

Government Orders

What I am hearing from the hon. member is that the Liberal Party wants to appease the Reform. I do not think the Liberal Party brought these changes about because of the Reform Party. For a long time the Liberal Party has been a beacon for changes to the Young Offenders Act. Certainly I disagree with what my colleague is saying.

My colleague is saying that in a civilized world we should have something which is called an adolescent. This young individual who snuffed three lives was not an adolescent; he had already moved into the adult world. He committed a crime. As the saying goes: You do the crime, you pay the time.

I heard with great interest my hon. colleague saying that we do not need prisons, that we need rehabilitation. I quite agree we need rehabilitation.

What in the hon. member's view should a young offender get for committing a severe crime, such as a killing or a rape? Do we say: "You are a nice adolescent so don't worry about it. We will give you a pat on the back because you are not old enough to do it", or: "You did the crime, you pay the time"?

Closer to home, if a young offender were to kill a member of the hon. member's family, how would she want to see justice served? What kind of time would that young offender be paying?

[Translation]

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Madam Speaker, it must be understood that I never said that teenagers, including criminals, were all very nice individuals. Let us not get carried away.

I think that it is extremely important to realize that there are around two million teenagers in Canada and that the member is talking about something that happened three years ago in his riding. One out of two million, that is not a lot to justify amending an act. According to statistics, over the past 20 years, around 46 teenagers a year commit odious crimes.

• (1600)

The example given by my colleague clearly proves that the problem is not with the act or sentencing, but with the enforcement of the legislation. If, in his riding, this odious murderer had been tried in adult court, as allowed under the present legislation, he would have been sentenced accordingly. He would have received a life sentence, Madam Speaker, not three years.

It must be understood that once again, the member, with his question, is providing me with a beautiful opportunity to make my point, a point which is in keeping with the question he asked me.

[English]

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Madam Speaker, my colleague in her speech mentioned that the

preamble of the amendments to the Young Offenders Act falls very short. What does my colleague from Quebec say about what should be the balance between the needs of the victim and the needs of the offender as outlined in the preamble as to the general direction the act should be administered?

I noticed the word "victim" is not mentioned at all in the preamble. I would like her views on the balance between victim's needs and offender's needs, especially as it should be outlined in the preamble of the Young Offenders Act.

[Translation]

Mrs. Tremblay: Madam Speaker, I think we need to make a distinction between the various types of crimes. There are the serious, horrible and unacceptable crimes, which should be dealt with before adult courts, as stipulated in the current legislation.

Now, for all the other types of crimes, we know that the majority of crimes committed by young people are property offences. The most important thing is to find a way to allow the young offenders to directly compensate their victims. Let me give you an example.

If we were to ask a 14- or 15-year-old who broke into my house to mow my lawn for a whole summer, I think that might serve as compensation for the crime and as a constant reminder to the offender of what he did wrong. That could improve relations in our society. I would probably lock my doors while he mowed the lawn, but still there may be some innovative alternatives to intolerance and repression.

Teenagers and children are victims. They were not born this way. We have to understand that they are not totally responsible for their actions. The economic and social conditions in which we have them live and the school situation they find themselves in have a significant impact on the lives of 14- to 18-year-olds. When they need to identify with someone, there is no one around: their fathers are gone, their mothers have new boy-friends or vice versa. They change home every week, they never live at the same place, they have problems at school. We built them huge schools where they do not feel as though they belong. All of these things make life very difficult for our young people. That is why they are constantly testing society to see what is allowed and what is forbidden.

The more innovative and tolerant we are towards young offenders, in order to give them the opportunity to right the wrongs they did, the better their chances for rehabilitation.

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the member for Rimouski—Témiscouata. I think she understands the problem of young offenders and she presented the issue quite well.