

one of the amendments to the capital punishment bill, is the chairman of that subcommittee. I am sure that under her able guidance the committee has been doing not only an excellent job of studying the situation but will make a report which will prove enlightening to the standing committee and to all hon. members of the House.

The Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in the other place has been equally involved with the study of matters which are recommended for our concern in this motion. That committee has had an examination of the parole system of Canada under way for some two years. It has heard roughly 115 briefs from after care groups, inmate groups, and from public organizations such as the Canadian Bar Association. I understand that the committee itself has not held public hearings outside Ottawa, but the staff of the committee has gone across the country to make a tour of the various prisons and to talk with officials and inmates. This committee is looking at all aspects of parole and other types of release, and particularly at such questions as temporary absence, day parole, mandatory supervision, the question of federal-provincial responsibility, the composition of the National Parole Board and questions as to whether it should be regionalized, parole eligibility, and also parole hearings and decisions.

This committee has not, I understand, studied the laws and practices of other countries as such, but it has looked extensively at the model legislation in the United States, and I have no doubt that after a two-year study of this kind, it will be coming forward with a report which will be very important indeed both for parliament and the country.

In sum on this point, all of the matters which it has been suggested here we should look at are being looked at, and in fact some of them are being looked at by parliamentary committees. This brings me to what I believe might be stated to be the second point of the motion, the first being the investigation of crime and its treatment in Canada. The second is that this should be done by a parliamentary committee. In a way, this is probably the most essential point which the hon. member is raising because he, himself, has remarked on the unbelievable amount of information which is available and yet, in contrast with the amount of information, the emotional and snap response which the public often makes to the information and to the situation.

In particular, he has commented on the failure of all sides of the argument to deal rationally with the subject of capital punishment. There is no doubt that this is a failing, but it is not one which is very easy to cure by a parliamentary committee or in any other way, because in fact what is involved in issues such as the capital punishment issue is a deep clash of values between various segments of our population.

Canadians simply do not all believe the same kinds of things and, as the hon. member has suggested, some are not seeing the evidence. One might even say they are not prepared to see the evidence that can be put forward on this subject. And since the result is one that comes from very deeply felt attitudes towards life, it is not easy to see how the work of a parliamentary committee, or indeed of parliament itself, could change such deeply seated views.

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Yet I would not want to be despairing of the expectation that any of us, indeed all of us, could change our minds on questions such as this.

Now, we really come to the question which the hon. member has most directly placed before us, the question of public understanding, and he has included in that the understanding of members of this House, of the issues. He believes that the best way to have an effective public understanding of all the issues connected with crime and its treatment would be through dramatizing the issues through the public acts of a special parliamentary committee. One thing which I cannot refrain from saying in a debate such as this, and I say it all the more because it certainly does not apply to the hon. member for Egmont, or indeed to any other hon. members I see in the House at the present time, is that there are some hon. members of this House who, it seems to me, for political advantage rather shamelessly exploit various aspects of the penal situation. When problems arise many of the members opposite will make political capital of them in a way which will inflame public opinion.

I believe this is one of the sources, perhaps one of the major sources for the continuation of this problem which we have, the fact that it is not something on which members of this parliament are showing positive leadership. This is a matter with respect to which some members are showing negative leadership. Only if that factor can be changed can we begin to make progress in guiding the public.

● (1730)

If a parliamentary committee is to be useful in resolving the sort of conflicts that arise in parliament and in the country generally on issues such as this, that parliamentary committee should not be a special committee. I think we should work through the ordinary standing committees of the House. After all, if the issue we are considering is one of the great issues confronting our country at this time, it should be brought before a parliamentary committee. Our parliamentary standing committees have been established to deal with such matters and they have been dealing with them for a long time.

Several years the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, of which I was and still am a member, studied the penitentiary system. That study fizzled out. It was undertaken during the course of our study of the estimates. We went west and looked at some penal institutions. I think that experience was an eye-opener for many members of this House who had not been inside such institutions. We saw not only what was being done, which was all too little, but we saw the tremendous difficulties that are encountered in doing anything to rehabilitate prisoners in our institutions, especially in the kind of prisons which we have traditionally established.

Without pursuing all the details of that investigation, may I say the failure of that justice committee to pursue this matter adequately was the result of a failure of determination on the part of members of the committee. That failure should not be taken as an indication of what the standing committees of this House can or cannot do. For many reasons I feel that an inquiry such as the one suggested should not be undertaken by a special commit-