

*Government Orders*

Do people really think that increasing sentences from 5 to 10 years or even from 7 to 10 years will help us achieve the aims of the act? Do people really think that reversing the onus to force the young offenders to demonstrate that they should be proceeded against in youth court instead of adult court will solve the problem and help us achieve the aims of the act? Do members opposite think that? Are Reform Party members of this opinion? Does the government think that increasing the period of time that a young offender who has received a life sentence must serve before being eligible for parole will help us achieve the aims of the act?

I have to believe that the minister did not ask himself these questions. The Liberal federal government, through its Minister of Justice, made a point of stating in clause 1 of the bill that crime prevention is essential to the protection of society and that a multi-disciplinary approach is needed to deal with this problem.

It is even stated in clause 15 that an order of custody is not the solution. However, the bill provides absolutely nothing to strengthen what is stated. Finally, they try to put on a smoke screen, to put everybody to sleep, saying that it will pass without a hitch. Well, no, it will not pass without a hitch. In Quebec, we do not want this bill. We feel unanimously that this bill is harmful to youth and that is not the solution. The solution lies in the implementation of the act as it now stands. The solution lies in social rehabilitation.

What I ask the Minister of Justice to do is simply to postpone this piece of legislation, not to have it given second reading in order that the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs can properly analyze the issue and report to this House. We will then see whether or not the act should be changed.

For the moment, the minister is saying: I am bringing changes to it and you go and study it. This is not the way things are supposed to work. That is not the way to improve legislation.

I would simply ask the minister to backtrack as common sense would require.

[English]

**Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley):** Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure tonight to address Bill C-37 respecting the Young Offenders Act. Although I believe the government is perhaps considering changing the Young Offenders Act, I do not feel Bill C-37 really addresses the issues.

I have two main concerns with the bill. One of them is the reverse onus that everybody seems to think is a real change, something that is going to make a real difference, sort of the meat and potatoes of the bill. I would argue that the reverse onus, which means that the youth courts will put the onus on the

16 and 17 year olds to prove that they should be heard and dealt with in youth court, is really going to solve the problem.

My concern is that the people presently in the youth court system are the ones who make a decision on whether or not youths 14 years old and up will be tried in adult court. These same people are the ones who will hear the cases of 16 and 17 year olds and make the decision on whether they will stay in youth court.

The past will show us that judges in the youth court division are very reluctant to place 16 and 17 year olds into an adult court to face the serious charges of murder, second degree murder and manslaughter. They seem to be very reluctant to have the younger people move up to adult court.

I do not see that the bill will make any change. I do not see where these same people will force young people to be tried in adult court. What we will see is that the people who make these decisions will continue to allow 16 and 17 year olds to be tried in youth court.

• (2005)

One of the cases that comes to my mind is the young person who was convicted of killing Jessie Cadman. He was a young offender at the time of the murder. The youth court judge determined that he would be tried in youth court. It was only because of the pressure put on by the community that that youth judge was forced to consider adult court. Isaac Deas was eventually tried in adult court and was convicted of murdering Jessie Cadman.

I suggest to this House that the same thing is going to happen where the youth court judges are going to act in favour of the young people and keep them in youth court as opposed to moving them into adult court. I do not feel that this change in the bill is going to make any bit of difference to the way that 16 and 17 year old serious offenders are going to be treated. I have great concerns about that. I think it would have been a much stronger message for the government to automatically lower the ages so 16 and 17 year olds are tried in adult court without any kind of dilly-dallying around in the youth court system.

The other concern that I have is in lowering the ages. It concerns me when I hear some colleague from the Bloc suggesting that the only reason this government introduced Bill C-37 was because of complaining and hysterical comments from the west, that people in the west want to throw their young people in jail and throw away the key. I think they are misrepresenting what the people in the west are saying.

Westerners are very concerned about the direction in which young people are headed and the way our justice system is not treating them. We suggest that young people and adults have to be responsible for their actions. For every action there is a reaction. If the action is serious, the reaction should be duly serious. If we have young people out there creating physical harm to other young people, young people who are murdering