

*Canada Child Care Act*

legislation. This Bill reached the floor of the House only on July 26. There were only two days of committee hearings. Before that committee there was almost unanimous condemnation of this legislation.

After four years of procrastination the Government had the arrogance to impose closure on a Bill of this magnitude and importance. When the Prime Minister blamed the Senate last week this Bill was still before the House of Commons; this Bill was still before the deliberation of Members of Parliament from all sides of the House. If the Prime Minister wants us to facilitate his timetable, his agenda for an election, he should tell us the date. He should let us know what he has on his mind.

Frankly, as a Canadian I would really like to know what the Prime Minister sincerely believes about this Bill. He slipped into the House of Commons early on the evening of August 11. He did not say much about child care. I have searched that speech and I cannot glean his views. I have no perception of what he really understands about the issue. The speech was nothing but a ritual bombast boasting about the flimsy record of the Government.

As I recall that evening, Mr. Speaker, even you were moved to accept the intervention of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bourassa (Mr. Rossi), and point out to the Prime Minister that there are rules in this House that we have to speak to the subject, that we are bound by relevance. I suppose one really could not expect the Prime Minister to understand that, he so seldom participates in debates in this House.

In that speech the Prime Minister boasted that his program was better than that offered by Governor Dukakis or Vice-President Bush in their mutual quest for the presidency of the United States. The branch plant manager says that he is doing better than head office.

• (1120)

The last time I looked, I thought we were talking about Canadian children. I thought we were talking about improving Canadian social programs. To make a comparison with a country that has a completely different approach to social justice, to social equality, to fairness and opportunity, is both misleading and irrelevant.

When the Prime Minister spoke in the House on August 13 about trade, again his speech did not really deal with the issue. It was largely a list of citations from business people. It was a speech of paid endorsements. Surely in the speech to the House of Commons on this issue on August 11, he could have found at least one endorsement. We would have been presented with them if he had them. It is significant that he was unable to bring one shred of evidence from one recognized group in this country having any knowledge or appreciation of the problem facing the future of our children and Canadian families. There was not one citation. The reason was that he could not find any.

During these truncated, restricted hearings before the committee limited to two days by the Government, there was unanimous condemnation of the Bill. There were 40 witnesses, including the Canadian Teachers Federation, British Columbia Daycare Coalition, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the National Union of Provincial Government Employees, the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women. They were limited to half an hour each, but unanimous in their condemnation of this legislation.

We are prompted to ask you, Mr. Speaker: Who then supports this legislation? Only a Conservative Government, only that Government.

Inadequate child care is a major barrier to providing equality for women at work. It is not just a woman's issue. It is not just an issue for parents. It is an issue for all of us. It is an issue for everyone in this country. It is an issue for parents, yes; women, certainly; Governments, of course; and employers. But fundamentally it is an issue that this country must face and with which every Canadian must come to grips.

We need a system that catches up to the demand. We also need a system that provides minimum national standards negotiated with the provinces. We need equality of treatment across the country. We need accessibility that is equally distributed across the country. The Conservative Bill does not even come close to meeting those criteria.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, there is a major flaw in the Tory system, and it is that child care should be aimed exclusively at children of pre-school age. This means leaving thousands of school children alone, without supervision, for several hours a day for a number of years.

These are the so-called latchkey children, usually wearing around their necks the key to their home or apartment. It worries me, every time I meet one of these children with a key around his neck. I am not only worried but downright apprehensive about what might happen to them.

I think it is absolutely essential to take a comprehensive approach to child care that must not be restricted to children of pre-school age. By excluding children between the ages of 6 and 13, we would certainly save money today, but we would also incur a disproportionately high social cost in the future. It is my firm belief that Canada must have a child care system that is designed to give Canadian families the widest possible range of options and, within that range, child care that is of high quality, accessible and affordable.

[English]

We also know that Canada now has approximately 240,000 accredited places either in day care centres or at home. The Conservatives want to add a maximum of 200,000 additional spaces in the next seven years. That would less than double the number of places by the year 1995.