

Canada Child Care Act

Let us go on. This child care Bill fails to guarantee that even current levels of financial assistance available under the Canada Assistance Plan to help low-income families meet child care needs will remain in place, let alone be enhanced. Those families that need support most will not get it with this legislation.

Under this Conservative plan there are some tax credits so that about \$200 per family per year will be used through the tax system to assist those people to provide child care. This is the same Government that goes on and on saying that we should not use the tax system to develop social or economic programs. At a time when tax dollars are hard to find, to be putting billions of dollars into the tax system without adequate funding for the development of new child care spaces is again an indication that the wrong priorities are being used.

Let us now look at some of the things that are needed in this legislation but are missing. When providing funds for child care, would it not make sense to use the hard to come by tax dollars to develop child care spaces through non-profit organizations? This legislation will provide support for private sector child care.

I want to make it very clear that there are some good private sector child care facilities. Child care for profit provides valuable services at a quality level in certain instances, but on balance the record is clear. The salaries and wages paid to those who work in child care for profit settings are significantly lower. The child to staff ratios are significantly lower. The training that staff members receive is less extensive. The staff turnover is greater. The health and safety standards are lower. The working conditions as well as the wages and salaries are significantly lower. Those are proven facts, and that is one of the points that this last set of witnesses and others before it made clear time and time again.

Also, and perhaps more important, in child care for profit situations there is little opportunity for parents to be involved in the decision making in terms of the curriculum and the kinds of programs being offered. They tend to be motivated primarily for profit. That is why they are there. They are there to make money for their shareholders or for the owners of the facility, whereas in the non-profit sector the primary motive, of course, is to provide quality care of a variety of types.

• (1710)

One aspect this legislation overlooks are those parents who are at home raising children. There is a lack of opportunity to develop the infrastructure that will support a mother or father who is staying at home raising children. I am thinking here of the funding of play groups, parent-child drop in centres, toy lending libraries, and in areas where there is part-time care for people who do not require day-long care but require care at certain times of the day or week. We would like to see more attention paid to that area. Those parents who have decided to remain at home to raise their children should have the appropriate support system to ensure that the upbringing of

their children is facilitated and assisted by some of the programs that would be funded under a child care Bill.

I would also like to say that this particular Act undermines the incentive for have-not provinces to increase child care services significantly due to the rapid phasing out of needed variable cost sharing. I believe this is one of the points made by witnesses before the committee time and time again. Those families who happen to live in have-not provinces will really be prejudiced by this legislation. That is something, we as New Democrats certainly want to see changed, and we have tried to change it. As you know, Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Vancouver East in committee and particularly at report stage consideration made numerous efforts to try to improve at least this extremely flawed legislation, but on virtually every count her suggestions were turned down by the Conservative majority in the House. We are very regretful about that.

There are two million young people in Canada who are presently in need of quality child care. I am talking by and large of licensed child care facilities where parents can feel secure that the quality is of a high standard, that the people involved are skilled in their profession, and that the necessary support systems are in place. It is woefully inadequate. The program of the New Democratic Party would put in place 200,000 new spaces, not over the next seven years with a cap on it after that but over the next four years. We would also put in place significantly increased sums of money to ensure that continued growth of child care spaces is provided and that those most in need of quality child care would have those needs met.

We do not feel at all enthusiastic about the use of tax credits. Under the present financial situation we face as a country, with the resources we are able to mobilize to provide support to our most valuable resource, the children of Canada, we would be well advised to focus those initiatives in the development of child care spaces.

Without national objectives, without clear national leadership to ensure the same level of quality of child care services across Canada from one side of the country to the other, this legislation is seriously flawed. For that and the other reasons mentioned, I think this Bill should go back to the drawing-board. Hopefully, with the election of a New Democratic Party Government after the next federal election, we will have an opportunity to bring in the kind of child care that the young people of this country deserve.

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for a fine dissertation on the evils of this Bill. I certainly agree with him that it is a very regressive Bill.

The Member referred to British Columbia. We have a number of Conservative Members from British Columbia in the House who support the Social Credit Party, for which they should hang their heads in shame. The Minister in British Columbia has made it official publicly that they are going to