

Criminal Records

[Translation]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): The hon. member for Portneuf (Mr. Fortin) made a brilliant plea yesterday, the realism, truth and sincerity of which impressed me greatly.

The bill now before us concerning the records of criminals deals with a most controversial matter. Although our other institutions have evolved, our judicial system has remained the same. We indulge in senseless talk and pettifoggery while we forget the human being. We still act as if the convicted man was a horrible beast. Most of our prisons and penitentiaries are schools of crime, with small, dark quarters, and unhealthy atmosphere, which bring to mind conditions in medieval times. This situation is painful enough without having to add the indelible stigma, that 20th century disgrace: the criminal record.

The principle of this bill is therefore justifiable, for it is high time we should get rid of those antiquated laws because of which the individual who gets caught—and I repeat, the man who gets caught is branded for life. God knows that countless thieves, crooks, bandits go about freely, very often wear white collars and are considered quite respectable.

As I was saying, the man who gets caught thereby becomes branded for life with the seal of approbrium. It should therefore be proved that much more is needed than a mere "minor reform". Major reforms must be made. Rumour has it that the convicted will be granted a pardon. One should also wonder if a condemnation was always just. Is there anything more revolting than getting a police record merely because the police wants to get even, or because the Crown wants to win its case, or even because a judge has allowed himself to be influenced?

I should like to illustrate what I mean through concrete examples in order to convince hon. members. In today's *Montréal-Matin* one can read the following heading:

The deputy minister claims he was beaten and thrown naked into a prison cell—

● (3:40 p.m.)

In view of the fact that a deputy minister from British Columbia is involved, the matter will be dealt with more rapidly, the police will plead guilty and the Quebec government will simply apologize. However, had an individual been involved, the police might have wanted to be right at all costs. I am simply quoting a newspaper report regarding

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

the misfortune of Mr. Redel. Here is what it says, and I quote:

Within the hour following his arrival at the police station, he received medical attention and then sent home.

That is what the police claim. However, Mr. Walter Robert Redel, from Victoria, deputy minister in the government of British Columbia, contends the opposite. I continue with the quotation:

—stripped of all his clothes and deprived of his personal belongings he was left in a cell, stark-naked, for three hours.

Finally Mr. Redel asked one of the guards to call for a doctor. Half an hour later a doctor arrived. Mr. Redel had a skull injury and the bone above his left eye had been fractured.

Later on, four or five men came to question him and they finally admitted their error, following a telephone call to the Department of Lands and Forests of British Columbia.

Mr. Speaker, is it conceivable that such things can happen in a civilized country such as ours? Is it possible that we can witness such stupidity, such errors? In most cases, when ordinary people are involved, they are unfairly convicted and this is how new criminals are made.

I am for criminal records being wiped clean after a certain time. If untrained police forces, as the Quebec police in particular, are left to do what they want and if we let Crown attorneys do what they want to win their cases at any price, we shall end by creating a kind of society that makes me think of the one described in the film "Z".

I have personally lived through very practical experiences which I would like to expound in this House. This will help prove that it is really time to do away with criminal records and to question our police methods as well as our legal system so that we can begin to really respect the human being.

Last August 23, I was stopped by two officers of the Quebec municipal city on the grounds that I was driving at 49 miles per hour in a 30-mile zone and that I had been spotted on the radar screen.

It can be said without exaggerating that all automobile drivers break regularly highway regulations, either by running through a red light or by forgetting to make a stop or by parking illegally or too long and especially by failing to drive within the speed limit. Therefore, it is not necessary to be a genius or even intelligent to arrest anybody at any time and for any reason. Thus, a good number of our policemen, whose worth is measured in