

*Government Orders*

their unemployment problem: send our young people to jail for five or ten years and send them at a younger and younger age.

Listen, I find this bill to be very wrong. I think that the government should honestly withdraw it, admit that it was misled by some members of this assembly who see repressing crime as the way to salvation, the panacea for all social problems, and I respect their opinion.

I think that the government is going the wrong way, that it has been misled and that it should withdraw honourably, consult its provincial counterparts and try to bring forward a bill that meets the provinces' aspirations, but first and foremost a bill designed for the young people in our society whom we do not want to lock up in prison unnecessarily until the end of their days with no hope of rehabilitating them.

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve):** Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise under your skilful guidance and speak to an important bill, if only because we think that the crimes committed by young people and by adults cost our society around \$8 billion.

I will start by saying that the bill before us represents a missed opportunity for a man who could have tabled a consensual bill. This is a missed opportunity and I will demonstrate, as my colleagues did before me, that this bill is strongly biased towards repression.

Our disappointment is twofold because we expected the government to be more partial to communities. Our disappointment is twofold because, if you had asked after I was elected to the House: "Who is the most promising minister? Which minister do you trust the most? Who is the most respected minister and the one we associate with the future of the Liberals?" I would not have hesitated to answer, "the Minister of Justice", because he had shown good judgment so far and earned the esteem of his colleagues.

We do not understand how the Minister of Justice, whom we associated with the more liberal, progressive and forward-looking wing of the government, could lend his name to such a conservative and backward bill.

So far very few stakeholders in Quebec and elsewhere are satisfied with this bill.

• (2105)

Just what is this Bill C-37 which, like the birth of a first child, was so anxiously awaited? This legislation provides that, from now on, 16 and 17 year olds charged with serious crimes involving violence will be proceeded against in adult court unless otherwise decided.

The wording of this bill is reminiscent of the old conservative mentality, something which we certainly should not be proud of as parliamentarians. This attitude, which is not based on any substantial evidence, means that in our society a 15 or 16 year,

old is an adult. I personally do not believe that at all. A 14 or 15 year old is a young person, and the hon. member, even though he looks sharp, certainly reached and passed that milestone a long time ago.

All this to say that it is a grave mistake to think, and to make the public think, that a 14-, 15- or 16-year-old is an adult when, socially speaking, everything points to the contrary. Unlike the situation which prevailed in your days, young people today stay at home longer. Today's 14-, 15- or 16-year-olds have a lot more difficulty finding their place in society than was the case for your generation. Consequently, these young people stay home longer and join the labour force later.

Another principle of the bill which truly reflects this appalling and useless conservative mentality is the one whereby sentences will be increased from five years to seven years in the case of second degree murders and from five years to ten years for first degree murders.

This is basically what this legislation proposes. There is also the principle that we will not only keep young people in jail for a longer period, but that they will also have to serve a longer period of time before being eligible to apply for parole which, in the past, has often been associated with rehabilitation. The position of the Bloc Québécois, thanks to the extraordinary work done by the hon. member for Berthier—Montcalm and the hon. member for Saint-Hubert, is very clear. No one on this side of the House thinks that repression will contribute to rehabilitating young offenders and criminals.

That is why we are so disappointed with this bill and that is why we will not support it. Our position on this issue is very clear. You should never forget that, in order to understand delinquency, the legislative tools and finally the very complex world of criminal law, you have to realize that the only goal of social and criminal laws must be to rehabilitate people.

There can be no other goal than to give a second chance to these people, because they are not born to a life of crime. It is not genetic. Under some circumstances, to which I will come back later, and for all kinds of reasons, mostly social ones in my humble opinion, people wander from the straight and narrow and turn to mischief, but there are reasons behind their behaviour that we must try to understand.

It would have been better if a piece of legislation like Bill C-37 would have provided us with more community tools. Although the mover of this bill, the Minister of Justice, is recognized as being liberal-minded, we cannot find in this bill any community tools that would put the people concerned on their way to rehabilitation.

We have another concern. Given the sensitive nature of this issue and all the moral considerations involved, since no one is pleased with the crime rate in our communities, we fail to understand why the Minister of Justice felt compelled to act now.