

Canada Child Care Act

Government did not act immediately on the report of the parliamentary committee even though it was dominated by its own members. It waited until the last minute in a fit of deathbed repentance and tabled the Bill we are debating now, after wasting two or three years when it could have acted on this matter.

I am sorry that the translation was not working. I wanted to be of assistance to my colleagues and to give a summary of what I was attempting to say in the other official language.

● (1540)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The time allowed for questions and comments has now expired. Resuming debate. The Hon. Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands (Mr. Manley) has the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jim Manly (Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to make a few comments on Bill C-144. First, in response to the Liberals who referred to a Dr. Katie Cooke and her report, it is true that while they commissioned that report, they have not used it as the basis for their own policy. In fact, they talk about a comprehensive policy only after the deficit has been brought down. They are also in favour of commercial child care.

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the work of the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) over the last four years. She has been the outstanding spokesperson for child care in this House over those four years. She travelled with the earlier committee, raised questions in the House of Commons, and acted as advocate, pushing, trying to get the Government to act on this issue. Then, when it brought in this travesty of a Bill, she led the fight to criticize its shortcomings. I think all Canadians interested in a real child care program owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Margaret Mitchell and the kind of work she has done over the last four years.

The importance of this subject matter cannot be underestimated because we are talking about the future of our children, and therefore the future of our country. It is on that basis that I regret the Government's move to limit debate on this important subject. The first social program of any note brought in by a government since medicare, and we are rushing it through the House without adequate debate. First reading was given on July 25.

It is a shoddy Bill, and I think most Members know the meaning of that word. It comes from the old textile trade. Shoddy is a kind of cloth in which inferior goods are used and it will not stand up. When you put shoddy into the wash, it falls apart. It is flimsy and you cannot hold it up to the light because you see through it. You cannot hold this shoddy Bill up to the light because the people will see through it, and that is why the Government is insisting on closure. It does not want the people of Canada to investigate the Bill. It figures this is

not really going to go into the wash until after the next election and the people will not realize how they have been hoaxed.

When it comes right down to it, Bill C-144 is a \$4 billion buy-out program which the federal Government is using over the next seven years to divest itself of further responsibility in the field of child care. There will be a limited amount of money available over that time to provide up to 75 per cent capital cost sharing for new non-profit child care spaces, but after seven years there will be nothing. The Government is once again reneging on promises it made during the last campaign. It is astute enough to recognize the public need for child care. It is clever enough to recognize that there is a growing public demand for child care, a groundswell of support equivalent to that for medicare in the early 1960s. However, it is not really answering the need. Instead, it is offering a palliative.

Most of us who are or have been parents recall that when we had very young children we would sometimes give them what you call the plug. When they were crying to be fed, instead of giving them a bottle or the breast you would take a dummy and plug that in its mouth and hope the child would quit crying. That is what we have in this Bill, a plug being given to the Canadian public in the hope they will not be crying for action for a little while. However, it fails to satisfy. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: If your child asks for bread, will you give him a stone? That is what we have here in Bill C-144, a stone.

There is still an ideological argument over day care. It has not surfaced very much in the House, but there is still that ideological strata in the Conservative Party that believes real mothers stay at home and make muffins and look after the children 24 hours a day while daddy is away at work. They neglect the social reality of Canada in the last part of the 20th century.

I believe children from the most privileged of nuclear families can benefit from quality early childhood care. The experiences of socialization, of developing motor skills and creativity in company with other children, are invaluable in the life of any child. It is something that Canada needs to develop on a comprehensive basis from one end of the country to another, but we are not doing it.

At the same time we in our Party, and I am sure all Members, recognize that bad child care is a disaster. You get a number of children who are in essence baby-sat for a number of hours during the day. They are regimented, sat down to watch television, because that is the easiest thing that can be done for them. They do not develop socially. They do not develop physically. Their creativity is killed. Bad child care is a disaster for our children and it is a disaster for the future of Canada.

Good child care is something from which every child from however privileged a home can benefit.