

*Criminal Code*

will be 50 or 60 children in the Davie Street area alone. Some of these may be boys dressed as girls, some of them may be girls as young as 15 or boys as young as 12. One of the provisions of the bill, which I will be dealing with, will deal with the age of consent.

Most of these young prostitutes come from broken or unstable homes. Many have been physically or sexually abused. In general, they have the common denominator of a very poor self-image. Some are habitual runaways who end up on the streets and are drug addicts. Some of them come from stable backgrounds, wealthy families. They are well provided for. They seek money, excitement, or the experience. There is a danger of its becoming a sort of trendy youth movement for lower mainland young people.

Along with experience, excitement and money they often find violence. They may be beaten, raped, or robbed. To escape the degradation that they experience, they seek refuge in drugs and become heroine addicts and therefore become hardened.

Recently I visited a project called the Senator Project which is in my constituency. It is a half-way house to give these children a safe haven. It is not federally funded. It is financed by the provincial government and by the city of Vancouver. I am glad today to have received notice that the council has approved the Senator hotel for another year. The thing which strikes one who visits this modest establishment, which is not a luxurious operation, is that these are just ordinary kids. They have terrible health problems. The street life is physically very degrading and harmful to them. The first thing that the Senator Project staff try to do is to restore their basic physical health. They do not try to reform or rehabilitate them; they simply try to give them a roof over their heads so that they can be restored to physical health.

These children are sometimes extremely talented. I met a young artist, who I shall not name, who was about 16, who is illiterate by our standards and who is very talented. In this kind of environment he has the opportunity to explore his artistic talent. They also have some opportunity to learn what the jargon calls "entry skills". They have very good educators who help these children get enough confidence in themselves so they can go into the school system. They are taught while they are there. These educators also have a lot of basic understanding and support. We do not know if this project will be successful because we do not know how many young people it will save nor how many young people it will rehabilitate, but we do know that it has been a worthwhile experiment. The issue is to keep the kids off the streets in the first place and to ensure that adults who exploit these children are punished.

I first began raising the issue at a federal level in June, 1980, when I proposed a motion calling on the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chrétien) to amend the Criminal Code to give local police the authority to deal fairly and firmly with the problem of prostitution. Of course, by that time, it had reached crisis proportions in the west end. However, the motion was defeated.

• (1620)

Also at that time I began a letter-writing campaign to the Minister of Justice pressuring him to take action on the situation. In a series of letters I asked the minister specifically what amendments he was prepared to make to the Criminal Code to toughen the laws on prostitution. I have also asked him to accompany me on a tour of the west end so he could see exactly what it is like. It cannot be imagined, it must be seen.

The minister has given several reasons for not acting on the problem. Initially he said that some people had expressed concern that changes to the Criminal Code might lead to some form of harassment of private citizens by the police. This is a legitimate concern. Later he mentioned that some women's groups were fearful that the rights of women may be infringed by any new laws. The last excuse seems particularly ludicrous to me, since the rights of west enders to live in a peaceful neighbourhood have long been thrown out and the rights of these children who are being exploited have long been ignored. I have canvassed women's groups in the area by letter. Not one of them responded that this was the intent of any opposition they may have. They were all appalled by the situation which exists in the west end and were quite responsive to suggestions that the situation can be dealt with.

In one letter to the minister I pointed out that if the residents of Rockcliffe in Ottawa had to endure half the disruption, noise, inconvenience and harassment experienced by west enders, I was quite convinced that the laws would have been changed a long time ago.

Last summer when the minister visited Vancouver, in the course of a confrontation with a group of concerned citizens he finally gave them a commitment that he would take some action as soon as the Supreme Court decision on soliciting was handed down. It came down earlier this month, so I intend to see that he holds to his promise.

In summary, there are four important issues which the new legislation regarding prostitution must address. It must define soliciting; the customer should be charged along with the prostitute; males should be included in the definition of prostitute; public place should be defined. The present law does not address these issues, so the police find that they are prevented from dealing with the problem of prostitution.

In the absence of any help from Ottawa, local municipalities have tried passing their own bylaws to deal with the problem, but these have almost invariably been struck down by the courts as conflicting with the Criminal Code or as being ultra vires the powers of municipalities. In fact this happened to the recent bylaw in Montreal. The only bylaw which has withstood court challenges has been a Nova Scotia law, which is the remedy the minister keeps insisting is his solution. Most municipalities, particularly Vancouver, feel that this is an issue which must be dealt with at the federal level and see the urgency by the Minister of Justice that they follow the example set by Nova Scotia as an attempt to pass the responsibility off on municipalities. Certainly there is no indication in the legislation that the federal government is ready to deal with the problem.