

Criminal Code

[English]

This bill is identified, and will be identified in the future, with the indelible imprint of our Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). It was he who had the courage to assemble it, to introduce it into parliament and to defend it across the land under the sharp scrutiny of a general election. If ever, then, there was a legislative measure that has been tested by public opinion and received a popular mandate, if ever the people of Canada have been given an opportunity to participate in public debate surrounding a legislative measure, it is this omnibus Criminal Code bill. We in this House of Commons, sir, have had a full opportunity to review and discuss it. The people of Canada have had every opportunity to look at it and to talk about it.

Since assuming this portfolio I have received representations, both public and private, from every quarter. I am glad to say that I sought all the advice I could from whoever would give it to me. I am grateful to those in the house and outside the house who have made their views known to me. I particularly want to thank, of course, the members of the legal profession from whom we heard. I am grateful to the memberships of the various delegations who came to see us, and I thank the thousands of individual citizens who expressed their opinions to me.

We were, of course, in touch with the provincial Attorneys General, and with the permission of the house I should like to table at this time the correspondence sought earlier by the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Woolliams) between the various Attorneys General of the provinces and the government of Canada.

Mr. Nielsen: It is a little late now.

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): I said that I would submit it at the appropriate time. With the permission of the house I should like to table it now.

Mr. Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

● (3:10 p.m.)

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): It took some time, I might say, to obtain the necessary consent of the Attorneys General, which explains in some measure the delay in tabling the documents. As will be seen from a comparison of Bill C-150 with the earlier Bill C-195, the representations we received did

[Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton).]

result in certain changes. Finally, I am grateful to all hon. members from all parties who gave me their advice and counsel and understanding.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, this bill is not easy to read. It contains 120 clauses in 126 pages. It takes a stand on some of the controversial questions of our time. Some of them pertain to the most inner part of our lives: life itself, death and the most delicate personal relations between human beings. I would be amazed indeed if even one of the hon. members showed an equal enthusiasm for all of the 120 proposals. Who could expect that? Any amendment to the Criminal Code induces controversy. Our response to this bill will depend upon our tolerance and our understanding of the needs of a pluralist society, a society where everyone must strive to reconcile his opinions and personal beliefs, including the ones dearest to his heart, with those of his neighbours, who are also earnest and sincere.

This bill will also test our respect for the sacredness of the law. It will prompt many of us to search their own hearts thoroughly.

[English]

Some hon. members have had to struggle with themselves to accept this bill. Some have had to struggle mightily because it deals with fundamental concepts. I understand this, and the Prime Minister and members of the government understand it. I hope nothing I say today or in the later stages of this bill will give any hon. member any impression other than that I deeply respect the consciences and private convictions of all hon. members.

Mr. McGrath: Will the minister permit a question?

Mr. Turner (Ottawa-Carleton): With the indulgence of the hon. member I will, at the end of my speech. I know the pressures to which a good many hon. members are subjected, and I respect them. Nevertheless, I believe that all the provisions of this bill are beneficial and in the best public interest, and I hope the measure I am introducing this afternoon will eventually find favour with the majority of hon. members and, even more important, meet with the approval of most of our fellow citizens.

Despite the variety of the subject matters contained in the bill and despite the wide range of views held about them, the government is firm in its conviction that this house