

Adjournment Debate

sexual offenders found to be dangerous on sentencing by the courts.

● (1820)

This is a shocking report in the extent to which it documents child and sexual abuse in Canada. It is a 1,300 page indictment of governments, both provincial and federal, for having failed to respond to what is clearly a national tragedy.

It is particularly appropriate as we approach the international year of youth that this government be called upon to make a commitment, a commitment to Canada's young people, that this problem, this crisis of child sexual abuse will be dealt with, and dealt with in a serious and responsible way. The extent and scope of the problem has been clearly and eloquently documented by the Badgley Commission. They have made a number of recommendations which touch on both provincial and federal jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker.

I was most disappointed to note that the Throne Speech made no reference whatsoever to the report of the Badgley Commission on Child Sexual Abuse. I can only hope that the rather more general commitment in the Throne Speech to assistance to victims of family violence will also include immediate attention to the victims of child sexual abuse.

One of the most urgent recommendations of the Badgley Commission Report is the establishment of the office of a special commissioner who would report directly to the Prime Minister. Similar offices have been created in response to concerns in the areas of human rights and the status of women. The Government of Canada has established special bodies to respond to concerns in that area. The Badgley Commission Report recommended that the Government of Canada should establish an office of the commissioner reporting directly to the office of the Prime Minister which could be assigned the authority to review the many recommendations of the Badgley Commission Report, and basically serve as an agency which would initiate and co-ordinate the reforms which are called for at the federal level, and also ensure that both provincial governments and municipal governments respond as is appropriate.

In response to my question, the Minister of Justice indicating that he would be meeting with his colleagues at the provincial level in St. John's, I believe, on November 23, and meet they did. Arising from that meeting with his colleagues there was no reference whatever in the communique, certainly no public reference, to the very serious problems which were documented by the report of the Badgley Commission.

I hope the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada (Mr. Speyer) will rise and give the House some indication of what the response will be of the Government both to these recommendations and the urgent recommendation with respect to the establishment of an office of the commissioner to co-ordinate the Government's response at the federal level.

This report cries out for action, and action now. There are no children in the House of Commons, but we have a special

trust and a special obligation to speak on their behalf, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chris Speyer (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Sexual Offences Against Children carried out a great deal of work in preparing its report which, as the Hon. Member indicated, was published on August 22, 1984. The committee was chaired by Dr. Badgley of Toronto. In fulfilling its mandate it met with concerned groups and received over 250 written submissions, as well as conducting a research program which included national surveys on sexual child abuse. I do not think the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) overstates the case when he says the report is highly disturbing to anybody with any sensitivity.

Given the multi-faced dimensions of its terms of reference, this inquiry required contributions and co-operation with the provinces, with the municipalities in the legal and social fields.

The Hon. Member for Burnaby asked what we are going to do; what this Government plans to do about the problem and the recommendations submitted to the Committee? The answer is relatively simple. The Government is going to take steps to deal with the problem and to make Canada a safer country for children. But effective changes involving many disciplines and requiring close co-operation of the three levels of government cannot take place overnight, as desirable as that may be.

For example, consider the total number of recommendations made by the committee. There are a total of 52 recommendations, of which at least 30 call for a potential federal legislative response. Changes to the Criminal Code and to the Canada Evidence Act are the responsibility of the Minister of Justice. Before these can be acted upon, it will be necessary to review each proposed change with the provinces, the Crown prosecutors' office, the defence bar and the police community. Action will be forthcoming. It will be forthcoming promptly.

● (1825)

Several recommendations call for the strengthening of services to children. While most of these require provincial leadership, in the case of victim compensation there is a clear overlap into federal jurisdiction. It is imperative to recognize that implementation of these recommendations is a complex undertaking. With this fact in mind, a number of steps have already been undertaken in relation to the committee's findings.

The Departments of Justice and National Health and Welfare, the Ministries of the Solicitor General and Secretary of State, and Status of Women of Canada have formed an interdepartmental committee to co-ordinate the federal work. Officials of my Department consulted with the Canadian Council on Children and Youth in August, and a national consultation day in association with the Fifth International Congress on Child Abuse was held in Montreal in September. The response of non-governmental child care organizations in