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Measures now to protect children

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How many more must die?

Drastic measures must be taken to protect the nation's children from the sadism, stupidity, or irresponsibility of their parents and guardians.

No society, and indeed no animal species, can thrive or even survive for long without ways and means of protecting its young.

That is a fundamental law of nature which applies as much to humans as, quite literally, to the birds and the bees.

For a conscious species to deviate from that law spells only one thing: extinction. That was the fate of the ancient civilisation of Carthage, whose worship of Moloch consumed its children.

What new form of madness is it then, that this society has succumbed to wherein children are regularly neglected to the point of abuse and worse, brutalised to death?

A recently completed International Labour Organisation report identified considerable child labour in agriculture, domestic work, prostitution and pornography.

Pre-teens were found working in the Beetham and Forres Park labasses, and selling homosexual and heterosexual services on the streets.

In addition to poverty, the report identified causes in physical and sexual abuse of children, and neglect by parents and poor child-rearing practices.

The traditional West Indian methods of bringing up children, which favours a rigid and often brutal discipline, was counterproductive enough.

Every study has shown that the violent and disturbed children today, who wreak havoc on the society, are the products of parents who never spared the rod, never halted at humiliating a child, either out of frustration with their own circumstances or simply from sadism.

But now we seem to have gone further down that road.

How many children have been killed by parents or stepparents in the past five years?

Apart from the deliberate violence meted out to children, there is the irresponsibility or stupidity of parents who abandon their children, either permanently or repeatedly.

How many have been burnt to death, like seven-year-old Marcus Lawrence, because their parents left them alone at home?

It is inconceivable that the UNC could not support the proposed bills which seek to protect children and establish their specific rights.

But laws, no matter how stringent or effectively applied, are at best a stopgap measure.

The solution is not merely to punish parents and guardians for their brutality and even for their stupid, criminally negligent irresponsibility.

The goal, which even the law's big stick must reinforce, has to be education. A campaign, such as those against drug use and unprotected sex, must be launched.

The culture of child rearing as practised by too many Trinidadians must be changed. Abusing, humiliating and depriving children, wilfully or out of ignorance, must be seen for what it is: illegal, immoral and inhuman.

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