

# *Security in the Precincts of Parliament*

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**W**henever parliamentarians get together, the subject of security is bound to rear its head. And while it never provokes passionate ideological debate, anyone can easily see why that subject remains at the heart of many a discussion. For whether we like it or not — whether we are even aware of it or not — we as political figures are in constant contact with the public: not as much, perhaps, as the stars of rink or stage, but focal points nonetheless for public aspiration and discontent. A political figure becomes an ideal target: easily identifiable with every ill which happens to be plaguing society at the time; a potential victim for an act of violence.

I need not look far afield for examples to illustrate my point. While Canada's political history has on the whole been relatively stable, it has still seen its share of violent incidents or accidents involving parliament buildings.

Consider, for instance, the events of 1849. At that time the federal parliament was located in Montréal. Parliament had approved substantial grants to victims of the 1837 Rebellion living in Upper Canada. The Doric Club, the Opposition and the Montréal Gazette were trying to prevent the same grants being made to victims living in Lower Canada. The very Opposition which, when it was the Government, had sponsored the Bill to indemnify the people of Upper Canada was now refusing compensation to the people of Lower Canada. Their reason? The money would become a reward for treason, a premium for the rebels. Protesters were egged on by the oratory of the Opposition, and the inflammatory writings in the *Gazette*. In the ensuing riots the Parliament of Canada was devastated and burned.

Now this particular violence was engendered by a particular situation: more specifically, it was sparked off by the demagogic statements of the Opposition. So there are times when political figures must share responsibility for this type of act. It behooves them, then, always to act wisely, lest a situation which they themselves have helped create gets out of control.

No parliament is an island, cut off from its environment. On the contrary, as the result of a deliberate political choice, attempts are made to bring the houses of legislature as closely as possible into the lives of the people. The House of Parliament, then, the political centre of any state, becomes the focal point for a vast

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segment of society. We should not be astounded if on occasion it becomes the scene of unpleasant incidents.

The political system in Canada and in Québec is an open one. It requires massive citizen participation, both within the parties themselves and within the political institutions. Indeed, it is on this massive participation that our democratic system itself is founded. Now these values dictate that our halls of legislature be open to anyone wishing to watch his elected representatives at work. Indeed, society acknowledges that every person is entitled to attend parliamentary deliberations. Parliament, moreover, plays an important role in political education and in the acceptance of those values by which our system remains peaceful and democratic.

There are people who consider that democracy and security do not go well together, and even cancel each other out. In these people's minds, democracy can be broadened only to the detriment of the security of parliamentarians; and, conversely, security can be reinforced — and the people kept at a greater distance — only to the detriment of democracy. But this paradox is more imaginary than real and is not the most appropriate approach to matters of security within parliament buildings. To a great extent, acts of violence directed against parliamentarians are rooted in the political culture of the society in question. Any security measures taken to protect parliamentarians and the halls in which they work must mirror both that culture and that society.

Various parliaments have adopted various security measures, but before discussing these I should like to digress for a moment. Most of the time, security lags behind reality. When adequate measures are taken, they are usually taken in the aftermath of some specific incident. So these measures are rarely sufficient to cover all situations; and besides, there are some situations for which no provision can be made. Still, it is hard to imagine things otherwise, and while a number of parliaments have adopted so-called "preventive" measures, most of their Members know full well that all these measures really do is simply reduce certain types of risks.

Let us not fool ourselves: if someone is truly determined to commit a violent act against a parliamentarian, he can easily do so outside the relatively sheltered precincts of parliament. He need not lie in wait for his intended victim, and catch him alone, at an election meeting, or at work in his riding.

The risks which attend parliamentarians outside their legislature buildings cannot be denied. Inside those buildings, however, the first duty of those in charge of security is to be sure that the

legislators can do their work in quiet safety. Some parliaments have adopted measures in this respect which, at least to the uninitiated, would seem to transform the houses of legislature into veritable fortresses. Some have their own special security forces — Québec is one of these. Others rely on local police departments to ensure such security services as guarding the buildings. Still others consider that the mere fact of having the entrances guarded not only increases security but conveys an impression of seriousness and solemnity.

This is nothing compared to the measures taken in yet other parliaments. Consider Israel's Knesset, for instance, where bullet-proof glass separates the public from the Members. India forbids all public meetings within a half-mile radius of the federal Parliament. Most parliaments take measures of some kind or another, such as the systematic search of visitors, the use of metal-detectors, compulsory identity cards, closed-circuit TV inside and out. . .

