

Government Orders

The member is also surely aware, from what the Minister of Justice has said, that he wants to address this issue in two steps: the first step being the amendments which he proposed last week and which are being undertaken, as you said so well, without first knowing the results of the 1992 amendments. The Act is therefore being reworked again before those results are even known. The second step will take the form of large-scale consultations on the entire young offenders issue, possibly resulting in a report to the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, along with proposed amendments to the Young Offenders Act. This is just one more snag for the Young Offenders Act, which was passed in 1984.

• (1605)

I have two questions for the member, Madam Speaker, which can be answered quickly. First of all, does the member find this to be a normal process in dealing with an issue as important as young offenders? Second, do this process and the amendments proposed by the minister—although she did touch on this point in her address—conform to Quebec's expectations concerning this issue, and in particular the expectations communicated very clearly to the federal justice minister by the National Assembly and the provincial minister of justice?

Mrs. Tremblay: I thank my colleague for his congratulations and his two questions. The process seems quite abnormal to me. If the minister had made a career in the same field as I did, and if he had applied for a grant to bring new amendments without first awaiting the results of a previous amendment, he would never have got the grant. It makes absolutely no sense to make amendments without really knowing the results of previous amendments.

In my opinion, therefore, since this is a two-stage process, it would be logical for the minister to be patient, wait for the second stage and postpone his bill for the time being. He is sending us on vacation but not sending our young people to jail as he does with this bill. The presumption of transfer to adult court is a problem that will increase the enforcement requirements of this Act, although he seems to say somewhere between the lines that it will be possible, for anyone so inclined, not to follow the Act and perhaps to circumvent it.

Now, as for Quebec's position, the only thing I find to cheer about in this bill, if one can say anything good about it, is that it gives me one more argument in favour of voting for Quebec sovereignty. Once again, the federal government is turning a deaf ear to Quebec concerning an Act that, while it could always be improved, is working very well in Quebec. The federal government will not win points in Quebec by making amendments such as these. It is showing us again that we have one more reason to leave this country which is not ours.

[English]

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Training and Youth)): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak today in support of the government's recent actions to crack down on violent young offenders who commit serious crimes.

As a preamble to my speech, we all have responsibilities in this country that we should not predicate the effectiveness of programs on what our political agendas are. I think we have a responsibility for the young people of this country and this piece of legislation and the amendments are clearly to address the needs that are there.

I am happy to be a member of Parliament and a contributing member so to speak who will perhaps add to a healthy debate and make viable suggestions that would fortify the country, bring people together and carve out a future for young people in this country rather than talk about some rather destructive means that would not bring any enjoyment or any good health to the country such as it is.

I am pleased that on June 2 the Minister of Justice tabled amendments to the Young Offenders Act. These amendments recognize the public's growing concern about youth violence and demonstrate the priority this government places on protecting the public.

These amendments, by shifting the onus on young people to take responsibility for their violent crimes, sends a strong signal to young people that their actions carry serious consequences. We are a country that basically wants Canadians to know that we all have a responsibility for our country and consequently for our actions.

• (1610)

However, as the Minister of Justice made clear, legislation is only one part of the answer to violence among young people. Protecting the public is the primary and necessary objective but we must focus our attention on helping our young people if we are to find lasting and effective solutions to youth crime.

I am encouraged to see that the amendments to the Young Offenders Act include provisions for the rehabilitation and treatment of young offenders in the community. There are many complex questions surrounding youth crime, questions that the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs will be examining as part of the reform of the youth justice system.

I welcome the opportunity to work with my colleagues in the House to take action on the contributing factors to crime and violence such as unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, drug and substance abuse, family violence, racism and illiteracy.