

Children's Rights

brought this together and brought into perspective, in so far as the Parliament of Canada is concerned, the rights of children in this changing society. I would commend the report to hon. members. It is entitled "Admittance Restricted" with the subtitle "The Child as a Citizen in Canada."

It is interesting that the title is "Admittance Restricted." Just a few days ago we read of a highrise apartment building in Toronto which advertised for tenants but stipulated "No Dogs Or Children." That is an interesting, ironic and sad commentary on our times and the changing society in which we live.

The rights of children are summed up in this paragraph on page 17 of the publication:

While insisting on the universality and individuality of human rights, we recognize the need for society to take special responsibility for identifying and safeguarding the rights of those who are incapable of doing so for themselves. Children have no claim on special freedoms which should not be available to all citizens, but their inability to insist upon their rights is an argument for special representation, not an excuse for ignoring them.

We have been ignoring the rights of children because they are not vocal. For example, we addressed ourselves to the rights of women because they were a vocal group in our society and we were able to redress some of the injustices that had crept into society with respect to the rights of women. It was not too long ago, and the House would do well to remember, that women's rights in Canada were not talked about. Women were looked upon almost as the chattels of their husbands in terms of law. They had virtually no rights before the courts of the land. We changed that, but that is the position children are in today; they are the chattels of their parents and very often the chattels of the surrogate parent, the state, the foster parent, the single parent.

The ultimate right of children is the right to life itself. I cannot resist bringing that in, because we should become more and more concerned with the ultimate right, namely, the right to life itself. Abortions in this country are growing at a rapid rate. There were 11,152 recorded abortions in Canada in 1970; in 1976 the number had risen to 54,536. How many of those pregnancies were aborted beyond the stage they could even be considered, in the widest interpretation, on therapeutic grounds? I will not go into that any further, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that by allowing the subject matter of this bill to go to committee, the House is addressing the fact that the Parliament of Canada should properly involve itself in the International Year of the Child. This would be the most meaningful way we could do so, by having a committee of the House examine the area of children's rights in Canada.

I believe the country looks to us as legislators to provide leadership in this field, as we had to provide leadership in the field of human rights when dealing with the rights of women, minority rights, and discrimination on racial or religious grounds. There is a large segment in society to whom we deny those basic rights. We do not give them rights before the court; they have no advocates; they are nameless, faceless, until they appear in the form of a tragedy reported in the newspaper as battered children, murdered children, abused children. Then it

[Mr. McGrath.]

is too late. That addresses itself to the negative aspect of our law dealing with the rights of children. The law cannot act until an offence takes place; then it is too late. I hope the committee will address that problem when it meets.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the House in anticipation for the consideration this bill will receive. I end it by reminding the House that it is about time we considered the position of children and their rights as citizens in our changing society.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief because, I hope we will be able to refer the subject matter within the time allotted, as has been agreed.

I should like to start by congratulating the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), who has the peculiar facility of getting his bills accepted in the House and in committee. I have often wanted to talk to him about his success. I suspect the eloquence he displays in this place must be displayed to individual members on a continuous basis. He seems to have made a very significant contribution—and I say this in all seriousness—not merely to the question of the rights of the child but to sensitizing the Canadian constituency to the problems of children. I refer, of course, to his success on the subject of advertising and the manipulation of children by advertising.

• (1732)

Unfortunately that unanimous recommendation which was initiated by the hon. member for St. John's East has not yet seen legislation, but we are still hopeful we can begin to look at this whole question of restricting advertising. The reason I want to commence my remarks about the subject of advertising, which the hon. member for St. John's East has raised before, is that when we are dealing with the rights of children and dealing with a piece of legislation which wishes to place in the law the protection of children, if one looks at the question of advertising that justifies the need for a general law. We tend to be hypocritical in this country about how we treat our children. We should see ourselves as children see us. We still consider children to be chattels or property.

As the hon. member for St. John's East pointed out, there is a movement concerning women that recognizes that there is less of a feeling of property toward them, but we have not progressed very far along the road in that respect with regard to children. Let me give some examples of why this attitude toward children is so strange, unnatural and inhuman. First, how many of us have seen the example of a group care home or a home for unwed mothers attempting to settle somewhere in a subdivision. Over and over again we hear "It is okay to have it, but do not put it next to my house".

The urban areas of Canada have experienced that over and over again. This is best illustrated by the number of people who show up at protest meetings and those who go down to the city council and say, "We cannot have those disturbed children in our area." All those people, of course, will insist that they have a very humane approach to their own children and to