

to do this, then in view of the high number of Indians in penitentiaries today we should impose an obligation on the Parole Board to have at least two of their number be representatives of our native Indian people in Canada. I rise to support that motion. I do so, first of all, because of the high incidence of Indian people in our penitentiaries, and secondly because of what the minister said in the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. The minister indicated that the kind of person who would be added to the board would be a retired judge, a person with experience in law enforcement, and probably a social worker. I do not think that is an appropriate mix to compose the Parole Board.

This is the reason the hon. member for Skeena has brought forth this motion. There has been no assurance by the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) that he would include on the panel of members of the Parole Board people from different walks of life. It is very easy to get a professional person to serve on the Parole Board. Although he probably brings with him an academic training and experience in the field, he does not bring with him the day to day experience of the people with whom the board will be dealing.

One cannot help but support the main principle of the bill, which is to add ten additional ad hoc members to the board. But one does hope that the members who are appointed have that experience that would make them better suited to fill this position. Therefore, I think we owe the hon. member for Skeena some credit for bringing this question of discrimination to our attention. We have the Huguessen report on parole and the Senate carried out a study in this regard. It is now necessary that legislation be brought forward in the near future to implement the recommendations of this report, as well as the recommendations of the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

• (1600)

In the meantime, we have a tremendous backlog of applications. It has been said by the minister that we must deal with these parole applications. He has also said that because of the volume members of the Parole Board have stopped personal interviews with prison inmates. They have also stopped some of their official hearings. All that is taking place at the moment is a review of the reports by members of the Parole Board. As suggested by the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), with the addition of 10 members we will be able to reinstate prison interviews of inmates and parole committees that will travel to different institutions to hold hearings.

It was a great step forward when the Parole Board was split into small committees which visited penitentiaries. I think the hon. member for Skeena, having a tremendous background in respect of some of the problems inmates have not only within institutions but on the outside, and having broad and specific knowledge about discrimination against Indian people in the courts and within the institutions, as well as within the structure of our parole system, was right when he suggested there should be a change in the composition of the Parole Board and that there should be discrimination in favour of our Indians rather than against them. It is very easy for us to suggest this, but if we discriminate in favour of the native Indian people I am sure we will hear screams for discrimination in favour of

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other groups in our society, and perhaps even on the basis of sex.

This amendment provides the opportunity of dealing with discrimination imposed against our native people. I realize the need for a strong parole system, as paroles and probations are two necessary steps in integrating prisoners back into society. It should be pointed out, and I am sure the hon. member for Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn) will do so, that there is a high recidivist rate in Canada. With this in mind, there is a duty on us all to make sure our probation and parole systems work, that our retraining programs are devised in a way that will ensure the rehabilitation of these citizens. Our Indian friends face a problem not faced by the rest of us, and I am sure that the hon. member for Skeena wanted to underline this fact when bringing these motions to our attention.

We now have an opportunity to help these people. The statistics respecting the number of Indian people in our penitentiaries are staggering. Another fact we must consider is that Indians do not, on many occasions, receive legal assistance. I would be quick to say there has been a tremendous improvement in our legal aid, but there is still a long way to go. By adopting this amendment in relation to Indian people, I believe we are taking a big step in the right direction.

The second motion, and I understand we are dealing with them both at the same time, deals with the appointment of former inmates to the Parole Board. I suggest this is a real challenge. I think there is a tendency for most people in our society to look at those who have been convicted of a criminal offence and sent to penitentiary in a different way than they look at others. It seems to me that people who have been convicted and have been in jail may have something to offer a parole board. These people have knowledge about the situation inside our penitentiaries, and I think they could make a contribution that cannot be made by sociologists, psychiatrists and psychologists. In this way our Parole Board can get first-hand knowledge about discrimination taking place not only in our penitentiaries but also in respect of our educational system and our system of employment.

What I have suggested would represent a step forward in our penitentiary system, but such a step requires a great deal of courage. Hon. members who have spoken today have displayed some reluctance to take such a great leap forward. During the capital punishment debate, many members professed to be against capital punishment but then proceeded to set forth certain exceptions. I think we must have courage in order to cope with this grave problem. By adding two members of the Indian race to the Parole Board, and by adding two members to that board who have had prison experience, I think we will move a long way toward coping with this problem. I hope we do not get tied up in an academic approach to this matter.

I trust that the Solicitor General will take to heart what has been suggested this afternoon, and I hope that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) will indicate that he thinks this is a good idea. These members would be ad hoc members of that board and subject to reappointment. This is not absolutely necessary, but I hope that hon. members will not be too restrictive or