of Novograd in 862.

The Vikings weren't just pirates of course, they used their knarrrs to cross the Atlantic long before Columbus was born. Viking ruins have been authenticated at L'Anse Aux Meadows in Newfoundland. The experts best guess is that they date from at least 1,000 AD.



### Basic Black

Arthur Black

Even more intriguing is the near certainty that Vikings got right to the heart of North America. Nearly a hundred years ago, a Minnesota farmer found a huge rock ensnared in the roots of a tree on his farm. The rock bore Scandinavian runes chiseled into its face. Experts scoffed at the Minnesota stone and dismissed it as a hoax because the inscription was virtually unintelligible. Last year, a linguist at Cornell University declared the inscription is written in a dialect of ancient Norse that has only recently been authenticated. There is no possibility of any faking. Nobody (in the 19th century) could have had the knowledge.

But the Vikings are remembered for their temperament, not their trekking. Almost everything about their culture was steeped in violence. To most of the world, the little mistletoe is a cheery plant associated with Yuletide festivities, friendship and smooching. To the Vikings it was evil. Viking legend has it that a mistletoe spear was used to slay one of their gods.

It's funny how national characteristics change over the centuries. You'd be hard pressed to recognize the Viking marauder in Scandinavians today. Twentieth century Danes and Swedes are more renowned for their civility and stolidness. Even the words the Vikings left us are, well, Viking-like. Anger comes from Old Norse. And my favorite: The most Vikingish word in the English language? Berserkers.

