

*Marriage and Family Life*

including the use of television, that will affirm the importance of marriage and family life.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is only Private Members' Hour and we do not have the stimulus of Government business before us. This is only a motion and will not initiate legislation that will call forth direct action. However, Mr. Speaker, I say to all Members of the House and to all who are joining with us that this Parliament cannot discuss any issue of greater importance to the people of Canada than that of the quality of family life. To support that I quote none other than the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) who said: "Nothing matters more than this. It's the family that counts. That's what makes our society, and that's what makes our country".

Through the ages the family has taken many forms, but in every civilization and by every tradition the family has been the basic institution of society. The tragic irony of these times in which we live is that never have people needed more what the family offers men, women and children, and never has the family been under greater challenge than it faces now. I submit, Mr. Speaker, that Parliament must join all other people and institutions of goodwill in helping the family cope and face that challenge.

We have recently passed amendments to the Divorce Act that were required. They passed without dissent and we can, therefore, conclude that they had at least the goodwill of all Members of the House. They were necessary amendments. However, even though they were a necessary word to issue forth from Parliament Hill, they were, nonetheless, inevitably a negative word. I ask the House today whether we cannot also send forth a positive word. Is the only word that Parliament can offer the country on the subject of marriage and marriage breakdown this necessarily negative word? Can we not offer a "yes" on the quality of family life? The need for it is illustrated by one of those who have written on the subject of divorce and separation by saying that: "This national and local government policy has more often addressed issues of divorce law than it has addressed the needs of families".

I would like to focus attention on the way in which those needs of families demand the attention of Parliament and the Government. I recognize the necessity for providing an opportunity for divorce and the dissolution of marriage. It is necessary, no matter how regrettable, but let us not forget that it demands a high cost, and usually a cost from those who should least have to pay it.

In one recent study entitled *The Divorce Revolution* the writer points out and supports the conclusion that for most women divorce means a long list of negatives including less financial income, fewer skills with which to cope, lower self esteem, increased anxiety, and greater fear of the future. The author makes this comment after that discussion: "For all its aims at fairness, the current no-fault system of divorce is inflicting a high economic toll upon women and children". Another study, *Marriage and Divorce in Canada*, compiled in 1983 and funded by the then Government of Canada concluded: "The financial arrangements made by most divorcing families were not usually adequate for dependent children".

I recognize and welcome the way in which our new legislation is at least designed to help the enforcement of court support orders but, at the very best, that benefit will be limited to the payment required by those orders. So very frequently, if the payment is made in full, it is less than is required for the kind of life the family once knew, and perhaps less than the family requires for a decent human existence. I ask Parliament to face the question of whether we are really counting the cost of marriage breakdown. Certainly we must provide legislatively for it, but are we counting all the costs that this breakdown inflicts upon people, particularly women and children?

One of the studies of Family Service Canada has reminded us that the cost goes beyond that which can be reckoned in dollars and cents. It identifies four areas in which children are affected particularly: one, the change of physical domain, not always for the better; two, emotional disturbance; three, reduced academic performance; and, four, a routine disruption which, among children particularly of young age, can be negative. In each of these areas vital to the lives of children very often parents demand that children pay a price no child should have to pay.

What are we going to do about it? We have already passed legislation. Can I point out, Mr. Speaker, that there is open to Parliament, and certainly open to Government, a step that does not require legislation. Laws can achieve only limited results. We cannot and should not say: "Thou shalt stay together", but we can provide, as Governments do all the time, education that aims at encouraging people to remain together, and at affirming the qualities, values, and necessities of family life. We need to do that, particularly now that we have passed the amendments to the Divorce Act that we rightly passed last week. Even though the law does not say to anyone: "Thou shalt be divorced", the fact remains that what is legalized is approved, and what is approved is very often adopted. It has been demonstrated over the years that the liberalization of divorce law has led to the increase of divorce action.

For example, the rate of divorce in this country increased from 6.4 divorces per 100,000 people in 1926 to 222 divorces per 100,000 people in 1975. The divorce rate grew approximately 35 times in those years. I will admit the cogency of what two writers on marriage and divorce law have said, namely, that legislative changes lag behind social reality. I will admit that the amendments we passed last week were an effort at legislative catch-up with social realities. However, let us also admit that legislative changes also shape social realities. We can expect that the amendments we passed, which I believe we rightly passed, will lead, not intentionally, but almost inevitably, to an increase in the number of divorces and the rate of divorce in Canada.

Therefore, I submit that we need some educational program that will provide a positive message to the country that Parliament is not simply saying that we will make divorce easier and quicker. We are not saying that. Rather, we are providing, through the amendments which we passed last week, a relief for those who rightly need it. At the same time, we are