

those sentenced to life imprisonment. My government is aware that this particular group of inmates, whose numbers are growing, is becoming a difficult issue for Canada's Correctional Service and for the penal system in general. Although the problems are complex, they are not always clearly defined, and as a result, they will not be as easy to solve as the motion may lead us to believe.

Of course, long-term offenders and those sentenced to life imprisonment have always been a part of prison populations, in Canada and the rest of the world. However, since they were incarcerated, they have never been deemed to be a specific risk or particularly dangerous. On the contrary, Correctional Service authorities have found that in their experience, "lifers", as they are commonly referred to, are among the most settled and stable elements of the prison population. In fact, it is often said they have a stabilizing effect on younger and less mature inmates.

Mr. Speaker, exhaustive studies conducted both in Canada and abroad have regularly demonstrated that the conditional release of inmates sentenced to life imprisonment involves very little risk. Recently, the National Parole Board published the results of a study which followed the progress of 308 paroled lifers for twelve years, from 1970 to 1981.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Burnaby, on a point of order.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for interrupting the Hon. Member but I would like some clarification. I realize the Hon. Member is new to the House, but nevertheless I believe there are rules about reading speeches. I know we are allowed to use notes, but I think this should be pointed out, Mr. Speaker. I do realize the Hon. Member is new—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I appreciate the fact that the Hon. Member is a new Member. She is looking at some notes to get her speech in order.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Bourgault: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the study showed that out of 308 lifers given full parole for the first time, only 20 per cent were incarcerated again for committing new offences, none of which involved any loss of life. The failure rate was only 6.5 per cent, less than half the average rate of 15 per cent.

These conclusions do not diminish the seriousness of the crimes of which these individuals were convicted, nor do they question the appropriateness of the severe sentences they were given. However, they do indicate it may not be advisable to earmark what would probably be very considerable sums of money for the construction of maximum security penitentiaries in remote areas, specifically for this group of inmates.

Maximum Security Prison

With respect to the small minority in that group of exceptionally dangerous inmates, the Correctional Service has very appropriate means to control their behaviour. Canada's maximum security institutions are second to none in the world. Using modern technology, the Correctional Service has improved or will soon improve security around the main institutions. In addition, the establishment of special detention units is one more way to isolate and control the more violent inmates in an institution.

Even though it is not urgent at this time to take special security measures concerning lifers and other inmates serving long sentences, the Solicitor General's department remains concerned about their particular needs and the problems they cause.

The question of long jail sentences was the focus of attention in 1976 after the adoption of Criminal code amendments and the introduction of the concept of first- and second-degree murder.

As Hon. Members surely know, first degree murder now results in a mandatory life sentence, with the possibility of parole after 25 years.

As to second-degree murder, it also calls for a life sentence, but in that case the inmate may be paroled after a minimum of ten years, although the courts can raise that minimum to 25 years.

Mr. Speaker, such lengthy jail sentences have given a new dimension to the correctional system. Before that, an inmate would seldom serve that much time behind bars. It seems that those sentences might have a new impact on both the inmate population and the correctional system.

Some people have been wondering whether long sentences might not make inmates desperate and more dangerous since they would conclude that since they have nothing to lose, they can resort to violence in the institution or even attempt to escape. Fortunately, I can say with confidence that, so far, nothing has given currency to that belief.

On the other hand, some people fear that such harsh sentences, whether they are served by lifers or by inmates with long sentences of limited duration, might have demoralizing consequences on prisoners on the psychological, social and even physical levels. That issue has been under consideration and research is continuing, although the findings so far are equivocal: although they do not dismiss the possibility of demoralizing consequences, they do not confirm that they are inevitable, nor do they predict their exact nature.

We are therefore faced with many important questions which still remain answered about the nature of the problems these inmates will have to face in the prison system. These questions will become increasingly relevant as the number of prisoners, especially lifers, increases as it certainly will. Since it is inevitable that the number of lifers will increase, our