

Government Orders

The whole issue of firearms comes to mind when I read that young people still have access to such weapons. This morning again, there was a story involving military firearms. There are so many firearms.

This is another aspect, but I want to go back to the main issue. What is needed is some positive action to convince young people to get involved in the community, on a volunteer basis or otherwise. But, first, the message conveyed by our leaders must be a positive one. It must be a message of hope telling young people that they have an interesting future ahead, instead of being about harsher sentences and incarceration.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve—Human Rights.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Madam Speaker, I would like to address a question to my colleague. Does he believe that the proposed amendments to the Young Offenders Act in this bill go in the right direction? If he does not, what legislative provisions would he propose in addition to the usual request for more social programming and counselling services?

If the bill says the wrong things—and I believe he is taking that tack—what does he propose other than throwing more money at the problem with increased social services?

[Translation]

Mr. Dubé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for asking this question. I thought I had said it rather clearly in my speech. We in the Official Opposition feel that this act already provides sufficient punitive measures and that we should instead—and this is really the crux of today's debate—be considering the need for additional resources to rehabilitate young people and reintegrate them into society—in short, preventive measures.

A parallel can be drawn with the health field, where money spent on prevention may seem like a lot initially, but pays long-term dividends. This is particularly true for young people. If we are harder on a young offender and send him to an adult prison, which is a highly criminalized environment, what will happen? In all likelihood—and I am tempted to use the word guarantee here—that young person will turn to a life of crime. Instead, we should tell the young offender: "You have done something wrong and you must acknowledge that fact, but we are giving you a chance to start over again". That is very important.

My colleague's question also indicates, quite obviously, that there are two countries within this country. I can understand the Reform Party members, they represent the views of their constituents; and I will admit that the newspapers clearly show that this is a major public concern, and I can understand that. But in Quebec—I must say this because it is the role of a member of Parliament to advocate the interests and demands of his constituents—there is no such collective reaction against young offenders. Yes, the issue remains a concern, but not on the same order of magnitude.

In the present federal system, the Criminal Code must be enforced the same way in every province, and I find that unfortunate. Clearly, some people, particularly in Western Canada, are not happy with the act in its present form. In Quebec, we are satisfied with the act as it now stands. It is often said that this is a big country. Now, that is all well and good, but when you try to dress everyone in the same clothes—tall, short, fat, thin—you find that "one size fits all" sometimes does not apply. I am drawing this parallel simply to illustrate my point, but I do feel that it is the essence of what I wanted to say. I see a difference of opinion, and we in the Bloc, obviously, say that the status quo is better in this case.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Madam Speaker, for the information of the House and also because my fellow Bloc member mentioned a case in Quebec where a taxi driver was killed by a young offender, I just want to say that the act was correctly applied to this person by the courts in Quebec, in that there was a request for transfer to adult court, and in fact, this young person was transferred to adult court. He will be treated as an adult and will be sentenced as an adult, if he is found guilty. So in the present legislation, we have all the instruments we need to do this. The problem is one of enforcement, and I think the Bloc Quebecois tends to emphasize this because the problem is really how the law is enforced.

And this week, I was very surprised to see the crime statistics. If we look at the figures, and all the newspapers reported the Statistics Canada survey which tells us that the crime rate has not increased since 1988, even in the case of young offenders, and I must say this is even more encouraging, and it seems the number of all types of crimes went down during the same period.

• (1705)

I have a question for the hon. member, if he would care to answer. I realize this bill did not come from the Bloc Quebecois, because it would never have made it to the House, but I would appreciate it if the hon. member would explain to the House why we have a bill that is so repressive—we have always had a problem with young offenders, and as long as murders are committed by young offenders, the problem will exist—when the statistics clearly show the problem is not as serious as one would have us believe in this House. There has been no shocking increase in the youth crime rate, so why introduce a bill at the