

Government Orders

However that is not the important point. The important point is that it was perceived and still is perceived by the people of Canada not to be working to the best effect that it could. We decided as part of our campaign strategy that we would agree to do something about the Young Offenders Act.

As soon as the Minister of Justice took office he began holding meetings with his colleagues in the Liberal Party to develop a strategy. The strategy that was developed was mentioned by my hon. friend, the last speaker. It was very clearly a two-stage process.

• (2015)

Stage one is to deal with the immediate concerns that we feel were brought to us by the people of Canada, namely, violent offenders, young offenders. Stage two is to conduct a complete, extensive section by section review of the act, taking as much time as is necessary, examining it in parliamentary committee, listening to the views and concerns of the Bloc Québécois, of the Reform Party, of the Liberal government and anybody else who feels like coming in. For example, the the NDP might want to come in and make a contribution.

When we take that second step process, we will then be able to examine and consider with the benefit of expert testimony and opinion the various points that have been made throughout this debate including, for example, lowering the age to whatever age it might be. Should it be 10? Should it be eight? Should it be seven as it was under the juvenile delinquents act? Why was it raised from seven to twelve? I do not know. Should it be moved down to 10? Should it be moved down to seven? These are the kinds of questions that are going to take some time to discuss.

In the meantime we have something in front of us, Bill C-37. I really only want to spend the few minutes that I have on three sections. I would ask colleagues on the other side whether they agree or disagree with the preambles found in section 1 of this act which I am going to read in their entirety as they would amend paragraph 3(1)(a) of the Young Offenders Act.

(a) crime prevention is essential to the long-term protection of society—

Who would argue that?

—and requires addressing the underlying causes of crime by young persons and developing multi-disciplinary approaches to identifying and effectively responding to children and young persons at risk of committing offending behaviour in the future;

All that says is that we have a problem. Let us see if we can figure out how to deal with it before the young offender offends.

(a.1) while young persons should not in all instances be held accountable in the same manner or suffer the same consequences for their behaviour as adults, young persons who commit offences should nonetheless bear responsibility for their contraventions.

With great respect, I doubt very much if there are too many Canadians who would disagree first, that people should bear responsibility for their contraventions and second, that children

are not adults. In my view children should not be treated in exactly the same way as adults.

Therefore the debate then becomes this. What is a child? Under what circumstances is the behaviour so egregious that it is necessary to take that child and say: "Okay, you are not a child. For the purposes of what you have done, you will be treated as an adult". Those circumstances are few and far between.

They are delineated in section 8 of the bill dealing with section 16 of the Young Offenders Act. Those are very clearly set out. If a young person is alleged to have committed first degree murder or second degree murder, the taking of a life, it is something that is sufficient to take them out of the realm of being dealt with as a child.

Second, attempting to commit murder, a very serious offence; manslaughter, technically one step below murder; aggravated sexual assault or aggravated assault, these are all violent crimes. They are the kinds of crimes which make people say that enough is enough, young people are not going to be allowed to do that and then be given the opportunity to be treated as if they had walked into a local Beckers store and stolen a chocolate bar because the two offences are entirely different.

While society might tolerate a 13-year old who goes in and steals a chocolate bar, a pen, some books or a girlie magazine or whatever it may be, they are not prepared to tolerate that kind of behaviour if someone takes a life. The bill says in those circumstances, if you are 16 or 17, you are going to be tried in adult court unless you can demonstrate why you should not be. Anytime a line is drawn, any line, some will say the age is too high and others will say the age is too low, but the fact is that lines have to be drawn. In this case it seems to me that 16 and 17 years of age is reasonable. You can drive a car at that age so if you are charged with committing a murder at that age, presumably you have the wherewithal to be able to be tried in adult court.

• (2020)

Now what about the perceptions of Canadians? I happen to have a petition signed by hundreds of people from the metropolitan Toronto area. I want to tell my friends in the Bloc that I absolutely refuse to believe that the people of metropolitan Toronto are any different from the people of Quebec, Montreal, Chicoutimi, or any other place when personal safety is at risk.

The petitioners believe what this petition states. Whether the stats are exact is irrelevant. That is what they believe and this is what they have signed: "Violent crime in Canada has increased by over 40 per cent since 1984. Youths age 12 to 17 although representing only 8 per cent of the population account for 23 per cent of all persons charged with criminal code offences". As I said, it is not relevant whether or not the figures are accurate to