

the media or the governments, as "experts."

The inevitable results of this one-sided sales pitch from the dreamers or the schemers has been that well-meaning, eager-to-oblige (admit it — humane, progressive, forward-looking are happier adjectives than reactionary, neanderthal, junkyard-dog mean) legislators, attorneys-general, solicitors-general, ministers of justice — and yes, god help us, some judges and police chiefs — have been well and truly hornswoggled into adopting legislation and policies which have fuelled, not deterred, crime and criminals. And nearly destroyed the third arm of government as an effective institution.

Plea-bargaining — the venereal disease of any system of criminal justice and the distinctive sore now on the U.S. system — once almost unheard of in Canadian courts, is now common to them. The joyful, semi-secret grapplings and couplings of defence counsel and Crown attorneys are performed daily, to their audible moans of delight and loud cries for "more."

Massive, costly programs of "court diversion," designed to ensure that no alleged offender who isn't actually apprehended with a severed head under his arm will ever have to endure the undignified taint of a court appearance, are carried out to the wild applause of attorneys-general, solicitors-general, ministers of justice and newly graduated classes of social workers.

Parole, and temporary absence programs from prisons, sanctified by parliament and vigorously employed by regiments of corrections bureaucrats, demonstrate a thinly veiled but effective contempt for the judicial function and have now almost devalued and debased the judicial coinage. No trial or appellate judge in Canada has any idea of how meaningfully the prison sentence he sweated to impose will be honored.

In that event, why not be a nice, warm, progressive, exciting (even trendy) judge and toss out absolute and conditional discharges and probation like confetti at a wedding?

Citizens of Canada triple-lock their doors, return to and cower behind medieval walled or guarded residences, abandon their streets and parks to thugs, hooligans and criminals, arm themselves with cans of mace and lead pipes and attend night classes in the martial arts.

How pathetic, how absurd, how shameful, how infuriating — how unnecessary — when one recalls that the first duty of the state is to protect its law-abiding citizens.

The thin blue line of peace officers, baffled and frustrated, represses its anger and says, all too often and all too dangerously, "what's the use?" So do more and more judges.

It is, I think, time for a real debate to begin.

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