

*Apartheid*

the last stage of the Bill, third reading, before it goes to the Senate.

Having said that, the Minister of Justice went on to introduce the final stage of the Bill knowing two things. First, the House traditionally recognizes that Members of Parliament carry on their duties and responsibilities not only here in the Chamber but also in other jurisdictions, not the least of which are the standing committees of the House of Commons. One of the most active standing committees and one of the most critical in the administration of justice is, of course, the Committee on Justice and Solicitor General. That committee is travelling today and holding hearings in other parts of Canada on important matters.

There is an understanding among Members that you cannot be in a committee and in the House of Commons at the same time. It is a physical impossibility. There has, therefore, been an understanding that a committee will not sit when a Bill in which it would normally be interested is before the House. In the alternative, there would be ample notice given to allow the spokespersons from the various political Parties to have a chance to be in the House to participate in the debate.

That is one tradition or common courtesy which was broken in this case. There is a second. The Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) worked hard with the Minister of Justice and his colleagues on the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General. He worked to develop a piece of legislation in the best interests of victims of crime. We are debating that Bill today. The Minister of Justice recognized that co-operation. The Hon. Member for Burnaby is recognized by Canadians from all parts of the country as an outstanding Justice critic.

He was unable to be here today because he was participating in a committee of the House of Commons, and the Government knew that. Nevertheless, the Government decided to bring before the House legislation which he had worked hard to develop in co-operation with the Minister of Justice, in spite of the fact that he could not be here for this last stage of the legislative procedure.

I am not complaining particularly or saying that this is terribly unfair. However, it certainly indicates an insensitivity and indicates that the Government is prepared to ignore tradition, procedures, and practices. I simply wanted to make that case.

The crime victim in Canadian society is victimized first by the offender and then by our justice process. Remedial action is long overdue. Every year almost 700 Canadian families are victimized by a murder, 2,500 lose someone to a drunk driver, and 100,000 other Canadians suffer lasting emotional trauma as a result of crime. Many more lose property or have their homes entered.

I understand that process, having been subject to a break and entry in my own home recently.

For these Canadians there is rarely any assistance to recover from the shock, fear, and anger. They experience delays in return of property—if there is any return at all—a lack of information about the investigation, and occasionally a summons to a court room where they are considered to be virtually a nobody.

Only one in 50 victims of violence receives any form of compensation at all from the state. Only one Canadian community in 100 has practical and emotional assistance organized for victims of common crimes. One in 25 has a rape crisis centre or shelter for battered wives.

This is not news to federal and provincial Ministers responsible for justice. Few have denied it, most have lamented it, and all have studied the recommendations of numerous reports. However, legislation has not been introduced or basic services established.

● (1805)

One Justice Minister was not content with this talk. Manitoba's former Justice Minister, Roland Penner, introduced a justice for victims of crime Bill which would have provided a coherent response to victims' needs for assistance and recognition. The Bill would have placed Manitoba among world leaders in recognizing the plight of victims of crime. Manitoban crime victims would have been informed promptly about remedies such as counselling, restitution from the offender, and compensation from the state.

I only hope, Mr. Speaker, that the change of government in Manitoba will not hinder the implementation and progress of this incredibly outstanding initiative taken by the former Government in Manitoba.

Victims would be kept informed of the investigation concerning the crime of which they were a victim. They would have their property returned when recovered and told how to prevent further victimization. Services would be created to help them cope with the longer-lasting problems of fear, anger, and sleeplessness. Judges and lawyers would consider the victims' needs, particularly when ordering restitution.

The Bill introduced by Manitoba's Roland Penner would achieve this by establishing a permanent committee which would use a victim assistance fund to promote specific principles of justice for victims. The inclusion of two victims on the committee would keep the innovations focused on the victims' needs.

You will recall, I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that in 1985 the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a detailed declaration on victims' rights, calling on countries for more effective measures to prevent crime and basic programs to assist victims.

The General Assembly, like other international bodies of which most of us are aware, stresses that victims have personal interests that are affected by decisions of the criminal courts. Victims must be given access to justice and fair treatment.