

Release of Yves Geoffroy from Penitentiary

offences arising out of this matter and every effort is being made by police agencies on an international scale to apprehend the fugitive.

4. Penitentiary procedures regarding temporary leave have been modified, as I have described, for certain classes of inmates in the penitentiaries and, as well, no further marriages by inmates will be considered until the legal effects of the marriages are taken into account and there has been consultation with the provincial Attorneys-General.

5. As a result of the amended procedures, the temporary absence program, which plays an important part in the rehabilitation of inmates will continue to develop but additional safeguards will help to better protect society.

6. Since it appears that there were no irregularities or illegalities committed by members of my Department, the Government sees no reason why a special inquiry should be undertaken in the Geoffroy case. However, if specific allegations of irregularities or illegalities can be substantiated, I can give the House the assurance that the Government will take immediate action.

7. The principle of temporary absence approved by Parliament does imply some risks and some errors. In spite of some concern over the Geoffroy case, I have nevertheless received letters from the Elizabeth Fry Society, the John Howard Society, the St. Leonard's Society, the Law Students of the University of British Columbia, the Canadian Criminology and Corrections Association and the Junior League of Toronto giving their full support to the program, and it is my hope that the public in general will continue to cooperate with us.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, on Friday I sought the approval of the House under Standing Order 43 for the setting up of an inquiry under the Inquiries Act. After listening to the lengthy and verbose nonsense which we heard from the minister today I am convinced that there must be a judicial inquiry into this matter; it is absolutely necessary. If the situation was not so tragic it would be a comedy. I want to read from one part of the minister's very lengthy statement:

On June 28, 1971 Mr. Geoffroy sought permission to marry Miss Carmen Parent with whom Mr. Geoffroy apparently had had a continuing liaison.

What utter nonsense! What are the real facts? Let us strip the matter down to the bare facts.

An hon. Member: You would have to close your eyes.

Mr. Woolliams: Yes, you would have to close your eyes not to see them. Geoffroy was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment in St. Vincent de Paul penitentiary on the grounds that he had murdered his wife while this liaison was going on. Those are the facts. Then he was released for two or three days. Let me say at the outset that under the law the minister must take the responsibility. Either he had knowledge of this matter or he did not, and if he did not have knowledge his mismanagement is so grave that he should resign.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: Geoffroy was released for two or three days under section 26 of the Penitentiary Act, it is alleged, which reads as follows:

Where, in the opinion of the Commissioner or the officer in charge of a penitentiary, it is necessary or desirable that an inmate should be absent ... for an unlimited period for medical reasons ... for humanitarian reasons—

There were certainly no medical reasons. What were the humanitarian reasons? Here is a man charged with the murder of his wife. After due process of law he is convicted by a judge and jury and sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of his wife. Then he is permitted by the minister to be released to marry a woman with whom he had a long liaison. If that is the kind of humanitarianism for which the minister stands, I think it would even shock the Prime Minister.

An hon. Member: That is the just society.

Mr. Woolliams: I want to refer now to section 684(3) of the Criminal Code which in part says:

No person sentenced to life imprisonment shall be released during the life of such term—

Particularly on a charge of murder.

—without the approval of the Governor in Council.

• (1140)

Release means release. This man was released on the grounds of humanity, that the children had to be taken care of, to marry the woman with whom he had a liaison while he was living with another woman. Release means release. I want to be fair in dealing with this matter. There is a marginal note that talks about release and it might mean temporary release, but if you go to the Interpretation Act you will see it substantiates that release means release as used in section 684(3) of the Criminal Code.

When the Right Honourable Lester Pearson was Prime Minister he made a statement at the time of the abolition of capital punishment in which he said that when people are found guilty of this kind of crime and are given life imprisonment they would have to have the approval of cabinet before they would be released.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Woolliams: That statement can be checked. While the fairy story that the minister read today might be sold to *True Story* magazine, there is no way he can get around the fact that this man was wrongfully released.

Therefore I say that the Governor in Council—the cabinet—is responsible for the release of Geoffroy, responsible for having given prior approval to his temporary release, responsible to the public and to Parliament for the violation of section 684(3) of the Criminal Code. I say that by corruption or incredible incompetence he was allowed to escape.

The minister's advisers may endeavour to argue, as I have already said, that the marginal note to section 684(3) of the Criminal Code does not mean permanent release but any kind of release. Check section 13 of the Interpretation Act, chapter I-23 of the Revised Statutes of Canada.

The plain grammatical meaning of the subsection is that no person, whether his sentence has been commuted from death to life imprisonment or to a term of years or wheth-