

Canada Child Care Act

facilities, particularly for single parents who on occasion simply must have a break. A weekend child care facility would provide that. We need toy lending libraries. We need part-time care and play groups. I could go on and on.

What is required under the general umbrella of child care is simply much more than day care spaces. I could talk about the need for enhanced maternity and parental benefits in our system or the fact we need paid family responsibility leave under the Canada Labour Code. Obviously the crisis is here. The need for action is now yet the Government is going backward. It is not introducing legislation to advance these services which are so desperately required. I say that in a country which has over 2 million young people in need of some kind of care or other, to have only 243,000 child care spaces obviously means the situation is totally and completely inadequate.

I suppose that is why when the National Action Committee on the Status of Women appeared before Members of Parliament not long ago they had very strong criticisms of the federal Government with respect to the lack of action over the last one, two, three or four years of the federal Government's administration. I remember that day in Kamloops when the Prime Minister said: "We have this at the top of our list of priorities". Even today, nothing has been done and now we are going to start worsening the situation through this legislation. That is why I say at the outset that I oppose the legislation. It is unamendable. You cannot improve it because it is such a disaster. I oppose it and hope the Government will bring in something that will actually begin to meet the crisis. It is not an easy situation to resolve. It will take many years. However, let us start building a good strong base today.

One of the things that the legislation will do is create 200,000 child care spaces over the next seven years. That sounds good to you and I, but under existing programs a lot more than that would be created. For example, in 1980 we had 109,000 child care spaces in Canada. In 1986 it had increased to 220,000. This year it is as high as 243,000. Over seven years, if we are to apply this same increase of 15 per cent each year, we would create over 500,000 spaces seven years from now. Under the government program we will only create an extra 200,000, which means we will have fewer child care spaces than under the present system.

Under the federal Government's program the number of child care spaces over the next seven years would increase at a rate of 10 per cent. Under present conditions, using the Canada Assistance Plan, it would increase at 15 per cent year over year for seven years. That is why I say we are going backward. The federal Government is worsening the situation. In addition, this legislation puts a cap on spending. After seven years, that is it. Of course, we will in no way be meeting the situation with this program, yet the Government says there will be no further expenditure. At least, that is the best information available today.

Another problem is that there will be no national guidelines or objectives. In other words, we will have one day care system in British Columbia, another one in P.E.I., a different one in Alberta, something different in Ontario and something totally different in Nova Scotia. We will have this patchwork of social programs for day care. That is not the way to run a country. That is not the way to provide leadership. Can you imagine if we had different family allowance cheques going out in different amounts in every province? Or, a different pension system in every province? Or, a different medicare system in every province? That is not a country, that is a hodge-podge. In her column a few days ago Marjorie Nichols said that the Government will rip the country apart by allowing different child care systems in each province of Canada.

● (1650)

In some provinces that might not be a bad deal, but I have no faith at all that Bill Vander Zalm in British Columbia will spend the money from the federal Government to enhance child care. As a matter of fact, Mr. Vander Zalm is on record as saying that if he gets the money, he does not know what he is going to spend it on. He has said that he is not going to spend it on operating funds. In other words, he might create a few extra spaces but the provincial Government will not give any money to operate those day care centres. I shudder at the thought of Bill Vander Zalm in charge of child care in British Columbia. Yet, that is what this particular legislation creates. We are obviously not very keen on that.

Let us look at the status quo in British Columbia and Alberta. In British Columbia there presently exist about 10,000 non-profit child care spaces and about 4,500 commercial child care spaces for a total of 14,500 child care spaces. In the Province of Alberta there are 824 public child care spaces, another 7,000 non-profit child care spaces, and an additional nearly 30,000 commercial spaces for a total of nearly 38,000 child care spaces. The Province of Alberta, therefore, has 38,000 child care spaces while over the mountains in a larger province, there are only 14,000 child care spaces. Therefore, even now we have a serious imbalance in what is provided to parents with young families in those two provinces. I could go through the list for every province in Canada.

We presently see two problems. One is the overwhelming lack of spaces for children in need of licensed child care facilities and the lack of federal standards to ensure that children have the same opportunities whether they live in British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, or Prince Edward Island. There is a lack of the federal leadership which is so desperately needed today.

Another problem is that, of the money being provided by the federal Government, \$2.4 billion will be used through the tax system. With the way things are in Canada today, a low income family, particularly one headed by a single parent, probably does not pay any income tax. They are not likely to be in a taxable situation. If you do not pay any income tax, a tax break is of no benefit to you. To be fair, the doubling of the