Even relatively harmless measures such as these are by no means universal. Certain factors can render them inadequate, or prevent their being functional: the rush of tourists, the very layout of the premises, and the political habits of Members: all these can have an effect on security measures used within parliamentary precincts. Let's consider for a moment our political habits. Who among us has not at one time or another entertained delegations of voters, lobbyists or journalists at his or her offices in Parliament? When visitors of this kind do drop in, we all hope that the security measures will not affect our reputation as easily accessible political figures. When over a hundred parliamentarians are working under the same roof, it becomes obvious that if the security service has been insufficiently prepared it can easily be brought to nought.

I would make one final point, the importance of which cannot be overemphasized: no security measures can be truly effective unless they reflect the political culture of the society whose institutions they are intended to protect, and unless they are accepted as much by the public as by those for whom they are intended. If they do not take account of that political culture — whether at the federal level or at that of those special entities we call the provinces — not only might they not prove effective; there is a risk that they will do more harm than good. In addition, they could well lose their popularity, and this can only do the institution harm. If security precautions are too far out of proportion to the political and social contexts, the end result will probably be contrary to that which was sought.

#### **Speaker Arthur Donahoe, Nova Scotia**

We had a situation which arose during our 1983 session in Nova Scotia when the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour decided they were going to canvass the views of the members of our legislature on certain issues which the federation was concerned about. Without advising anybody, they sent a number of their people to the legislature just before the daily sitting began. They buttonholed members and put a number of them on the spot before TV cameras and radio microphones and so on, asking the members questions about their views on a number of issues with which the labour people were concerned.

This caused us to have an in-camera meeting of the House to discuss the situation, and it was decided that we should put up some additional security in the form of a couple of brass posts and

a silken cord to restrict access to certain parts of the legislature building. As most of you will know our legislature sits in a very old building and effective security is very difficult to put in place.

As Mr. de Bellefeuille said security measures have to be accepted by the public. They also have to be accepted by the members, because within a couple of days of that modest measure being taken, the members decided that it really was not necessary. So, soon after they were put in place, the brass posts and the silken cord came down, and we're now right back where we were before that incident took place.

#### **Speaker John Turner, Ontario**

All legislative assemblies seem to be faced with very similar problems. We will not, in any circumstances, allow demonstrations of any kind within the Legislative Building, and certainly not within the Legislative Chamber.

People coming in as guests to the Legislative Chamber do enter there with the permission of the members. Of course, this has not precluded some demonstrations taking place. As a result of a series of demonstrations in the Spring of 1983, we considered many security measures and rejected most of them. We did come up with a system of having people wanting to attend the public galleries complete an application for a pass. The pass information is put into a word processor, the pass is printed, and the name, address and telephone number are recorded on a computer for future reference.

Now it's very easy to say that people can give the wrong names and wrong addresses, and that is quite right. On the other hand, I think there is a psychological effect of people having to apply for a pass, and it may cause them to stop and reconsider what their motives may be.

While the House is in session, we do have an armed policeman in the front lobby from the Ontario Provincial Police. He or she is there only, again, for the psychological effect of having a presence. We do not deny anybody the right to demonstrate outside our building and, in fact, we have encouraged it to the point where we have gone to a great deal of expense in supplying some very sophisticated equipment for their benefit and their use. But having said that, people who attend those demonstrations and are visible members of the group demonstrating are not allowed to come into the House after the demonstration, for rather obvious reasons. They may apply for a pass on an individual basis the same as anybody else, but we will not allow them to enter the building or to enter the Chamber as a group.

#### **Speaker Herb Swan, Saskatchewan**

In our legislature we have had a few tense moments since I have been a member, and that is a brief time. We had a demonstration one evening by an anti-nuclear group. They came in, a very noisy group, and when they came to the galleries apparently had nothing in their hands. But once they were in the galleries, they had many things in their coats. There were a number of things hurled down onto the floor, none of them heavy. They were mainly signs and papers and so on. But there was no way that the security people we have could have been effective in that situation. The galleries were packed, so we had about 300 people in that particular group.

We have a number of security people, but most of them are up in age and not trained, basically, in how to be in a security position. They are fine as far as taking a look to see whether you have a permit to come into the gallery or not — that sort of thing they can do. But to take hand and remove a group of three hundred would be a real challenge, even for the RCMP. So I think that we have to, as parliamentarians, take a very serious look at what security we need for our chamber. We do not have the solution at this point, but we have started to make changes in allowing large groups like that to enter the Legislative Building. We have many demonstrations, but we have them stopped at the door of the legislature, and the demonstration takes place outside on the doorstep, and we encourage members of government to take part and to speak to those delegations that come. But if you have a very large delegation, I think it is wise not to have them end up in the galleries in the Chamber, because tempers do flare and it can be a very serious situation for the elected member.

