

● (1115)

In addition to these areas, as Minister of Justice I hope to be introducing to the House, within the next several months, suggested amendments to the Divorce Act. Particular attention will be given to improving the law with respect to the enforcement of maintenance orders. This will ensure that people who are awarded maintenance, and who badly need to be supported, can receive that support in a more effective manner, or can enforce the orders for maintenance and support that they obtain. We also hope to improve the mediation process in connection with the whole area of divorce. In addition to the legislation in that area, I hope to keep the NDP critic busy.

We will be bringing in legislation immediately after Christmas which will deal with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which was enacted as part of our Constitution in 1982. That legislation will amend many of the statutes of Canada because of inconsistencies with the provisions of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In addition, there are areas of great importance in which it is not clear whether particular provisions of the present Canadian legal system are in violation of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I will be asking the House to consider those areas and to give advice on areas of great difficulty and subtlety. It should be an extremely interesting and important subject of discussion in committee, as well as in the House. As I have said, there will be legislation introduced in the House as soon as possible after the Christmas break.

I am also charged with the responsibility of suggesting to the Government policies and positions with respect to the issue of the constitutional conference, which must be held by April 17 of next year, on aboriginal issues. I am currently involved in becoming properly briefed and understanding what the issues are, in order to prepare for that conference. My colleague the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Crombie) and myself have already met. As well, we will be meeting with the provinces and representatives of aboriginal groups to prepare for that most important constitutional conference.

How do I want to approach the justice area? As I see it, it is largely an area which is non-partisan. That is the way in which I intend to approach it. In other words, if anyone has suggestions, no matter who they might be—they might even be a member of the NDP, not to say the Liberal Party—the suggestions will be treated on their merits. Of course, I would be surprised if their suggestions have any merits, but it will all be dealt with in a non-partisan manner. If there are any suggestions from the Conservative caucus, of course, they will be treated in the same manner.

Seriously speaking, I view most of this area as being one which is not very partisan, and I would want to approach it in that sense. I would be amenable to changes which are introduced if they appear to be sensible and reasonable. Nothing could be more sensible and reasonable than that. I am prepared to listen to critics of both the NDP and Liberal Parties, and if their suggestions are worth-while, I would certainly be prepared to make changes in accordance therewith. I am

Courts Amendment Act

interested in seeing the law reformed and changed, but only after it has been given sufficient thought.

● (1120)

I do not want to rush at things or endanger individual rights because there is a certain evil present in society. I do not want to change the law too rapidly in order to try to eradicate that particular anti-social behaviour and in so doing endanger everyone's individual rights. We must be extremely careful of what we do in the areas of pornography, child abuse, hate propaganda, soliciting and the like, in order to ensure that we take a balanced approach and act with concern and compassion, that we do not panic in our desire to improve society and to do away with the social evil. I want to be careful in this regard as I am a believer, Mr. Speaker, in individual rights, particularly in these areas.

I will be asking the House of Commons standing committee for its views and opinions on matters which go before it or on matters to which it might be referred.

With respect to judges, Mr. Speaker, I will be introducing amendments to the Judges Act as well later on. I am now considering the question of salaries and the emoluments of judges. There was a report made by Mr. Otto Lang in committee about a year and a half ago, I believe, with respect to statutory provisions concerning compensation for judges and what should be done. No action was taken in connection with that report. Therefore, the issue of compensation for our judges who are appointed by the Government of Canada to the provincial Superior Courts, District and County Courts, as well as our own Federal Court, is a matter which must be dealt with by the House in the next few months as well.

I have to act, Mr. Speaker, as spokesman for our judges who are not in the position to act publicly, in any event, with respect to their own interests and concerns. They are appointed to the bench and cannot involve themselves in public debate or controversy. The position of the Minister of Justice, therefore, is that he must act as their representative and I intend to do so. If I feel that their needs are clear and that certain actions should be taken which are fair and equitable, even if they might be controversial and not popular with the public, I will put forward their case and ask the House to be sympathetic in its decision as to what should be done in connection with salaries and other provisions relating to the judges of this country, who have an extremely difficult task, Mr. Speaker, a task which has become of tremendously increased significance since we adopted the Constitution in 1982 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Our judges have been given by the people of this country, or their representatives, tremendous powers to decide whether legislation is valid or invalid, whether or not it is in order and whether or not it corresponds with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We need, therefore, a first-class bench. We need first-class men and women appointed to the judiciary of this country who will act as our judges, and the events of the last several years have given that need even greater importance.