

Children's Rights

I am not going into that here. We know, however, that psychopathic behaviour can be diagnosed very early in life. If we do not start diagnosing it early we will not solve that behaviour through the criminal justice system. We have not been able to in the past, and we will not in the future.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: These problems must be solved early. It is no good putting children in jail. Their behaviour should be examined and treated early and we should have the resources for such treatment. We must understand that a child has a right to be educated and that a child who is disabled has a right to be educated or treated. That includes a child with a psychopathic disorder.

We hear talk about the extended family and I think the hon. member for St. John's East has put his finger on the major problem in society. Uncles, aunts and cousins today are gone. That family group pressure was upon the parent to treat that child well, otherwise grandmother would come over to take the child away. That pressure is no longer there. We have replaced it with nothing. We have replaced it with the faceless bureaucracy that tries to solve the problem. The only way to solve it is with a bill of rights for children so children have rights and the doctor will not be worried about protecting the parents of a battered child. The refusal to report suspicious incidents of battered children is a national tragedy and is a situation occurring across Canada. We need to change the law and in order to do that we need to study that law.

● (1642)

I began my remarks by congratulating the hon. member for St. John's East, but I want to take issue with him on one point which he made. It was probably an offhand remark and it concerned the question of unwed mothers and children of unwed mothers. I happen to think that that child also has rights. If the wrong parent is the unwed mother, that child should not be routinely raised by the unwed mother. The rights of that child should be paramount, and what is best for that child must prevail.

Perhaps it is wrong in many circumstances for an unwed mother to say "I must cling to my child. After all, I have been through a tragedy and all I have out of this tragedy is my child". If that is the wrong thing for the child, I for one do not think we should have an unbending rule that says that that unwed mother should raise the child. Quite often an adopting family provides a far better atmosphere in which to bring up that child. Perhaps that is the only thing the hon. member and I have a disagreement about. He may have simply been expressing a preference in an individual case.

As I have said, I do not want to see this bill talked out. In order that that will not happen I would hope the House would now support the following motion which I propose. I move, seconded by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles):

That Bill C-243, an act respecting a Canadian Bill of Rights for Children, be not now read a second time, but that the order be discharged and the subject matter of the said bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

I put this motion, Mr. Speaker, realizing there may be some reluctance to accept an opposition member's bill by the committee. Surely the subject matter is well worth the study. Certainly the precedent has been well set in terms of the bill which dealt with the subject of pornography as well as the bill which dealt with the subject of the abuse of children in the way of television advertising. I would hope the House would support this motion.

Some hon. Members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. It is moved by Mr. Leggatt, seconded by Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre), that Bill C-243, an act respecting a Canadian Bill of Rights for Children, be not now read a second time but that the order be discharged and the subject matter of the said bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, I am sure members on the other side would not want to deny me an opportunity to say a few words—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Take five minutes.

Mr. Francis: I am sure the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) would not want to gag me in this House when I have some things I want to say.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No.

Mr. Francis: I have not had previous notice of the amendment. It does seem to me that the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs is about to have a number of very serious matters put before it. Before an amendment like this is adopted routinely there should be some consideration of what kind of attention the committee is prepared to give such a motion in the near future.

I want to commend the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) who introduced the motion. I have commended him on other occasions for the work he has done in the area of care for children. I am aware of his concern. He sets a very good example to members of the House in his own family life.

Without question his concern is a very real one. The cause which he has undertaken is one that will take a good deal of time, not only in this parliament but in subsequent parliaments. There is no easy resolution within our federal-provincial constitutional framework of the very complex matters raised. There is a very limited jurisdiction on the part of the federal authority as the hon. member would recognize; he is a lawyer and I am not.

When I listen to hon. members' stories about incidents of child abuse that live in their memories, there is one which will live with me as long as I am still rational and in possession of my faculties. When I was elected a member of the Ottawa city council in 1958 I was a new member of council and I had some