

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, this whole issue of youth crime is beyond us. Let us act as if we understand what this is all about. That is what the Liberals probably told themselves, since Reform members have been badgering us, during question period, five days a week since the beginning of this Parliament, by reading us reports from regional scandal sheets and making rabble-rousing remarks on youth crime.

Bill C-37 is a repressive piece of legislation, where the end results of any criminal law, which are, as my learned colleague from Chicoutimi reminded us, crime prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in our society, have been forgotten. Strengthening the law will not bring about better results. We only have to take the United States as an example. This bill does not do anything to curb youth crime. Tougher sentences for murders are not justified, according to data from the Department of Justice which indicate that the number of murders is down from the 1970s.

• (2055)

Also, in 1992, maximum sentences under the Young Offenders Act went from three to five years. Why does the minister not wait to see how effective the 1992 amendment is before making further changes? The Quebec Minister of Justice would have preferred the status quo and was disappointed and concerned with Bill C-37. That goes to show how costly duplication in the justice area can be.

Finally, the province of Quebec will be responsible for managing the system. But the recommendations made by Quebec have once again been overlooked. This is another tug of war between Quebec and the other regions of Canada which have different legitimate aspirations. In 1992, the crime rate increased by 2 per cent, compared to an average of 5 per cent for the previous years. The rate is lower than it has been in previous years, which leads us to conclude that it really is not necessary to strengthen the legislation.

Between 1986 and 1991, the murder rate, the true reflection of serious crime according to some criminologists, among young people has remained constant. Current literature does not support the argument that increasing the length of a sentence has a deterrent effect. The legislative provisions are being tightened up, but no global solution is being offered to young people. To my mind, this reform is regressive. It is a victory for those who take a repressive approach to youth crime.

I recall sitting comfortably in my living room several years ago watching inmates in a maximum security facility being interviewed. Just listening to some of these individuals in their thirties sent chills down my spine. They had become animals. They were no longer human. They had nothing in common with

human beings. One of the inmates in the group spoke directly to the cameramen and to the interviewers and said: "I was 13 years old the first time I was sent here. The government raised me. The prison system raised me and look what kind of animal I have become". And now the government would have us believe that this repressive measure—

Obviously a society must find ways to control crime and to deal with those who commit crimes. However, a society which quenches its thirst for vengeance by taking it out on young offenders is taking the wrong approach. The outcome could be as devastating as the results I saw in that prison where human beings had become wild animals. Some of the inmates in their thirties had been in prison since the age of thirteen. They were raised by the government. Honestly. And no doubt the government must also accept responsibility for their failed lives.

I think that the government should have focused on the three themes my colleague from Chicoutimi mentioned earlier, including prevention. Naturally, crime cannot be managed or controlled without any prevention. The first thing to do if we want to reduce crime is to try and prevent crime, to create public awareness of the dangers of living in society. It is sad, but it is a fact that cannot be denied. We must also take more serious steps concerning more serious crimes. This goes without saying. I continue to think that prevention could produce untold results compared to those we can expect from Bill C-37.

About rehabilitation, when the whole administrative machinery is set in motion to prosecute young persons in some cases for a senseless, irresponsible act, the risk is that the life of a future citizen will be wrecked because this person will spend the rest of his or her days behind bars. Prisons are known to teach much more about crime than the science of life.

• (2100)

When criminal offenses have been committed and an offender convicted, society must also carry out its reintegration duty. It must help young people get out of the mess they got into out of stupidity and, without harbouring any hard feelings, try to put them back on the right track. I think that full employment policies, job creation policies, policies that would give our young people hope, the hope of finding lasting employment and leading an honest, decent life, would go a long way to resolving our crime management problem.

Our young people have no career opportunities. They go to university knowing that as educated as they may be, they are basically facing unemployment. For those who have not had the opportunity or who are unable to go as far as that, it is even worse; it is even more tragic for them. My friends in the Reform Party say that those people should be put in jail. It seems to suit the Liberal Party, because I think that people in jail are not counted as unemployed. Perhaps that is how they intend to solve