

*Minister's Statement on Penitentiaries*

Criminologists, psychologists, psychiatrists and senior officers with a long experience of the correctional field are agreed on the fact that at least 80 per cent of our inmates can be rehabilitated.

Therefore, a policy must be established concerning those 80 per cent, that is, the larger part of our inmates, rather than a punitive policy intended to meet the needs of a minority. We will undoubtedly have to keep on protecting society against dangerous criminals, but we will also take into consideration the fact that most inmates do not belong to such a category.

Reforms are undertaken on the basis of two essential principles. Firstly, an inmate is always a citizen who, sooner or later, will return to a normal life in our society and, as such, is basically entitled to have his human dignity, of course, but also his rights as a citizen respected by us to the largest possible extent. Secondly, in order for the rehabilitation to be as successful as possible, we must take advantage of participation from the community, both inside and outside our institutions, so as to have within our institutions a way of life that is as similar as possible to the normal life of citizens.

With such principles, we hope to change in our institutions the climate of tension that results from useless coercion, obsolete policies, and to create in the old-style institutions a more relaxed atmosphere more conducive to the rehabilitation of individual inmates.

We have therefore endeavoured to liberalize the system. On the one hand, we have closed the maximum security section in St. Vincent de Paul Penitentiary and we have transferred most of the inmates of the old Kingston Penitentiary to Millhaven.

We have suspended all work for the construction of the new Mission Correctional Centre in British Columbia and appointed a task force whose terms of reference are specifically to assess the entire problem of maximum security institutions and to report to me at the end of October.

At the present time, we anticipate the creation of a greater number of pre-release centres. We also are working towards providing for visits by the inmate's family under conditions which are to comply more fully with the requirements for privacy, especially in the case of maximum security institutions.

In other institutions, we are considering the possibility of allowing the inmates to go out, following the adoption of a leave system which will be along lines similar to the "military leave of absence" system; such leave is to be periodical and regular and provided on the basis of merit. Already, in Warkworth institution, some inmates hold a regular job in a local industry; they therefore leave the institution daily.

On the other hand, we have already instituted a Permanent Advisory Committee of eight psychiatrists to help us improve mental health conditions for the inmates who are ill and to study shortcomings in the present system. We expect a first report from this group some time during the month of November 1971.

I would also like to announce the forthcoming arrival within our medical services of a permanent advisor on nursing. Moreover, a meeting is to be held in October, grouping all the medical doctors who are working in

[Mr. Goyer.]

penitentiaries at the present time, in order to determine the inmates' medical requirements and to review the services provided for them so as to operate on a rational basis.

We have promoted the creation of inmate committees within the institutions. Elections have taken place within all 36 institutions and each one of the committees has held at least one meeting. The idea of inmate committees was enthusiastically received by the inmates. These committees will make it possible to establish more satisfactory co-operation between the inmates and correctional staff in order to gain better knowledge of the inmates' problems.

In another field, we have relaxed the regulations governing communications of inmates with Members of Parliament and the Commissioner of Penitentiaries. For a few months now, letters addressed to Members of Parliament or the Commissioner are not being opened or censored by the institutional authorities.

Quite recently, we brought the inmates' haircuts more up to date and provided the inmates with clothing which is similar to that worn in the outside community, especially clothing worn for leisure. We have also abolished the humiliating custom of identification numbers on clothing.

Within the same perspective, we intend to give increasing application to the "living unit concept" which we have been testing successfully within some of our institutions. This is a matter of reorganizing a normal community on a small scale: a limited number of inmates are grouped within the same wing and they share the same premises with the Correctional Officers who are in charge of the group. We are, in fact, carrying on a kind of group therapy. The result will be that the inmate will no longer be depersonalized, a frequent occurrence under the old system.

We are also proposing to establish the cafeteria system within our institutions to replace the system of meals eaten within the cells, a practice which added to the dehumanizing character of prison life.

And among the most significant of proposed reforms, I would like to point out the new concept of work and industry within the penitentiaries. It is a well-known fact already that the organization of industries within our institutions at the present time tends to promote unsound production habits. The efficiency rate for our inmates is assessed roughly at one third that of a normal worker. In order to cope with this problem, we have put into practice two projects on an experimental basis.

At the William Head minimum security institution on Vancouver Island, a regular wage will be paid for the construction of a building required by the institution. The inmates will be required to comply with the same requirements as those in force in private industry with regard to working hours and productive capacity. Instead of the present daily allowance which varies from .55 cents to .85 cents, the inmates will receive the federal minimum wage, which will make it possible for them to pay for their room and board in the institution, to pay for their clothing, to help support their family, to save money for their eventual release from prison, to pay their taxes and to be eligible for payments under unemployment insurance and workmen's compensation acts. Once released, an inmate may