

Children's Rights

who have made the UN's ten principles a reality in their homes have a real distrust of the concept. One man said to me the other day that children would be able to call an ombudsman who would decide whether he had a "right" to stay up until 9.30 p.m., decline to practise the piano, skip breakfast, etc. We know this is not the intention of the legislation before us but I do not think we will be any further ahead if we implement legislation which parents distrust and fear. For some time to come, children will be living with their parents or other caretakers. What the family needs, regardless of its constitution, is not a divisive mechanism but rather as much support as possible in as many ways as possible.

We hear a lot these days about parents who abuse their children. The parents we don't hear enough about are those millions and millions who are doing a superlative job in the face of almost impossible odds. Often it is one parent alone who must provide loving care to increasingly sophisticated children in a world where the only constant is change. Then when the parent turns to experts for help, he or she receives conflicting advice.

Parents, too, are sometimes confused about the changes in spiritual values and social values which are taking place. Take the prevalence of violence, for example. If our objective is to assure that children grow up in an environment which encourages their physical, mental, social and spiritual growth, I must seriously question the extent to which a statement of rights would go in meeting it. When I examine the United Nations declaration of the rights of the child, I noticed that the word "need" could in every case be substituted for the word "right". To my mind this would be a much more positive and productive way of thinking.

I want at this time to refer, as did the hon. member for St. John's East, to the excellent report "Admittance Restricted" which has been put out by the Canadian Council on Children and Youth. I would recommend it for reading by anyone who is interested in this subject. I had myself intended to place a portion of it on the record but time will not allow me to do so. Reference is made to it in a report which appeared in the *Globe and Mail* earlier this week under the heading "Children neglected, study says" and in the *Winnipeg Free Press* over a CP story headed "Children's needs ignored: report—parental neglect criticized." Unfortunately, I cannot go further into that aspect because of the time restraint.

Let me add one further point before resuming my seat. Next year, 1979, will be considered the Year of the Child. The United Nations has taken up this concept and we in Canada are doing likewise. I might mention that the hon. member for South Western Nova (Miss Campbell) was one of the first in this House to consider that the government should become involved in the Year of the Child. I can only say that advances are being made, and will be made, and that next year will be a year in which Canadians as a whole will be involved in children's issues.

Mr. Ralph Stewart (Cochrane): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) should have brought this measure before the House again for

[Mr. Robinson.]

the second time this year. I am also delighted to note that we have been able to put aside partisanship and have agreed that we should refer the subject matter of the bill to committee. It will be my pleasure to move such a motion in a moment.

I am very glad we have an opportunity to debate this question so near to the year when countries around the world will devote their attention to the needs of children. The subject should certainly be sent to a committee of the House where it can be discussed in a fulsome way. I look forward to participating in that discussion. There is already growing up around the world a practice of adopting children who cannot get enough to eat, who lack proper clothing and who have no prospect of an education. There are members of this House who have adopted children around the world and I wonder whether I could put forward the suggestion that, as a gesture to launch the International Year of the Child, all hon. members give close consideration to this possibility.

I understand, of course, that we cannot get into the question of abortion in a debate of this kind, but I am sure this subject and related matters will receive attention during the discussions in committee. I say this because if there is any group of children in need of a voice, it is that group of children who are in their mothers' wombs and who are crying out in their silence for us to defend them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stewart (Cochrane): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving us a few minutes extra before terminating this debate.

I therefore move, seconded by the hon. member for Saint-Jean (Mr. Smith):

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following therefor:

"Bill C-204, respecting a Canadian bill of rights for children, be not read a second time but that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn and the subject matter thereof referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Amendment (Mr. Stewart, Cochrane) agreed to.

Motion (as amended) agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being after six o'clock I do now leave the chair until 8 p.m.

At 6.04 p.m. the House took recess.

● (2002)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.