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Government moves to tighten up parole system

A torrent of criticism caused by offences committed by prisoners on parole and temporary leave of absence has persuaded the Government to take measures to prevent abuses of the release program and to provide more adequate means of investigating inmate grievances.

In a statement to the House of Commons on June 1, Solicitor General Warren Allmand outlined as follows the steps taken in this regard:

...Since 1961...inmates could be released to the community both under the authority of the National Parole Board or the Canadian Penitentiary Service. Because the criteria for selection of inmates by these two agencies have not necessarily been the same, there has been some difficulty. The differences in criteria arise not only because of the different statutory authorities under which they operate but also because the considerations that apply in assessing an inmate for temporary absence differ from those applicable to parole. Inevitably this has led to confusion in the public mind. Moreover, there are certain legal complexities that bring into question the operation of a large portion of the temporary absence program. The most difficult problem concerns what are commonly called "back-to-back" temporary absences, a practice developed in recent years whereby inmates are released on successive leaves of absence over an extended period of time, generally for rehabilitative purposes. I have therefore made the following decisions:

1. In the future the Canadian Penitentiary Service will cease the practice of providing back-to-back temporary absences for inmates in federal penal institutions. This involves a change in the Canadian Penitentiary Service directives and does not require an amendment to the legislation. The Penitentiary Service will continue to operate a temporary absence program under Section 26 of the Penitentiary Act to provide three- and 15-day absences for medical, humanitarian and rehabilitation purposes, with or without an escort.

2. For those inmates who are now on successful temporary back-to-back absences or where in the future extended absences are considered necessary or desirable by penitentiary authorities, provision will be made for a greater use of day parole under the Parole Act. This will enable inmates to continue their education, accept employment, and generally pursue their rehabilitation outside the institutions.

Enlarged Parole Board

3. Legislation will be introduced at the earliest opportunity to amend the Parole Act to permit the appointment of ten additional *ad hoc* members of the Parole Board. These ten members will be assigned in teams of two to the five regions of Canada and will deal primarily with day parole and panel hearings in the institutions. This step will enable the National Parole Board to deal with a considerable backlog of cases that require detailed consideration, and simultaneously satisfy the new volume of decisions on day parole that will come before the members.

4. The appropriate regulations under the National Parole Act will be changed so that an inmate will be required to serve one-third of his sentence or seven years, whichever is the lesser, before he becomes eligible for parole. Previously inmates became eligible for parole after they had served one-third of their sentence of four years, whichever was the lesser. Concern has been expressed that the premature release of inmates on parole contributes to an unacceptably high rate of parole violations, and that