

bill is somewhat limited, but it does open up the whole matter. It appears to me that adding members of the Parole Board will not be effective in meeting the major problems which confront the board at the present time, although it may lead to some improvement. The minister said he was studying the Huguessen report and would be introducing legislation later to implement some of its recommendations. It seems to me that for the present at least, he is not prepared to go very far in carrying out those proposals. We await further legislation which will disclose his own thinking with regard to what is contained in that report.

● (1700)

Two amendments have been proposed. One would require that two of the additional members of the board would be from the native peoples. I have a great deal of sympathy with the motivation which prompted the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) to put forward this amendment. We read from time to time of the high percentage of native people who run afoul of the law for various reasons and find themselves behind prison bars, so this is a matter of real concern. Perhaps there is some ground for feeling that white people cannot understand the thinking of the native people and, on the basis of the treatment accorded to the native people down through the years, that discrimination may be shown against them by the Parole Board in the absence of native representation. Nevertheless, I agree with other members who have argued that to accept the amendment would be to create a precedent which would be unwise, since in the establishment of other boards and commission in the future we might find ourselves resorting to a similar operation although it would be extremely difficult for every facet of our community or society to be represented on these boards. Thus, I do not think the course recommended by the hon. member would be a wise one to follow.

His second proposal was that the board should be comprised of two members who had been, in a phrase used by my hon. friend from Peel South (Mr. Blenkarn), "on the other side of the fence." I should not like to see this recommendation find expression in the act itself. I am reminded of a situation which arose when an Opportunities for Youth grant was given in respect of a study of the drug situation. Some of those who conducted the study were drug addicts and, of course, they recommended that drugs be freely available. That, of course, was to be expected in the circumstances. I do not think anything should be written into the law along the lines suggested by the hon. member, even though I believe such people as he mentioned should not be barred from participating in the work of the board in certain circumstances.

A number of examples of violation of parole on the part of various individuals have been brought to our attention today. I shall not take up any time by referring to such cases, but I wish to conclude by saying that though offenders should be given every opportunity to rehabilitate themselves we must do everything possible to ensure that those who have committed violent crimes, especially, do not return to become a danger to society.

Mr. Duncan M. Beattie (Hamilton Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to join my

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colleagues on both sides of the House to applaud this amendment to the Parole Act. I support the principle of this bill without qualification, Mr. Speaker, because it is long overdue. It is so long overdue that I feel compelled, before continuing with my comments on the measure, to ask a question: Why has it taken the government so long to discover that the Parole Act no longer serves the purpose for which it was designed?

At the present time, the Parole Board is based in Ottawa and it is hopelessly understaffed. This has been known for a very long time. We did not need a royal commission or a task force to tell us that. It has been common knowledge for a long time that the Parole Board has abandoned the practice of interviewing prisoners face-to-face because it could not keep up with the backlog of requests for parole hearings. Because of understaffing and because of the growing backlog of requests for hearings, the board has been forced, in many cases, to grant parole on the basis of incomplete information. It was inevitable that the board would hesitate in some cases to grant paroles which were justified, and it was also inevitable that some of the paroles which were granted would prove to be bad risks. The evidence of this can be seen in the extremely high rate of parole violations. It is a sad fact that a great many parolees in the past two or three years have committed serious crimes such as rape and murder after being paroled.

While I support this amendment, and while I applaud any move which would increase the number of members and officers of the Parole Board, I must confess I have some reservations about how effective the measure would be. I have witnessed too often the way in which the government uses bona fide situations such as this for partisan political purposes. No safeguards are built into the bill to prevent the government from using it as an opportunity to reward party hacks and camp followers. Parliament Hill and many of the government agencies are crawling with defeated members of the Liberal caucus in the last parliament, and I am apprehensive that the bill before us will be used to look after those who have not yet been suitably rewarded.

In this connection, I must ask whether the procedures and practices followed in the past by the Parole Board will still govern the new, enlarged board. There is a demonstrated need here for a clean sweep. The entire parole system has fallen into disrepute in the past few years and the dedicated, competent members of the board are under the same cloud as those who are disinterested and incompetent, those who, in fact, are members because of certain services rendered at some other time and in some other capacity. It will not be enough just to swell the ranks of the Parole Board. We must ensure that the Board is given new guidelines, terms of reference which are in line with present day situations and needs. I would like to see the board granted sufficient flexibility to enable it to deal with applicants on a personal basis, but in view of the failure of the parole system in the last couple of years, especially with regard to leaves of absence of prisoners, this would have to be approached with great caution.

● (1710)

There are many aspects of the parole system that must be reviewed, Mr. Speaker. I have no doubt we will find