

The Child at Risk: the roots of violence and aggression

by Judy Pelham

What can be done to alleviate the problem of crime in our society? On October 16th a committee of the Canadian senate released a report entitled "Child At Risk" which deals with the pre-natal, perinatal (at the time of birth), and post-natal influences that might eventually lead to criminal behaviour. Before yawning and shelving this report we might do well to consider some statistics that the report cites as impetus to its investigation. For the periods 74-78 there was an increase of sixty percent in the rate of juvenile crime. In 1978 there were one hundred and twenty-nine people eighteen years old and younger in federal penitentiaries and seven hundred others in provincial adult prisons. For the years 77-78 the total cost of the Canadian penal system was more than five hundred million dollars. Eighty percent of the inmates of federal institutions have been previously convicted. Recognizing these facts, the committee draws a comparison to medical research, and looks to crime prevention as a possible answer.

To illustrate some of the concerns of "Child at Risk" imagine the following individual: He inherits genetically a poor tolerance to stress and is disposed to anti-social and criminal behavior. His mother does not eat properly during her pregnancy and he suffers from malnutrition. His mother smokes and drinks heavily. She takes drugs, whether over-the-counter,

prescribed, or otherwise. The experience of birth is a trauma for any child. He will probably be born premature and underweight. The labour may be difficult. The drugs she is given during labour may cause the fetus to receive insufficient oxygen. He has minimal brain damage. She may not want to have the child. He is separated from his mother and placed in an incubator. By the time he is released from the hospital his mother is back at work. As an infant he is deprived of a close emotional relationship with either parent. He is the object of emotional and physical abuse. His family is poor. He is babysat by television. He develops learning disabilities and a hyperactive and undisciplined personality. It would not be surprising if such a child became a delinquent.

While these misfortunes do not ensure that the individual will become a criminal, the report of the Senate Committee shows that each factor increases the risk of the child becoming delinquent.

Moreover, these things are likely to happen in combinations and while one problem presents a certain risk, two problems quadruple that risk. The committee presents facts, conclusions, and recommendations from information they have gathered from relevant data, studies recently published, and on the basis of testimony from expert witnesses.

The committee recommends a greater "awareness" of and planning for parenting and the care of the woman during pregnancy. "It was once thought the placental barrier protected the fetus from noxious influences in the system of the mother," yet it is shown that all these things affect the child in harmful or unknown ways. The committee also heard testimony that severe stress "with almost one hundred percent certainty finds the children born damaged." Another recommendation is that a prenatal child allowance be paid to pregnant mothers, on the condition that

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The far left of the NDP — alive and well

by Arnold Mosher

The NDP, in catering to a larger part of society, has lost many of its socialist ideas, said Jim Turk, a self avowed member of the left caucus of the New Democratic Party. Turk, a University of Toronto professor, speaking at the MacMechan Room last Friday said he would restrict his talk to the Ontario provincial and the Federal NDP.

Turk said the NDP set two goals for itself 1) getting elected and 2) achieving reforms. He pointed out that many of the reforms the NDP sought, like Medicare and Petrocan, have been attained through political leverage.

But in achieving these reforms the party had to be a threat and in order to do this it had to hold more seats in parliament said Turk. The consequence was that the party went looking for popular support, and in so doing changed its orientation.

No longer is the NDP a party of the working man, Turk said.

It is now a party based on Keynesian economies, seeking to work within the framework of capitalism.

According to Turk this prostitution of party ideals is making the party just like the Conservatives and Liberals.

A "planned society" is what the left of the NDP desires and this can only be achieved via working class support says Turk.

Turk said that to run the government along socialist lines required an all or nothing effort. Capitalists says Turk "privatize the profitable and left unprofitable to government."

If the NDP were elected as a government, its changes would have to be made rapidly since capital interests would wear away support for the government during a gradual transition, said Turk. He said it would be best to take over the economy during an economic boom.

"An exclusive parliamentary system is not enough," said

Turk, for the inputs into the New Democratic Party. He said rank and file reliance on elected officials had a debilitating effect on the party and led to apathy. To counter this Turk said the NDP must develop an extra parliamentary system through the trade union movement.

Turk has centered his activities in working class areas in the Toronto area. These areas have a large immigrant population which, according to Turk, is more aware of working class solidarity. Turk said by running an Italian vote in that area while retaining the working class support they already had.

Turk said that in labour unions there is more willingness to take socialism than in the NDP itself. The left caucus in Ontario being made up of one third steel workers.

"The future is not preordained," said Turk, "and however narrow, there is a potential to more fundamental class interests."

