

Oral Questions

Mr. Stanfield: Would the Minister of Justice say whether the government has received any detailed explanation as to the latest escapes? Has it received any explanation of why a guard tower 30 feet away from the point where the men are said to have gone over the wall was empty at the time?

An hon. Member: He was at a luncheon.

Mr. Stanfield: Can the minister say whether this guard tower and others at this penitentiary are now being manned continuously? What assurance can the minister give the House?

Mr. McGrath: They shouldn't be allowed to escape during the lunch hour.

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, it is true it appears that two of the towers in question were unmanned at this particular point in time. It is also a fact that this was directly contrary to instructions which were given again in writing as recently as May 1 that these towers were to be manned at all times.

This discrepancy in conduct compared with the directions which existed is part of the elements which have led to the need for an inquiry.

Mr. Stanfield: As I understand it, the inquiry referred to by the minister relates to prisons, security and break-outs in the province of Quebec. I should like to ask the Prime Minister or the Minister of Justice whether the inquiry will be broadened so as to include the penitentiary system in the whole of the country, either in the form of a royal commission as proposed by the right hon. member for Prince Albert last week or in the form of an inquiry by a special select committee of the House as proposed today by the hon. member for Yukon? Will the government broaden the inquiry to include the whole penitentiary system in Canada and all its aspects?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, the inquiry to which I referred a moment ago was specifically in relation to the incidents that took place over the weekend. The Solicitor General reacted in quite a positive way to the suggestion of a broader inquiry in terms of the consideration he wanted to give to that suggestion when put to him in the House the other day. I am sure he will include in his consideration of the appropriate inquiry the suggestion contained in the motion of the hon. member for Yukon.

ESCAPES FROM INSTITUTIONS—REQUEST FOR BROAD JUDICIAL OR OTHER INQUIRY

Mr. David Lewis (York South): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact the escapes reported in the last day or two are the most recent of a number that have taken place in the last number of weeks or months, and in view of the fact one may reasonably suspect there is some kind of loss of discipline or morale in the system at the moment—I address this question to the Prime Minister—can we have from him an assurance today that there will be a broad independent judicial or other inquiry into the whole system of the guards and supervision of penitentiaries in Canada?

[Mr. Stanfield.]

Right Hon. P. E. Trudeau (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice just gave the answer I would repeat to that question, that the Solicitor General did indicate his sympathy with the suggestion. He referred to other inquiries that had been made in recent years into the penitentiary system. He indicated he would want to consider all these and then give his opinion to cabinet and make a statement to the House, if necessary.

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, my question really follows that of the hon. member who preceded me. This is a matter directly for the Prime Minister. I ask the Prime Minister whether consideration is being given to the suggestion I made two or three weeks ago, concerning the open-door proclivities that are becoming part and parcel of the penitentiary service today so far as inmates are concerned, I asked for the setting up of a royal commission. This is a very serious matter and one in respect of which the administration of justice is being widely criticized?

Mr. Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me the question is an elaboration of the question just asked by the Leader of the New Democratic Party and my answer, I must say, is along the same lines.

Mr. Diefenbaker: It seems hard to get an answer from the Prime Minister. I do not want him to draw on his imagination for his facts, but I am wondering whether he could answer the question. Has the subject been before the cabinet and I would like an answer instead of these smart-aleck answers the Prime Minister regularly gives the House?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Yukon on a supplementary.

SECURITY IN PROVINCE OF QUEBEC—REQUEST THAT TERMS OF REFERENCE OF INQUIRY COMMISSION BE BROADENED

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary for the Minister of Justice. In light of the announcement by a spokesman for the Solicitor General that a three-man inquiry commission will be set up this week to investigate penitentiary security in the province of Quebec and in view of the obvious reluctance of the government to broaden that inquiry to include the whole of the country, will the minister at least assure the House that the inquiry will be prepared to examine recent disturbances at Millhaven, Cowansville, St. Vincent de Paul, Dorchester and Prince Albert penitentiaries as well as its existing terms of reference?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly discuss that representation with the Solicitor General. I should think that the objective in maintaining a somewhat narrower ambit for this particular inquiry is to deal with the very specific issues that are involved here. The broader questions are important and the Solicitor General attaches great importance to the questions involved as he indicated to the House earlier, including the over-all question of morale, and is considering the