

Children's Rights

their children? He identified the duty to maintain, the duty to protect and the duty to educate. How far have we come since that famous jurist defined those parental responsibilities? We still treat children today as chattels. Children are in the same position today that women were in twenty-five years ago, when the female spouse was considered the property of her husband. That was the case in most of the provinces in this country, and she could be subject to beating or any other kind of abuse without any recourse to law. We have changed and corrected that situation, but we have not bothered to examine the problem of the young Adriennes of this country.

I address this question in the form of television advertising. We abuse children by what we do to them on television; by taking advantage of their young imaginative minds and using them as surrogates to sell junk foods or toys that do not work. We confuse them by advertising products and telling them that if they want to be members of the "in" group of young teenagers they have to drink "X" brand of beer. By the very sophisticated use of peer group advertising we are taking our children and turning them into alcoholics before they even reach the age of majority. We are confusing them and turning them into cynics.

We have addressed that problem by reference to a standing committee of the House of a bill I introduced. We made recommendations to the House, and the House concurred in the recommendations that this form of advertising should be eliminated in Canada. Those recommendations were ignored by the CRTC and the Minister of Communications (Mrs. Sauvé). That was three or four years ago and today the Federal Trade Commission in the United States is getting around to banning that kind of advertising. At least they have recognized this is a serious problem and are now holding public hearings which will lead to the serious curtailment, if not the total prohibition, of this kind of abuse of children which we condone in this supposedly modern and enlightened society of ours.

We could talk about venereal disease which is a growing problem. We could talk about the problems of the urbanization of our country and what that means to a child. Stop and think for a moment. Most of us in this House when we were growing up were part of an extended family that included not only our parents but also our grandparents, maternal and paternal, as well as aunts and uncles, the neighbourhood church, the neighbourhood school, all of which provided an umbrella of protection in the small towns and villages of rural Canada.

Look what is happening today in the megalopoli of this country. The extended family no longer exists. The neighbourhood pastor is gone. The grandparents are no longer there. The children are lost in this large urban society and no longer have that protection children once enjoyed. They are now very much alone, and require the attention of society to afford them a degree of protection.

Traditionally parents have had almost total control over their children. But, at the same time, as I have said, that control was exercised in the framework of a supportive net-

[Mr. McGrath.]

work; a network which held the parent accountable for the way in which he raised the child. Lifestyles are changing and traditional family life has been altered. The movement of large groups of people from rural to urban areas, the increasing size of metropolitan areas and even the type of work one does are all factors which contribute to the changing lifestyle. No longer is there a majority of families living in a close-knit kinship group with numerous relatives nearby to offer a helping hand. Often families live several hundred miles from their relatives. Frequent moves because of job requirements also discourage close attachments to a particular community.

Other aspects of family life are also changing. With the increasing number of divorces and separations and with the tendency of unwed mothers to keep their children—and I support that situation—there are more families in which there is only one parent to shoulder the burden. In addition, more women are entering into the labour force, either by right or through necessity because of inflation, and remaining in it even when they have very young children; and that leads to the problem of providing adequate daycare centres which this country has not yet addressed. The Minister of National Health and Welfare should address herself to the matter of providing funding for good daycare centres, because there is greater reliance on this form of supervision and care.

Because of these changes and others, parents are confronted with a difficult and confusing task. No longer are parents confident that they know exactly how to raise a child, for the world is increasingly different from the one in which they grew up. Lacking the traditional basis of familial support and living in a society increasingly characterized by permissiveness and alienation, parents face a complex assignment. Needless to say, some parents are unable to cope with the pressures.

I notice, Mr. Speaker, that you are about to indicate that my time has expired. I wonder if the House would allow me the indulgence of carrying on?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Is there unanimous consent that the hon. member should continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

● (1622)

Mr. McGrath: I will try not to take up the time of the House, Mr. Speaker, but I feel that the subject is important enough to have the case adequately presented. We are talking about whether or not parents are able to cope with the pressures of modern society, and we must ask if society is doing enough to assist parents in their job. What is the responsibility of society to ensure that every child has a chance to enjoy the benefits which society can provide? These include a healthy life, an opportunity for a good education, a chance for a meaningful career and the opportunity to work.

What can society do to protect the right of a child? Basically, society can take two approaches. First of all, my legal friends would appreciate the negative approach, which we now take, in which offenders are punished; and there is the positive approach in which respect for children's rights are encouraged. It is that positive approach that my bill speaks to.