

Administration of Justice

the reasons we have had a rapid increase in the prison population this year is the fact that we have had piecemeal changes, mandatory supervision, cutting down on paroles, stiffer sentencing, greater police efficiency, all of which has been brought about by certain changes or potential reforms in the system but done on an ad hoc basis. This method endangers the present structure because we have overcrowding in many federal institutions, and that has caused some of the disturbances and riots and may well cause more if we do not treat the situation as a total concept.

While it is true that, as members of parliament, we have a basic duty to reflect and exchange the views, ideas and concepts of the public we represent, we also have the basic responsibility to provide leadership. I can think of very few areas where leadership is required more than in the whole area of crime and the treatment of crime in our federal institutions. I know there will be a federal-provincial conference in December, but the trouble with so many of these conferences is that often they consist of the converted preaching to the converted. These reports are full of all kinds of notions. The Ouimet report, in the opening of the fourth chapter, contains the following statement:

Throughout this report we stress the need for public understanding of the issues involved in crime and corrections and for direct citizen participation in the correctional services.

That is what we must achieve. But we will not achieve it just because we set up another royal commission or have another inquiry from the Solicitor General's Department or because a university group produces a report, and there are many such reports now. We must make the Parliament of Canada aware, we must sensitize it to the basic problems that exist within our penal system, and in that process we must have a dialogue with the Canadian people so that the reforms that must be instituted by this parliament can be achieved. I think that is our basic task, and I hope that the suggestion for a joint committee can go a long way toward achieving it. I will be very interested to hear the views of the other hon. members. I hope that they will, in a large measure, support this proposal.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I think that all members on this side of the House will generally agree with the suggestion which the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) has made with respect to the inadequacies of the prison system and the need for reform. In fact, we agree with this so much that the government which we support has, in effect, been doing all of the things about which the hon. member for Egmont has been talking. But there remains the problem to which he refers, namely, that there is insufficient public support to enable these reforms to go forward as fast as many of us would wish.

● (1720)

Without at this point getting into the fundamental question of value judgments, the value judgments which, say, the hon. member for Egmont and many other people in this country would make, we can at least agree that there is not really enough publicity given to these problems, and not really enough public awareness of the details such as

[Mr. MacDonald (Egmont).]

the actual situation in the prisons, the actual success of our rehabilitative practices, and so on. On the one hand, there is certainly some disillusionment with the work our prisons are doing, but on the other hand, obviously public opinion may be split between those who feel there should be a more repressive attitude taken in prisons and those who feel that the approach should be different and stress the rehabilitative rather than the punitive aspect.

The hon. member frankly stated at several points that, he did not want to be held too closely to the words of the motion that he has put before us. Yet at the end of his speech he did return to the substance of his motion, and so I think it is fair to look at the motion which he has put before us and to consider the debate in those terms, and not in the broader terms of reform of the whole prison system, which he also portrayed in his speech.

The exact motion which the hon. member for Egmont has moved is:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should introduce a measure to establish a parliamentary committee to investigate all aspects of crime and its treatment in Canada, which should have specific terms of reference to closely examine...

Here a series of particulars are given:

... (a) the subject of crime prevention and the work of the Correctional Consultation Centre of the Solicitor General's department (b) the subject of punishment—its deterrent value and relevance to the rehabilitative process—with particular attention to capital punishment, by collecting factual information and holding public hearings (c) the correctional process, including the Penitentiary and Parole systems.

There appear to be several elements in the motion which we are being asked to approve today. The request is made that this committee should investigate all aspects of crime and its treatment in Canada. That would seem to suggest, if the words are taken literally, that in dealing with "all aspects of crime" we should be dealing with questions of law enforcement as well as questions of treatment of crime. But from the emphasis which the hon. member has given I would take it that the aspects he is particularly concerned about are those concerned with the treatment of crime in Canada, which somewhat limits the terms of reference.

The fact is that all of the recommendations which are made in this motion are actually under way, and in many cases have been under way for a great length of time. I will not take the time of the House to go through all of the ways in which we are now carrying out these various proposals. But I would draw the attention of the House, in slightly more detailed fashion than has been done by the hon. member, to the work of the special subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

This subcommittee has been actively involved now for some months, with some six or eight members, in visiting penal institutions across Canada. I understand they have visited the institutions in the west, and are now probably about to proceed to those in the eastern part of the country. They have received submissions from inmate committees and from many other people connected with prisons. They are concerned with the general problem of the administration of the penitentiaries. The hon. member for Louis-Hébert (Mrs. Morin), who has recently been the centre of much attention in this House as the sponsor of