

That this telecast should have preceded by a few hours the debate we are holding today is a coincidence both happy and disquieting. Happy, because it draws the attention of the people to a truly current problem which has always threatened and still threatens the maintenance of law and order in a democratic society. Disquieting, because the idealized and romanticized screenplay and the performance of the protagonists in this violent and sophisticated game underlined what we already know: One gets used to everything, even the loathsomeness.

We get used to evil, we get used to the horrors of war and death, we get used to inflation, cataclysms, labour disputes, crime; there comes a time when, far from disturbing us, the remembrance of those calamities does not even stir up a defence reflex, a time when we even allow ourselves to be seduced. And so it is with organized crime. That is why, Mr. Speaker, it is urgent that we discuss it, and even more urgent that we act.

● (1510)

This is what I wanted to say and this is why I accepted to sponsor this debate, not that I want to blame the government, no but to wake them up, not that I want to pass judgment on them, no but to urge them to be more vigilant, to better co-ordinate their activities with those of the other levels of government and particularly to suggest that they establish a true national policy bent on fighting organized crime.

I would like this government to be more severe in handling what I would call antibiotics designed to reinforce the lymphatic system of our society which is becoming increasingly powerless to react.

Mr. Speaker, I say these things because, even though this might be a paradox, to pass judgment on organized crime, is tantamount to passing judgment on the kindness of the good and honest elements of our society.

It is not the existence of a parallel power, a swarming and shifty power operating outside the law, which should surprise and concern us, it is rather the apparent ease with which it can operate and the calmness of our attitude towards these activities the importance of which we refuse to acknowledge. Let me use the following comparison to better describe the situation, Mr. Speaker: organized crime is like inflation.

Both are developing, running wild and playing havoc with everything because of the international context, with the support of unscrupulous go-betweens and swindlers, motivated only by profit, insensitive to the human sufferings they cause, and with the tacit complicity of politicians, who are afraid of taking any drastic action and control arguing that politics is always the art of the possible, but not more. Finally, both inflation and organized crime lead implacably to social disorder which imperil individual aspirations, rights and basic liberties of citizens by hitting the weakest first upsetting the economy of a country to such a point that, sooner or later, chaos results.

Even though this is not a problem which can be blamed upon any one government is particular, it may have political implications, if our leaders are not determined to put a stop to it.

Let us go back to the past a little.

Organized Crime

Periodically, I would say sporadically, society has bursts of goodwill and rebels, but very soon falls back into a reprehensible apathy.

In America, at the end of the 19th century, the people were getting uneasy about the activities of organized crime and some action was taken. All of a sudden this enthusiasm cooled off with the murder of two police officers of New Orleans and New York. Then followed a ten-year period of inaction.

In the twenties, prosecutions by the United States Treasury Department put an end to the prohibition era and resulted in the conviction of a well-known Chicago figure, Al Capone. Then followed a ten-year period of inaction.

In the thirties, New York prosecutor Thomas Dewey took a series of proceedings to dismantle the well-established organization of the crime syndicate leader Lucky Luciano.

Then there was another ten-year period of inaction.

In the forties, the FBI inquired into underground organizations specializing in blackmail and criminal abetting in the movie industry, and managed to break up organized crime. The sensational arrests made at the time are still in our memories. Then, Mr. Speaker, there was another ten-year period of inaction.

After the war, the people did not show any particular interest in the proliferation of underworld activities until 1950, with the inquiry of the Senate Kefauver Committee, and 1957, when the McClennan inquiry was launched after the Appalachian meeting. We then had to wait until July 23, 1965, when the Katzenbach Committee was set up to report objectively and fully to President Johnson.

At that time, Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me a personal remark, I was minister of justice in Quebec, and at a meeting in Washington with Attorney General Katzenbach and FBI authorities, we exchanged data and information in order to intensify our fight in Quebec against the most varied criminal activities, especially, it will be remembered, in the field of fraudulent bankruptcies and criminal arson, a very popular activity at the time, when our prosecutions turned out to be so timely that several witnesses were silenced, liquidated and buried in quicklime. Ten years later, organized crime is still a topic of discussion in this House.

Meanwhile, we have to admit that commendable efforts have been made. The administration of justice in Quebec was drastically changed as a result of the shrewd and realistic work and recommendations of the Prévost inquiry. That fact is worth mentioning in this House.

I should also like to congratulate Mr. Justice Réal Brunet and his fellow commissioners of the Quebec Police Commission, on their courage in conducting the present investigation and their remarkable patience in dealing with the many obstacles that stand in their way. I also wish to mention Mr. Justice Cliche and his colleagues and the inquiry that is going on concerning violence in the construction industry, investigation whose conclusions, at the rhythm that disclosures are being made, will probably tie in with those of the inquiry commission on organized crime.