

other children, but their actions belie this statement. They have more concern for the value of their property than they do for the tremendous resources we have in the children of this country. So there is this attitude of looking at children as chattels.

Our commercial world looks upon children not as children but as a market. This is a market to be manipulated by advertising, a market to make sure that the child will persuade the parent to buy a particular product and too often that product has no nutritional value at all. Again, there has to be something in the law that says Canadians must change their attitudes toward children. Last but not least, and it is something that the hon. member touched upon, is the whole question of discrimination against children. The hon. member referred to the commonly seen sign saying that children and dogs are not wanted. Presumably they will accept a boa constrictor and birds, but children have no place there. We are letting our children grow up in segregated areas; by this, I mean places where they do not see their grandparents. As the family network is broken down nothing has replaced it.

If a child was abused there was a time when the grandfather would beat up the father who abused the child. But that does not happen any more. Children have been left in limbo with no protection. Because our society has changed and the extended family has broken down, we in this place must replace it with rights and law.

I want to speak about one special area that the bill does not deal with specifically but which would be covered. That area concerns the problems of the native children in Canada. This group of children is more abused than any other. This is due to the native culture being under attack. It has been ever since western Europeans came to North America. When you look at that culture under seige, the victims are mostly native children because they come from a different tradition. Native parents by tradition have been kinder to their children. Europeans have tended to be more disciplinarian and have tended to use corporal punishment. However, if you look at numbers for Canada as a whole, the most abused child tends to be the native child. As I say, his culture is under attack and in our community we have tended to take away the pride of his heritage. This is a special problem we will also have to deal with.

The hon. member for St. John's East also referred to the question of the right to life, the question of the right of a child to be born. He and I have some differences over how we can accomplish this. I just want to say briefly that I do not know anyone in this place who is not seeking to reduce the number of abortions that take place in Canada. I am not sure the law that we have in fact has contributed one way or the other to the increase in abortions. But I do know this, that unless a child is a wanted child and unless we concentrate on family planning and birth control so that those who are born are needed and wanted, then we cannot begin to get a handle on the question of the abuse of children.

It is all very well to talk about the right to life, but it must be talked of in the context of the right to happiness and the

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right to a child's existence. Instead of arguing about what we are going to do in terms of the abortion law, let us get down to arguing about the reality of birth control. Let us get down to arguing about the reality of allowing parents to decide whether or not they want children so that every child is a wanted child, a cherished child and a loved child. This is one way we can make a substantial contribution to the prevention of child abuse.

Lastly, in the field of child abuse and in the field of crime we have arrived too late on the scene. In Canada the theory is, in order to solve a crime the criminal is the one to be attacked rather than the cause of the crime. The same is true with regard to child abuse. We do not have preventive programs, such as programs to identify the high-risk parents, being those parents who are likely to need some kind of counselling and support so they will not abuse their children.

There is one program in North America, I believe in Colorado, that has shown a good deal of success. In my community of New Westminster we have one of the better child abuse programs, but it needs some additional help. There is an application presently before the minister of health to fund a prevention program, a program which will seek to identify high-risk families and prevent abuse of the child before it becomes a reality. If we can do that in the area of child abuse, we should think about doing it also in the area of crime, in terms of preventing anti-social behavior, identifying, for example, psychopathic behaviour earlier. There is not much point in the long run in attacking the parents and the victims without attempting to prevent the occurrence.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for St. John's East who I think is doing a fine job of sensitizing the Canadian people to this particular problem. I wish him the very best. He certainly has our support to move this subject forward.

● (1742)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude-André Lachance (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) in congratulating the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) and recognizing with him the need to make Canadians and this House aware of the importance of protecting and promoting children's rights. And in that respect, in the little time I have—as the hon. member suggested, we are looking forward to having an opportunity to consider that question more fully in the committee on justice and legal affairs—I would yet like to point out a few of the accomplishments that have been made in the area of the protection of children's rights.

Children's rights may be affected in various ways, particularly by what is called family law. First, several legal decisions can affect the individual status of children. Adoption and status claim actions are examples of that. Second, certain matters can affect the material or financial status of children. That is the case of alimony claim actions or support orders