

Child Abuse

this field and take appropriate measures for the prevention, identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

This is not a partisan issue. I do not believe that any hon. members who sit in this House are in favour of child abuse in any form. However, we must now show this. We must now show that we are concerned about Canada's children. We must show that we are concerned about their rights, and that the abuse of innocent children will not be tolerated in our country.

Our children are this country's richest resource for the future. We must not allow some of them to be deprived emotionally or physically of their heritage, when it is possible for us to change the situation. We cannot right the wrongs of the past, nor can we right every wrong of the present. But what we can do and what we have a responsibility to do is to act on a situation that has become more prevalent than any of us wish to admit.

Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what clearly lies ahead. Of all human resources, the most precious is the desire to improve. I suggest to this House that this is one area which we can improve upon and which we must improve upon. I am not offering a solution to the problem of child abuse. Indeed, there may not be a complete solution, but what I am asking is that we recognize the problem, and that we make an attempt to do something about it by directing the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs to study and report back to the House its recommendations in respect of appropriate measures for the prevention, identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and for such other measures in the same matter as the committee may consider desirable.

● (1620)

The problem exists, and I believe that it has been clearly defined in this House. It has been said that to define a problem is to begin to solve it. I hope this is the case. We have the opportunity to make an attempt to find a solution to this problem. I think we must, but it must be remembered that opportunities carry with them obligations, and this is only too true in this case. Our obligation at the present is to ensure that this resolution, or one similar to it, be passed by this House, and passed as soon as possible.

This is not a matter which should be neglected, and it is not a matter in which political affiliation is of concern. I hope all members of the House will do everything possible to co-operate and ensure that this measure takes effect, and that a committee will indeed look into this matter and report back to this House. Elton Trueblood once wrote, and I quote:

A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit.

I hope, Madam Speaker, that this is indeed one shade tree that all members of this House can sit under and can take pride in. It can be done, Madam Speaker, but only with the help and co-operation of all hon. members of this chamber.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I shall be just a very few minutes. I

[Mr. Howie.]

commend the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie) on introducing this resolution. I also wish to commend him on the thoughtful and excellent speech he has made in support of it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I agree with him that this motion ought to pass this afternoon. I am delighted to learn there is a good chance that it will. My contribution toward getting it through will be to make these remarks very brief.

As hon. members realize, there is a fairly wide public awareness of the fact that there is more child neglect and child abuse in Canada than there ought to be in a civilized country. I am sure all of us are embarrassed and ashamed that it takes place in our land. I have the notion that people generally are aware of it and do not like it, but hope that somebody will do something about it. That somebody, of course, is always somebody else.

The hon. member said we are the legislators of this land and it does not fall to us to pass the buck. The least we can do is arrange for a thorough study of this matter in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs. I am pleased to give our party's support to this motion.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, I want to begin by congratulating the hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie) on presenting this motion. This is a subject which has interested me for some time, and one which we have had under study in the ministry of the Solicitor General for several months.

Our three man team studying this matter has developed more than 300 contacts in Canada and the United States. They have travelled in Ontario and British Columbia, and have consulted with local authorities such as Dr. H. B. Cotnam, chief coroner of Ontario, and Dr. S. Segal of the British Columbia Family and Children's Law Commission. In addition they have attended conferences on the subject in Washington, Boston and Victoria, B.C. A policy paper is being developed within our ministry at the present time, and should be ready soon to be presented to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs should this motion pass. I might say that I am in favour of having this motion pass. I hope that near the end of the hour we will do just that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allmand: Generally our feeling is that while cases of child abuse may be prosecuted through either the criminal court via the Criminal Code sections on assault, neglect or sexual exploitation, or through the family courts under the provincial child welfare statutes, the Criminal Code is the less appropriate one. The experience in the United States indicates that state or provincial specific legislation on the subject, defining abuse and creating methods of reporting and handling cases, as well as safeguards for professionals involved, is one good approach.

The federal input in this matter might be to help the provinces with research and demonstration projects, to develop communications among interested groups and