

Government Orders

Another serious issue that Bill C-41 fails to address is that of individuals in public positions losing their positions if convicted and sentenced to a term of incarceration. Previously a member of Parliament who was convicted of a criminal offence could only lose his or her position if sentenced to a term in excess of five years.

The justice committee accepted a Liberal amendment to this clause that reduces the necessary term of incarceration from five years to two years. However the committee rejected a Reform amendment that elected officials should be removed from their positions if they are sentenced to any period of incarceration. Perhaps it was a little too severe for the Liberals' liking but the zero tolerance was based on reality. Members of the RCMP who are convicted of a criminal offence lose their jobs if they spend even one day in jail. How could Parliament permit such a double standard?

We expect members of the national police force to have such a high standard of conduct that any incarceration would automatically result in the loss of their jobs. Yet when it comes to the standard of conduct of our own, the lawmakers of the country, we say that only incarceration in a federal institution for two years or more will disqualify an elected official. How can the government justify this contradiction?

However the biggest problem with Bill C-41 is not necessarily what is there but rather what is not there. Bill C-41 is tinkering when what is really needed is a major overhaul.

• (1955)

I go back to the CPA letter which says that it should be sent back to the drafting table with instructions to start again. It is not just Reformers who feel that it needs to be scrapped; that is also supported by the CPA.

We need a sentencing bill that will lock up violent high risk offenders and keep them incarcerated until they are no longer a threat to the public. We need a sentencing bill that will provide offenders with a sentence that is a specific deterrent to them and a general deterrent to others. We need a sentencing bill that provides sentences that are commensurate with the severity of the crime, sentences that are applied consistently and with a high degree of certainty.

The justice system is suffering from a major lack of public support. If we are ever to regain the public's faith in the justice system, we must provide Canadians with laws that will really keep our streets and communities safe.

Bill C-41 is not the answer. I ask my colleagues on the opposition side and on the government side how they could possibly support such a poorly written document that will infringe on justice in Canada.

Ms. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the hon. member personally addressed me in her speech I think I should not only respond but ask her a question.

The hon. member said that I was not present at all the hours and hours of committee meetings and I did not listen to the witnesses. One does not have to be there to comprehend, to be able to read the bill from cover to cover. That is very simple to do. It is also quite easy to get transcripts of the committees and understand them.

I did not only deal with them to get my knowledge. As a family practitioner for 23 years I have knowledge of what hate crimes do to people. I worked in emergency rooms and know about people who had come in beaten up because of their sexual orientation or because of their race in the city of Vancouver. I have a very valid reason for speaking the way I did.

If you discuss the abstracts of the bill, look at the fine points of clause by clause consideration and dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s but fail to understand the principles behind the bill or the very real part of the bill that will affect Canadians where they live, that will affect their lives in a very real and meaningful way, you have missed the whole issue completely.

Does the member understand the principles?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Kilger): Before I go to the next member, by and large debate has been conducted in a very parliamentary way, but I remind members that because it is an issue about which there are some very strong feelings it is important for the interventions to be made through the Chair.

Ms. Fry: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member. Does she fully understand why hate crimes should have aggravating factors? Hate crimes do not only hurt physically. Nor do they only hurt psychologically. Hate crimes leave a lasting effect on the individual. Hate crimes cause the continuing erosion of the self-esteem of a group that feels rejected by society. Members of that group have no sense of self-worth. It haunts them throughout the rest of their lives.

Does the hon. member fully understand that aspect of hate crime?

Ms. Meredith: Mr. Speaker, I can honestly say that I fully understand the intent of the bill and the impact that hate crime can have on an individual. That is why I am pleased that the courts already take that into consideration.

• (2000)

I appreciate the fact that the hon. member is a medical doctor and not a lawyer, but perhaps if she looked through transcripts of trials and sentencing she would find that the courts now take that into consideration in sentencing. They already take into consideration that a beating might have been because a person was homosexual or because they were of another race. They already give more severe sentences based on that aggravating factor.