

Penitentiaries

ty, adding to it. That fellow, in spite of his experience, standing before the court, broke into tears and swore to the young presiding judge that he would not have to regret his attitude. Today it is a happy moment for me to learn from the hon. member for Timiskaming that my forbearance bore fruit, that one can still believe in rehabilitation, that one can still believe that there exists in a human being, even the most corrupt one, a potential that deserves respect.

I fear, Mr. Speaker, that those escapes might bring about among the people the feeling that we should put an end to that rehabilitation attempt in our penitentiaries.

And in concluding those introductory remarks, I say it is essential for the minister to reassure the public, to preserve and protect justice which is being undermined by that event, to protect our institutions. For that reason it is important that the minister tell us the truth on those escapes.

It is an easy thing for public men to pass on the responsibilities to boards of inquiry, to compel judges to arrive at conclusions which they themselves could have drawn had they had enough courage to face facts. And I believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is not by creating a judicial inquiry which will have to last weeks and months that we shall know the truth about that.

I respect the choice of the minister who announced a while ago that Mr. Justice Ducros of the Superior Court, had been appointed for that duty. I will not make more comments about that but I still believe that we Members of Parliament, assembled in a special committee, as was recommended this morning, would be able to obtain immediately the facts, hear witnesses, experts and come to conclusions.

However, I would have thought that the minister would have told the House and the people today about the written instructions that were given to guards and the oral instructions that were repeated to them. Were there or not any suspensions since the Sunday incidents? We should consider particularly the fact that the same guards might still be on duty as well as the director of the penal institution who, so it seems, is said to have been warned of the escape plans by the director of the Quebec Police Force. And yet the same director is still in office. I know that you should not prejudge and condemn someone without even hearing him, but it seems to me that to reassure our fellow citizens the suspension of the people involved would certainly have been appreciated.

I am surprised that we do not have yet the evidence that should have been collected over the last three days by the RCMP officers. It would have been quite simple for the minister to table in this House the affidavits and the witness evidence so that we might know where we stand instead of having to rely on the minister's word, on press reports or simply on hearsay.

This morning I pointed out to the minister an enlightening experience which was the escape of Lucien Rivard in 1964 or 1965. In this case, the man was far less dangerous than those currently at large. Perhaps he was more dangerous for the safety of some politicians of the time but, as an individual, there was no risk that he might commit murder.

[Mr. Wagner.]

And yet what happened? Within 48 hours after the escape—I remember this affair because I was responsible for it—overnight, we had interrogated all witnesses, obtained affidavits, collected evidence, seized revolvers and prepared everything so that the next day everything was available to the House. For three days, in reply to questions arising rightfully from everywhere, the House and the Canadian public was informed and we were not required to refer the whole matter to a royal commission which would have convened months later.

That is why I feel that swift, accelerated justice can, while reassuring the concerned public, give satisfaction to the people. That is why, with my colleagues, I was happy to accept the motion for the institution of a special committee of enquiry of the House. I believe we should proceed quickly. Some of the information obtained to date worries us deeply. We have noticed, in particular, that two of the prisoners at large were in the past suspected of FLQ activity and that, at one point, when the Cross incident occurred, those gentlemen were listed among the prisoners which the FLQ wanted departed to Cuba. It seems to me those things should be looked into without delay.

I wonder why, for instance, reports on inquiries into previous escapes involving those same persons might not be tabled in the House. If we were to study those reports and establish who helped or took in the criminals after their first escape, it might be easier for us to find out what the facts are.

I convey this information to the House and make those suggestions in all modesty, as my contribution to this debate. I say to the Solicitor General that, while we understand his problems, the fact remains that in our present political and social system, the members of the cabinet are answerable for the actions of the civil servants. This solidarity and responsibility is one thing from which there is no escape, and I urge the Solicitor General to take good note of my observations, as well as all the speeches made in this House. I will be pleased to co-operate, that justice might be done to all.

● (2210)

[*English*]

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief, because most of what I had intended to say has already been said very ably by speakers who have gone before me.

All of us in this House who are concerned with the protection of the public have a very special responsibility. That responsibility is to refrain from fanning the flames of passion over the escapes and the failures in the parole system. If we are genuinely concerned about the protection of the public, we must endeavour to see that the public is ready to support a decent system of rehabilitation. We are doing public protection no service at all if we play on the fears of the public as the media are inclined to do.

The hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) said that in any good program of penal reform and rehabilitation, mistakes are inevitable. Of course, if that were the only test we must have one heck of a program, because there have been a number of monumental mistakes. My hon. friend from Broadview said the program had received