

Other

NDP blasts Bloc-Tory co-operation; Separatist party accused of hypocrisy for helping government scrap sentencing exception for fraudsters

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481 words

14 February 2011

[The Globe and Mail \(Breaking News\)](#)

GMBN

English

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The New Democrats are accusing the Bloc Québécois of hypocrisy for helping the Conservative government quickly scrap a law that allows non-violent offenders to serve just one-sixth of their prison sentence.

Two votes will be held in the House of Commons on Monday to end discussion of Bill C-95, a piece of legislation that was hastily cobbled together to keep one high-profile white-collar criminal behind bars after another recently obtained his release.

"We're not going to have anywhere near sufficient time to have a debate," NDP justice critic Joe Comartin said, telling reporters that weeks of hearings are required to understand the complexity of the bill.

"We believe there are parts of the one-sixth regimen that should be eliminated but we also know there are also lots of other fact situations. It's not just the [Vincent] Lacroix and the **Earl Jones** type of cases that need to be dealt with," Mr. Comartin said.

The criticism comes amid polls that suggest New Democrats are making some headway in Quebec, which has, in general, been less supportive of tough criminal justice measures that are favoured in other parts of the country – particularly those where the Conservatives have their base.

Mr. Lacroix, the author of one of the biggest frauds in Canadian history, was released this month after serving about two years of a 13-year sentence. He had pleaded guilty in 2009 to almost 200 charges in relation to the \$115-million debacle at Norbourg Asset Management Inc.

The new law was crafted at the instigation of the Bloc, which wants to prevent the similar release of Mr. Jones, a disgraced financial adviser in Montreal who is currently behind bars in relation to a multimillion-dollar **Ponzi** scheme.

But Mr. Comartin said many other people who would make good candidates for early release would be affected by the proposed legislation.

"We also know that there are other people – people particularly with addictions who have cleaned those up, who longer are a risk to society – and we should have the ability to get them out, get them into half-way houses and get them rehabilitated fully into society," he said. "This pressure to do it in a very short period of time is grossly undemocratic."

Mr. Comartin said he is not surprised the Conservatives are moving to shut down debate on the bill.

But it is a hypocritical move on the part of the Bloc, he said, "at a time when they fought so many other crime bills including around the length of time people spend in custody. They have been

adamant about that, stood on principle in most cases and won't do it here for only political considerations."

Globe and Mail Update

Document GMBN000020110214e72e0025x

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