

Adjournment Debate

could be used in adult court when a young person continued his criminal behaviour into adulthood.

The emphasis of the old Act on the needs of the offender was particularly evident in its dispositional or sentencing provisions. When the juvenile court found that sanctions such as probation were not sufficient to deal with an individual, the Act provided for the case to be transferred to the care of child welfare authorities, rather than ordering a specific sentence which would be served under the jurisdiction of the criminal justice system.

By way of contrast, the Young Offenders Act has clearly acknowledged that young people are responsible for their illegal behaviour and that society has a fundamental right to protection. The new legislation has not abandoned the principle that young people have special needs that demand the attention of the juvenile justice system and society as a whole, but it places this issue in perspective. The principle that the protection of society must be a primary concern is reflected in the legislation.

For example, the Act authorizes police to take fingerprints, just as they do when investigating adult offenders, as was mentioned by the Hon. Member. Criminal records are now clearly available to the criminal justice system, including the adult court, unless they are subject to destruction following a specified period of crime-free behaviour by the young person. Under the new legislation young offenders are subject to incarceration in correctional facilities and remain under the jurisdiction of the youth court throughout their sentences. As a result, a young person must serve the entire sentence in custody unless the youth court authorizes early release.

For the most serious of cases, the act permits a youth court to transfer a serious charge to adult court. Where such a transfer is ordered, the youth will be subject to all the penalties that an adult would face, up to and including life imprisonment.

It is fully appreciated that in implementing such important changes in the orientation of juvenile justice, difficulties will be encountered and some of these require legislative change. The Solicitor General has held consultations in Vancouver, Toronto, Regina, Montreal, and Moncton to discuss the Act with representatives of police departments, youth courts, private sector agencies dealing with young offenders, and other groups involved in youth justice in Canada, including his counterparts in the provinces and territories.

In summary, I would like to assure the Hon. Member that the Minister is well apprised of the concerns with the Young Offenders Act and is prepared to respond fairly and effectively to those areas which clearly require change.

● (1810)

BANKRUPTCY ACT—PROVISIONS AFFECTING FARMERS AND FISHERMEN. (B) ROLE OF ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE

Mr. Vic Althouse (Humboldt-Lake Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to pursue this afternoon a question I addressed to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Wise) on Monday.

Farmers across the country were encouraged early last month when the Minister of Agriculture promised to address the serious farm debt crisis in Canada. They thought that finally the Government was beginning to take charge. "I plan", said the Minister in his speech on December 2, "to bring to Cabinet before the end of this year new financial measures through the Farm Credit Corporation to address the serious financial needs of Canada's farmers".

That sounded like a commitment, even to members of the public used to empty promises. However, the Minister of Agriculture went even further in December and said:

I want to give these producers legislation with teeth—legislation that will bring farmers and creditors together to work out reasonable solutions. And where solutions can't be agreed on, farmers will have the option of appealing to the courts.

Finally, the Minister claimed, and again these are his words: This is an urgent priority and you can count on action before Christmas.

That sounds an awful lot like a promise. Yet on Monday of this week the Minister modified his position and said that action before Christmas had only been his "hope" and perhaps his "wish". The economic future of agriculture does not rely on the "hopes" and "wishes" of the Minister. It relies upon action. Why has the Minister of Agriculture changed his tune? That was the question I was asking. Is it because the Minister, in spite of what he says in the House and throughout the country, accepts the position of the major banks? They are saying that things are not that bad in the farm sector. Does the Minister agree with that assessment? If so, does he also suggest, as the major bankers do, that a debt write-down and a debt moratorium on loans held by bankers would be "ill-considered"? In short, is the Minister now siding with the banks against the farmers? Is that why we saw no action before Christmas? Surely the Minister knows the agriculture sector better than that.

The second alternative would be that the Minister could not get any action on such policy through the Cabinet. Perhaps the Cabinet does not recognize the importance of this matter even though the Minister does.

There are some Conservative ideologues in the Cabinet who argued publicly, before becoming Cabinet Ministers, that it is everyone's economic right to fail and that the free enterprise system cannot prove it is working unless there are a lot of failures, showing that it is doing its job of weeding out some people. Unfortunately, people who are being weeded out in the farm sector right now are some of the most productive and youngest entrants to that sector of our economy. The Minister seems to have a lot of convincing to do, and I think it is time that he stood up to the Cabinet and let it know that this is an important matter and that agriculture does matter in this country. If he fails to convince Cabinet on the basis of farm financing, what can farmers expect to get out of free trade negotiations into which the Government is leading us?

In light of the confusion that has been raised in the minds of farmers by the vacillation of the Minister, I think it is time today that the Minister clarify the position of the Government and let farmers know just what he is proposing to do and