

Penitentiaries

Agassiz area in which is located the Mountain prison and another institution not far away.

I also have communications from the district of Kent and the city of Hope. These have the backing of the municipalities and suggest that the priorities expressed in parliament by the former solicitor general should be reversed and that prime consideration be given to the protection of the public rather than the rehabilitation of inmates. They go on to refer to parole, passes and lack of security and call upon the government to take action to remedy the situation before it gets completely out of hand.

I have a letter here from the Public Service Alliance of Canada presenting the same argument with reference to the Kaiser case, the man who escaped from prison and broke into a trailer. I have another communication from the Mount Cheam ratepayers' association expressing concern for the safety of women and children in the vicinity of federal prisons. It reads in part:

We have also expressed our concern regarding the pay and conditions of prison guards and the conditions the RCMP have to work under in the Agassiz area.

These are documents received from concerned citizens. I know that some will say I am not in favour of rehabilitation. We listened to the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) denunciate the suggestion of my colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta. (Mr. Reynolds). He said that the biblical standard is one of compassion and mercy. He then called upon the Solicitor General to be tough and ruthless when dealing with prison guards and persons in responsible positions. He cannot have it both ways. The Solicitor General has said, in respect of dangerous criminals, that they do not let them out. All I can suggest is that they still find some way or another of getting out.

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, may I express my regret that the minister is in the difficulty he now faces, and also my sympathy regarding the advice he has received. I suggest it is not much different from that received by his predecessor which led to many of the problems the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) now faces.

I suggest we must first get rid of the Commissioner of Penitentiaries. He was chosen for political reasons. He has been, and obviously still is, incompetent as the administrator of penitentiary services. I say that because I have had experience over a number of years with the penitentiary system. I have read some of the history of this service. A few years ago when Alan McLeod was appointed commissioner of the penitentiary service it was taken for granted by most guards that when a judge sentenced a man to a definite period of imprisonment he was to be kept in prison for that definite period. It was felt that after he had been let out we had strong police forces who would return him to jail if he did not live up to his parole conditions. Many police forces hounded these men to the point that it was almost impossible for them to remain out of prison.

Over the years we have been enlightened as to the penitentiary service. Schools have been established to train guards and to give them assistance in handling some of the problems that arise between guards and staff. Over the years we have changed the personnel in our penitenti-

[Mr. Patterson.]

aries and in my opinion we were reaching the point of developing a fairly progressive system.

The minister in his remarks paid careful attention to the Parole Board. I suggest that everybody knows the chairman of that board has no guts. Let me remind hon. members of the Tanya Bush case and the case of the two little boys from Montreal, or Toronto who were murdered by released prisoners. Whenever such a thing happens, the Parole Board tightens its regulations and we find there are no more paroles. This board will not take a chance.

The criticism made today by several hon. members was in respect of the construction of penitentiaries. I remember visiting the maximum penitentiary at St. Vincent de Paul some years ago. It was built like a dog kennel. There was wire over the top of the cages on which one could walk to see what the prisoners inside were doing. It was originally so bad that the recreational area was fenced, with the prisoners inside and guards, with dogs, circling the outside. That sort of treatment was obviously so bad it had to be discontinued and that penitentiary was changed.

I do not know why the new commissioner was appointed and I am not aware of his qualifications. I do know many employees of the service are highly dedicated and competent men, but many are incompetent. I suggest there should have been an inquiry conducted after the riot that took place in Kingston some time ago, and the result of that inquiry should have been made public. With the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) I visited Millhaven soon after the transfer of prisoners from Kingston. We found that almost every prisoner had been beaten unmercifully, and we were told by the then solicitor general—

Mr. Allmand: I rise on a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. I am sure the hon. member would not want to mislead the House by his suggestion that there should have been an inquiry following the Kingston riot. There was an inquiry conducted by Mr. Swackhammer, and his report was made public a month ago.

Mr. Peters: It was made public in the same way that other reports have been made public. I have in mind the report of the department in respect of the St. Vincent de Paul riot. I read that report, but only parts of it were made public.

In any event, there was no justification for those guards to beat up the prisoners. We do not believe in that kind of treatment in our society. When two Members of Parliament visited that penitentiary they found that the rules had been changed. Members of Parliament can no longer visit penitentiaries and those two members were told to leave. I suggest to the Solicitor General that he should re-establish the procedure of allowing Members of Parliament to visit penitentiaries as a right. I am sure this procedure will result in the obtaining of information which would allow the Solicitor General to correct the situation before riots could develop.

● (2120)

Members of Parliament for years had visited penitentiaries. In my opinion they did a fairly good job. They knew what was going on and they interviewed the prisoners. What happened in this last case? I am told that Coco Mercier, who was to be on trial for a number of days, went