

Oral Questions

Hon. Member has not even identified the so-called project that is mentioned in the telegram.

Having said that, I am confident that there are many municipalities across the country that will welcome and will find great relief in the \$2.4 billion that will be expended in every Province and many municipalities right across the country. There is no question that many municipal representatives are keenly aware of the problem of unemployment. No doubt, as these projects are announced they will be well received, particularly in those areas that have a high unemployment level.

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PENITENTIARIES**NATIVE SPIRITUAL RIGHTS—INMATES' HUNGER STRIKE**

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. As the Minister knows, three Indian inmates, Gary Butler, Darelle Butler and Stuart Stonechild are in the twenty-ninth day of a spiritual fast in British Columbia and Alberta and are physically deteriorating. The prisoners are seeking full recognition of their spiritual religious practices, including the sweatlodge and the sacred pipe ceremony. In view of the fact that this practice of traditional native religions is a right and not a privilege that should have to be bargained for, what immediate action is the Minister prepared to take to recognize this fundamental right in all federal prison jurisdictions and to put an end to the historically racist policies of the Correctional Service of Canada in our prisons?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General of Canada): Madam Speaker, I can say to the Hon. Member that I have no sympathy at all for that hunger strike which is under way on the West Coast, especially since those Indians involved in it spent several weeks fattening up before the strike began.

We have an enlightened policy on native spirituality. The Indians took me to court in British Columbia and the policy was sustained as being consistent with the Charter of Rights. We have already built three sweatlodges at other institutions and federal penitentiaries across the country without the need for anyone going on hunger strike, and without the need for questions being asked of me by the NDP.

Further, two of these strikers are American citizens. If they would prefer to be imprisoned in the enlightened conditions in the United States, they can apply for a transfer to their own country. I can assure them that I will give my approval to that request for transfer.

APPLICATION OF POLICY

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question. I would be interested to know whether the Minister believes there is one standard for

Canadian prisoners and another standard for non-Canadian prisoners in his novel doctrine of prison discipline.

Last Friday the Minister admitted that native religious ceremonies have not been permitted in Canadian penitentiaries in the past, despite the disproportionate number of native people in Canadian prisons.

Will the Minister assure the House that, in drawing up new guidelines for these spiritual practices, he will fully involve Indian representatives from the Assembly of First Nations and prison Indian brotherhoods? Will he assure the House that there will be a very speedy resolution of this matter, particularly in view of the serious nature of the on-going spiritual fast which he blithely dismisses, despite the fact that human lives are involved?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General of Canada): Madam Speaker, these individuals are striking on a volunteer basis. I think the Hon. Member should read the answer that I gave to the question on Friday.

In fact the policy has been changed. At present a policy is in effect which recognizes native spirituality and allows the expression of native spirituality in institutions although, as I indicated, that was not the case in the past. That policy is now in effect. It is an enlightened policy which is sustained by the courts.

I am reviewing all the practices myself, Madam Speaker. For example, I do not think the natives should have full control over the amount of sweet grass and rope that each individual can keep in his own cell, which is something that they want. I think a reasonable policy has been developed and I am reviewing it. I think it is a good policy.

As for the process and the speed with which we are building sweatlodges where there are native inmates in institutions, consistent with the other priorities of the Correctional Service of Canada I think we can be proud of the rate at which the new policy is being implemented.

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO CORRECTIONAL SERVICE

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Madam Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Solicitor General. In the last nine months there has been a riot at Archambault when three guards and two inmates were left dead; there have been suicides and attempted suicides at Archambault, Edmonton, and other institutions; two weeks ago the three-member inmate committee at Archambault resigned en masse due to tension between guards and inmates; a week and a half ago two inmates were stabbed with picks at Archambault; last Friday a guard was murdered and an inmate wounded at Archambault, and last Sunday an inmate convicted of murdering a guard at Archambault last summer was—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Does the Hon. Member have a question?