

Penitentiaries

the warden. He has the toughest job. He has to be able to walk down the range and quell anger before it gets out of control. There is no point in promoting wardens in the region out of maximum security institutions. That is a trend that suggests the warden is not the most important man. The warden in maximum security prisons is the key man in the system. If he has the right philosophy and is tough enough, the institution will be well run. Having the bureaucracy located in a high rise in downtown Vancouver directing the region and second guessing the warden is a mistake.

Perhaps the key recommendation in the entire report was the development of a national prison industries corporation, a corporation that would change the structure internally in those prisons and would provide work, compulsory work. I am not against a person who has committed a crime being sentenced to work. We all have to work. The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) told us there were no free lunches the other day. To sentence a person to work does not mean you are sentencing him to a ball and chain. It means that he will have the chance to make a productive contribution to society. Those inmates must be able to structure their day and put in eight hours like everyone else. The national prison industries corporation should be in place now. It is due to negligence and delay that this has not been done.

To those people in a community in the trade union movement and the business sector who object to the idea of their products competing with products made within a prison, I say that manufacturing can be tailored entirely to producing those items we buy abroad and that our own industries have not seen fit to make. That will not upset the general market area; if it does, it will be only slightly. It will provide wages for prisoners and compensation for victims as well as board and room for those who are sentenced. There is no reason why they should not pay for the cost of their keep or a significant part of it.

The Solicitor General has not agreed that we are in a crisis. We have had crisis management. The concern of the Solicitor General's department has been in the area of diffusing the next hostage-taking incident. We are asking the Solicitor General today to adopt the report so that long term strategy can be planned to change the atmosphere within the system. If that is done it will reduce the number of deaths, hostage takings and murders. We will be on our way to changing some of those statistics we were talking about earlier on rehabilitation.

I have tried to make this a non-partisan approach and I hope the Solicitor General will as well. I wish to take the opportunity of congratulating the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) who did a superb job for the committee.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: I am surprised that he is still outside the cabinet walls, and that is no reflection on our present Solicitor General. I do think new blood is always useful for a Liberal cabinet. I want to thank the House for its indulgence in listening to these remarks. I hope the Solicitor General now

[Mr. Leggatt.]

appreciates how vital and important it is that he adopt all the recommendations, and to show his expression of good will I expect him now to rise in this place and say, "I accept recommendation No. 65", that the committee be reconstituted so that we can get on with the job.

● (1422)

[Translation]

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I want first of all to thank the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) who has been kind enough to let me speak immediately after lunch, for which I am very grateful him. I hasten to add that I am anticipating with great pleasure the remarks he will make, I suppose, immediately after me.

[English]

In order to reply first of all to the comments of the hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt), I might indicate I very much appreciate the tone of this debate. I was a bit apprehensive yesterday when I read the motion. However, I did recognize that it was brought forward in order to bring to the public's attention the very serious matters with which we are presently dealing, and I appreciate the motion having been advanced at this time by the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) who, as we all know, has a number of other irons in the fire.

Mr. Nielsen: With no embarrassing vote.

Mr. Blais: Yes, we are always happy to have votes in this place because we have a very good record in terms of results. Having said that, that is the only partisan remark I will be making.

I want to advise you, Mr. Speaker, that since assuming office about a week ago yesterday I have had some, albeit brief, opportunity to acquaint myself with the many important and difficult issues confronting the ministry of Solicitor General. As I stated very soon after my appointment, one of the principal areas of concern is that of corrections, an issue in which I have had a long-standing personal interest. I practised before the criminal Bar prior to my election and formed very strong opinions in that area.

My first week on the job has given me the occasion to see what is being done in this field right now, and what is being planned for the immediate future, and it is for that reason I welcome this opportunity, as I have indicated.

As a member of the House and, indeed, as a member of cabinet, I followed the work of the subcommittee on the penitentiary system in Canada with a great deal of interest, as I did in respect of the publication of the report itself and my predecessor's August response and the November progress report. I strongly endorse and let there be no question about that—I give my own personal endorsement to the statement of support made by my predecessor in respect of the general thrust and philosophy of the report, and I share his sense of urgent commitment to far-reaching, and I repeat that term far-reaching, reform in corrections.