

tion in the form of a programme organized throughout the whole of Canada for school lunches.

Some hon. members may feel that that is rather small potatoes, and that it is beneath the dignity of members of parliament to discuss. But, as I said before, I cannot think of anything which would give greater results for the money expended, or which would bring in better returns by way of health and strength for a growing generation, than by bringing into the schools of the nation the practical food requirements which will ensure healthy bodies for our children.

There are various ways of estimating the cost of such a scheme. I am in a position to know that already within the Department of Pensions and National Health there are officials who would do everything within their power, if they were only free to be able to start such a plan, and organize on a wide basis throughout the country. It could be done very amicably, I believe, with the provincial officials also. There need be no friction over it. If the federal government had a department which could organize on a wide scale, it would give impetus to the provincial governments which have already, I know, started programmes so far as they have been able to do so. The whole plan could be issued as information; it could encourage not merely hot lunches where they are feasible but even in some places could do what we are doing for some of the Indian children, issuing a special candy with a vitamin content. That is being given to Indian children in some areas, and I can think of many white children, particularly in my part of northern Saskatchewan, to whom it would be well to issue such candy. I see no reason why Indian children should not have it; I am not against that at all. I am saying what a pity it is that our own children cannot have it in areas where it is badly needed also.

There are no figures to prove to hon. members that malnutrition exists among the children. I have not been able to find any figures; yet that it does exist I am certain, Poverty has been one of the main causes but not the whole cause. I will admit quite freely that ignorance on the part of young mothers and in some degree a slight indifference to these things has also been responsible. I believe that in a school lunch programme you could make the focal point the teaching of good eating habits not only to the children but through them to the parents. In that way the scheme would be of very great importance.

I was thinking only the other day of the marvellous work done by women's groups all over Canada in support of the war effort.

We have Canadian clubs, the I.O.D.E., the Red Cross, church groups, the Y.W.C.A., little tiny clubs of women everywhere who have been giving of their time and energy to provide comforts for our soldiers, sailors and airmen. I have often thought to myself, what is going to happen to the energies of all these women when the war is over. Why cannot we, with the setting up of this department, enlist all the energy and ability and willingness of these groups to work on behalf of the children in this country who are in need of help and care so badly? I believe that many of these women's groups would welcome the idea if the department started to organize these many things which are needed on behalf of mothers and children in Canada. So far as the work which is being done for the soldiers, sailors and airmen is concerned, the women do not care what rank a man has so long as he is in uniform. Then comforts and all kinds of things are provided for him. So it is with children; there is no difference between them. Whether they come from the homes of the poor or from middle-class homes, there are many things which need to be done for them, and I believe that this department which is being set up could help to give the women of this country something to go on fighting for and working for after the war is over rather than letting all their effort and energy and initiative lapse for want of stimulation, coordination and organization from a government department. I believe that nothing should be done in this regard in a dictatorial way. It should be rather a matter of suggestion in the beginning. In many local communities you could get action committees set up, organizing programmes to suit the needs of the localities. There need be nothing stereotyped about it, but a wide range should be open for the exercise of the abilities of the women who would take up this work on behalf of the children. It would be a challenge to our women to win the peace which is to come after the war.

I would ask the Prime Minister, who has introduced this bill, if before it passes he would not consider setting up under section 5, among the functions of the minister—I shall not attempt to word the clause—the setting up of a certain group of officials in his department whose special function it should be to care for the welfare and basic needs of the children of Canada.

Mr. JEAN FRANÇOIS POULIOT (Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, I am fortunate indeed in addressing the house after the two hon. members who have just spoken. One of them, the hon. member for Renfrew South (Mr.