

*Parole and Penitentiary Acts*

reading receiving the support of several Opposition Members as well.

If we consider the referral to committee, we see that the Government certainly did not drag its feet. Three days after receiving its order of reference, the committee met to designate a steering committee and agree on procedural details. The committee started sitting about 18 days after that. They were held over a four-month period, including even the Christmas recess. The committee held 14 hearings and heard a great many witnesses.

Our colleague the Hon. Member for Wellington—Dufferin—Simcoe (Mr. Beatty) appeared as a witness before the committee on five occasions, and his Deputy Minister as well as other Departmental officials appeared on ten occasions. The Committee heard the views of many non-governmental groups such as the *Société Saint-Léonard*, the Queen University Group dealing with the parole bill, the Citizens United for Safety and Justice, the Ottawa-Hull Victims of Justice, the Association of Criminal Lawyers, the Canadian Bar Association, the Canadian Association of Penal Justice, as well as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry and John Howard Societies.

Is the Opposition suggesting that the time-frame to deal with Bill C-67 at the various stages could have been shortened had we chosen not to hear these groups and disregard their views? Yes, the Government had to spend a little time listening to the valid testimonies of these interest groups.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has fully cooperated with the Committee. In addition to the Minister, the Committee had the opportunity to question officials of Correctional Service Canada, the National Parole Board, and the Solicitor General Secretariat.

Moreover, the Government has demonstrated flexibility and good faith by moving six substantial amendments to this bill. I shall spare the House the many details of these amendments, while reminding Hon. Members that the Committee had concluded its work on January 23.

By contrast, when we see how things moved in the Senate, we realize that all along the Government has done its best to expedite matters, suggesting compromise and cooperate with a great deal of openmindedness. The Senate Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs had six months to deal with this Bill. Meanwhile, in its desire not to press our colleagues in the other place, the Government deemed it advisable to postpone the reference of this Bill at the report and third reading stages. We wanted to provide the Senate with an opportunity to propose constructive and creative suggestions which could have been incorporated in the bill at the final report stage.

Yet, it was only on May 14 that we received the first so-called interim report, at the urgent request of our colleague the Hon. Member for Wellington—Dufferin—Simcoe. Then we received on June 23 a second so-called interim report. However, no final report ever came to us. Yet, this pre-study had

been most exhaustive, even exceeding the scope and subject matter of the Bill. This pre-study had even been marked by a series of visits to various penal institutions. In spite of all that, there were very few suggestions made to improve the Bill and most of those put forward by the Senate group had already been discussed or turned down before. Lacking somewhat in imagination, our Senate colleagues tried to recycle some of the worn-out ideas expressed by Hon. Members opposite. The Opposition should then have demonstrated its dissatisfaction. Was it sleeping while the Government was making new concessions to speed up the process? For instance, the guidelines concerning decision backing have become statutory rather than regulatory provisions. If there were undue delays, the Opposition should point their fingers elsewhere, because the Senate study turned into delaying tactics. If there were time overruns aimed at delaying this legislation, you should rather blame your august colleagues.

Finally, looking at the report and third reading stages, it will be found that they had to be hurried, because delays in the other House took almost all the time available. In the little time left to us, the Government made a point of disposing of some 34 New Democratic amendment motions, not to mention the avalanche of rhetoric from the Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata). The Bill went through third reading on June 26 and was referred to the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition over the last few weeks chose to blame the Government for giving little attention to the Bill over the last few months they asked why the sudden urgency to enact it. I want to put the record straight. I would invite Hon. Members opposite to read the evidence given by the Hon. Member for Wellington—Dufferin—Simcoe, as the then Solicitor General. When the Minister appeared for the first time before the Senate Committee, he insisted that the provisions in the Bill were urgent. He even recalled they had previously looked at similar provisions in Bill C-32 introduced by the previous Government.

During the seven other sittings of that Committee, senators launched into an analysis, not of the legislation itself but the penitentiary system, even indulging in a small tour of certain institutions, for the purpose of moving around the place, Mr. Speaker. Travelling has always been conducive to new experiences, but never reforms.

When he appeared before the Senate Committee on May 8, 1986, the Solicitor General again reminded Committee Members of the urgent need for the Bill. He also stressed how important it was for the Government to have it enacted before the Summer recess. After reviewing the various amendments introduced to incorporate the criticisms voiced, the Solicitor General urged members of the Senate Committee to concentrate on the Bill and make their amendments known as soon as possible. He was ready to consider any amendment consistent with the objectives stated in the Bill. However, having little or no concern for improving the provisions in the Bill, Committee Members resorted to delaying tactics that put Canadian public safety at risk.