

Children's Rights

the rights of the child are far reaching, it should be composed of federal and provincial representatives that might consider the rights of children as proposed in this bill, such as their right to a proper education—although I appreciate the fact that education is still considered a provincial matter. The right of a child to a proper education in the seventies might include not only the opportunity or privilege to learn the other language but the absolute right to learn the other language. What is a proper education so far as children are concerned in the seventies in Canada?

● (1632)

If the task force is set up I hope it will take into account that the right of a child in British Columbia is to have one hour of French in school every day beginning in grade 2 or 3. I include Quebec in that; perhaps their right should be to have an hour or two of English every day. Aside from what rights bureaucrats think children should have, and aside from federal provincial jurisdictions we are speaking of the rights of children to travel from one province to another and to be able to speak both official languages. That too should be the right of children.

I know that the hon. member for St. John's East has taken into account the ten provinces and two territories and the complex jurisdictions relating to the designation and enforcement of rights of children in the various provinces. I say this is all the more reason we should set up a task force comprised of both federal and provincial representatives to enforce the rights of children across Canada.

I submit we need uniform legislation by virtue of a task force. I would disagree on only one point. Clause 4 of the bill reads as follows:

Such officers and employees as are necessary for the proper conduct of the work of the task force may be selected—

In other words, we wish to select the task force. It continues:—from among the public service of Canada and from among the public service of the provinces.

I would suggest that this task force be drawn from a broader spectrum of society such as is represented in the House of Commons. I should like to see lawyers, journalists, unionists, ministers, homemakers—people who, with all due respect, would not have a bureaucratic mind. The bureaucratic mind is worth while in some cases, but not in this case. I suggest it was the bureaucratic mind that ten years ago said: "Here we have poor little children so let us scatter them out like little puppy dogs or litters of kittens." I think we could enlarge the area from which members of the task force could be drawn.

I appreciate the fact that on December 21, 1976, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution declaring 1979 the International Year of the Child. That is all well and good, Mr. Speaker. A poster is fine, but what we need is a task force to go across the country making sure that children have their rights in the 1970s.

I hope the bill proposed by the hon. member for St. John's East will reach the committee stage and that we will soon have a task force bring in a report.

[Mr. Raines.]

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I should like to support the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) not only on this bill but I should also like to congratulate him on some other initiatives he has taken in the past. I think it is particularly important that we note the work he did with regard to children's advertising. I think that was one of the most effective contributions that a single member has ever made to this House, and I for one would like to congratulate him.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: I am disappointed, of course, that the recommendations from the committee in regard to that matter, which were unanimous, were not adopted in legislation. Nevertheless I hope the hon. member will continue to press for changes in the advertising laws. Surely if there is one right that children have, it is not to be abused by subliminal advertising.

With regard to this bill, Mr. Speaker, one of its key parts would set up a task force to examine the rights of children. One of the most important of these is the right not to live in abject poverty. As we look at changes in the law to provide some protection from battering and starvation and the agonies that children suffer, I hope we will keep in mind that the bottom 20 per cent of our population in terms of wealth distribution draws about 4 per cent of the gross national income. That condition has prevailed over the last 20 years and as long as it continues the abuses that the hon. member so eloquently referred to will continue. We allow families and children to live in abject poverty, which is one of the main reasons for the abuse of children.

One aspect of this subject that I want to deal with is education. This is one of the reasons I am so anxious that the bill not be talked out and that the subject matter go before the committee. A subcommittee comprised of all members of this House examined all the maximum security institutions in Canada. We found that the educational levels of inmates in those institutions averaged grade 8. Even more important, 40 or 50 per cent of those inmates suffered some kind of dyslexia, brain disfunction, or some learning disorder that was not diagnosed early in their lives. As a result, those individuals who were discarded by their peer group, discarded by their parents, discarded by the school system, decided they still had an ego and the only way to display that ego was to commit crime. As a result, they wound up in our institutions.

Surely one of the rights of children is the right to an education, and in order to give them that education we must have the facilities to diagnose learning disabilities. All across this country we continue to place children in what they call "special classes". In these there are children with I.Q.'s of 80 or 130, hyperactive children and children with a wide variety of learning disabilities. Surely those children should be diagnosed and treated as individuals.

There has been a fair amount of debate in this House and in the country on the question of the death penalty. That may or may not make a contribution to the criminal justice system but