

*Canada Child Care Act*

would like to comment on some of those arguments and point out to this House why it is misinformation.

First, there is the red herring that while there were approximately 240,000 licensed day care spaces in Canada in 1987, there were two million Canadian children who needed licensed day care and that, therefore, this Bill's goal of adding 200,000 licensed subsidized spaces over the next seven years is totally inadequate to meet the needs.

I know that you have heard that argument, Madam Speaker, on many occasions throughout this debate. That figure of two million children represents every child in Canada under the age of 14, both of whose parents or whose single parent is working for pay or is a full-time student for at least 20 hours a week. Of these children about 850,000 are under the age of six while the rest are between the ages of six and fourteen. Can one jump to the conclusion that all these children, or even the ones under the age of six, required licensed day care?

Clearly the answer is no. That is not what Canadians told a special committee on child care.

● (1240)

The fact that children aged 6 and over are in school is a point that seems to be lost in this debate. They are in school for more than 20 hours a week and many under the age of six are in nursery school, pre-kindergarten or forms of non-parental care that are not counted in the total of licensed day care spaces. Many others are being cared for by a neighbour or relative in their home or in the parental home.

Also, many parents are able to arrange their work schedules so that one of them is at home with children while the other is earning. These facts have been completely ignored. I have not heard them mentioned at all in this debate by members of the Opposition.

We are told by opponents to the Bill that these so-called informal arrangements are forced on the parents by the absence and lack of licensed day care spaces. That is nonsense. In February, 1981, Statistics Canada surveyed Canadian families on their child care arrangements. At that time there were 1.13 million children under the age of six receiving some form of non-parental care. Of these, just 127,000, or 11.2 per cent, were cared for in licensed day care centres.

Parents were also asked to give up to three reasons for their current child care arrangements. The parents of only 89,000 children gave as one of their reasons that it was the only arrangement available or that they were not aware of alternatives.

Parents were then asked if they wanted to change their child care arrangements. The parents of only 165,000 pre-school children answered yes. When asked to give up to three ways they would want to change their arrangements, the parents of only 48,000 children gave as one of their desired changes an arrangement in a day care centre.

I am not saying that we only require 48,000 new child care spaces in Canada. The survey to which I referred was done seven years ago. While tens of thousands of licensed day care spaces have been put in place since then, I believe that the need has increased. But the survey demonstrates that the vast majority of parents then using informal child care arrangements were satisfied with those arrangements and did not want to change to have their child cared for in a licensed day care centre.

I would like to have seen a follow-up from that 1981 study, but I do not believe that the situation has changed to justify the argument that licensed day care spaces are required for every child of earning parents.

Those listening to this debate may not have guessed that this is an area within provincial jurisdiction. Our Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), is attempting to stimulate the provinces to add at least 200,000 new licensed subsidized spaces over the next seven years. What is the response to that? I have already mentioned the House Leader of the New Democratic Party. He said: "If the Government had done nothing at all, if it had not even introduced legislation, we would actually have more child care spaces than we have under this initiative". That is ridiculous.

Unfortunately, this comment was picked up by the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition. No economist or person has studied what has actually happened in the day care field who would honestly and fairly make that kind of statement.

The NDP House Leader says as well that at the moment there are 240,000 child care spaces in Canada, and the Conservatives have said that over the next seven years they would like to add another 200,000 spaces. He said: "Over that length of time on an annual basis, that is an increase of about 10 per cent a year. We have seen a growth of about 15 per cent under the *status quo*".

Let me indicate what is wrong with that argument. First, the goal set by this Bill is one of adding at least 200,000 licensed subsidized spaces, not licensed spaces. Second, there are not 240,000 licensed subsidized spaces now, as suggested by the NDP House Leader. There are in fact 160,000. Our Government is proposing to increase that to at least 360,000 over the next seven years. That is the appropriate comparison and the one that should be made in the House in this debate. Of the 15 per cent annual growth in licensed spaces between 1982 and 1987 which the NDP House Leader refers to, just under 40 per cent was in commercial day care spaces. That is a form of child care which his Party would like to abolish. Obviously he did not take the time to reconcile his quotation of the facts with this fact.

Third, I believe that it is a rather elementary principle of arithmetic that growth rates tend to decline as the bases from which they are calculated increase. For instance, if one begins with 20,000 day care spaces in Canada and adds 20,000 each year, the growth rate in the first year is 100 per cent, then 50 per cent and 33 per cent the year thereafter. In short, the