

*Canada Child Care Act*

My colleague, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell), our distinguished critic in this area, received a number of telegrams on this issue and I want to read a couple of them to show that it is not just the NDP who feels this way. Other people with a particular interest in this field feel the same. There is a telegram from Sharon Hope Irwin, a child care consultant:

"Child care Bill very dangerous. Respectfully request your efforts to block Bill on second reading. It lacks national objectives, encourages commercialization to the detriment of child care, and does not deliver the promised spaces. Please promote quality child care—accessible, affordable, with high standards."

That is what my future constituents in Port Moody—Coquitlam want. That is what my present constituents in Vancouver—Kingsway want. They want child care which is accessible, affordable, and with high standards. I have another telegram from Carol Christian, President of the White Horse Day Care Association, and Joanne Oberg, Secretary of the Yukon Day Care Association. It says:

"We urge you and your colleagues to speak against the Childcare Act in the House. It is devoid of national objectives, limits spending on child care, funds the commercial sector and does not satisfy the need for spaces, it does not create a day care system but is a government spending program, this waste of public funds will set back day care to the dark ages."

Those telegrams are worth paying attention to.

We in the NDP believe child care in Canada is in a crisis. We have been waiting for four years for the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) to deliver on his campaign promise. You will recall what that was: an effective national system of child care. We think Canadian families have been let down again. In other words, another broken promise by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister thinks you can just throw money at the problem—build a road to James Bay, buy a constituency, build a prison or whatever. That is not the way to tackle child care.

● (2150)

Neither before, during or after the passage of the Conservatives' inadequate, flawed strategy will our families and our children's needs be met. In fact, this fundamentally flawed legislation moves us backwards. There will be fewer child care spaces for our children after the seven years of the Government's program than under the existing system, even after the expenditure of the money.

Furthermore, this Conservative legislation fails to establish the principles on which to build an effective national system of child care. We should be building the first major national social program since medicare was established, but the Government has failed to provide leadership and set out the principles for quality child care in Canada.

We in the NDP believe that Canadian families and their children need greater access to quality child care at lower cost. This Bill does not deliver that. We have said and will continue to say that the Prime Minister should go back to the drawing board and bring forward a child care program to meet the needs of average Canadian parents and their children for child care services now.

It is not only the members of the NDP who have said this. There is an editorial in *The Globe and Mail* today which criticizes this particular Bill. That is not exactly a New Democratic policy paper. This position comes from all angles of the political spectrum. I have here a letter from the National Anti-Poverty Organization, part of which I will read into the record. It is addressed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and says:

"Dear Mr. Minister:

I am writing to express, briefly, the concerns of the National Anti-Poverty Organization with Bill C-144, and to urge you to schedule public hearings on the Bill prior to its passage in the House of Commons.

As we told you in past meetings, we were concerned with the expected absence of targeting of funded spaces to low-income Canadians, and with the expected failure of the legislation to require public accountability by public or community-based management of funded centres. In addition, NAPO has historically opposed the use of public dollars to subsidize for-profit operations, particularly in areas of basic social need like child care.

Bill C-144 fails to establish national objectives, much less the federal standards we would have liked to see contained in the legislation. Even the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord permits the establishment of national objectives for new social programs, yet your government has chosen not to include them in the Bill. We believe this Bill permits the expenditure of very large sums of public money without establishing what the government hopes to accomplish through this expenditure. Canadians have a right to know what your objectives are with child care, and we would urge you to include these in amendments to the legislation.

We have been concerned about the targeting of spaces since your announcement that a good portion of the funding for this "new" program would be transferred from the Canada Assistance Plan.

Under CAP, at least spaces could be subsidized only if they were provided to those in need or likely to be in need without the space. While this permitted subsidization of middle-income Canadians, it did not allow for subsidies to the wealthy. Under this legislation, there is no such assurance or guarantee. Both you and your officials have assured us that operating subsidies will go only to targeted spaces. This is not clearly stated in the Bill, and should appear as an amendment to the legislation.

In addition, removing this funding from CAP will allow dollars previously used only for operating and capital costs for not-for-profit child care centres, or for operating costs only in for-profit centres, to be applied to both operating and capital costs of for-profit centres, if so wished by provincial Governments.

There is evidence that has been submitted by specialists in the field that for-profit centres, in the aggregate, offer lower quality service, minimum required staff/child ratios, lower wages to staff, and lower educational requirements for staff. In addition, we believe that public dollars should not subsidize private profits, and should not subsidize operations that are not accountable to the public paying the subsidy, however indirectly. This Bill does not meet these concerns."

That is what I meant by an inadequate system of child care as set out in this Bill.

I heard the Prime Minister speak in the House today about child care. Some of us thought he might use the occasion to announce the election, but he did not. He was really speaking about women's issues. He was addressing women's issues because he is weak, according to the polls, on women's issues. He has a gender gap like George Bush. Women do not trust our Prime Minister and do not agree with his policies. In his speech he never asked why that is, and I would like to take a minute now to suggest to the Prime Minister why that is and I will return to child care after that.