

Canada Child Care Act

use this Bill, but they are going to use it in the way they want. They are going to take the money for capital funds in order to build some new buildings, perhaps for day care, but they are not going to use any of the money available for operating funds to make it possible to put a program into those new buildings. They will not take any money to reduce the fees, to improve the wages, or to enrich the program, something which is desperately needed because most of the day care centres operate on a shoe-string.

Does the Member think that this is fair? What does he think should be done to ensure that British Columbia uses some of that money to reduce the fees? The fees are often \$4,000 or \$5,000 a year. That is bad enough if there is only one child, but if there are two children it is just impossible.

There is also no guarantee that British Columbia will use any of that money for infant care or care for children under the age of three years. There are no licensed services for that age group. There is nothing really, or very little, in the way of after school care for school aged children as well.

Furthermore, the Premier of British Columbia makes day care subsidies available under the Canada Assistance Plan, but then charges a user fee at the day care centres so parents cannot really use any available subsidies. That is his kind of philosophy.

Can my friend say whether this program will improve child care and make it more accessible to the children and parents from all income groups in British Columbia who need it?

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member's question reminds me of a number of very important issues raised in a report called "Caring for Canada's Children", put forward by the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell). In that report she outlines not only the needs in a very specific way but, more important, the solutions. If there is a problem, there is a solution which she identifies. She mentions latch-key children. When school gets out at three o'clock or three-thirty, depending on what school one is attending, and the parents do not arrive home until six o'clock, perhaps even later, for two, three or four hours out of the day the children are home alone. That concerns us a great deal.

There are also toddlers and young children under the age of three years. There is virtually no mention of very young children in the legislation. One could go on and on. As Members of Parliament from British Columbia, my colleague from Vancouver East and I know that the premier said at the outset of this public discussion that he was not at all inclined to pass along these funds for child care. He said that there were other pressing needs in the province and that he would feel quite justified in using funds from child care to build bridges or whatever else.

When we reflect back on the comments made by the Premier of British Columbia we become very nervous, indeed. I cannot recall a single progressive comment he ever made with respect to child care, although I can recall a number of very unprogressive comments. All we have to do is look at the

abysmal situation which exists in British Columbia in terms of those parents who so desperately need quality child care and there is simply no place to turn.

I know it is not only British Columbia. I know the problem exists in other provinces as well, but it is particularly acute in British Columbia where, over the years, many communities have actually regressed. There are fewer services in terms of child care per capita than in the past. When we have a provincial Government that has that kind of mind-set, that has policies which are anti-children, we cannot rely on that premier and his Government to develop and provide quality child care in that part of Canada. We know it is an impossibility. I personally would not have any faith that it would occur.

For those people who are interested in the details, not only in terms of what we believe as New Democrats are the critical concerns and needs with respect to child care but more important the solutions in terms of meeting those needs, I could not recommend more strongly the publication called "Caring for Canada's Children" which I mentioned earlier.

• (1720)

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I want to make a comment on behalf of people in rural Canada. Often child care is thought of as an urban issue because when people live in cities or neighbourhoods they can go very short distances to get child care.

Could the Member from Kamloops offer us some wisdom on how we could establish a child care system that would treat rural people in an equitable way in terms of providing child care for the sons and daughters of farmers, people in small villages, and people in hamlets where there are sometimes great distances between residences? Often in rural areas people think that the child care program is basically something for urban Canada, for big-city Canada, for people living in Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, Toronto, or Regina, rather than for people in small areas.

Could the Member give us any ideas on how we could organize a system that would be fair for people living in rural Canada; for farmers and ranchers and people living in small villages and hamlets?

Mr. Riis: Mr. Speaker, once again the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom) is asking thoughtful questions. He asks about child care for rural Canada. We will be hearing members of the New Democratic Party outlining their concerns in terms of child care, not only for rural Canada but also for native children and for disabled children.

Specifically in regard to the Hon. Member's question in regard to rural Canada, let us understand that we are not in a position to tell small communities or rural parts of Canada what they should do. That decision should be left to them. The funds should be provided at the community level so that small rural towns, villages, or areas that are unorganized can make the decision on what kind of child care best meets their local needs.