

*Government Orders*

In closing, I wish to express my support for Bill C-78 at second reading and to issue a warning against what we too often see in some courts of law that are probably trying to proceed too quickly. A famous trial recently held in Canada showed us that the prosecution is often much too eager to plea-bargain with some witnesses to get them to testify against their codefendants, an arrangement through which a person pleads guilty to a lesser offence or an offence included in a more serious offence in return for a lighter sentence and a promise to testify against targeted people for whom the prosecution wants stiffer sentences.

In some cases, this practice is quite commendable; in other cases, it is, in my opinion, quite reprehensible. And I do not think that good judgment can be guaranteed by a bill. I call on the solicitor general, on provincial attorney generals, who must deal with these issues practically every day, to use as much common sense as possible when plea-bargaining with witnesses, many of whom are corrupt, who will testify against codefendants in return for a more lenient sentence. This practice deserves a serious examination. It must be the subject of wide criticism and of a broad national debate.

What do we expect from our judicial system? Our judicial system does not make enough room for victims. We, of course, give the accused all the benefits provided by our laws, by our charter of rights and freedoms. We must, however, give victims in criminal cases the importance they deserve. As we heard several times in the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, victims of crime very often feel left out. A crime has been committed but the victims are the least of our concerns. It is all well and good to be concerned about witness protection. I nonetheless think that people who have lost a loved one—be it a spouse, a child, a friend or a relative—to murder are entitled to some compassion.

• (1050)

On these words, I will ask the government to provide protection, to provide much greater compensation for victims.

[English]

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.):** Madam Speaker, I believe I have 40 minutes. If so, I will be sharing my time with the member for Fraser Valley West.

**The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu):** Does the hon. member have unanimous consent of the House to share his 40 minutes as first speaker?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Mr. Thompson:** Madam Speaker, at the outset I congratulate the member for Scarborough West for initiating this topic through his private member's bill. It needed to be done and it brought the attention of the government to the fact there was a shortfall in our system regarding the protection of witnesses.

It is unfortunate that such members are no longer part of the justice committee. He is a member who contributed much, who understood much about legislation and who was able to formulate this kind of initiative. I am sure he would be able to do more in the future. However, since he does not co-operate with his Liberal caucus when voting on some bills, he will no longer be serving on the justice committee. It is a shame that we have that situation in Canada, but unfortunately that is the way it will be with the Liberal government. However I am sure the hon. colleague will be contributing as much as possible in the future along these lines.

We must protect our witnesses if we are to combat crime. I do not think anyone would deny that. The colleague from the Bloc mentioned the words common sense, which are the two key words. We must protect our witnesses and we must do it in a common sense manner. We have to take many things into consideration when we are doing it.

We all know the importance of witnesses when it comes to fighting crime. It is much easier when we have good witnesses to help put away criminals that need to be put away. We also know it is foolish to enter into any kind of special agreement with individuals. We only need to look to the latest court case involving Mr. Bernardo and Ms. Homolka. Providing for and doing what we did for the witness, Karla Homolka, in that case was a criminal act in itself. We need to be cautious when doing these kinds of activities, which could make it very possible that someone who is guilty of an offence would be let off the hook under a protection act for witnesses. We need to be careful about that.

There are a lot of crazies out there in the world who are in it for the dollars. They are willing to eliminate witnesses. We know they are out there. We know we have some in the prisons today. I talked to one inmate not too long ago in British Columbia who was there for eliminating a couple of witnesses; he was a paid hit man. We know there are more of them out there. We know that organized crime is becoming more and more active with the bombings that we see going on throughout Montreal and other parts of the country and with the smuggling that is taking place only an hour's drive from here, which occurs on a regular basis. When we know that kind of organized crime is active then we have to be very careful when we bring forward witnesses that may crunch organized crime. We certainly must have some kind of protection in place, because the criminals would be willing to eliminate the witnesses rather quickly to protect the huge industry that exists.

• (1055)

It is unfortunate that we have a government, a solicitor general and a minister of justice who sit back and watch these kinds of activities go on and do not seem willing to get involved or do much about them. It is a shame when we pick up the paper and read about bombings taking place in Canada by terrorists, thugs and organized criminals, and we have a government that sits back and the best it can come up with is that it is a provincial matter and we should not get involved. It is a very poor attitude