

Government Orders

we are dealing with armed robbery, the average sentence may be nine years. The average length of time served in a penitentiary may be four or five years. Those who are advocating the abolition of parole say when you abolish parole you would also bring into line sentences so that you would take the average length of time served and make that the new sentence for armed robbery, for example. The maximum sentence for armed robbery would become five years as opposed to nine years.

I am not advocating lengthier sentences in a general way in the abolition of parole but rather the abolition of parole with a reform of the sentencing structure. In certain areas sentencing ought to be reformed and sentences ought to be increased. For example, if you drink and drive in Canada and if you are convicted for the second time, you automatically serve seven days or a week in jail. There is a mandatory period of incarceration, and yet if you are caught for the second, third, fourth, fifth time and convicted of selling drugs to kids in school yards, there is no minimum sentence. It does not make any sense at all why a drug pusher should not be treated at least as severely as someone who drinks and drives.

An hon. member: At sentencing.

Mr. Nunziata: At sentencing, that is correct.

An hon. member: We should reform that too?

Mr. Nunziata: The reform should be here now. Let me close by asking the member a question with regard to the position of his party. The New Democratic Party traditionally has favoured, or its philosophy is more supporting of, inmates rather than the protection of society. What I sense from the member's submission is that he is not seeking greater rights and more lenient sentences for inmates. He is not recommending that our prisons be emptied.

There seems to be a shift in the position of the New Democratic Party toward an emphasis or priority placed on public safety and that aspect of the criminal justice system. Perhaps the member could comment.

• (1340)

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. I want to make a point very clear, that where we have advocated lesser sentences or

greater acceleration through the prison system, is in the non-violent area. We believe, and I continue to believe, that we have far too many people in prison today who could be released and be no threat to anybody else in society. I am not saying they should be free, but we believe that they should go through the system faster, to halfway houses, do community service work, do public service work. If they are found guilty of very large frauds or serious frauds, so-called white collar crime, maybe at sentencing a prohibition of staying out of the business community for three, four, five years after release could be part of the sentence. We still maintain that there are people behind bars today who should not be there because they are non-violent and they would not be a risk to society.

We have never been opposed to being severe in our sentencing of those who are violent and those who continue to show violence while they are in the prison system. We do believe that no matter how mean or miserable a human being may be, and we are not perfect beings—and as one philosopher said, we are the only beings capable of reason and not rational beings—we still think that there is often hope that people will rehabilitate themselves and can re-enter society. Emphasis should be put on that, but not ahead of public safety and the security of law-abiding citizens, but that other process should be part of the correctional system.

That I think is very important and that is our position on it.

Mr. Dennis Mills (Broadview—Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for clarification in his response to my colleague from York South—Weston. He seemed to be suggesting that white collar crime was not really putting society at risk, there was not as much of a danger. It seems to me that if we send out a signal that white collar crime is not as serious in the community, we tend to promote the idea that someone will tamper with this white collar crime because the sentencing is not as severe, and even if that person is sentenced there is really no form of incarceration or no sentencing that is going to have a sustained penalty.

White collar crime is really serious in this country today. If we send out a signal that we are not going to really consider this crime as just as dangerous to society