

had indicated he would speak to it, but now I believe he has informed Senator Hastings that he will not do so.

I believe I am safe in saying that this item should be considered as having been debated and removed from the order paper.

The Hon. the Speaker: As no other honourable senator wishes to speak, this inquiry is considered as having been debated.

EL SALVADOR

POLITICAL, MILITARY AND SOCIAL SITUATION—DEBATE
ADJOURNED

Hon. Heath Macquarrie rose, pursuant to notice of Wednesday, March 4, 1981:

That he will call the attention of the Senate to:

(1) the increasingly dangerous political, military and social situation in El Salvador;

(2) the compelling hazards of third party interventions and the possibility of the escalation of hostile actions within El Salvador;

(3) the further compelling importance of the resolution of the conflict by means of a political settlement rather than through recourse to sustained and bloody armed conflict; and

(4) the value of Canadian encouragement and support of the efforts of those individuals and groups seeking mediation of the conflict in El Salvador.

He said: Honourable senators, I have great regard for this particular procedure. It is one of the virtues of the Senate that we have this procedure whereby we may give the benefit of our mature wisdom, as a chamber of second thought, to issues which are contemporary, and these may be in the international scene as well as in the national scene. It is important that we have this flexibility, because it is indeed trite to say that it is a rapidly changing canvas which covers the international scene today. I sometimes feel that we lose a bit of spontaneity by the long lapse between putting down the inquiry and dealing with it. Mine was put down on March 4, and much has happened since then.

Another thing which has caused me some concern is that quite often an inquiry prompts remarks from the person who inspired it but no one else. It may well appear to be some little exercise in particular reasoning that he may have—hobby-horsing, if I were so slangy as to use that expression. I should like to see more of these inquiries carried through with more discussion representing a variety of thought in the Senate. I invite other participation in this matter. Regrettably, the El Salvador situation will not be going away. I think we should give some thought to a better mechanism of having the Senate, or a committee thereof, seized with some of the very important foreign policy issues, because our standing committee is engaged in very useful long-range studies. The committee has built up great expertise and facility in dealing with such subjects.

[Senator Frith.]

● (1500)

Since the introduction of my inquiry in March, distressing events in the Middle East and elsewhere have caught the attention of the world, so that there is now diminished media attention for El Salvador. I wish that the dangers had diminished as did the attention given to it by television, radio and the press.

As a serious deliberative body, the Senate is ideally suited to seek beyond today's headlines. For that reason, I am somewhat pleased it is not one of the racy news items of today. In the "electric age," as MacLuhan called it, the devices of our technology make possible a broader public involvement. He used to say that every school child would weep at the assassination of President Kennedy because they knew about it instantly and, therefore, were affected. It contributes, I fear, also to a shortened memory span. The citizenry deluged with data, impressions and action shots becomes a sated, saturated audience all too ready to forget or, at least, to ask for a change of emphasis or perhaps a change of locale. It seems like yesterday, in my mature accumulation of years, that the howling mobs of Tehran, and the grim, glum countenance of the Ayatollah Khomeini dominated the livingrooms everywhere, every day and every night. But little is heard of Iran today, yet the problems, the anxieties and the dangers are still there.

Do we ever hear about Afghanistan today? How often is Afghanistan featured on television in our country? How much space is given to the terrible situation in Somalia? There is danger, suffering, bitterness, conflict and tragedy existing all over the world, but it seems that in our age we have to have periodic fascination. In our age the latest thing is the only thing, otherwise it is no good, and that is a terrible thing if it prevails even in reference to human suffering. Unless you are constantly the recipient of the attention of the television camera, you will not be given consideration. Whether an item is newsworthy on the comparative and recent scale or not, the situations are there and thoughtful people must think about them.

So it is with El Salvador—that sad little country. With problems so immense, with suffering so vast, our first consideration should be—and it is not always given this priority—in human terms. The statistics are imprecise. One thing we do know is that there is a devastating assault upon human life every day in that country. For far, far too many of those poor people, Thomas Hobbes' description is all too true that life is nasty, brutish and short—tragically short for many.

In recent weeks I have been reading what I can from serious and casual articles, and one of the finest articles I read was from the *Washington Post*, written by Loren Jenkins. He writes about Chalatenango, a small city in the north where, he says:

It is a dead body by the roadside that first announces the city limits of this somnolent provincial capital in northern El Salvador.