

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this debate today because the bill, of course, is a very important one for my riding of Kingston and the Islands where there are so many federal penitentiaries. When a bill is introduced that provides significant changes to the Penitentiary Act, it is very important that I try to make some comment on the substance of the legislation that is before the House.

I agree with the comments that have been made by my colleague from Cape Breton—The Sydneys that really what is going on here is, in large measure, window dressing and the government is failing to address some of the major issues of crime and punishment in Canada. Those particularly relate to the question of alternative measures and programs within federal penitentiaries, which in my view are not affected significantly by the passage of this legislation.

Part of the problem is the lack of funding for these programs and the cutbacks I learn about on a regular basis during the course of my visits to federal institutions. Those cutbacks, I submit, are at the root of the problem in dealing with corrections in this country.

As I listened to the Solicitor General make his opening speech in the debate the other day and to his parliamentary secretary, the hon. member for Niagara Falls, I could not help but recall lines from *The Mikado*. The parliamentary secretary said, for example, and I quote from page 10576 of *Hansard*:

All I can say is that unless you give a sentence that is commensurate in people's minds with the seriousness of the crime people will lose that confidence.

He was referring to confidence in the system. Of course we all know the jingle from *The Mikado*: "My object all sublime, I shall achieve in time to let the punishment fit the crime—the punishment fit the crime". The parliamentary secretary reminded me very much of that line as he spoke in glowing terms about how this bill was designed to correct the problem of sentencing and punishment in Canada.

Unfortunately, it fails to do that because as my hon. colleague has indicated and as the hon. member for Scarborough West has indicated in his very able speech in this debate, the government has failed to bring

forward its sentencing legislation which is an integral part of the corrections proceedings in Canada and which should have been dealt with at the same time as the penitentiary amendments that are brought forward in this Bill C-36.

• (1130)

I could quote from an editorial in the *Calgary Herald*. No one in the House would maintain that the *Calgary Herald* is anything but a supporter of the government. After all, it is in a city that elects more Tories per capita than I think any other in the country. I do not think there is anything but a Tory member from Calgary. Of course the government House leader is one of them. This is what they wrote in his paper. I would have thought he might have prevailed on his colleague, the Solicitor General, to do something more substantive.

Let me read from this editorial that appeared on October 10:

Keeping dangerous criminals in jail longer, as federal Solicitor General Doug Lewis proposes to do, will undoubtedly make Canadians feel safer.

So will the lengthy roster of parole related housekeeping measures the Solicitor General intends to implement.

But Lewis's changes won't necessarily make Canada a safer place.

Without concentrated efforts aimed at rehabilitating criminals already in jail and preventing potential offenders from falling into the vicious cycle of violent behaviour, Lewis's well meaning but short-sighted efforts can have little real impact.

I agree with the sentiment expressed in that editorial. I could go on reading it, but I think I have made the point.

What we are doing here is missing an opportunity when we are revising the Penitentiary Act to do something significant, to help with the rehabilitation of offenders in Canada. I am repeatedly faced with the argument, as are many members, if we just lock these people up we will solve the problem. With great respect we will not.

Sentences come to an end. Offenders are released. Without some meaningful programs to try to reintegrate offenders into the community and provide them with opportunities to obtain gainful employment, to lead something approaching a normal lifestyle on release, we will simply postpone the continuing problems with the offender and leave society at the mercy of these people upon their release.