

*Government Orders*

think that it must be an extremely small minority, otherwise I would have heard from him.

As for me, I did not waste my time. I checked with those who are really concerned by this issue to find out what they thought of those amendments. I am referring to those who will have to implement the legislation. I consulted these people and no one, absolutely no one agreed with the bill. On the contrary, they all rejected it.

On May 5, 1994, before Bill C-37 was tabled, Quebec's National Assembly voted almost unanimously in favour of asking the federal government to ensure that any amendment to the Young Offenders Act is in compliance with Quebec's laws and policies regarding youth protection.

• (1955)

After reading the report released by the Minister of Justice, the Quebec Liberal minister disapproved of the decisions made by its big brother and stated that he was concerned and disappointed by the position taken by the federal government on this issue. He is not the only one. Whether it is the official justice critic for Quebec, the Association des centres jeunesse du Québec, the Maison Bosco, the CUM Director, some Quebec police associations, renowned criminologists like Jean Trépanier and Marc Leblanc, and many more, all agree that the bill introduced by the minister is counterproductive and goes against the educational direction Quebec has been trying to follow for at least 15 years.

We must realize that reactionary measures will not help us to overcome these problems. Things are far from perfect, but the direction taken by the province of Quebec is far more worthy than that chosen by the Minister of Justice. Despite some horrendous crimes that have been committed, this is not the time to blindly opt for repression and intolerance, which will only add to the problems instead of solving them. We should not use this issue to play petty politics, which the government seems to be doing by trying to pull a fast one on Reform members on the one hand and silencing the minority advocacy groups on the other hand.

Yes, we must realize that the praiseworthy efforts made by the province of Quebec on this issue reaffirm once again its special status. Yes, from the debate on this issue and many others addressed here in this House, we can see that there are two countries within this country. The federal government is responsible for creating a greater gulf between our two people. It is slowly but surely helping us on our way to separation.

It will all be explained in due course to Quebecers. Till then, however, I remind my constituents and Quebecers who almost unanimously opposed this bill that Ottawa just gave in to the

mass hysteria that mainly took over western Canada and those hooked on televised information and isolated but sensational cases.

The minister gave in this time and it is legitimate to ask ourselves if and when he will give in again. Will he do it when some members from western Canada ask to legalize corporal punishment against the young or to lower the age at which one can be indicted pursuant to the law or to return to capital punishment? What will the Minister do then? His actual stand worries me. Will he give in again? Unfortunately, if it can bring some temporary and unrealistic glory, this heir apparent of the Liberal Party of Canada will undoubtedly do it.

This issue is too important to put the interest of a politician or a party before that of society and especially that of the young. Should I remind the Minister that today's young are tomorrow's society? Even if they are given a prison sentence, they will come out some day. That is why education, social reintegration and rehabilitation are so important.

More prisoners become real bandits than rehabilitated citizens. We must not fall into this trap. As I said, this bill does not solve anything and reflects a purely repressive philosophy. The government should understand this and withdraw the bill. Those national standards forced on Quebec, which does not want them, give its courts less flexibility in sentencing.

As a Quebecer, I understand that the federal government imposes standards that are divorced from reality. In the end, these standards will fill up prisons, increase court costs and add to the legal red tape—all areas of Quebec's jurisdiction. That gives us another good reason to free ourselves from this constitutional straitjacket, where the federal government always did what it pleased while ignoring Quebec's demands and imposing national standards without any consideration for our legitimate wishes. But the time for that is almost past.

I confess, I believed that the federal Minister of Justice was a progressive man who listens to those responsible for administering justice. Unfortunately, I was wrong; that is what I confess. I made a mistake, because had he been such a man, he would not have proposed such amendments. He could have tried to correct some problems in the enforcement of the law, within his own jurisdiction.

• (2000)

We heard many members say in this House that the problem is not the act itself, but its application. Everybody knows that. Neither Quebec nor Ontario now for the last few years seems to have understood the intent of the Young Offenders Act. The rest of English Canada uses this act to put away problem teenagers. That is not the intent of the YOA.