

Young Offenders Act

the chronic shortage of resources to deal with victims of abuse, whether it be sexual abuse or physical abuse.

There is no excuse in a civilized society for us failing to respond to the cries of our young people, young people who are abused, and then when they lash out in desperation and engage in criminal acts, according to the Hon. Member for Scarborough—Agincourt, we throw them into jail with adult offenders. We all know some of the consequences of that.

The approach suggested by the Hon. Member is fundamentally misguided. We should be putting more resources into prevention of crime among young people. We should be recognizing the concerns about regional disparities. If necessary, we should also recognize that the present choice which confronts judges between a sentence of a maximum of three years for murder, or a maximum of life with no parole for 25 years, may in fact be too harsh. Perhaps there should be provision, as has been suggested by Professor Bala of Queen's University, for some discretion in the hands of the judge.

You are signalling that my time on this issue is coming to an end, Mr. Speaker. I would appeal to the Hon. Member to reconsider this legislation, to consult with his colleagues, consult with those in the field, and to recognize that the legislation is premature.

We as a society have a responsibility to our young people not to condemn them to the adult penal system, but where there is hope for rehabilitation to seize that opportunity to work with the young people and to do what we can to ensure that they do become productive citizens in our society. Prevention is the key and recognizing that there must be a different approach. That is not the response of the Hon. Member for Scarborough—Agincourt. For that reason, I speak strongly against the proposed legislation.

Mrs. Christine Stewart (Northumberland): Mr. Speaker, I want to say that being present in the House today I was asked to second my colleague's Bill this afternoon. Affirming what was stated by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Burnaby—Kingsway (Mr. Robinson), I felt that it was my responsibility to do so in that I respect the right of all my colleagues in the House to have time to express their opinions on various subjects. However, that does not mean that I support the Bill of my colleague.

In my own riding and in my own acquaintance I have many friends and colleagues who are involved in trying to deal with the Young Offenders Act. Many of them have expressed great frustration with certain aspects of it. I do have the opinion that we must review the Young Offenders Act, which is going to be done, and look at several aspects of it that bear revision, not merely the transfer of young offenders. People have expressed to me great frustration with regard to the anonymity aspect of the Young Offenders Act, and the ability of young offenders to reject psychiatric treatment. Victim's families are very frustrated by some of the inadequacies of the Young Offenders Act and the court's legal systems in trying to help youth and protect victims and victims' families.

• (1740)

My colleague, in introducing his Bill, explained himself, in his own good words, why his suggestion was inappropriate. It is true that there are youth who are exploited by hardened criminals. This is a fact and we cannot have youth bearing the injury for that injustice.

We must address this Young Offenders Act. I cannot agree with my colleague's method of redressing it, but I would urge the House to reconsider the Act.

Mr. Girve Fretz (Erie): Mr. Speaker, the Bill tabled by the Hon. Member for Scarborough—Agincourt (Mr. Karygiannis), to amend the Young Offenders Act with respect to its provisions for murder addresses a very difficult issue.

I say this because the answers cannot be found just in our criminal laws. Rather, this issue is one that seems to demand that we meet our obligation as federal Members of Parliament to ensure that the criminal law is sound. But this issue also makes important demands of our provincial and territorial colleagues who have the responsibility for ensuring sound administration of the Young Offenders Act.

I begin my comments with this thought because, in my view, the past several months bear testimony to the fact that there is considerable confusion, if the media coverage of this issue is any indication, as to which government is responsible for what. It would appear that we as legislators have come to receive all the pressure for resolving the problem of youth involved in violent crime.