

*Government Orders*

there once in the evening. Always I have had no difficulty in entering the institution.

In fairness I normally call ahead and make an appointment. I do not think I have ever dropped in and said I would like to take a tour that day, walk around and see somebody. Often I have been told that someone is unavailable to come to the visiting area. I have said that was fine, that I would go to the cell and visit the inmate there.

I have done that frequently in various prisons in my area. I found the visits always easy to arrange. Possibly it causes a bit of annoyance to the staff that I am going to that particular location, but if that annoyance were there it was not expressed to me.

I do not see a problem with this but the government apparently does. It is not willing to allow members to use their judgment as to when to enter a prison. It is a matter that will be entirely at the discretion of the institutional head, as he is described in the legislation, and of course in accordance with the regulations issued by the cabinet.

It is a serious omission from this bill that this right is denied. Members of Parliament exercise the function of an ombudsman in our society in many instances. We deal with complaints from constituents on a host of issues. In my particular case the inmates in the institutions located in Kingston are clearly constituents for at least a certain purpose. They may well have a vote in the next election, although that is not entirely clear. They have it now under a court decision that is under appeal. Whether they are voters or not, they are still living there and they are still entitled to some representation from a member of Parliament.

That is true of persons living in institutions across this country. Many other members have institutions in their ridings where the men and women who live there and also the employees who work there, are entitled to representation.

Surely it is not an expectation that the only place a member of Parliament is going to see either a prison employee or an inmate will be at the member's office or at the employee's home. Surely there is an expectation that there could be a visit on site on property owned and operated by the Government of Canada which is represented in this House by cabinet and by all of us in a certain sense. Surely there is an expectation we might be able to visit on site and see people who are living there,

who are being cared for or who are working for the Government of Canada.

Every member of this House could go to another government office such as the income tax office and visit the employees there and talk to them. Why are we not able to go to a prison at will and talk to people there?

There are restrictions on this one. There are restrictions on prisons, and they are all in this bill. I submit that the minister was ill-advised in rejecting the amendment as cavalierly as he did. He chose not to speak to it, not to give any answer as to why it was inappropriate.

It is merely a matter of fear and trembling on the part of the government and its obsession with secrecy, its obsession to ensure that something embarrassing is not released. I am disappointed.

I can only express some optimism that when this bill gets to the other place, the hon. senators will move appropriate amendments to correct this glaring omission from the legislation in accordance with a bill introduced in the other place by Senator Hastings some time ago which would have corrected the previous Penitentiary Act that is now being repealed and replaced by this new corrections bill.

In summary, my final message on this bill is that what Canadians need today for their own protection and for the safety of us all are not necessarily longer prison sentences and the locking up of inmates. Those can provide some temporary relief. What we need is to provide a healthy economic environment for Canadians so that the incentive to commit crime and to repeat crime after one offence is taken away. In fact, there would be an incentive to live a law-abiding and normal existence, working and taking part in Canadian society.

That is what the government should be providing. That is the kind of environment that it needs to create. Providing for additional lock-up at great expense to the taxpayer is not necessarily going to solve these problems. It is a temporary measure at best.

Instead of spending its time and energy on relatively minor but important updating of this act, the government would be better off spending its money trying to create a healthy economic environment in Canada, trying to create jobs for Canadians so that they are able to obtain employment on release from penitentiary or whatever it may be.