

rapidly declining morale in police organizations and law enforcement agencies in the country, does the minister have any plans for a revision of the bail reform legislation which these organizations feel is causing these unfortunate incidents?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe the bail reform law is within my jurisdiction. I believe it is within the jurisdiction of the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I redirect the question to the Minister of Justice.

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I regret I have to ask the hon. member to repeat the question.

Mr. Nielsen: The question is prompted by the death of Constable James Lothian in Toronto recently and other murders and attempted murders. In view of the disturbing decline in the morale of police organizations and law enforcement agencies throughout the country, does the government have any plans for revision of its bail reform legislation which these agencies attribute as the cause of these unfortunate incidents?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in the House during my speech on the Speech from the Throne the other day, I believe we are beginning to gain that experience with the bail law as it now stands that is necessary to make it operate effectively. I drew specific attention then to the necessity for police officers, and particularly Crown prosecutors, to exercise their responsibilities in presenting to the courts in the appropriate cases the need to retain a person in custody rather than grant bail, as a definite part of the bail reform law itself. However, I do not anticipate any change that would return to the day when the poor were kept incarcerated and the rich were allowed to remain at large.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: In view of the minister's reply, and I hasten to assure him that those on this side of the House are just as eager to see reform in bail legislation as anyone else—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nielsen: In view of that answer, can the Solicitor General tell us whether the government has any plans to consult with the provinces with respect to provincial law enforcement staffs, and specifically with regard to his own responsibility for the RCMP? Does the government have any plans to increase the staffs of these organizations in order to cope with the doors that have been opened by the bail reform legislation?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I believe the staffs of the organizations referred to by the hon. member are under provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Nielsen: The RCMP?

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Mr. Allmand: With respect to the RCMP we are doing everything possible to make it more effective, but the majority of the criminal law provisions are administered by the provincial departments of justice.

KILLING OF POLICEMEN—INQUIRY AS TO LEGISLATION TO RESTRICT FURTHER SALE AND DISTRIBUTION OF FIREARMS

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Justice. It is also prompted by the incident in Toronto. In view of the increasing homicides occurring as a result of the use of rifles in this country, is the minister considering legislation to restrict further the sale and distribution of firearms?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, that question is one which is under constant consideration and review. The House had an opportunity to address itself to it not long ago, and the government will be addressing itself further to that question.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will recognize the hon. member for Calgary North on one last supplementary on this subject and then try to move on to the next subject.

KILLING OF POLICEMEN—POLICY RESPECTING COMMUTATION OF DEATH SENTENCES OF THOSE CONVICTED

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I direct this question to the Solicitor General. In light of the fact that about ten people have been convicted of murdering police officers and their death sentences have been commuted by the government, is it the policy of the government of Canada to continue to commute sentences where people are charged and found guilty of murder and capital punishment applies?

• (1440)

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, since 1967 when the law was changed with respect to capital punishment there have been four commutations in cases involving policemen and prison guards and each case was decided on its merits. At the present time there are two cases but they have not yet exhausted the appeal procedures.

Mr. Woolliams: The minister says that discretion is used in each case. I think we had better get to the facts. Has there been any case in which someone was found guilty of the murder of a police officer and the government has not commuted the sentence to life imprisonment?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, of the four cases since 1968 there has not been a case where there has been a hanging.