

public support. He used the past tense. My overwhelming concern is that public support for what was basically a sound program is fast disappearing, and will continue to diminish unless we can lessen the number of errors which are occurring. I shall not dwell on those errors. In this party we think that the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) has been doing a good job and we wish him well. What we are sorry to see is that some of his officials have been letting him down. I think we can all congratulate him on his candour and on his honesty; those are very refreshing qualities in this House.

It seems to me that the Parole Board has over-reacted and that every time an incident occurs the cutback is so overwhelming the jail population grows, and when there are so many people in jail there are bound to be escapes. Inconsistency on the part of the Parole Board has led to some of the difficulties we face. I think there should be consultation on the part of the parole boards with respect to inmates in the penitentiaries. Before they let someone with a psychopathic personality free, there should be consultation with other prisoners, because a man who is able to "con" a number of people might not have been able to "con" his fellow inmates who often have good judgment of the people around them. There should also be consultation with prison guards who are often in a position to make an astute assessment of the characters of inmates. Much of the good work of rehabilitation is being destroyed as a result of the errors which have occurred.

The hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta (Mr. Reynolds) has placed a good resolution before the House; it is one which our party will support. Like him, I have had an opportunity to go through the B.C. Penitentiary. It is an institution which should be torn down. It is not rehabilitating anybody. We cannot operate a civilized and humane system when we hold people in cages. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke) told us about all the problems, but I do not recall his offering any solution to them. The solution is a decent and humane system of rehabilitation because, let us not forget, these people are going to enter society again.

The last question I intend to deal with concerns the psychopathic inmate. Too little attention has been paid to this question. The studies which have been going on in British Columbia have not been funded, despite requests to the Solicitor General. This is too bad, because there are very real problems involved in the treatment of a few inmates who are not capable of being rehabilitated. Perhaps the reason the system is encountering failures is that it has been operating on the basis of a belief that everyone is capable of rehabilitation. I do not accept this. A good penal system must pay attention to the psychopathic criminal who cannot be released. We must study this problem, if necessary at the elementary level, so as to try to identify people with this kind of behaviour. Much work is needed in this area.

● (2220)

As I say, I welcome the resolution and support it. I hope the justice committee will be given the opportunity to travel and to visit penal institutions, and particularly be allowed to speak to inmates, because as much can be learned from them as from anybody.

Penitentiaries

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I should just like to say at the outset that I welcome the fact that a parliamentary committee is going to look into the operation of the penitentiary service and its many facets. There have been in the past a number of royal commissions on this subject. There was the report of the Archambault commission of the 1930's, the Fauteux commission of the 1950's, the Ouimet of the 1960's, and more recently the Swackhammer commission into the Kingston penitentiary riot. Presently, we are awaiting the Hugessen report into parole and temporary absence.

Some of the reforms that these various reports and commissions recommended have not yet been implemented, even though many years have passed since the recommendations were made. It seems to me that others have been implemented with over-zealous haste and little pre-planning. I think that for the time being we have had a surfeit of judicial or independent inquiries. The time has come for us, as parliamentarians, to educate ourselves, and in so doing educate the public, as to the nature of the malaise and discontent which afflicts our penitentiaries system, and may I say as well the progress in penal reform that has been made over the years. Too often this is overlooked.

I think these educational results could be better achieved if at the outset the minister made available to the members of the committee, if necessary on a confidential basis, the reports and transcripts that have been made both to the Swackhammer and to the Hugessen commissions. For instance, I refer to the fact that the Swackhammer commission visited nine institutions and received statements from some 580 persons, including penitentiary staff and inmates. If on the basis of full confidentiality these statements could be made available to members of the committee as pre-preparation for the work they are to undertake, I think they would come to their task better informed and prepared.

The constituency that I represent, that of Kingston and the Islands, lives with this problem on a daily basis. It is not something that comes up whenever there is an escape from a penitentiary in a certain part of the country; it is something that we have with us every day. Within our general area there are five major penal institutions. Some 1,500 people in my constituency are employed in those institutions in which over 2,000 inmates are incarcerated. So, not only is the safety of the community and the protection of the public involved in a very real sense; the involvement is much more than that. There is the involvement of the employees working in the prisons, there is the involvement of some 400 to 500 volunteers who work in the prisons on a weekly basis, and there is the involvement of inmates working in the community on temporary absences, on day paroles and in other roles.

As one who has been a voluntary worker in these penitentiaries over the last seven years, I have found it extremely beneficial for me to establish a good working relationship with the administration, the custodial staff and the inmates. My work has given me some insight perhaps into the problems that exist at these particular levels. In view of this, I should like to suggest that the committee take a look at its role and its responsibility from three different perspectives: first of all, from that of