

Criminal Code

element of the offence should be relevant to the sentencing. The larger argument is that the sexual aspect should not be downplayed too much. Other people claim that removal of the word "rape" reduces the seriousness of the crime.

My own personal reservation is with the age of consent. For that reason I look forward to a study of the bill in committee which will give us an excellent opportunity to consider the changes that should be made before it becomes law.

I should like to say that there are many good things about the proposed legislation. It will apply to men and women; it will make it easier to get convictions for sexual assault; it will give more protection for children and many anachronisms will be removed.

I look forward to the bill being made even better when it comes before committee.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Madam Speaker, I think all hon. members owe a debt of gratitude to the hon. member for Vancouver Centre (Miss Carney) for sharing her insight and experience with us, for the work she has done within her constituency, for being brave and honest enough to really look at what is going on in western Vancouver, for being sensitive to the needs of the people there and for giving us a true picture of the community. She has shown the unutterable contrast between the affluence of the surroundings and the degradation of the life there.

I do not want to bicker or thrust a barb at the hon. member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson)—I do not say this in that sense—but some weeks ago in an attempt to badger the government to bring this legislation forward he made a slip of the tongue. I am sure that is all it was. He said, "We want to get some decent rape legislation in this country".

I think that is what is wrong with the perspective of this House, Mr. Speaker. That is what is wrong with a large percentage of the practitioners of law in this country. They are looking for technical precision. They want legislation to be technically accurate. We are not dealing with whether the issue is good law, although that in itself is an issue, we are dealing with the question of whether the issue is good life.

Life in the western side of Vancouver in particular is being destroyed because we in this chamber have sat in splendid isolation for years, talking about the intricacies of law so that we can get good judgments in court. I realize that is important, of course, but all the while life in that part of the community and in other cities is being destroyed. So the issue is not simply whether this is good law; the issue is how we can preserve a good life for these people in the fullest sense of the word.

As the hon. member for Vancouver Centre spoke I could not help but think of some work being done in my own community of Surrey. Most of the teenage prostitutes in Vancouver are there because they were the victims of incest in their homes. These teenage prostitutes have had their self-concept destroyed in childhood. They have had their sense of self-worth destroyed in childhood. For them there is nothing to live for

that is relevant except the opportunity to make some money from their lack of self-worth. So they end up on the streets on the western side of Vancouver.

There is a committee in Surrey which has almost finished a project which, sadly enough, is to deal with an area of education from kindergarten through third grade, the aim of which is to let children know in sensitive ways, through the use of text and picture, what the subtleties of child seduction are.

I am sure hon. members have seen news reports in the last few weeks about a conference held in Medicine Hat which drew attention to the fact that most child abuse comes at the hands of close relatives and friends—the people a child trusts. Because the adults manipulate them, they get the signals from those adults that the practice is all right. In the process their lives are being destroyed.

I say again that the focus is wrong, Mr. Speaker. Certainly we want to get good legislation because it is the mechanism that is used to preserve the good life for our children who will grow up to be the future citizens of this country.

I know that the hon. member for Burnaby and others have focused on rape legislation and that they are concerned about what is going on in the courtrooms of our land and the difficulty of getting convictions. I understand that concern, but it is disturbing to realize that all we are aiming for is good convictions. As I say this, I recognize the need for good convictions, and because rape law has not been adequate it is easy to lose sight of other issues.

I should like to spend a few minutes pointing out to hon. members what is going on in other areas of the country. Some weeks ago I attended a public meeting in Vancouver when a high school counsellor from my constituency spoke. He spoke of the myriad of young people who come to his office to discuss the problems of life and of the high school discussion groups with which he is involved. He told us that the dominant question about anything is: Is it against the law? That is the only rule of conduct that appears to be left for young people in our society—is it against the law?

It seems to me that along with a lot of other things that have gone on in our society has been an erosion of non-legal barriers to certain kinds of conduct. By and large, one kind of mentality that is developing asks—can I get away with it, is it against the law, or can I get around the law? As long as that kind of mentality is developing among our young people, it behooves us to be extra careful about the laws we pass in this chamber. There is an erosion of the moral and social guidance systems that we as individuals need in order to steer our course.

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As fewer and fewer people are attending churches, and more and more people are becoming uneducated in terms of strict moral judgments in our land, it becomes more and more important that the laws of our land reflect a guidance system which will tell our young people, "This is what you can do, and this is what you cannot do for fear of what will happen to you". The subtle change which has come in our mentality is that the judgments passed down in our courtrooms are seen to