

Oral Questions

Mr. Kaplan: When I see the list and the numbers involved, I will consider proposing some new program within the institutions for protecting not only the guards and the rest of the prison population, but the community in general, from that very violent group.

An hon. Member: What about the committee report?

Mr. Kaplan: I might add that one of the reasons for the problems in our institutions is the trend in recent years, which I welcome very much, and which I think the House does, not to send people to these institutions who can be diverted and who can be punished by fines or other forms of punishment outside the institutions.

Mr. Crosby: A supplementary question, Madam Speaker. The staff at Dorchester penitentiary have complained bitterly about lack of manpower to control the prisoners and the Solicitor General has been told in the House and in committees that the situation is dangerous. Does he acknowledge that he received these warnings respecting manpower, will he tell us how he responded to them, and what can he say about the rumour of more resignations among the staff at Dorchester?

● (1420)

Mr. Kaplan: Madam Speaker, I can say that I have not heard that rumour about staff. I am meeting this afternoon or tomorrow with representatives of the union of Solicitor General's employees. I want to discuss with them their grievances and also, of course, the special perspective which they have and which I would like to have on dealing with this type of offender.

Mr. Crosby: Madam Speaker, the great problem in our prisons, as the Solicitor General has pointed out, is the handling of dangerous and desperate prisoners. Yet the Solicitor General disregards the warnings and says that he will take the risks of mixing these dangerous men in the general prison population. Can he now justify these risks in terms of the safety of prison staff and the effective administration of Dorchester?

Mr. Kaplan: Madam Speaker, again that is not exactly accurate. We have two special handling units across the country for housing the most violent and dangerous offenders. They are put in special handling units and they are not released until a national committee, which studies individual cases, feels their release is justified.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): What about your speech in London?

Mr. Kaplan: We also have punitive dissociation to which inmates are subject after they engage in incidents.

What concerns me is that so far we have no specific facility for dealing with those who we know are violent, or may be violent and dangerous, and a threat to the institutions and to the guards. It is to that group, the size of which I am not

certain yet but which I will know more about within the next few days, that I would like to direct some special programs.

INQUIRY WHETHER CONDITIONS WILL BE EXAMINED

Hon. Allan Lawrence (Durham-Northumberland): Madam Speaker, my questions are also directed to the Solicitor General. I think the House is rather appalled to learn that only after a study the Solicitor General is perhaps thinking of imposing a fine on some convicted murderers who instigated a problem resulting in the killing of a prison guard on the weekend. Has the Solicitor General considered, as several independent members of this House have come to him and pleaded in regard to Dorchester just this summer alone, setting up some type of inquiry so that at long last we can have some public exposition of the real problems that exist, not only in that sick institution but in a sick system generally speaking?

Hon. Bob Kaplan (Solicitor General): Madam Speaker, as to Dorchester, there are three inquiries under way. There is one by a coroner; there is one by the police in the area, which may result in charges being laid; and then there is a special inquiry authorized by the commissioner at my direction which is under way now. The results of the last special inquiry at Dorchester, which I have had for a few days, I read over the weekend. They point as well to this problem of the requirement for some new classification, which I propose to devise within the next while when I see the numbers involved, to deal with this violent, dangerous group, who too often are known ahead of time, but only on the basis of suspicion and special insights on the part of the correctional service, but for whom no special program has been designed with their security needs in mind.

Mr. Beatty: Appoint them to the parole board.

Mr. Lawrence: Madam Speaker, as the Solicitor General knows, the coroner feels he has been bypassed by his officials. The RCMP have made extraordinary attempts to make sure that the facts in this case have not been made public and perhaps will not be made public, which I find quite deplorable. Finally, the commissioner's inquiry which the Solicitor General is now talking about is merely correctional service people talking to correctional service people in an in-house type of inquiry in which the report by this minister is never made public. What I think this House and the public are entitled to—and I ask the minister for it today—is an independent public inquiry not only for Dorchester, but perhaps into the whole mess and method of dealing with these dangerous offenders and hostage-taking incidents.

Mr. Nielsen: That was also a committee recommendation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kaplan: Madam Speaker, as to the point of never making the facts public, I would indicate to the House now that I would be prepared, when the facts have been collected