

*Government Orders*

that crime has become rampant and exaggerating public fear. Fear is also fostered and intensified by rising crime statistics.

Some analysts are of the opinion that the intensity of the fear presently experienced by Canadians results in part from economic uncertainty. High unemployment has contributed to the climate of insecurity and vulnerability and is causing social and economic problems that reinforce the feeling of social disintegration.

• (1750)

The Liberal Party platform includes proposals to increase the length of maximum sentences imposed by the courts for first and second degree murders committed by young offenders; to relax the requirement to systematically dispose of police files on young offenders after a certain time; to allow the identification of some young offenders who have been convicted of violent crimes; and to create a "dangerous young offender" category for dangerous and habitual young offenders. We, Bloc members, cannot support the bill before us.

It has been established that through positive, early intervention in their lives, young persons struggling with social, psychological and emotional problems can be prevented from straying into crime and becoming dangerous repeat offenders.

There are a number of examples in support of the view held that young people commit offenses because they figure the gains derived from their unlawful activities will outweigh the price they will have to pay if caught. Criminologists and young offenders support workers have observed however that in many cases, young people commit offenses for reasons totally unrelated to the law. In their view, most young offenders commit property offenses which are not particularly clever and are more indicative of their lack of maturity and irresponsibility than of their maliciousness.

The overwhelming majority of young Canadians and Quebecers are ambitious, hard-working and respectful of their peers. Most of them become productive and law-abiding citizens. To put all young people on the same level as the minority who commit crimes is to do them a disservice.

Suing someone who committed a crime may provide some comfort to the victim and reassure the public, but it cannot be as satisfying as preventing the crime as such. It is often harder to implement crime prevention programs than to merely sue an offender after the fact. Preventing crime requires a review of on the economic, educational, social, moral and legal conditions which generate crime as well as an and it requires effort to change these conditions. The co-operation of many departments from all levels of government, as well as of the private sector and the public in general is needed. Making crime prevention

programs effective is a major challenge. However, the results obtained with such programs, namely a reduction in crime, are much more beneficial for young people, and also for Canadians who, otherwise, might have become victims.

In conclusion, as parents, MPs and responsible adults, we simply cannot support this bill. We must take our responsibilities towards our children and teenagers. It is a lot harder to promote prevention, but it is also a lot more effective and rewarding. All those involved, including parents, educators and social workers, must work with young people to prevent crime.

I simply cannot believe that a ten-year-old child is mature enough to realize that he has committed a first or second degree murder. I have a ten-year-old daughter myself and I simply cannot believe that she has that comprehension. These children obviously know what is good and what is bad, but I doubt very much that they would understand that they committed a first or second degree murder. These children need protection. Yes, they must be punished. Yes, we must teach them, but how far must we go?

We must also do more in terms of promoting rehabilitation which, according to statistics, gives very good results.

It goes without saying that this approach will require additional efforts from all those involved in the process, but I am convinced that the results will be much better than if we hastily pass harsher laws.

• (1755)

[English]

**Mr. Pat O'Brien (London—Middlesex):** Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to join in this debate on the Young Offenders Act and on a much-needed new bill to improve that act.

First of all let me congratulate the Minister of Justice for this bill. It offers to Canadians, as part of a two-step plan, some interim improvements to the youth justice system. It is important as members that we recognize and acknowledge this will be a two-step process. This is not the final and finished product if you will. If it were I would simply say to the minister that it does not go far enough in the ultimate sense but for now it is very good and major step in the right direction.

It is important to note that the second phase will be a thorough review by a parliamentary committee and by a federal-provincial task force on the whole youth justice system. There will be considerable public input in that review process, as there has been so far to this point. Obviously it is very important to involve provincial legislatures and provincial justice officials because the legal system is administered at both the federal and provincial levels.