

Penitentiaries

p.m. when a 25-watt bulb is turned on for the night. The prisoners sleep with their heads one foot from the open toilet at the rear of their cell, so that the guards can see them in hourly checks during the night. If the guards cannot see their face, and evidence they are breathing, they will pound on the door until the prisoner moves. The guards said they did this to make sure the prisoners hadn't escaped or committed suicide.

It should be understood that there are some inmates who spend three years in such conditions. It is not just a matter of spending ten days, or 15 days, or 30 days there—for that length of time they might be tolerated. McCann spent 754 consecutive days in solitary confinement. Often one hears the argument, "Look at what they did to their victims." I agree that these men have committed atrocious crimes at the expense of society, but surely the standards we impose should not be those adopted by those who commit these crimes. Surely they should be civilized standards, because the way in which we treat the worst elements in our society reflects the standards which our society seeks to uphold. On this score, Canadians have a great deal about which to search their hearts.

The subcommittee recommended that in terms of the Criminal Code we should move into areas of diversion. I quote from paragraph 190 of the report:

Many witnesses testified that if Canada builds prisons, those prisons will be immediately filled. Conversely, if alternatives for prison can be found for the majority, who are not dangerous, some of the existing buildings will be emptied. Thus, before entering into a multi-million dollar construction program, less costly and more productive alternatives should be introduced.

Perhaps the Solicitor General would comment on the construction program proposed by his department. I realize that for him this is a new portfolio, but a number of figures have been put forward as to the extent of this program. My information is from a report which I would be happy to give to the Solicitor General. It states we are building 26 new institutions and that the estimated cost will run about \$460 million over the next five years. We will be adding another 3,326 additional beds to the prison system. At the moment the total program will construct 4,712 new beds and we will be phasing out 1,386 old ones. The net figure is 3,326 new beds over a five-year period.

● (1412)

I would suggest that we are following a construction program which will be a self-fulfilling prophecy. When you provide beds inmates will be found to fill them and the courts and judges will continue the present archaic system of punishment without rehabilitation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have to interrupt the hon. member because his time has expired. If he seeks unanimous consent of the House I am ready to ask the House if it will allow him to continue. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Leggatt: I wish to thank the House, Mr. Speaker. This construction program is a self-fulfilling prophecy. I submit that if the Solicitor General would examine the demographic figures he would find that the crime rate curve has been flattening over the years, in spite of the violent crime which we

have experienced in Canada. Take a look at the facts and the statistics. In 1974 there were 545 homicides. In 1975 that figure increased to 620. In 1976 the homicide rate was reduced to 597, that is, by 7 per cent over 1975. If you use the population base figures and, taking the crime statistics, fix them to 100,000, which is the way judicial statistics are usually calculated, we find there has been a decrease in the homicide rate of .3 per cent. All violent crime curves are now on a down trend. The high point on the curve was reached in 1968.

In Canada people who commit the most crime fall into the 17 to 28 age group. After the second world war when there was the baby boom, when the crime peaked on the curve in 1968, a large percentage of the population was in that age bracket. Since then, crime has been slowly declining. With proper planning the crime rate would probably flatten out. It may not decline further but the population will continue to increase at a faster rate than that of the crime rate.

Therefore, while we may need some emergency construction, I would urge the Solicitor General to re-examine this massive building program of some \$460 million. I appreciate that some new institutions will have to be built to alleviate immediate problems, particularly in the British Columbia penitentiary area. However, in terms of the total cost we ought to re-examine what we are doing.

I would like to cite some other interesting figures to the Solicitor General. In 1970 the total cost of running the penitentiary service was \$70.6 million. In 1976 to 1977 it was \$256 million. We are spending a lot of money but I do not think we are spending it wisely. We have not examined the trends carefully enough. There is no point in building a lot of "warehouses" in this country. The way the bureaucracy operates in Canada they will find a way to fill those warehouses. They will fill them with humans. This is not the way to solve the problem of reducing crime and, in the process, of rehabilitating criminals.

At the beginning I wanted to state that I support the motion before the House. It has been most carefully worded. It is traditional that we in this party will amend a motion which emanates from the official opposition. In examining this particular motion I can see nothing to amend. They have asked for the adoption of the 65 recommendations. Those recommendations came from every political party in this House, and it is a non-partisan motion reflecting the political views of the public as represented by the members on that committee.

In the three major areas of failure in implementing the report comes first of all the question of staff training, salaries and pensions, the idea of upgrading service to the RCMP model, and improving the morale of the service. There is nothing like money to improve morale. If you provide pay increases for correctional officers you will improve the morale of those institutions right away.

The second disappointment was the rejection of a recommendation with reference to regions. We want the warden to run his institution; we do not want him second guessed by region. We want the highest paid official in the region to be