

Government Orders

with intent or without intent other young people or adults, they should take the responsibility for their actions.

We are suggesting that 16 and 17-year olds are old enough to take that responsibility in an adult court situation. We are also suggesting that we cannot just forget about young people, 10 and 11 year olds, who have made a decision to commit crime, things that they know are wrong. We have to bring them into the system so that we can deal with the problem at that early age. If the problem is showing itself at 10 and 11 years it is very important that the system deal with that problem.

I suggest that when my colleagues from the Bloc say that people out west just want to lock away their kids and not deal with the problem, to ignore the problem, that perhaps they are ignoring the problem. Not too many weeks ago there was a 15-year old boy who was stabbed to death in Hull. Last week or perhaps the week before a 10-year old boy took two loaded handguns to school and threatened his classmates.

I suggest by not dealing with those problems, my colleagues are ignoring the problem in their province. If they really think that people in their province are not concerned about safety in their homes and on the streets and that young people bear the responsibility for their actions, they are fooling themselves. I do not think this problem only concerns western Canadians. I think it is a problem all Canadians are concerned about.

The results of various polls show that people in my constituency, representing all different classes of people and economic situations, feel that we have to lower the ages to 10 and 15 years old, and to let 16 and 17 year olds be dealt with in adult court. I received 3,500 replies to the poll included in my householder. Of those 3,500 replies over 90 per cent of the respondents were in favour of lowering the age.

This is not an insignificant number. Over 90 per cent of the respondents of 3,500 replies feel that the age limit should be lowered.

• (2010)

In a poll separate to mine taken by the community newspaper only 12.7 per cent of the readers who responded felt that the age limit should be kept the same. Over 80 per cent wanted either to eliminate the age restrictions with the Young Offenders Act or to lower them. I would suggest that I am in a position of representing my constituency. It may be in western Canada, but it is telling me loud and clear that my constituency feels one of the major changes the government should have considered in its amendment to the Young Offenders Act was to lower the ages.

I mentioned earlier that another concern of mine was reverse onus. It will not make any difference at all. I do not think we will see any changes in the numbers of young people who are raised to adult court. It certainly will not deal with offenders who are under 16. The present act as it stands right now allows 14-year-

olds and older to be raised to adult court. I do not see the same kind of conditions in this piece of legislation.

In summation, the only feeling of hope is that this is the first of two stages. The bill is only the first stage in amending the Young Offenders Act. The second stage, which is a 10-year review of the act, will allow the kinds of changes I feel Canadians are demanding, Canadians all across the country and not just in western Canada.

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough West): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to have the opportunity to say a few words on second reading of the bill. I have been listening carefully to comments by both the Official Opposition and the Reform Party in respect of the bill. I want to make a few preliminary remarks in that regard.

First, quite frankly the position of the Bloc Quebecois startles me. I was here in the last Parliament when the Conservative government introduced certain amendments to the Young Offenders Act. At that time the vast majority of members of Parliament from the province of Quebec were from the Conservative Party. They supported the bill. They supported the so-called strengthening of the Young Offenders Act at that time. They spoke as Quebecers, specifically stating that the people of Quebec wanted the Young Offenders Act strengthened, that there were problems with young offenders not only in Quebec but throughout Canada, and that it was necessary in order to make certain amendments.

Unless I am not hearing things clearly, it would seem as if there has been a startling transformation in the opinions of the people of the province of Quebec as represented by the Bloc Quebecois. I find that a bit hard to believe. I am very interested in knowing where they are coming from. I find they are literally coming out of left field. They are not representing the people of the province of Quebec as I understood the concerns of the people of the province of Quebec for five years prior to the last election. Maybe things have changed but I honestly do not believe so. I have to discount much of what the Bloc Quebecois is saying with respect to the bill.

Until I start hearing some realistic comment and I start hearing some acknowledgement that the Young Offenders Act applies exactly the same way throughout the country or does not apply exactly the same way throughout the country rather than hearing that those in Quebec do this and that as if there were a different Young Offenders Act in the province of Quebec, that is absolutely untrue because the Young Offenders Act applies from coast to coast to coast.

With that said let me turn then to the bill and to the approach we in the Liberal Party have decided to take with respect to young offenders. We do not pretend that the act is perfect. We never have. It was clearly stated in the red book and in our campaign that we acknowledged the people of Canada were not happy, if nothing else, with the perception of how the Young Offenders Act was working. It may have been working extremely well. I am not one who believes it was but it may have been.