

*Maximum Security Prison*

The motion before the House arises as a result of the recommendations of the subcommittee on penitentiaries in 1977. Indeed it is similar to—although it is not in the same terms—recommendation 63 of the subcommittee. I have listened with great interest to the comments of the Hon. Member for Oxford and of the Hon. Member for Glengarry-Prescott-Russell (Mr. Boudria) on this motion. I think a number of very important concerns were raised. In proposing the adoption of this motion, I believe the Hon. Member for Oxford said that there were two primary motives. One was the protection of society, and the second was the need to improve the criminal justice system. I do not think any Member of the House would disagree with those being fundamental objectives of the criminal justice system and the penal system in the country.

We have to ask ourselves carefully whether the implementation of this motion would achieve those objectives and, if so, what would be the other implications of the motion. One of the concerns I would raise with respect to the motion and the way in which it is framed—and I know the Hon. Member is aware of this—is that in many instances prisoners sentenced to terms of life imprisonment are in fact the least disruptive or the best prisoners, in a sense, within institutions. I have consistently heard from guards, wardens and indeed other prisoners that lifers recognize that they have a term of life imprisonment. Life means life. There are many misconceptions about that. It means that after a certain term of years one is eligible for parole. That is all it means—eligible for parole. In most cases these people simply want to do their time quietly and without causing disruption in the institution. It is some of the other elements in prison—at Kent Institution, for example, the elements they call the bikers, the punks and people serving terms of shorter duration for break and enter and crimes of that nature—who have tended to be more involved in violent and disruptive acts within institutions.

To suggest that those people who are sentenced to life imprisonment might pose a greater threat to society—I do not accept that the evidence bears that out. If we are talking about the protection of society, I believe those people are serving their terms within maximum security institutions. I do not think that moving lifers to another part of the country, whether it is the Northwest Territories—and I am sure we will hear a word or two on that suggestion from the Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson)—or another area, will result in enhanced security to the community. By and large they are not the people who would pose a threat to the community in the institutions in which they are presently located.

What about the second objective, the need to improve the criminal justice system? Will this in fact achieve that objective? I have some serious concerns about that. In effect, we are banishing these individuals to a term of imprisonment in a remote area. Having said that, I recognize the intent of the Hon. Member's motion. I think the intent is worthwhile. I believe it is that in that kind of environment the opportunity would be greater for the individual not to have such a restrictive environment.

The Hon. Member asked how many Members of the House have actually been inside a cell in a special handling unit. I have certainly visited special handling units. They are inhumane and degrading institutions which I do not think play any part in a civilized criminal justice system. The motive of the Hon. Member in seeking to replace those institutions, those wings or those special handling units, with another type of institution is good. I share the concern which he has expressed with respect to those institutions. However, I wonder whether we are in fact adopting the correct approach by substituting banishment to a remote area for those admittedly defective institutions.

As well, I wonder about the implications in terms of support networks for prisoners. Even though they may be serving terms of life imprisonment, there is an opportunity for some of them—and we do not know how many—to be released on parole at some point. If they are to be released, surely the kind of support networks which are essential for release must be present. They must have a network which is not literally thousands of miles away but which is closer, whether it be family, friends or an opportunity for half-way houses. I suppose the Hon. Member might argue that individuals in that category could presumably be transferred closer to their families and closer to the communities in which they would ultimately live. I would certainly want to see that element studied carefully before such a proposal were to be adopted.

Ultimately, I believe that what the Hon. Member is seeking is not unreasonable. He is seeking an assurance that in dealing with the small number of prisoners within the federal system who are presumably designated by institutions—and in some cases presumably voluntarily—as people who will likely be serving lengthy sentences, those sentences should be served in the most humane manner possible. I remind Hon. Members of the House that the sentence is to deprivation of liberty. So often we forget that that is the sentence, that we should not be going beyond that and depriving prisoners of their other human rights as well.

Let me say in closing that the motion calls upon the Government to study this question. That is very much in keeping with the suggestion of the subcommittee on penitentiaries in 1977. As long as it is clearly understood that what we are seeking is a study and that many of the questions which have been raised with respect to this proposal will be addressed, I certainly think that such a study would be appropriate. I do not believe that it should in any way be construed as the first and most important priority in the criminal justice system, but in so far as it attempts to deal with the problem, which is a serious problem, it is worthy of support.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Lise Bourgault (Argenteuil-Papineau):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased with this opportunity to speak to the motion, but first of all, I wish to thank the Hon. Member for Oxford (Mr. Halliday) for drawing the attention of the House to the problem of prison inmates with long-term sentences, including