

Government Orders

When we talk about compensation for crimes, the government comes up with things like 30 per cent of their income for room and board. What the government does not come up with is what kind of income they are getting. Government members say it is \$5.61 a day, but they discount the fact that they get GST rebates, old age pension, CPP and the guaranteed income supplement. They discount that.

There is nothing more that can be said. I would agree with Bill C-78, but the Young Offenders Act, Bill C-45, Bill C-41 and all these other acts are abysmally poor. We cannot deal with the problems in the criminal justice system by dealing with one Bill C-78, which is only a small portion of what is needed, and by working in a very poor fashion on the other bills. They should not take credit for something until they do it 100 per cent right, not 3 per cent right.

What more can we say? The only way to get through their thick heads is to replace them, and that we will do in the next election.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to participate in the debate following the remarks of the hon. member for Fraser Valley West. I will try to draw the debate back to the bill before us, instead of the scatter gun treatment we have had all over the place on all the other legislation the hon. member says he does not like. When he gets a good bill he does not know what to say; he is almost tongue tied. I sympathize with him, but I want to address my remarks to Bill C-78, the witness protection program act, which is the one we are debating in the House of Commons today.

The purpose of Bill C-78 is to establish a solid legislative and regulatory basis for the RCMP source witness protection program. This is necessary to ensure that our national witness protection program offers the best protection possible to potential sources and witnesses. Given the importance of the program and the fact that we are strengthening it and making it more open and accountable, it would be useful to provide the House with a brief historical overview of the RCMP source witness protection program and some background that went into the development of the witness protection program act.

I am sorry the hon. members find this so amusing. I do not think it is.

Historically witness protection programs are most closely associated with the investigation of organized crime. The term organized crime covers a broad range of criminal activity, including large scale drug trafficking, murder, serious assault, money laundering, extortion and robbery.

I wish hon. members would restrain themselves. They seem to treat serious legislation as a joke. The hon. member for Fraser

Valley West in his remarks did not talk about the bill, and I did not find his remarks amusing.

The hon. member says that the speech was written for me. I am assisting the solicitor general in my capacity as his parliamentary secretary today. I am trying to impart information to the House concerning the bill so that hon. members perhaps will make more enlightened comments later. I wish the hon. member for Fraser Valley West had not split his time. He could have made his remarks after mine and would have benefited from listening.

As often as not, the crimes committed by these organized groups go hand in hand with the use of fear and intimidation to ensure the silence of potential witnesses and informants.

• (1125)

Using a broad definition of organized crime, it can be said that at the present time approximately 50 per cent of RCMP source witness protection program cases deal with organized crime. However witness protection today has a broader application. The disturbing trend in recent years has been the use of fear and intimidation by lone criminals. These people are willing to go to any lengths to avoid conviction or to extract retribution from witnesses. As a result a growing number of people need protection as a result of their role in cases that have nothing to do with organized crime.

To deal with the growing need for witness and source protection, and in response to increased enforcement priority placed on fighting major national and international drug trafficking organizations, the RCMP source witness protection program was started in 1984. Although originally intended for the use of the RCMP alone, the program now provides protective services to provincial and municipal police forces across Canada. While many police forces rely entirely on the RCMP for witness protection services, some of the larger police departments have formed their own witness protection units. These larger police services usually come to the RCMP for assistance in cases where federal help is needed to facilitate a change of identity for a witness or an informant.

Most people entering the RCMP source witness protection program in the mid-1980s were associated with major drug trafficking activities. However, as I mentioned a moment ago, this has changed of late. Today a growing proportion of people entering the program have been involved in Criminal Code offences such as murder and serious assault. Since starting the source witness protection program the RCMP has built up an infrastructure of experienced members and contacts. RCMP members are available in every province and territory to support witness relocations and protection, to obtain secure identity changes, and to help obtain the necessary provincial documents to authenticate those changes.