

Government Orders

I question I often ask myself is why is the government so hesitant to drastically overhaul the Young Offenders Act? Is it still clinging to the old Liberal philosophy of stressing the rehabilitation of individuals over the protection of society as a whole?

As many may recall, this policy was first publicly stated in 1971 and has been the policy toward crime ever since, clearly. More important, that philosophy is alive and well in the present government and in fact tonight in the members opposite.

One need only look at the paltry amendments proposed in Bill C-37. Let us look at the facts. Since the introduction of the Young Offenders Act, youth crime has actually risen by 117 per cent. In 1992, 12 to 17-year old males accounted for 3.9 per cent of the Canadian population and yet they accounted for 12.6 per cent of all crimes and 27.6 per cent of all property crime in the country.

It is difficult to dispute numbers and statistics. This state of affairs cannot stand and it must be addressed. Unfortunately it will take a lot more than the trivial changes of Bill C-37 to bring youth crime under control.

Rather than lamenting the missed opportunities this bill presents, let me illustrate what would have satisfied the tremendous anxiety of the Canadian people and effectively brought youth crime under control.

This bill should have entailed or been part of a larger program that would have established youth crime registries across the country. Such a program would alert potential victims of dangerous young offenders and avoid disasters from occurring such as the one brought on on the west coast by Jason Gamache. Gamache of Courtenay, B.C. was recently convicted of first degree murder in the death of a six-year old child, Dawn Shaw.

Evidence showed that Gamache was a repeat sexual offender who was not allowed to be with children. This fact was not known to the local authorities or Gamache's neighbours because of the privacy sections of the Young Offenders Act.

• (2030)

This is frightening. The elimination of this section of the act and the establishment of an offenders registry could have saved the life of Dawn Shaw. The terminology concerning "information sharing" in Bill C-37 is too vague to allow for any considerable change from the present.

Currently the age of operation of the Young Offenders Act is 12 to 17 inclusive. This will remain unchanged under Bill C-37. The age of operation should be modified to reflect the realities of youth crime. Sixteen and 17-year olds should be offered no special treatment under the law. Why should they? For all

intents and purposes they resemble adults. Young people at age 16 are allowed to get licences to drive cars. They are considered adults. Why should it be any different in the Young Offenders Act?

The age of operation should therefore be modified to 10 to 15 inclusive. I believe this modified age of operation would prove to be a solid deterrent for 16 and 17-year olds. The current provisions for 16 and 17-year olds under Bill C-37 are far too loose and will undoubtedly allow the current tragedy of crimes to continue.

In conclusion, I fully support the Liberal member for York South—Weston when he stated that: "The tragedy of youth crime is a ticking time bomb in this country". Perhaps that backbencher should have, could have, would have had more input into the committee stage of the drafting of this bill when some committee somewhere got together to put this legislation together. This is a government member who is not allowing the Liberal ideology to go along with what he is hearing back home in his constituency.

It is simply tragic that all the government has proposed in response to this dilemma is Bill C-37. I will nonetheless vote in favour of this bill simply because the current status quo cannot stand. The urgent need for real reform however will remain and I am confident this issue will return to the House sometime in the near future.

As my colleague from Yorkton—Melville suggested earlier, we will make sure as a caucus that this will be continuing to come forward in the House of Commons. We will not let this matter rest. There are Liberal backbenchers as well, and they know who they are, who will not let this matter rest until we know that people can sleep safely in their homes without young people lurking around their hallways and when they get up to check on their children they are brutally stabbed, murdered in front of their own family.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Fillion (Chicoutimi): Madam Speaker, I could never forgive myself if I did not speak in this debate about Bill C-37 since a lot of Quebecers and Canadians are very concerned by the issue.

Before commenting specifically on the main changes defined in the Act to amend the Young Offenders Act and the Criminal Code, I first want to speak about young people, the ones affected by the bill.

Like my colleague for Argenteuil—Papineau, I worked for many years with young people, as a teacher, and I understand their reality, their everyday life. During my 34 years of teaching, I worked with over 4,000 young people.

Let me tell you that the way we describe them today is not close to reality. Young people simply need to feel we love them to realize their potential. They do not need a repressive bill. That