

be blindly intolerant, which in the end will only make matters worse and will not solve anything".

To really understand the problem, let us look at the kind of crimes young people commit. A study conducted in May 1994 by the justice department reveals that the number of young people charged with murder has substantially dropped since 1970. Contrary to what members opposite would have us believe, between 1974 and 1979, on average, the police charged 60 young people with murder. This number dropped to 46 for the period between 1986 and 1992, a considerable drop indeed.

Homicides are certainly the greatest source of fear for people, however, as I just showed, there is no cause for alarm since the number of young people suspected of homicide has dropped. On the other hand, it is true that, in general, the incidence of crime among young people is on the increase. In a recent article by J. Frank, entitled "Violent Crimes Committed by Young People", we learn that common assaults have drastically increased.

Should we send young people to jail for taking part in a gang brawl? Do not worry, I am not trying to downplay this kind of violence which is increasingly prevalent in our society. I only wish to repeat that the bill does not seem to address the right problem.

• (1945)

We are tightening the rules regarding serious bodily harm, when statistics clearly show that the problem is elsewhere.

There probably is a number of members who, in their youth, were involved in some street fight—this was mentioned earlier even by Reform members. In most cases the problem was dealt with at home, by the parents, or in school, by the principal. Where would these young people be today, had they been dragged before the courts?

Clearly, any attempted answer would be hypothetical, but we all know that prisons are more apt to produce criminals than facilitate re-entry into society.

Generally speaking, any increase in the crime rate can be linked to poverty and unemployment, in other words, to the recession. It is not sentencing we should review. As Raymond Giroux was saying in *Le Soleil*, on June 4: "Governments should look after education and employment. The schools and the labour market would do more to lower the crime rate than all the jails in the country".

The bill is only a band-aid on a wound that should have been seriously disinfected. Increasing the sentences and releasing the names of young offenders will not put an end to youth crime. We should draw a lesson from the American experience, since it clearly shows that heavier sentences have really no effect on the crime rate.

Government Orders

We should not discount the problem or deny it completely, but rather give ourselves adequate and effective means of reducing crime among young people. This bill will not do that.

With these amendments to the Young Offenders Act, the government seems to have yielded to right-wing lobbyists. By trying to avoid controversy, the government is not solving anything. Gilles Lesage, a journalist with *Le Devoir*, wrote on June 4: "By branding young people, as proposed by the red book, Minister Rock is discrediting himself. The status quo would be better than this pseudo-reform".

Youth crime is a reflection of social unrest, which imposes a heavy burden on Quebec and Canadian societies. Today's social reality may have something to do with the gang wars that are becoming more prevalent.

In conclusion, I think we must stop sticking our heads in the sand and trying to resolve the problem through inadequate means. Let us give our young people the hope that tomorrow will be a better day. The future of our achievements is in their good and not-so-good hands. Let us stop placing the burden of our social failures on the backs of a whole generation, because if we have 11- and 12-year-old kids committing crimes, we have a serious social problem.

Canada strongly condemned, with good reason, the horrible Tiananmen Square massacre in China. However, does the proposed reform of the Young Offenders Act, silently, under the cover of words and without bloodshed, not deprive young people mistreated by life of any hope of pulling through, for prison will certainly hurt and mark them for life.

[English]

Mr. Jake E. Hoepfner (Lisgar—Marquette): Madam Speaker, I had a prepared speech for the debate on Bill C-37 yesterday. I did not realize I would be on House duty during this debate today. I have thrown the speech aside and I will talk for a few minutes on some of my personal experiences over the last couple of months.

I agree with a lot of what has been said today. We probably are going in the right direction with Bill C-37.

One of the hon. members on the other side said this morning that 95 per cent of our youth are real good kids and I would say the percentage is probably higher. However there are bad apples and they are very bad apples. This House has the authority to deal with them. If we do not do something about those bad apples, the whole barrel will be spoiled. That is why I want to address this debate in a different way today.

• (1950)

About two months ago when I was home for the weekend I got a phone call at 2 a.m. It was the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre. My son had been attacked and we were to make haste and get to the emergency ward as soon as possible.