

Young Offenders Act

It is because I am not convinced Bill C-192 has been framed against the background of recommendations such as these, which I wholeheartedly endorse, that I urge members of this House to support the amendment, not for the purpose of killing the bill but for the purpose of taking another look at it. The child is a full child and we must remember that. When we deal with a segment of his life that is deemed to be undesirable by the community, we must remember it is only a part of his life and, in some instances, a very few brief moments out of his entire life. I suggest to the minister that we as legislators have no right to colour that individual's entire life by our reaction to his activities covering just a few moments, no matter how grievous those activities may seem to us, because the child who is delinquent does have mental difficulty. He is in need of our help and is in need of rehabilitation. The last thing he is in need of is a criminal code under which young persons find themselves outside the law for activities of a few brief moments.

● (8:50 p.m.)

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): Mr. Speaker, I was discussing this bill a few days ago with a Saskatchewan cabinet minister and he indicated to me that the provincial government was quite concerned about the cost that would be put on the provinces in connection with the corrective services which would be expected of them under this bill. If the minister does not expect to provide some relief to the provinces in this connection, I think he should consider this matter because it is a legitimate worry to the provinces.

In my view this bill is too harsh and its punitive aspects are overemphasized as against the corrective aspects. I have had a number of representations lately concerning the question of abortion which concerns the public at present. I told these people that there is no bill on this matter before the House at the moment but that it was an important issue. One lady said to me that if parents would accept their responsibility and look after their children properly, they would not be such a problem. I must confess I agree with her. I think that many of the problems which we have with children stem from parents who have neglected their responsibilities. It is too bad that we cannot have a bill to punish parents who do not look after their children in the way they should. That is the way I feel about it.

I regret that the action we will take under this bill is directed at the wrong people. Not long ago I read a little item about hippie children. This article suggested that most of the hippie children came from homes where there is no effective father. When I hear some of the suggestions from the women's liberation movement, particularly from some individuals who act as if being a mother is a disgrace to the female sex, I get a little upset—anybody would get upset—and I think there is something wrong with such a father or mother. They should have pride in the fact that they have children, and they should try to raise them in society in the best way they can. Some are better at this than others. Some may not be as well qualified as others. But I really get upset at those who do not try.

[Mr. Forrestall.]

I think there should be a bill of rights for children, in the sense that they have a right to good parents. A few days ago when I was in Weyburn I was talking to a lady who takes an active part in the community in Girl Guides activities. I am not saying that Girl Guides is the only community activity in which people can engage to help children, but I suggest it is one of them for parents trying to do the best they can at home. Sometimes the best they can do when a child begins to move out of the home is to help in the community in which they live to ensure that the children take part in good, clean activities.

I was talking to a member of the press gallery who told me about taking his youngster to a ball game. That is probably the best time that this man could invest in his children. It cannot be measured in dollars and cents, but when he looks on his boy when he becomes a young man who is able to solve his problems he will be proud of having invested this time in the child. When I was at a hockey game in Lloydminster I saw there a mounted policeman who was acting as coach to the Lloydminster team. What better way is there to solve police problems with the young people in Lloydminster than for a policeman to be directly involved in an activity of this nature? If you are going to keep young folk out of trouble, that is the best way to do it and thus avoid spending so much time chasing after them. I commend this mountie and others like him who have done similar things.

Despite the best efforts of some parents, one might almost think that some children are born part bronco, as I heard one fellow describe it. They have a streak in them that has to be worked out. Some of them invariably get into trouble. I can think of many whom I have known in the past who have been this type of individual. With a little help from an understanding judge, an understanding policeman or what have you, they have been able to work out their problems and are now good citizens. This is the way it should be.

What makes some young people like this, I am not sure—I am not a psychiatrist or psychologist—but I am aware that many of them are now good citizens. Some times it seems to me that young people who are born with a great deal of energy and nerve are more apt to get into trouble because they have more energy to burn. Perhaps they need more guidance, and occasionally when they get into trouble they need more consideration because they have a special problem. You might ask, why are we concerned? The answer is that if we are not concerned and if we do not solve the problem of these teenagers, the problem will become greater when these young people become adults. I suggest that some of them only grow physically and not emotionally. The figures I have heard quoted in connection with teenage troublemakers who become adult troublemakers and law breakers show that 20 per cent began this way.

One thing that astounded me when I visited a penitentiary was the number of young men there. It disturbs me to see all the energy and hope in these young men locked away from society because they had a problem and obviously could not be let loose. When I talked to some of the officials in the penitentiary I discovered that most of the