

Supply—Solicitor General

solution to this problem we might turn to the institutions themselves—gear the activities of some of the inmates and some of the facilities in a constructive way so as to produce some commodities or items which could be sold on the open market. This could not be done across the board, of course, because the services of many of the inmates are required in the administration of the penitentiaries themselves—without them, inmates would not be fed, clothed, and so on.

I realize that this suggestion will raise the question of convict labour, low cost labour and all the rest of it. It is supposed to represent a threat to free enterprise. But that is a lot of malarkey, considering we have about 7,000 people in the penitentiaries at the moment and that half of these could not be involved in the production side of what I have in mind. In any event, if the items were sold at the going price how could this interfere with the economic system? Of course, it would give rise to cries of protest—and these might come from the trade unions, too. But I do not think the criticism is valid. It would do a great deal of good if we were to produce something worth while in the penitentiaries and sell it on the open market, thus creating another source of income which could be used to the benefit of inmates as they were released. A portion of this income could be credited to the bank balances of inmates those who are required to work in administrative functions within the penitentiaries themselves, as well as those who take part directly in production.

We may have to subsidize this system as we do the present one. We now subsidize the whole structure of inmate work by paying inmates two bits or four bits a day depending on a man's stature within the system—how good or how bad he has been. The extra sum obtainable on release will help these men, and the individual may feel he is accomplishing something more worth while than he is at the moment.

The key factor is employment. We must concern ourselves with public enlightenment and especially with employer enlightenment. There are some employers who will go overboard to employ a person who has been an inmate of a penitentiary, or to employ a person who is on parole. But they are few in number. Many employers will refuse any employment to such persons on the grounds that they may steal something, presumably from the company, or give the company a bad

[Mr. Howard.]

name, or create difficulties among the other employees and so on. The reason varies with each company and with each individual.

None the less we must try to develop public enlightenment and secure acceptance by employers and trade unions of the idea that assistance must be given to these individuals whenever possible. One of the difficulties an inmate encounters on release is the impossibility of being bonded, as a result of which he loses the opportunity of taking up some kinds of employment. The bonding companies will not put up a bond. Here perhaps is a field for a government venture. Either the Solicitor General's department or the Department of Finance might set up a system of bonding which would take care of this situation and at least remove this obstacle.

I know, Mr. Chairman, that the hon. member for York-Humber rose to speak earlier, and since I have a few more remarks to make I wonder whether I might now call it ten o'clock? I see this debate is scheduled to be resumed tomorrow.

Mr. Pennell: Would the hon. member care to finish his remarks now, before the committee rises?

Mr. Howard: The hon. gentleman is very generous but I doubt that I should take advantage of his generosity. If anybody else wishes to speak that will be all right, but the hon. member has placed me in an embarrassing position.

Progress reported.

• (10:00 p.m.)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, we propose to continue with these estimates tomorrow, as was indicated some time ago, but in order to meet the convenience of I think two members of the house it may be that I will want to call the third reading of the bill to amend the Canadian Wheat Board Act before we start discussing estimates tomorrow.

Mr. Rapp: Mr. Speaker, could the house leader indicate the business for Thursday?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I hope tomorrow to be able to announce the business of the house for the remainder of this week and next week, but I think the plan is to take legislative items on Thursday.