

*Private Members' Business*

anecdotes are isolated cases that do not reflect the reality around us. They try to make cheap political capital out of tragic situations.

I remember that, just recently, the hon. member for Crowfoot exploited the tragedy that took place here in Ottawa, in which two young children were shot and killed by their father, who used a hunting rifle, as their seven-year old brother looked on helplessly. Imagine that, while talking about gun control, the hon. member from the Reform Party had the gall to say that gun registration could not have prevented that tragedy.

It could certainly be said that the Reform member is a whiz at recycling news, but has no regard for the pain and suffering of survivors. This is how the Reform Party deals with the events affecting us.

The same analogy can be applied to the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca's explanations regarding Bill C-301. The recipe is simple. Take some nice fat jailbirds. Add some spicy tabloid news and a few drops of exaggeration. Brush with empty rhetoric, taking care of never letting any rehabilitation into the mixture. Mix all ingredients together, hoping that your audience is so confused that it might agree with you.

If I am being cynical on such a serious subject, it is because I want to show how distorted the examples used by Reform members are. According to the inquisition member, parole standards should be abolished, and we should treat offenders like cattle by cramming them into correctional institutions that are already overcrowded.

Let us now look at the Reform member's source of inspiration. California's "three strikes" law went into effect last year. This law provides for very harsh sentences against any repeat offender already convicted twice of relatively serious offences.

• (1810)

Like Bill C-301, California law requires the judge who convicts a person for the third time to sentence this person to life imprisonment without possibility of parole for 25 years. Think for a moment how outrageous such a legislation would be. The judges will no longer have any latitude, since the act is taking away any discretion they used to have. Sooner or later, this is bound to lead to absurd decisions.

Let me illustrate this with an example. In March, a 27-year old man was prosecuted for stealing a slice of pizza from a group of teenagers and sentenced to life imprisonment. The facts are quite simple: he stole a slice of pizza from a group of young people between the ages of 4 and 14 in a restaurant in Redondo Beach, California.

Because he had a record and was therefore a repeat offender, the offender came under the three strikes act and the judge had no other choice but to sentence him to life imprisonment without any chance of parole for 25 years.

That is the logic behind the proposal made by the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. Repression and punishment are the only two ways the Reform Party has found to control crime. With legislation like the bill introduced by my

Reform colleague, what happened at Redondo Beach could well happen here; the situation may not be as absurd, but it could be just as dangerous. It is more than likely that a 19-year old offender would be sentenced to life for robbing a convenience store. In fact, robbery is included in the list of offences mentioned in the schedule proposed in Bill C-301.

Let us look at the type of offences for which three convictions would buy a one-way ticket to the pen for a very long time. There is piracy, hijacking, endangering safety of aircraft in flight, using explosives. Whatever my hon. colleague's views on the matter, these offences are already liable to life imprisonment.

I find it hard to imagine that someone would be able to commit this type of offence three times in his or her miserable life, as he or she could have been sentenced to life twice already before committing a third offence.

I have nothing to say about the other offences listed, except maybe to mention that they are generally considered disgusting and reprehensible. I cannot overlook however the case of robbery. This offence is on the fateful schedule. Its inclusion will cause such prison overcrowding that it is hard to predict the implications. Again, this is an offence already liable to life imprisonment. But very few individuals serve full sentences because, objectively, the seriousness of such an offence does not justify life imprisonment.

If the circumstances surrounding the offence did warrant such severe punishment, Bill C-301 would indeed be superfluous, since the offender would already have been sentenced for life. How many life sentences can one serve consecutively? As far as I know, unlike cats, we only have one life.

The schedule of offences provided for under this bill lists 15 or so major offenses. Naturally, I would have no sympathy for any individual sentenced three times for any of them. Quite the contrary, I am of the opinion that repeat offenders do not deserve preferential treatment, but it is a different matter altogether to put them away in penitentiaries under the pretext that this makes our streets safer. Society will always be better served in the end through rehabilitation programs suited to the various offenses. Close supervision is the key.

Too many offenders were paroled before they were ready to reintegrate society and went on to commit a subsequent offence.