

Adjournment Debate

We would have expected a rational Government to make sure that the parole system works well and that it is the alternative that is being presented to the Canadian people. However, we are seeing perhaps the most expensive prison in the history of Canada being built right in the middle of the Prime Minister's riding. I do not think that is a defensible position, particularly when the Government is inviting us to take seriously the things the Nielsen task force has recommended to us and, in particular, the option of not building the penitentiary. The Solicitor General went so far as to say that the question of the penitentiary was not open. He felt that the show had to go on and that they had to go on making the decisions. I do not think this is the correct decision.

I would like to add that I had a chance to discuss this matter further with the Solicitor General at the Justice and Solicitor General Committee. In that committee, he said that this penitentiary was one that I had in effect approved while I was Solicitor General. He proved that by showing that I had in the past endorsed an extension to Drummond Penitentiary. He asked me how I felt about that. I would like to confess that I thought that that extension to Drummond had actually been built. I thought that we were talking about a further addition of cells in the Quebec region. Now I have to react and ask the Government to react to that challenge. I do so just by looking at the bottom line.

This penitentiary is over four times as expensive as the addition that might have been built to Drummond, and would have been built if the instructions that I had given and the decision taken by the former Government had been followed. However one looks at it, the penitentiary in the riding of the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) has to be looked at as nothing but politics and something very unnecessary.

• (1815)

Mr. Speaker, you will be interested in the prediction which I am about to make in my remaining minute. If more prison cells have to be built, they should be built in western Canada. Let us look at the offender population, from where offenders come, and the fairness of building extra cell capacity in Quebec when the crying need is for extra cell capacity in western Canada. People in every part of the country like to believe that there are no criminals from their part of the country. However, I am afraid that the only way these cells in Quebec will be properly used will be by moving inmates from western Canada for incarceration in the Province of Quebec. There will be language problems and the unfairness of inmates not being close to their families or the communities to which they will return upon release. It is a mistake and it is a misallocation of resources.

I put it to the Minister's mouthpiece tonight, whoever it will be, to reverse this terrible decision and to countermand the decision made by the Prime Minister. He should announce that more money will be put into parole, that less money will be put into this penitentiary, and that if more cells are built,

they will be built in western Canada so that offenders convicted there will be able to serve their time there, not be required to go to the Prime Minister's riding to serve their sentences.

Mr. Gordon Towers (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, neither you nor I can accept the fact that there are worse criminals in western Canada than there are in any other part of the country. We just cannot accept the Hon. Member's challenge. Further, I encourage him to request his colleagues in the Opposition and in the Senate to pass Bill C-67 and Bill C-68, and a lot of his wishes will be accomplished. He would certainly be working in a positive manner if he worked in that direction.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond further to the issue raised by the Hon. Member for York Centre (Mr. Kaplan) during the Oral Question Period of March 25, 1986, with regard to the construction of a 240-inmate protective custody unit at Port Cartier, Quebec.

As the Hon. Member will recall, the construction of a protective custody facility in Quebec was originally announced on his behalf, as the then Solicitor General, in April, 1984. The need for protective custody accommodation still exists, but the location for the new institution has been changed in the interests of socio-economic development, to alleviate severely distressed conditions in the Port Cartier area.

The institution at Port Cartier will meet the accommodation needs for protective custody inmates in the Province of Quebec. It is projected that 230 cells will be required by 1993-94. It will replace the outdated protective facilities at Laval Institution. This institution, formerly called St. Vincent de Paul, was opened in 1873 and has been identified for phase-out since the late 1970s. Because of its age and structure, it cannot be renovated or operated economically for a higher security population at current standards. This new institution also conforms to the recommendations of the parliamentary subcommittee report on the penitentiary system, that the Correctional Service of Canada have dedicated protective custody institutions to house this special population and provide sufficient programming.

Historically speaking, penitentiaries have traditionally been built to serve geographical areas or the needs of newly created provinces. In more recent years, advancements in technology and service delivery have meant that the interests of regional development, particularly in areas under distress, can be taken into great consideration in site selection. Springhill Institution in Springhill, Nova Scotia, is an example in point, as is the area in the Miramichi region of New Brunswick where the Atlantic Institution is nearing completion.

Although the location of the new institution may be considered as relatively remote from Montreal, Port Cartier has the necessary infrastructure in place to support the needs of a penitentiary, and program delivery to inmates will not suffer because of its location. However, because of its location, the Correctional Service of Canada will endeavour to facilitate the maintenance of family ties where possible. It has, for