

Child Care Ltd

From June, *Company Creche* will be landing on the desks of personnel managers and training officers. The new magazine, from Corporate Image Publications, will carry articles on the mechanics of setting up a creche, the benefits of a stable workforce and even, apparently, the moral questions of childcare. Editor Andrew Wilson anticipates he'll soon have a circulation of 5,000.

There's been a lot of hype over childcare recently. The government has decreed that employers should take responsibility for childcare facilities, and now large concerns like ICI, ICL and the major banks are drawing up impressive plans.

The Midland Bank is opening a pilot in Sheffield this summer, and aiming for 300 creches nationwide. But this, they say, will take three to four years, as it's a complex and expensive business. They hope to collaborate with local businesses and local authorities to cut costs, a model used in the London Borough of Camden, where the council, Thames TV, London Weekend and Nalco already have a joint scheme.

But will these moves do anything more than scratch the surface? During the second world war, there were more than 1,300 nurseries looking after 62,000 children. Now, public nurseries



A new tune for mums?

have less than half that number of places, and cater for just 1% of under-fives.

If present plans are put into effect, we look set for an explosion in the number of creches. But childcare organisations fear we might also see abuses and malpractice similar to those accompanying the boom in old people's homes. Local authorities presently register and run checks on nurseries, but are hampered by staff shortages, and could not cope with extra supervisory duties. And proposals in the Children Bill aim effectively to deregulate childcare.

Some private nurseries, like the newly-opened Shepherds Bush Day Nursery, have recognised the demand for high quality care. But it comes at high-quality prices: fees run at £5,200 a year. And of course all workplace childcare is still taxed as a perk in this country. The goal of good, affordable childcare as the norm is still a long way off. •

Caroline Harris

Marxism Today

Coming Next Month

The contents of the July issue will include: the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution; the Labour Party Policy Review and Manifesto For New Times; Cynthia Cockburn on the ambiguous meaning of perestroika for Soviet women; and an interview with Shere Hite.

On sale: **Wed, June 28**. Order a copy from your newsagent now.