

## Canadian Public Opinion on Criminal Justice

(Abstracted from *Selected Trends in Canadian Criminal Justice*, published by the Solicitor General of Canada in 1979.)

The results of public opinion surveys carried out in the last decade are summarized below. The data may appear contradictory, but this is inevitable when poll data, which are superficial and can be misleading, are compared with the results of more in-depth surveys.

### Concerns about Crime

When asked to select from a list, seven in ten Canadians rated crime and delinquency their second or third social concern, just after inflation and unemployment.

When asked to identify social problems without consulting a list, however, few persons mentioned crime and delinquency. In other surveys only one to three Canadians out of ten said they were fearful of being victimized by strangers or afraid to walk in their neighbourhoods at night.

### Policing

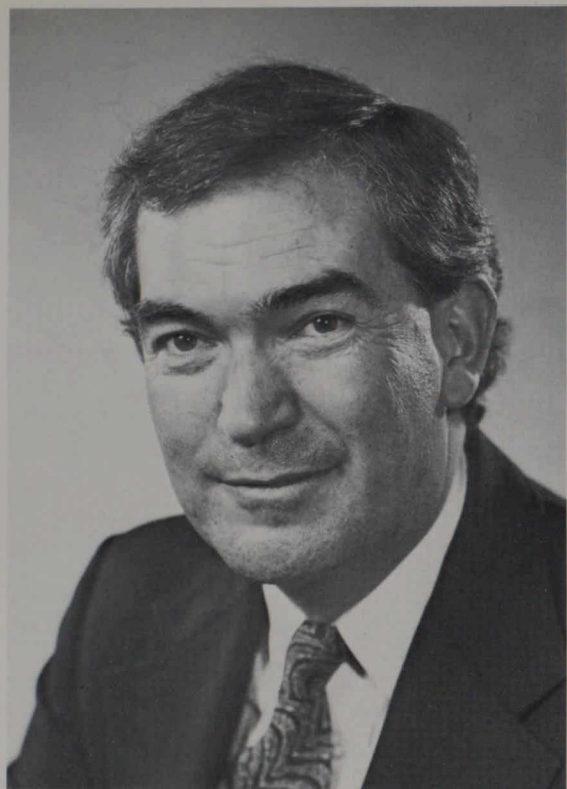
Most Canadians felt very positive about the police, crediting them with positive personal and moral characteristics. While most people considered the police generally competent, they did not consider them as efficient in solving specific crimes. Those who had themselves been victims of crimes were the most critical, and many regretted having called the police because of the time and inconvenience involved in the prosecution of their case.

### Sentencing Practices

Polls taken in 1966 showed that four in ten Canadians believed the courts did not deal harshly enough with criminals. Seven in ten held this opinion in 1979. The polls also indicated that the sentences Canadians believe to be appropriate are often very severe and are harsher than those actually handed down by the courts. In-depth studies, however, suggest that Canadians may be considerably more in agreement with present court practices than the more superficial polls indicate.

### Aims of Sentencing

There is no clear agreement among Canadians about the preferred aim of sentencing or incarceration. A small majority, six in ten, said they personally favoured "rehabilitation," but thought that, in reality, the emphasis is on punishment. They seemed pessimistic about the impact of prisons, and many were critical of correctional measures designed to rehabilitate, particularly if they involved tools such as half-way houses, which would put "criminals" in residential communities.



Bob Kaplan, Solicitor General.

The Solicitor General has authority over federal prisons, parole and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The other federal law officer of the Crown, the Attorney General (currently Jean Chrétien), concentrates on enforcement and prosecution.

other crimes of violence, and the murder of police officers or prison wardens. The death penalty was mandatory. All others were classified as non-capital and carried the penalty of life-imprisonment. The penalty for a capital murder committed by someone under the age of eighteen was also life-imprisonment.

- 1967 – For a five-year period ending December 28, 1972, only murders of policemen or permanent employees of prisons were classified as capital.
- 1973 – The above amendment was extended to 1977.
- 1976 – Capital punishment was abolished. Two degrees of murder were established. The first includes planned and contracted murders; murders of police officers or prison employees; murders committed while committing or attempting to commit rape, kidnapping, or hijacking; and murders committed by persons already convicted of murder in the first or second degree. These require mandatory twenty-five years' imprisonment before parole. All others are of the second degree and require sentences of ten years (or more, according to the judge) before parole.