

Administration of Justice

tee. The only advantage that I can see flowing from the establishment of such a committee would be that it would include members of the other chamber. This might be an advantage in helping us to co-ordinate all our views on the subject.

Quite apart from any considerations involving our committee system, I believe that even if we were to set up, first, a special committee which would look into the problem, we should still need to bring it back to the justice committee or whatever committee of the House may be most directly seized of this subject matter. The special committee somehow would need to involve the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. In other words, the justice committee being the committee that is charged with dealing with matters of this kind, it being the committee that works with the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General, it would be the body which in the final analysis would have to see to it that progress was made. If that body was separate and apart from the body undertaking the investigation, I do not think the purposes which the hon. member has in mind as set out in the motion would be well served.

As many hon. members wish to take part in this debate I will say no more except to observe again that we on this side of the House share the hon. member's concern about reforming the system. Some of us harbour reservations about our ability to accomplish what the hon. member wishes. We do not think you can do it by setting up a special parliamentary committee. However, I would very much favour, as I know other hon. members would, giving such further terms of reference as are necessary on this subject to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs to enable it to pursue investigations that are even more wide-ranging than those it is at present pursuing.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member introduced the motion standing in his name he spoke sincerely and, if I may say so without giving offence, he also sounded frustrated and in some ways disillusioned with respect to this subject matter. The parliamentary secretary went on at length recounting the work of the committees. He made special reference to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs which has been seized of many matters coming within the general ambit of the motion before us.

As I listened to the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald), who mentioned that three major royal commissions have looked into these matters since 1938, and as I listened to the parliamentary secretary and reflected on the various pieces of legislation and reports of various commissions with respect to which the committee reported to the Solicitor General, it seemed to me the last thing we need is another parliamentary committee to do what the motion proposes. It seeks the establishment of a parliamentary committee which would look into all aspects of crime and its treatment in Canada.

Much of the time, particularly in the last ten years, the attention of this House has been devoted to the investigation of crime and its treatment. Increasingly, people of this country have come to feel that this exercise is becoming more and more futile. Indeed, as I was listening to the hon. member I looked at a newspaper that had come from my constituency today. The headline, in big, black letters

[Mr. MacGuigan.]

reads, "War declared on vandals". The article which follows reads in part:

Broken windows, garbage dumped in the street and other rowdy activities showing an apparent total disregard for law and order were typical of this group . . .

The article continues:

The underlying problem, according to the Cumberland mayor, is that the 'laws are taking the teeth out of law enforcement.'

The article then refers to a recent letter sent to the Attorney General which blames—

. . . 'the leniency of the courts and the lack of support given to the police by the courts' . . .

Apparently the matter was of great concern to the council. The letter continued:

'In many cases the police are severely handicapped in dealing with situations because of the permissiveness allowed and perpetuated by senior levels of government. Often, when violations do result in convictions, the penalties are so inadequate as to make a mockery of the whole process.'

I quoted that excerpt to illustrate this point: although parliament has been concentrating more of its efforts in this area, and although members are becoming more expert on the fine points of administering our penal system and developing new approaches to parole than at any time in our history, the kind of sentiments expressed in the article are on the increase. Dumping garbage on the streets is not a crime in the sense that committing murder is a crime; nevertheless, in many ways the two crimes are not so different one from another.

The hon. member's notice of motion has been on the order paper for some time. Certain events have taken place since it was first put on the order paper. I have referred to garbage being dumped on the streets and to acts of vandalism. In my view, the last thing that we need is a parliamentary committee, special or otherwise, which would spend further time looking into "the subject of punishment—its deterrent value and relevance to the rehabilitative process—with particular attention to capital punishment". Capital punishment has been examined in greater depth by this House than perhaps any other aspect of crime, probably with little or no effect on the incidence of murder.

● (1740)

Instead of trying to have a committee of this House look into all aspects of crime and its treatment, it might be a more useful exercise if this House, either as a body or through some special mechanism, spent a little time looking at crime and its causes. By and large we have completely ignored the root causes of crime in discussions about changes to our penal laws, parole acts and all the other matters which come under the administration of the so-called correctional system. We have not done anything in so far as focusing the attention of this House and the Canadian public on the whole question of the causes of crime.

Because I have not taken part in any of the committee meetings I wish to say a few words in this debate. Quite frankly, I am a little sick and tired at the fact that we have increasingly been conducting microscopic examinations into little changes this way or that in connection with the question of crime and its treatment. Perhaps that is one of