

Family agenda missing in Canada

Gun-toting gangs and a red light for swingers hurts our families

BARRY LILLIE

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The holiday pause in the election campaign was the Christmas gift most Canadians welcomed from our politicians. Unfortunately, the recent shootings in downtown Toronto on the busiest shopping day of the year has cut short the season's hopeful spirit and focused us once again on the failure of our leaders, past and future.

Raising children from infancy to young adulthood is an incredibly difficult task in today's world of pop culture, expressed in music lyrics, videos, television and advertising with deeply flawed celebrity role models.

Parents and our schools are often competing to be heard over the non-ending, blaring volume from the iPod and the constant messages of hardship and risk-taking endorsed in one form or another.

Prime Minister Paul Martin has offered a solution to gun violence in Toronto by banning all legal handguns and only allowing the illegal handguns to be out in the community.

Conservative Leader Stephen Harper has espoused a policy that makes using a gun in a crime punishable by a longer sentence.

Jack Layton would throw more money and more programs at youths in order to keep them too busy playing pick-up basketball at midnight to roam the streets at three in the morning.

Every parent knows that this is simply a Band-Aid attempt to cover a gaping open wound.

The Supreme Court of Canada on Dec. 21 added to the struggle of families by ruling that private sex clubs (swinging sexual activities for couples, bath houses, massage parlours, etc.) are now legal in Canada. This, in effect, gives a green light to the expansion of red-light business districts in Canada.

More remarkable than the specific decision is the logic that sets the new precedent. The new determinant for deciding morality-based crime will not be the community standard of decency (previously used), but rather proof that harm is being done (as judged by the Supreme Court). It is possible that the High Court has just thrown out large sections of the Criminal Code.

Pornography and even child pornography may be subject to this new precedent because proponents of both often suggest that these are simply necessary outlets for individuals and do no harm to other relationships. Sex is no longer about intimacy; it is simply about gratification.



TORONTO STAR

Schoolmates of Jane Creba cry together at a makeshift memorial outside a store on Yonge Street in Toronto Thursday. The 15-year-old girl was struck by a stray bullet while taking advantage of Boxing Day sales with her family.



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The harm of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is simply a personal decision and does harm to the individual only.

This is now the law of our land: Do whatever you want as long as the harm does not impede the functioning of society (whatever that means).

This decision by the Supreme Court essentially dismisses the values of most parents raising children and opts for a new model of permissiveness that is dangerous to Canadian families. It has occurred with no political debate, no community discussion, decided by Supreme Court justices appointed with virtually no political scrutiny.

Families in Canada today come in many forms, from intact to some form of blended family. It is impossible to go back to my parents' day where couples remained together forever, and in too many cases lived difficult and unhappy lives. It is possible, though, to build on what is consistent in all forms of families, such as the parent's love for their children and their desire to see them through to be fulfilled and responsible adults.

This requires a leader or political party to frame the debate around a true family agenda that is not simply a choice between day-care plans that give money to all parents with young children or requires all families to enrol their children in limited public space.

It recognizes the variety of family forms and endorses policies that were agreed to over seven years ago by all political parties in the Report: For The Sake Of The Children. This remarkable but forgotten report sits on the shelves of every federal politician, collecting dust and now cobwebs, as our children lose a meaningful relationship with one of their parents.

A family agenda would take the positive efforts that are done around parental leaves at birth and extend that philosophy to the workplace and beyond. Business would recognize that flexible work regulations and management attitudes would result in stronger families for our community and even stronger loyalty to the business. Too many fathers believe their jobs and their family's financial future are tied to being the dutiful employee.

The non-elected Supreme Court has once again moved Canadians to a place few Canadians would want to go. It has done so while our politicians have abdicated any real leadership for their responsibility to assert our community standards, to frame the policy choices and to engage the public in an open and frank debate.

Children, especially adolescents, need as many loving, involved role models as possible in their lives. It starts with the parents and larger family, but families need the help of legislators to assert their rights, and our courts to uphold community standards of decency to give them a fighting chance to be successful at their most important job.

Tiara Dungy said, upon the death of her brother James, 18, from apparent suicide: "I just wish he could have made it until he was 20. Because when you're 17 or 18, sometimes the things you guys say (parents) to us doesn't always make sense. . . . When I got to 20, they started making sense again." James was the son of Indianapolis Colts coach Tony Dungy.

Barry Lillie of Kitchener is a retired teacher and facilitator of a support group for fathers.