

of the question, we have gone into that proposition at length before the standing committee and my position remains unchanged.

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PENITENTIARIES

ESCAPE OF JEAN-PAUL MERCIER FROM ST. VINCENT DE PAUL—REQUEST FOR STATEMENT ON CIRCUMSTANCES AND POSTPONEMENT OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT DEBATE

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the Minister of Justice or the Prime Minister. It concerns one of the escapees, Jean-Paul Mercier, who pleaded guilty last week to the murder of two game wardens, Mederic Coté and Ernest Saint-Pierre. He committed those crimes, to which he pleaded guilty, after escaping from the penitentiary where he had been serving 24 years for armed robbery and attempted murder. In light of that fact I ask, and I say this with a kind of respect to the ministers, will they now make a categorically clearcut statement to the House with reference to this person and the circumstances surrounding the escape of this man who has been found guilty of two murders, one attempted murder, and one armed robbery?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, the escapes include this individual and others about whom one could make very serious statements in regard to their being at large. This is one of the reasons for the inquiry. The Solicitor General, I think, indicated to the House in the case of this particular institution, with the inclusion in it of persons requiring great security, that greater security provisions were made. Part of the problem, of course, is that some of them were not in fact in place at the time.

Mr. Woolliams: In light of the circumstances I have set out, would the minister now advise the House, with respect to the plea of guilty by this particular individual, whether he pleaded guilty to non-capital murder or capital murder and whether he pleaded guilty to capital murder while the temporary abolition of capital punishment was still in operation?

Also, in light of these circumstances and until all this is clarified, would the minister undertake to see that the debate on capital punishment is further adjourned in view of these horrible, terrible, tragic facts until they are all straightened out and a statement made to the House so that debate can proceed in an orderly fashion?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I must say I am glad that we will have an opportunity this afternoon to examine the rather serious lack of logic in some of the remarks by the hon. member. With regard to his inquiry respecting the circumstances of a particular plea and so on, I will be glad to seek this information from the provincial Attorney General under whom the prosecution would have taken place.

Mr. Allan Lawrence (Northumberland-Durham): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Can he inform the House how long the guards' coffee breaks are?

Oral Questions

Mr. Lang: I imagine, Mr. Speaker, that the Solicitor General, who is still appearing before the committee with his estimates, would be glad to discuss this matter.

BRITISH COLUMBIA—REQUEST THAT INSTITUTION BE BROUGHT UP TO DATE TO FACILITATE REHABILITATION

Mr. John Reynolds (Burnaby-Richmond-Delta): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. In view of the deplorable conditions at the British Columbia penitentiary which I visited last week, and in view of the fact that a stabbing took place in that prison last Wednesday which has yet to be reported, can the minister advise when this prison will be brought up to date so that it and other prisons will be more acceptable for rehabilitation purposes instead of being training grounds for escapes and further criminal activities?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I know that the Solicitor General will welcome the interest of the hon. member in support of his hopes for improving the conditions of prisons in this country and for the way in which, as a result, we will be able to deal with the rehabilitation problem.

Mr. Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with the minister more. We all hope for rehabilitation, but this prison is 100 years old. I am asking when we can expect some action in that area so that prisoners can be rehabilitated instead of what is going on right now. We still have not had the stabbing explained that took place in that prison last week.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The Chair will now recognize the hon. member for Annapolis Valley who has a supplementary to the second question, and after that the hon. member for Kootenay West.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

APPOINTMENT BY FORMER MINISTER, EDGAR BENSON, OF FIRM WITH WHICH HE HAD BEEN ASSOCIATED AS AUDITORS—GUIDELINES FOR CABINET MINISTERS

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, I direct my question to the Prime Minister. It deals with cabinet ministers and conflict of interest. Did he look at any papers in regard to the severance of Mr. Benson from his former firm to ascertain whether there was any residual or beneficial interest retained by him in the firm or, just like another political leader not too far away from us, did he take the word of someone else when ascertaining the facts? Further, while I am dealing with cabinet ministers, in view of the question by the hon. member for York South about the Canadian Transport Commission, does the Prime Minister intend to develop guidelines or present legislation to define the present situation of cabinet ministers and any holdings they have that are related to applications to the Canadian Radio-Television Commission so that there can be no doubts, in view of the recent allegation in St. John's about one particular cabinet minister and the potential conflict of interest there?