

Young Offenders Act, but they were not given sufficient opportunity to consider the Bill as proposed.

The Bill was introduced for first reading about a month and a half ago, but it was not brought back for second reading until sometime later. We were told time and time again that it was an extremely urgent piece of legislation, yet the Government waited a full month before it brought the Bill back for consideration in order to refer it to committee. Once the Bill got to committee, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the committee was given a very limited period of time in which to deal with the legislation. We were continually rushed. The Solicitor General (Mr. Beatty) and his Department kept telling us that public safety was threatened. We did not hear from groups that should have been before committee to give us their perspective of the Bill. We did rush it through. There were agreements by all three political Parties to expedite the Bill. We in the Official Opposition indicated at the outset that we would not obstruct the Bill, that we intended to move amendments to the Bill but we wanted to see speedy passage of it.

I wonder whether we have done a disservice to the Young Offenders Act by rushing this Bill through as quickly as we have. It is an improvement of sorts, but the Bill could have been made even better had the Government adopted some of the amendments proposed by the Official Opposition. The Government, because it is the Government, is always reluctant to adopt recommendations and amendments by the Opposition. I guess the New Democratic Party is so frustrated by this whole process that it did not even propose any further amendments at report stage. Some of the concerns of the New Democratic Party were addressed by certain amendments that were adopted at committee. Some of those concerns, if not all, were concerns of the Liberal Opposition as well. We were appreciative of the fact that we were able to move some of those amendments at committee and that they were all adopted by the Government. However, most of them were technical in nature. We believe that some of the substantive motions we moved today would have improved the legislation. I suppose there will be other opportunities in the future to deal with the Young Offenders Act. Even though this Bill continues to be flawed to a certain degree, I hope the public will accept the principles underlying this piece of legislation.

● (1650)

I must say publicly that I am pleased that the Government did not move any amendments to the Young Offenders Act which would derogate from the basic principles of the Act. I know that there are those in society who would have preferred major amendments to the Bill which would have attacked the very heart of the legislation. For example, there are those who argued that the three-year maximum period of incarceration provided for under the Young Offenders Act was too short. They want that period extended to five, six, or seven years. I am glad the Government resisted in that area.

I am appreciative as well that the Government resisted the arguments to reduce the age of criminal responsibility from 12.

### *Message from The Senate*

Police forces from across Canada argued that the age of criminal responsibility should be reduced from 12. I am not sure what age they wanted to reduce it to, but the Government resisted, and that provision of the Bill remains.

We in the Opposition believe very strongly that young people under the age of 12 should not be held criminally responsible. We fail as a society when youngsters aged 6 to 11 commit Criminal Code offences. The parents of an offender of that age must take considerable responsibility. Rather than subjecting a child of tender age to criminal prosecution we believe that those children should be treated through mechanisms put in place at the provincial level through social services programs available in the provinces of Canada. I am glad that the Government did not change that age provision in the Young Offenders Act.

In conclusion, the Bill which we are passing today is a step in the right direction, but not a big enough step. If the Government had adopted the 20 amendments which the Liberal Opposition proposed, it would have been a giant step in the right direction. The Bill would still have been slightly flawed, but there is no Bill which is absolutely perfect. Had the Government listened to the Official Opposition and adopted those amendments, this would have been a near perfect piece of legislation which would have been the pride of this Parliament. It would have been one of the finest pieces of legislation to come out of this Parliament in the last two years.

I hope that all those involved with young offenders across the country will be happy with this legislation and will work together to ensure that when we deal with young offenders in Canada we consider first and foremost their best interests rather than treating them as adult offenders. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at third reading.

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[*Translation*]

### MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest):** I have the honour to inform the House that the Senate has passed Bill C-93, relating to self-government for the Sechelt Indian Band without amendment.

### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

#### YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT, CRIMINAL CODE, PENITENTIARY ACT AND THE PRISONS AND REFORMATORIES ACT

MEASURE TO AMEND

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. MacKay (for the Solicitor General of Canada) that Bill C-