

*Private Members' Business*

There is probably not a community in Canada where a good number of children are not going to school hungry.

Recently a report from the Social Planning and Research Council of B.C. noted that using Canada's food guide, B.C. welfare rates would only allow a parent to feed a child properly for two and a half weeks each month. Surely since much of the administration of social service assistance is within the purview of the provinces, indeed in some provinces the municipalities, it is imperative that there be some standardization required to ensure that children under their jurisdiction be maintained in such a way that they are able to rise above the poverty line in their lifestyles.

Currently Canadian children are guaranteed certain rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and under federal and provincial legislation, policy and procedural manuals, standards, contract for services and through the adherence of rules of natural justice and administrative fairness as interpreted by the courts, or through the office of the ombudsman in those provinces where there is an ombudsman.

Attitudes about children and youth have progressed in our society, from a view of the child as a chattel to his or her parents, to the more modern view of a child as a person in his or her own right. Canadian laws, policies and practices have reflected this historical evolution while maintaining a recognition of the family, however defined, as a primary unit responsible for the care, nurturing and development of the child.

On April 27, 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into force. While the charter was intended to apply to all Canadians, it has been used most often in cases involving adults. The Canadian Youth Foundation has observed that society has recognized that the needs and capacities of children and youths differ from those of adults. Although children and youths are individuals entitled to constitutionally protected rights, these rights must be defined somewhat differently for adults. The courts will have to define these rights and interpret the charter in a manner that will benefit the children and youths of this country.

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The federal government, on behalf of all Canadians, has responsibility to all children of Canada and the

guidance required by the federal government is considerable. It is not good enough to leave the equitable administration to the provinces. Other federal responsibilities include a universal affordable child care strategy for all children in Canada who require child care, taking into account all options that will fill the needs of the family and the child, a national child abuse strategy that will include the proper funding and will include a child protection commissioner and a federal commitment to support the Kids Help Line.

Let me be more explicit about the areas I have just mentioned. A growing crisis in child care in Canada was first acknowledged by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1970 which pointed out that parents require supplementary child care to allow them to fulfil both work and parental responsibilities. The commission pointed out that society had a role to play in providing these services and without provision of these services the equality of women would be meaningless.

In the 1984 election even the Conservative party recognized there was growing demand for action in the area of child care. Then opposition leader Brian Mulroney responded by making a commitment to a national child care program. Again, during the 1988 campaign, this government pledged its commitment to the caring of Canada's children. We are still waiting. As recently as July the Prime Minister told Conservative party faithful that: "We recognize for many Canadians, especially single mothers and fathers, getting child care spaces is not just a question of lifestyles or personal fulfilment but of basic economic necessity. For working mothers proper child care is an essential investment of economic fairness and equality". And for children it is an absolute must.

This commitment, it seems however, only comes during election campaigns. By the time Michael Wilson presented his Budget the Tories had shelved their child care promises.

Canadian families will be hard hit by the government's failure to fund new spaces and the Conservatives have displayed a total lack of understanding for the real needs of parents and children in this country and for the real needs in terms of the rights for the children of this country to be protected. Working families and their children will suffer, particularly in households headed by