

Organized Crime

Italian mayor in Palermo who in spite of threats to him and his family went ahead in standing up to organized crime. The implications have been tremendous, both in the United and in Italy.

We also have to remember, as my colleague from Winnipeg pointed out in a previous debate on this subject, now that it is less profitable and less safe for organized criminals to ply their trade in the United States and in Italy they will be looking for other places to move to and other sources of influence. Canada must be prepared for this. I suggest that the establishment of a special joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate to examine this whole subject could only be a useful and constructive one.

Mrs. Pauline Browes (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to address the House on the motion of the Hon. Member for Trinity (Miss Nicholson) for a parliamentary inquiry into organized crime. Much of the organized criminal activity in Canada involves the supplying of illegal goods and services, gambling, loan sharking, drugs, prostitution, pornography, and other forms of vice are included. Press reports indicate that organized crime is also involved in legitimate business with the purpose to monopolize services and manipulate prices. Within these structures activity is not dependent upon any one individual, and the criminal activity will continue to flourish even if one or more of the principals is removed.

We also know that persons involved in organized crime represent a wide variety of backgrounds and origins. They are groups of criminals, some working within structures as complex as those of some large corporations and subject to internal laws which are rigidly enforced. Their actions are well thought out conspiracy aimed at gaining control over fields of activity in order to amass profits.

All Canadians are concerned that organized criminals be thwarted, exposed, punished, and incapacitated to show that their business will not be tolerated in Canada. But I ask, Mr. Speaker, is the way the Hon. Member for Trinity suggests the best way to deal with organized crime in Canada?

Some Canadians, perhaps influenced by media, may have vastly inflated views of the extent of organized crime in Canada. While I do not want to minimize the threat posed by organized crime in Canada, particularly with respect to drug trafficking, the combined law enforcement efforts of the various orders of government in Canada are increasingly effective in controlling organized crime.

A major problem with inquiries of the nature proposed here is that they attract a great deal of public attention. There are public hearings, daily reports in the media, and discussions of the latest revelations on national news and interview programs which could sensationalize the issue and undermine the work of law enforcement authorities.

A parliamentary committee collects information. It is not a court of law where the rules of evidence are strictly applied.

When there is a breach of criminal conduct only a trial, where a defence can be made public, satisfies the Canadian sense of justice.

Therefore, because the rules of evidence are less rigorous in parliamentary inquiries than those applicable to Canadian courts, inquiries have to be handled very carefully. Moreover, evidence educed before such an inquiry could not be used in court proceedings and thus is of little value from a law enforcement perspective.

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Moreover, it is likely that a parliamentary inquiry would unnecessarily alarm Canadians by creating the impression that organized crime has not been adequately addressed by Canadian police and the courts. In addition, I am concerned that an inquiry would tend to deflect both attention and resources away from ongoing intelligence and enforcement efforts, and possibly retard the investigation and prosecution of major cases.

I believe that the arrangements we already have in this country are our strength in combating organized crime. We have a federal police force, the RCMP, dealing with the problem. We have all levels of government and their enforcement agencies co-operating to provide an effective shield against organized crime. We have national intelligence systems, national police training programs, joint force operations, and a host of other mechanisms. Major institutions, such as the Canadian banking community, are examining ways and means of minimizing the extent to which they can be used to launder money.

Those efforts are not widely appreciated and reported on in the media. In Canada, we tend to proceed more quietly and with less fanfare than in the United States.

In my view the approach of Canadian law enforcement authorities to organized crime is effective. It focuses efforts and resources and reflects excellent co-operation between all jurisdictions in the prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of organized crime figures. Enforcement policy and activities operate to preserve the confidence of Canadians in the integrity of our social, political and economic institutions as the major influences constraining the corruption that organized crime attempts to promote.

Key to this is the integrity of Canada's police, courts, and other law enforcement institutions as our front line defence against organized crime. Fortunately, these institutions have been and remain free of corruption, and we must sustain policy and programs to ensure that it will never become a country in which the underworld can take root.

The Government recognizes the Hon. Member's legitimate concerns respecting organized crime. A parliamentary inquiry would add little to the mechanisms already in place to deal with organized crime. Rather, this House should support and encourage the federal and provincial Governments in their law