Not long ago we had a demonstration take place on opening day. The Chamber itself was secure, but outside the Chamber and in the entrance to the building the people were packed, and they booed everybody. They even went so far as to boo the Lieutenant-Governor, who is not a political person. I think that things like this need to be looked at. If we are going to have an effective legislative system, we must maintain the right of the person who is elected to do his job to come into the Chamber and enter into debate. So that is the reason our government, just in the last two years, has made the decision to restrict that type of demonstration to the steps and outside of the building, and not allow them in. It was not a popular move, but I think it is something that is very necessary.

I think in every province we probably have a few derelicts of society who are dangerous. We have our share and we have pictures of those who have been a nuisance around the Legislative Building over the past few years. They are circulated to every department and if those people show in or near the building, there is a warning that goes through the whole building that everybody knows they are there and to watch for them and to be very careful. I think that is needed, and it is one of the methods of security that has worked, and we have been able, about three times in the last two years, to turn back people of that type. When they have made their first entrance into the building, somebody spots them and the security people have been able to usher them out and move them along.

#### **Jack Hawkins MLA, Nova Scotia**

Some organizations, misguidedly, regard parliament, or the grounds outside as a platform for media promotion. Now, the effect of this on the conduct of the House is not good. To some degree, it results in intimidation, if not physical, at least on the psychological level.

Secondly, in my experience over some period of time, this has resulted in disruption of the activity of the House. How is the business of the House to be conducted with a group of demonstrators shouting in the gallery or outside the House? I have been in the House when you could not hear the man who happened to hold the floor. One example comes to mind during the 1970s. I was appalled to see a PhD, a doctor, a fellow academic, earning a very substantial salary in my department, (and old enough at that

time to be my father) on the legislative steps screaming for more money and disrupting the House. I think this has no part in the democratic function of a legislature.

There was a similar situation recently and security measures had to be taken. I disagree with those who feel that legislators, in the course of their debates, do not deserve some type of protection, whether they happen to be brass bars or whatever, to prevent demonstrations, in the gallery or the buttonholing and intimidating of members of the legislature. That is not the purpose of the legislature. The purpose is calm, hopefully rational debate, certainly without intimidation from outside.

There can be delegations to the premier and to his cabinet but massive demonstrations on the legislature grounds are not appropriate in my view. The House is a place for debate, not for emotional activity by non-elected officials.

#### **Sheila Copps MPP, Ontario**

I have noticed that in the course of the discussion, we have moved from a security issue to an issue of demonstrations. I think there is a lot of danger involved in developing the kind of siege mentality that would prevent us from exercising free speech within the confines of the legislative area. I think all of us recognize the inviolability of the Chamber itself, but at the same time we cannot use that as the reason for, in some cases, preventing free speech that has, in fact, been encouraged in our legislature.

We have a very large front lawn at Queen's Park but we provide microphones, speaker systems, and usually demonstrations (even upwards of two thousand or three thousand people) have been carried out with relative ease and, in fact, with the assistance of the security staff of the legislature. As far as delegations, they are then picked from among those people who would be organizing a given demonstration, and to date it has worked reasonably well.

I just want to make two points. I worked for a member of the legislature for four years before becoming a member myself. If we are really concerned about the difficulty of security within the confines of the legislative process, it seems to me that many of our assistants are often times in much greater danger than members of the legislature because they are the front-line people who both at the riding level and at Queen's Park, are screening individuals who would fall in the category of being potentially abusive.

If we are simply concerned with the issue of preventing serious harm in the legislature, we could install a plexiglass wall. None of us really want to see something like a plexiglass wall put up, because it does inhibit public participation, or perceived participation, in the parliamentary process.

But one of the things that perhaps could be considered would be the possibility of a metal detector prior to entry into the actual Chambers which could be non-intrusive as far as the participants entering. I mean, how many of us go through airports every day and go through a metal detector?

I am not sure that we want to look in that direction, but I think that would eliminate metal objects, like guns, that could be carried into the legislature. After the 100-plus year tradition of an open parliamentary system, I would hate to see us separated from our constituents by plexiglass or other security measures.