

consequences of the acts that they have committed or are about to commit.

In the case of serious crimes, there are three categories of young offenders. The first category is made up of those whose psychological state or mental health can be considered fragile. These young offenders, with the help of adequate rehabilitation programs, can have every chance of making it and returning to society.

A second category is composed of young offenders who commit petty crimes and who, in unpredictable circumstances, commit the irreparable: murder or another serious crime. Finally, the last category is made up of 16- and 17-year-old teenagers who committed serious crimes because their delinquent past had shown them the way. This juvenile delinquency could be described as hard-core.

Young offenders are referred to adult courts in these cases because prevention and rehabilitation have proven ineffective. The majority of young offenders who have committed serious crimes are in the first two categories that I have described.

Many studies indicate that the homicide rate among young people has increased very little in recent years. A federal justice department document published in May 1994 found that the average number of people under 18 suspected of murder was considerably lower than in the 1970s, and that the number of people under 18 that police suspected of murder averaged 60 annually from 1974 to 1979, compared to only 46 from 1986 to 1992.

But public awareness of youth violence has risen. It seems clear that the public overestimates the number of violent crimes. In fact, a 1992 survey found that Canadians believed that violent crimes accounted for 30 per cent of all crimes committed. The facts are quite different: 10 per cent of crimes are violent. The facts are often distorted by the media which, for obvious reasons, often report spectacular crimes, and people are led to believe that there has been a significant rise in violent crime.

• (2120)

The Official Opposition believes that the repressive measures provided for in this bill are not justifiable for all young offenders. The law already contains clauses to punish offenders who commit serious offences. The statement of principle proposed by the Minister of Justice in Bill C-37 opens the door to new clause relating to prevention, rehabilitation and social reintegration is included in the bill.

Quebec and some other Canadian provinces like Ontario focus their efforts on crime prevention, and on the rehabilitation

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and social reintegration of young offenders. Several studies, namely the Boscoville study, have shown the positive results of that approach.

However, many provinces do not have the structures and resources needed for that approach, so that punishment may look like an easier solution.

This bill is denounced by all stakeholders of the judiciary system as well as by the Minister of Justice of Quebec because it ignores the whole issue of rehabilitation and social reintegration. Youth crime goes beyond the judiciary system.

Could our society be responsible for youth crime? To refuse to ask that question is to ignore reality and the root causes of delinquency. Does a society have the right to choose the simplistic option of punishment and pretend that it is thus facing its responsibilities? Madam Speaker, Quebec does not believe so and I am convinced that the rest of Canada does not favour that approach.

[English]

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I of course could not resist saying a few words to finish the debate this evening, having listened to numerous speeches from the other side of the House.

I found myself particularly incensed by some of the speeches by my friends in the Reform Party. I want to commend the hon. member for Wild Rose on his presentation. I expected a little more bombast which is normally the case with him but he was somewhat mollified tonight. I suspect his colleagues put the clamps on him, and it is as well.

I do want to say that I also have spent a lot of time in prisons in the Kingston area. There are many of them—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Milliken: Hon. members opposite seem to think it is for reasons other than visitation, but that is fine.

I have not encountered inmates who have told me that the reason they were there is because they got off too lightly the first time. I have never heard this and I have met with dozens of inmates in the last five and a half years that I have been representing that area.

I have been to Kingston penitentiary. I have been to Millhaven penitentiary. I have been to every one of them and I have never been told that by any inmate, nor has any of the custodial staff of Correctional Services Canada told me the reason they thought the inmates were there is because they got off too lightly the first time if it happened to be in juvenile court.