

Oral Questions

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, I was just trying to indicate to my friend that the question as posed was not a fair one. He must not judge a person's improvement in income on the basis of a single year. It may be that a group of people will receive an increase of 12 per cent this year but received increases of only 3 per cent, 4 per cent, or 5 per cent in past years. It may very well be, and I believe it is the case, that a group of people will receive a 5 per cent increase this year but received increases of 7 per cent, 9 per cent, 12 per cent, or even 20 per cent in previous years. In order to judge the fairness of income increases given to different categories of people in Canada, one must study the situation in some depth. That was the kind of advice I was trying to give to the Hon. Member.

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PENITENTIARIES**ESCAPE OF EDMONTON PRISON INMATE WHEN ON UNESCORTED TEMPORARY ABSENCE**

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Solicitor General and is in regard to one Balentine Leschenko who, a few days ago, disappeared from the third unescorted temporary absence which was given to this man who was an inmate of the Edmonton maximum security prison. Mr. Leschenko was serving time for robbery and armed robbery. As recently as August, 1983, the Parole Board denied him an unescorted temporary absence on the basis of a need for further demonstration of good behaviour. In view of the fact that this particular prisoner has escaped or attempted to escape on two or three occasions, can the Solicitor General tell us exactly why that prisoner was out on an unescorted temporary absence, keeping in mind the fact that he will not be eligible for mandatory supervision until February 26, 1991?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, this is one of those cases that falls under the jurisdiction of the National Parole Board. The individual concerned had served some 12 years in penitentiary. He was eligible for parole some five years ago. For five years the Parole Board had been reviewing his case and finally came to the conclusion that, in its judgment, he should be allowed out on unescorted temporary absences. He took two such absences without incident. On the third absence, he violated the rules. I cannot say that the Parole Board did not act within its discretion. When considering the criteria that were presented, it decided to allow this inmate to begin a process of resocialization after spending 12 years behind bars.

ROLE OF NATIONAL PAROLE BOARD

Hon. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Solicitor General could first let the House know whether or not Lechenko has been apprehended. As well, the House would be interested to know what experience the particular members of the Parole Board had who decided that it

was all right to let this prisoner out on an unescorted temporary absence. What does the Solicitor General have in mind to do about the fact that, at the very least, it seems to be a strange exercise of judgment, given the fact that this man is only 33, his offences include armed robbery, and his past record is one of attempted escape and escape?

● (1450)

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, as to the success record of the National Parole Board in granting unescorted—

Mr. Fraser: I am talking about these parole officials.

Mr. Kaplan: I do not know the particular parole officials who sat on this case. The National Parole Board hears nearly 45,000 cases a year. I will look into the matter. However, I can tell the Hon. Member, and it is a matter of public record, that members of the National Parole Board are drawn from a very broad cross section of people, including former policemen, people with experience in the correctional service, educators, people with journalistic experience, and some former Members of Parliament. So far as their success goes in deciding on the granting of unescorted temporary absences, I can tell the Hon. Member that in 1981 they had a 98.99 per cent success rate on temporary absences granted. In 1982 they had a 99.36 per cent success rate. There were only 13 failures out of over 2,000 cases. In 1983, out of 2,761 unescorted temporary absences, the success rate was 99.49 per cent, so I thank the Hon. Member for his supplementary question.

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WESTERN GRAIN STABILIZATION ACT**ABSENCE OF GOVERNMENT MEMBERS FROM COMMITTEE MEETING**

Mr. Charles Mayer (Portage-Marquette): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, the latter not being in the House at this time. The Standing Committee on Agriculture met last Thursday. Five members of our Party were there along with one member of the New Democratic Party, the Hon. Member for Humboldt-Lake Centre. Only one government Member showed up. We had to adjourn and could not pass the amendments to the agriculture stabilization act out of committee. Would the Parliamentary Secretary tell the House whether he is prepared to ensure that more than one government Member will attend the committee meetings so that if we in our Party show up and Hon. Members of the New Democratic Party show up, we can pass the Bill out of committee? Could we have a commitment that when the committee meets we can pass the Bill through, clause by clause, in order to get it back to the House as quickly as possible so we can get some money into the hands of the western farmers?