

Penitentiaries Committee

penitentiaries under the control of the government of Canada and the plans of the government in relation thereto with powers to report from time to time its observations and opinions thereon; send for persons, papers and records; adjourn from place to place; sit during sittings of the house; and print from day to day such papers and evidence as may be ordered by the committee, and that standing order 66 be suspended in relation thereto;

That 15 members of the House of Commons, to be designated at a later date, act on behalf of the house as members of the said committee; and

That a message be sent to the Senate requesting that house to unite with this house for the above purpose, and to select, if the Senate deem advisable, some of their members to act on the proposed joint committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully commend this motion to the house. The subject matter, I believe, does not raise differences in a party sense, although I recognize that there may be difference of opinion among members in their individual capacities. It is within the recollection of the house that I made a reasonably lengthy opening statement regarding penitentiaries on the calling of the estimates of the Department of Justice. I therefore do not propose to trench upon the time and patience of the house except to offer two short points in support of the motion.

We are now well into the first half of the ten-year penitentiary plan and I humbly suggest that it would be profitable to examine our physical plant before launching into the second part of the program. I do not conceal from myself or the house that there has been some criticism of our new institutions. The principal target has been the special correctional units, one of which will be completed later this year at St. Vincent de Paul. The penitentiary service appreciates that such criticism is inspired by a genuine interest in this important matter. The building of three other units has been stayed, and I believe it would be worth while for the members of a committee to have a first hand inspection of this one unit so that they would have an opportunity to voice their opinions before we march forward.

A question was raised during the estimates debate whether a penitentiary committee was necessary having regard to the fact that there is a Justice and Legal Affairs Committee already in existence. It is interesting to note that of the 14 members who last year offered enlightened opinions on this important subject of penitentiaries, all of whom I believe are still members of the house, only two are members of the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee. In other words, I am saying that

[Mr. Pennell.]

many members whose training and experience is outside the legal world have a deep and abiding interest in penitentiary affairs and the failure to establish this committee might mean that the house would be deprived of the benefit of their judgment.

I do not, of course, suggest that the members of my own profession are not competent to deal with this matter, but I do want to emphasize that the subject of penal reform in this modern age is no longer the private preserve of judges, jailers and lawyers. The penitentiary service is faced with a building program of formidable dimensions and great urgency. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I renew my plea that this motion be adopted, for I believe that a committee can render valuable assistance in drafting the blueprint necessary for the development of our penal institutions in the difficult days ahead.

Mr. Eric A. Winkler (Grey-Bruce): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the views that have been set forth to the house in this regard. We appreciate the fact that the plan in respect of penitentiaries is of a rather extensive nature. We certainly recognize the need for this program and the need of the community at large in so far as penal reform and our present institutions are concerned.

We, too, believe that this motion should be adopted without extensive debate. However, we in the opposition think that the justice committee as constituted at the moment might well deal with this question and so avoid a great deal of conflict in regard to these matters. So far as the participation of members of the other place is concerned, we believe that they could be asked to join the justice committee for this purpose.

The minister stated that the interest of people hitherto concerned with this problem might not be taken into account, but we believe that those who were interested might well become members of the committee for this purpose. We do not believe that a duplication of committee responsibility is necessary. We believe the division of the Department of Justice has caused concern in regard to the responsibilities of the ministers involved. These questions are all in the field of justice and we would ask the minister to allow the present standing committee to deal with this problem.

Recognizing the need and the fact that the committee might well get to work immediately in the areas the minister has suggested, I