

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Fontaine (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, in the course of my remarks today I should like to set the record straight for certain Opposition Members and certain editorial writers. After the ill-considered initiative taken by our colleagues in the other place, which was aimed at blocking this Government legislative measure, we were accused of unduly delaying the introduction of our Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I am astonished that certain Members opposite blamed the Government of procrastinating to have this measure adopted since it had been on the Order Paper for over a year. On the contrary, I believe I will be able to prove that the Government has always been firmly committed to pass this legislation as soon as possible.

Opposition Members are being ridiculous when they claim to have been taken by surprise with respect to the intentions of the Government. In its first Speech from the Throne the Government did indicate it intended to act upon public concern over the Canadian penal justice system. We had promised we would do away with the deficiencies of this system so as to guarantee that Canadians would be better protected against criminal acts. Bill C-67 was our way to meet part of this commitment. We agree that Bill C-67 will not solve all problems, but still it is a major step in the right direction because it contains the urgent measures which are needed and which can be quickly implemented while we wait for the findings of certain wide-ranging studies undertaken by the Department of Justice and the Solicitor General.

• (1220)

Mr. Speaker, had Opposition Members gone to the trouble of reading the Speech from the Throne, they would they would have realized that the Government had given a clear indication of its intentions in that respect. No one who intelligently read the Speech from the Throne would express surprise about the importance given to this Bill by the Government.

True enough, over a year has gone by since Bill C-67 was read for the first time. On June 27, 1985 the then Solicitor General introduced in the House two Bills to empower the National Parole Board to change the provisions concerning the mandatory supervision of parolees. Had Members opposite paid attention to the statements of the Solicitor General they would have understood that the Government was really intent on providing better protection for society by preventing the release of patently dangerous inmates.

Had Members been the least concerned about the safety of our fellow Canadians they would have learned that shortly after his appointment as Solicitor General the Hon. Member for Central Nova (Mr. MacKay) announced that he would introduce legislative measures to eliminate automatic release granting.

Some Members claim that if the Government had really been convinced about the appropriateness of Bill C-67 and the need for quick adoption it would have said so earlier and taken the steps required to push it through the various legislative stages earlier in the session.

Parole and Penitentiary Acts

Those who come up with this kind of argument simply like the sound of their own voices. Undoubtedly they are unaware of the fact that unfortunately the previous Government had tried to make the problem disappear by introducing its own Bills S-2 and C-35. Overly confident about its own genius and probably in a hurry to deal with the matter without having to hold meaningful consultations, the previous Government got stuck with its two Bills. This Government chose not to take the easy way out, knowing full well that this kind of legislations was a contentious issue. My colleagues lived up to their responsibilities and made sure they would achieve the broadest possible consensus with respect to these legislative provisions. My colleagues did not spare time and energy to speed up the legislative process.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has accused the Government of unduly delaying the adoption of Bill C-67.

In fact, the Opposition would have us responsible for the time it has taken this legislation to get through the various stages before its referral to the other place. The Opposition is mistaken. I suppose that, being unaccustomed to holding consultations and allowing all parties to express their points of view, it would have preferred us to ignore such procedures entirely. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that unlike our colleagues opposite, we do appreciate hearing the views expressed by various sides on our policies, even when they are negative.

If I may recall the various stages this Bill has gone through. I am sure you will agree that the delay for which we are being so unfairly criticized was due both to the fact that the Government gave various groups a chance to express their views and make a thorough and careful study of the matter, and to the dilatory tactics used by Members of the other Chamber and of the Opposition to delay adoption of the Bill.

First of all, the Bill was tabled in 1985, before the House adjourned for the summer recess. The Government deliberately chose that date, since during the summer, it wanted to obtain the views of provincial governments, private and public organizations and certain individuals. The early tabling of the Bill in June 1985 gave groups with an interest in correctional matters a chance to take a close look at the provisions of the Bill. During the study process in 1985, the press showed a great deal of interest in the legislation. The Bills were also sent to provincial departments responsible for correctional services, to private agencies and to lawyers, for comment.

Officials of the Department of the Solicitor General met with these various groups, while correspondence received by my colleagues also contained various views to be considered and carefully weighed. Generally speaking, the Bills were well received, especially at the provincial level and by victim assistance groups and the media. Following the Cabinet shuffle in the summer of 1985, the Solicitor General, realizing it was an initiative whose time had come, decided to concentrate on promoting this legislation. Subsequently, after Parliament resumed in September 1985, the Solicitor General moved second reading of the Bills in question. All parties had an opportunity to participate fully in the debate on second reading which took three days. The Bill was adopted on second