

Government Orders

\$100,000 per person in some instances, which is the case in some young offenders facilities.

The average cost of keeping someone incarcerated in a federal institution for one year is \$39,000. If we can get better results or even if we can get the same results in alternative measures we should examine them.

We should leave the possibility with the provinces that want these programs for adults. We should give the learned judges and justices the ability to place people on these programs if it is deemed the best course to take.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the official opposition critic on correctional issues, I take a particular interest in this bill. In spite of all the controversy surrounding this issue, the time has come to update and adapt our criminal justice system to the modern reality.

The efforts made to reform the sentencing process in Canada span a number of years and have required enormous human and financial resources. For the first time, we have an opportunity to give concrete expression to these efforts and to implement recommendations made by numerous commissions in their reports. Such a reform requires an objective review of the current situation, as well as the development of an original model for the future.

Several recent studies come to conclusions which confirm the need to reform Canada's criminal justice system. Let me mention a few. First, it is fairly safe to say that Canada puts too many people in jail for periods which are too long. Second, contrary to popular belief and to what some may claim, the crime rate, particularly for violent crimes, has not increased in Canada. Studies covering the period between 1988 and 1993 show that these rates remained essentially the same throughout that period. In fact, the rate for violent crimes has dropped slightly since 1991.

• (1945)

Bill C-41 is a true reform of the sentencing process, and only such a reform will solve some of the crucial problems which have been surfacing in recent years. Instinctively, and also because of fear, society has always been in favour of imposing long terms of imprisonment on criminals. Yet, it is established that such long periods of incarceration increase the risk of recidivism.

Consequently, public safety is not at all increased, quite the contrary. If we put offenders in jail for long periods of time, the problem will not be solved once they get back on the street.

Almost sixty years later, we finally have a chance to make amends and act responsibly, fifty years after the famous Archambault report, published in 1938, stated that we had a

collective responsibility, and we have that chance in the form of Bill C-41 and, more specifically, the new section 717 of the Criminal Code.

Of course we could save a lot of public money by using probation instead of incarceration as part of the rehabilitation process. In Great Britain, where alternative measures have been used for years and are used frequently, this did not lead to an increase in the crime rate, on the contrary, since Great Britain has one of the lowest repeater rates in the world.

The government has spent millions of dollars in recent years on the construction and maintenance of prisons that in the end do not do what they are supposed to do. Incarceration has failed to meet its two main objectives: to punish the offender and to protect society on a permanent basis.

Overcrowding and double occupancy of cells have reached a critical level in federal penitentiaries, as the hon. member from Kingston pointed out a few minutes ago. If Canada were to build new prisons, they would fill up immediately. However, if we could find alternatives to incarceration, in the case of offenders who are not dangerous—the majority of the prison population—we would solve the problem of overcrowding in prison institutions. We are talking about more than 80 per cent of the prison population, in this case.

So before getting into construction programs that will cost many more millions, we should develop alternatives that are less costly, more cost effective and therefore more effective overall.

The average annual cost of community supervision for all provinces is about \$1,500 per person on probation or parole, while it costs \$80,000 annually to keep an inmate in prison.

Quite frankly, using prison sentences as the principal punishment for all kinds of offences is no longer a defensible option nowadays. Most offenders are neither violent nor dangerous. It is unlikely their behaviour will improve as a result of going to prison. Consequently, alternatives to incarceration and alternate forms of punishment are increasingly considered a necessary option.

Alternatives to incarceration are not a recent development. The principle has been discussed for half a century. And for half a century we have been marking time. I think it time we tuned into today's reality and for once took a step forward by adopting provisions that would enable us to develop alternatives to incarceration, as clause 6 of Bill C-41 proposes.

We are forever hearing that imprisonment is expensive and that the courts are too slow. Well, by adopting alternative measures we also resolve the problem of congestion in the courts. With these measures, minor offences may be handled by means other than formal and costly legal proceedings. There are two main objectives: to prevent subsequent criminal behaviour