

Government Orders

• (1945)

Today we know that in the outside world people in a community have a fear of law breakers. There are home robberies reported that have been witnessed and there have been many business break-ins. Older people want security. When something happens in their community they have a great sense of fear.

Medical attention becomes very important as a corrective measure while a young offender is incarcerated. It is all right to talk about long sentences and so on, but while that person is in prison they must receive the proper medical attention. If they are not ready to be back on the streets when their time is up then a very definite assessment should be made of the case at that time.

I was interested in the words of the minister in his statement, his news release, on the day he tabled the bill when he said poverty, alcoholism, family violence, racism, illiteracy and many other factors may lead to criminal acts by young people and adults alike. Of course we have witnessed that from adults and young people alike. The conditions of our times certainly contribute to the moulding of the character of individuals today.

The increased sentences for teenagers convicted on first degree murder would be ten years, seven years in and three years out in the community under supervision, and seven years for second degree murder, four years in and three years under supervision in the community.

The personal injury offences would be in adult court unless they can show a judge that public protection and rehabilitation can both be achieved through youth court. They have to prove that they should be heard in youth court if they are 16 or 17 years of age. Otherwise they go to adult court.

Those who have been convicted of murder in an adult court must serve before they can be considered for parole. It is important that a person who is not ready to be out on the streets should not be out there. I mentioned that a moment ago but I think this is one of the largest fears people had about the previous legislation, that a person would be out on the street. There were a number of cases that have been very well documented and very well publicized and of course it helped to really drive that point home.

We know that in the present legislation the maximum sentence for young people convicted of murder in youth court is five years. It used to be three years. There is no parole in the youth system at the present time. However, the proposals that the minister brought in recently would increase sentences in youth court to ten years. There is a reason for it, and that is why I am repeating that particular part. With the previous three year sentence there was no timeframe for the medical attention that person should have been receiving and there was no medical attention for the proper assessment before they went back out on the street.

The minister will be meeting with ministers of health from the various provinces and territories later this year on this very important provision. The provinces are in charge of health care and we must have the proper number of people involved in the system who are well qualified to make assessments on young offenders and to make recommendations for their treatment while they are in prison. If that does not happen the additional years are not going to mean very much. The person will only come out with the same attitude with which they went in.

• (1950)

In my view, and having gone through a couple of very traumatic situations with families who were involved with youth murders, it is a very difficult situation for them. It is very serious for the parents but it is also very serious for other people in the family. Certainly it is serious for the people in those communities, particularly if the communities are small and people know one another. I want to emphasize the importance of proper medical care for these young people once they are in prison.

I commend the minister for increasing the sentences and lowering the age limit for people being brought into adult court. If measures of this nature are not taken, then crime will continue to grow among those people who are today laughing at the law. When people start smiling and laughing at the law it is not only they who are in trouble, our whole society is in trouble.

This is very important legislation for this Parliament. It is very important to put it in place. The follow through is going to be very important because it is going to spell the success or the failure of this new initiative.

I want to say to the ministers and to the members of the House that as this bill unfolds and as the legislation, the regulations and the provisions for medical care are brought forward there will be a number of us in the House watching the procedure very carefully to make sure that the proper provisions are being carried and that it is going to be useful to society and useful for the young offenders who get into trouble.

A lot of improvements can be made if we have the proper discipline in the home and some direction in the home to begin with. We should encourage that while we are discussing this bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm): Mr. Speaker, on June 6, when I rose to support the amendment tabled by the Bloc Québécois regarding the Young Offenders Act, I asked the Minister of Justice to say who, in Quebec, had hoped for such amendments.

I am still waiting for an answer, but I know that it will never come, because nobody in Quebec was in favour of such repressive changes as those proposed by the Minister of Justice. If there are people in favour of such changes, it has to really be a small minority. In fact, when I see the minister remain silent, I