

Adjournment Debate

Last summer, Mr. Speaker, I, along with people right across Canada, woke up to news reports about a little girl in Toronto by the name of Allison Parrot. We first heard reports about her disappearance, and then we heard reports about her grisly murder.

This authoritative news voice kept telling us that we should be bringing back the death penalty. As a result of that urging, and all of those reports, there was in my constituency office, my office in Ottawa and my home, a deluge of requests to bring back the death penalty. I had an inundation of letters and telephone calls urging me to support the return of the death penalty, all the time pointing out that for many years the polls reflected support for the return of capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, why is it that that happens so regularly? I do not know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I personally believe that that feeling was reflected in the comments of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) and the Attorney General of the Province of Ontario, and more recently in the comments of the Chairman of the Canadian Sentencing Commission, all of whom have said that Canadians have lost confidence in our criminal justice system.

The recent vigilante killings by store owners in Calgary and Montreal are yet further illustrations of that very point, that feeling of frustration on the part of the Canadian people. The Minister of Justice, as you will recall, Mr. Speaker, also said that vigilante system is unacceptable; that a "Charles Bronson" system of justice is unacceptable.

I agree with those statements, Mr. Speaker, and I know you do, too. But, Mr. Speaker, it is the job of the Minister of Justice, the job of the provincial Attorneys General, to ensure that we have a system of justice in which Canadians can have confidence. Canadians must have confidence in their criminal justice system.

What is being done about it, Mr. Speaker? Of course, we are going to have a free vote on the issue of capital punishment. But, is that the answer? I doubt that you think so, Mr. Speaker, and I do not think so either. I believe that if the former Government, a Government that was in power for 15 years or more, had taken some action to tighten up the bail laws, as well as the sentencing and parole laws, we would not have this problem now, and Canadians would in fact have confidence in the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, you know as well as I do that the present Government—bless it—cannot escape blame, either. Canadians voted for a change in September of 1984, and here we are today, insofar as the criminal justice system is concerned, and very little has been changed. In fact, we seem to be following the same old agenda. Perhaps it is the Liberal agenda, perhaps it is a bureaucratic agenda, but it is not the agenda of Canadians. Canadians know that between the years 1976 and 1985 violent crime increased 25.7 per cent in the country. They want the criminal justice system to be tightened up. I believe that public opinion polls would be very different now on the

question of capital punishment if steps had been taken to tighten up the criminal justice system.

• (1805)

Irrespective of whether capital punishment is brought back, Canadians want the system tightened up. The Minister of Justice would not have to worry about a vigilante or a Charles Bronson system of justice or about the confidence of Canadians in the criminal justice system if he would only tighten up the bail laws, sentencing, and parole.

The Minister and the Government have had some 2.5 years to do it. However, there are 2.5 years left in the mandate of the Government. That is enough time for the Minister of Justice to take some decisive action in this area so that he can leave a legacy of which he can be proud, of which I can be proud, and of which Canadians can be proud.

I am looking forward to hearing from the Parliamentary Secretary tonight that the Minister of Justice is about to take some decisive action and to leave a legacy of which all of us could be proud.

[Translation]

Mr. François Gérin (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I must congratulate the Hon. Member for raising this issue and for his remarks. I know that he is deeply concerned about this issue, having advocated these principles ever since his election. I must say that fortunately some Hon. Members devote their time and energy promoting major issues. It is true that the system we have inherited must be changed and changed thoroughly, but these changes cannot happen overnight. They can only be carried out following a rather extensive consultation. And we started this extensive consultation the moment we came to power in September 1984, something of which the Hon. Member is well aware for having contributed to it.

And this consultation has started to pay off. For instance, two weeks ago, the Canadian Sentencing Commission tabled its report which indicated what a great many people knew already, namely, that there are differences in sentencing for the same crimes which people just cannot understand. That is why they answer in various polls that they no longer understand the system. Referring for instance to the various examples given by my hon. friend concerning the perception which people have of the criminal justice system and especially the vigilante type of justice, we realize that people do not quite understand the principle of necessary force involved in cases of legitimate defence. As much as 68 per cent of poll respondents were quoted at saying that a vigilante type of justice could be legitimate under certain circumstances. But if they have been asked a different question, such as: Would you agree that the victim should use more force than necessary? Well, I am sure most Canadians would have said no.

So it would seem that Criminal Code provisions as worded may lead to confusion. People should be better informed