

*Daycare*

quality universal daycare in every centre in Canada, affordable daycare for every family that needs it.

● (1740)

Now, unfortunately, it is that member's government and the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin), indeed the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), who have refused to take any action in this area. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that the International Year of the Child occurred close to three years ago, and many projects funded partly by the federal government demonstrated the need for services and action for children. Last year recommendations were brought to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs from the Commission for the International Year of the Child, and we spent many weeks seriously considering the needs of children and made some very tough recommendations. They were rushed through, came back to the committee in order to be tabled in the House last July, and what has happened? Before this House adjourned for the summer it was intended that major action be taken. Nothing at all has happened. I checked with the Minister of National Health and Welfare and found that the report has not even been taken to cabinet. Judging from some of the remarks made by the minister, I am quite sure she has hardly read it, and I will elaborate on that later. The groups across this country who have worked so hard to do things for children have been completely ignored. This is a disgrace when you think of the situation in Canada today and the needs of our younger generation, and the damage that can be and is being done to millions of children, particularly those caught up in poverty.

So I would like to use my time, Mr. Speaker, to speak, of course, on daycare and child care services generally, but also to read into the record some of the recommendations from a report the NDP presented to that committee and the recommendations we feel should have been acted upon.

Major economic and social forces have, over a long time, brought major changes to Canada's families. We are really in a new era today with respect to what is happening to families and its implications for social policy. Inflation and the growth of women's career demands have resulted in a very large proportion of two-worker families. Where just a generation ago barely 25 per cent of married women with school age children worked outside the home, it is now more than double that number and rapidly rising. Stress on domestic tranquillity and changing values in society have resulted in an increasing number of divorces. Two out of three marriages are likely to end in divorce today. We also see the new phenomenon of a constantly changing family situation, changing partners, indeed changing family combinations.

The growth in the number of single-parent families has given rise to a number of new problems for society. Recent estimates indicate that nearly half of the children born during the 1970s will be raised at least partially in a one-parent family home, usually the mother. In 1977, 44 per cent of Canada's families headed by women were living in poverty. We have runaway inflation and massive unemployment taking

their toll on today's families with a major impact on Canada's children. As previous speakers have mentioned, the lack of supervised daycare has made it very difficult for many women, and many men as well, who are badly in need of a second income, to get needed daycare. High mobility, isolation, and the distance from other family members, also make it very difficult to get support when needed. I think of many of the families in rural communities who do not have daycare centres or services. We think we are badly off in the cities, but I can tell you that in many communities in Canada there are no services at all.

Many children, particularly in western Canada where the families have moved and left their relatives behind, grow up without having their grandparents close by. This is really a sad commentary when you compare it to our generation's family life. The challenge of the 1980s is to find new ways of supporting families while enriching the experiences of growing children. New concepts in education and child development are needed to encourage self-reliance in children. They have to be able to adapt to a very mobile and changing society. We want to encourage creativity and adaptability so that children will be able to face the many changes that are coming.

Of course, of top priority are daycare and other child care programs for preschoolers, the most important age in a person's life. We need a range of child care services and supports, particularly for parents of young children. Affordable, quality daycare centres must be there in every community, not only to help meet the needs of working parents but to stimulate a child's development and provide backup support for communities. A guaranteed annual income is also basic to mitigating the effects of widening gaps between wages and prices and to substantially reducing poverty, and I will have something more to say about that in a moment.

We have presented in summary form a number of national priorities. We picked the most serious areas of concern affecting our children and pressed, through the health and welfare committee, for government action in these areas. Our national goals for children must include adequate family incomes and the opportunity for children and young people to develop their full potential in a rapidly changing world. Protection from poverty, abuse and neglect, the strengthening of families and a whole range of community support are priorities. We looked at it from the point of view of federal departments and chose just one area where we could and should take immediate action for children.

From the point of view of the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen), we urged income support programs above the poverty line for families with young children. This meant increasing the child tax credit substantially and, hopefully, taking steps to move as soon as we can toward a guaranteed income system. To the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Munro) we said there must be emergency action for native children, and I wish I had time to elaborate on that. It is probably the most desperate problem in Canada, for they are the poorest of the poor, and this is a national disgrace.