

Government Orders

[English]

I want to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona for his thoughtful, in-depth presentation. I appreciate the contributions of the hon. members for Kingston and the Islands, Laurier—Sainte-Marie and Kindersley—Lloydminster. I hope the steps I have taken to solve matters within my discretion will go some way to remedy the situation. The hon. member for Winnipeg Transcona and his caucus colleagues may be assured that if the House indicates to me that it has been persuaded by his arguments I stand ready to be guided accordingly.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

The House resumed from June 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, an act to amend the Young Offenders Act and the Criminal Code, be now read a second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Madam Speaker, 35 years ago, I opted for a career in education, specifically in the training of pre-school and primary school teachers.

I also decided to speak for those who have no voice, the children and adolescents who rarely get an opportunity to express their views, defend their position or demand their rights. Therefore, I am especially pleased to speak today to this debate on Bill C-37, An Act to amend the Young Offenders Act and the Criminal Code.

At the outset, I want the House to know that I fully support the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Saint-Hubert who is also the justice critic for the official opposition. This overly regressive bill should not proceed beyond second reading and should be withdrawn by the government.

Moreover, the amendment states that the Young Offenders Act "introduces no concrete measure for the rehabilitation of young offenders" and "does not encourage the provinces to take legislative or other measures necessary in order to set up comprehensive crime prevention programs".

● (1540)

I would like to add my voice to those of my colleagues and join the broad consensus in Quebec which opposes any attempts to make the provisions of the Young Offenders Act more stringent. In the time allotted to me, I would like to outline our main reasons for opposing this bill.

First of all, far be it for me to deny the existence of youth crime and violence, much less to minimize the seriousness of

the problem. In point of fact, vile, unacceptable crimes such as premeditated murder are committed by juvenile delinquents. The present system acts as a kind of safety valve and works well in that the existing legislation already makes it possible to transfer such cases to adult court and to sentence the offenders accordingly.

During 1992-93, 33 cases involving serious crimes were transferred to adult court. The problem is that we do not have the data to confirm or invalidate the government's decision to move in this direction. As for other serious crimes which can be categorized as relational crimes, reintegration into Canadian society should be the preferred approach.

The legislator showed that social reintegration was one of its main concerns, as he clearly stated in the principle of the bill by including Paragraphs a) and c.1) in Clause 1, and I quote: "Crime prevention is essential to the long-term protection of society and requires addressing the underlying causes of crime by young persons and developing multi-disciplinary approaches to identifying and effectively responding to children and young persons at risk of committing offending behaviours in the future". The bill goes on to say: "The protection of society, which is a primary objective of the criminal law applicable to youth, is best served by rehabilitation, wherever possible, of young persons who commit offences, and rehabilitation is best achieved by addressing the needs and circumstances of a young person that are relevant to the young person's offending behaviour".

Where the shoe pinches is that the legislator's goodwill does not extend beyond stating these nice principles. Too bad. The Minister of Justice had everything he needed to bring about the changes that would have made the youth justice system more efficient. He financed a late-February seminar hosted by the University of Toronto's criminology centre. This seminar brought together a group of experts including academics, government officials and professionals working in the field of youth justice.

The introduction to the final report dated March 28, 1994 says that the purpose of the seminar is explicit in its very title, "Beyond the Red Book: A Workshop on Recommendations for Amendments to the Young Offenders Act". What is the minister proposing to us in his bill? The promises in the red book, and nothing that goes beyond this now outdated document. Nothing takes into consideration the opinion of the experts who met at that seminar to advise the minister—at great expense to the taxpayers, need I remind you.

They give themselves a clear conscience. They study. They consult. But why, I ask you, Madam Speaker, since everything was already in the red book. So the essential amendments in this bill concern heavier penalties for serious crimes and the presumption of referral to adult court.