

tion and consequently, have a better understanding of their problems.

All of the measures that I announced on June 1 have been implemented except the provision of the ten additional ad hoc members to the Parole Board. Treasury Board has already given approval for additional support staff, parole officers and classification officers who would work in conjunction with those ten new members. I trust that hon. members share my concern for the need to immediately enlarge the membership of the National Parole Board as proposed in this legislation. The passage of this bill will not provide a cure to all the problems that we are facing in the field of corrections. It would, however, provide a response to a pressing need. In particular, it would do a lot to help with the over-crowding problem in our penitentiary system. Last year, for example, the population of the penitentiaries increased by more than 14 per cent which is much higher than the increases in previous years. As a result of that over-population situation we have had more tension, more frustration on the part of inmates and employees, more overtime and so on which has led to escapes and other incidents. We would hope that with additional members the Parole Board would be able to provide a better screening and maybe a quicker screening of applications so that more and better people could be put on parole than in the last year.

For the longer term, as I said previously, more profound changes will be necessary. The report of the task force on the releases of inmates, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Hugessen of Montreal, which I made public a few months ago, is receiving detailed consideration. As hon. members appreciate, the report raises a number of important issues that could only be dealt with by substantial changes in our current legislation. Also for the long term, we will have to consider the report of the Senate Committee on Parole and Temporary Absence which should be ready soon. It is also my hope that the report of the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee of this House, which is carrying out an enquiry into our penitentiary system including parole and temporary absence, will be of assistance to us in our search for improvements in the corrections field in the longer run.

One of the key questions with respect to parole, is the distribution of responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments. Generally speaking, the National Parole Board has authority over inmates who have been convicted of offences under the federal criminal laws, whether they are in federal or provincial institutions. Some provinces have, in recent years, expressed the wish that these arrangements be reviewed so that the jurisdiction over federal offenders in provincial institutions could be assumed by provincial parole authorities. This is a question that we propose to discuss at the federal-provincial conference on corrections which will take place late this fall, probably in December.

I am hopeful that these federal-provincial discussions on corrections and especially on parole will allow us to reach some conclusion as to whether the current distribution of responsibilities between the federal and provincial authorities is as efficient as it should be. The conclusion of an agreement on this question would enable us to better come to grips with some of the major issues raised by the

Parole Act

Hugessen task force and others, in connection with the release of inmates.

In the meantime, I hope that hon. members will agree with me that this legislative measure which is before them today is one that deserves their support. While the quick passage of the bill will, admittedly, not provide us with a cure-all to all our problems in the corrections field, it will at least help us to cope more effectively with some of the problems relating to the release of inmates.

I also want to say that since the bill has been drafted and tabled in this House the Treasury Board has suggested to me that one of the sections could be amended and I intend to put forward an amendment along certain lines. I am referring to subsection (4)(b) of section 4.1 which deals with the non-salary benefits of those people to be appointed to the board. I have been informed, after the bill was drafted, that this section deals with things that are already dealt with in a Treasury Board directive. Consequently, all these matters are taken care of. In other words, the non-salary compensation to people who are order in council appointments, such as these people would be, is covered already by a Treasury Board directive. So, in committee I will move simply for a deletion of subclause (b) on page 2 of the bill. It does not affect the principle of the bill. It relates to the non-salary compensation of the people who are to be appointed on an ad hoc basis to the board.

● (1520)

Having said that, I once again urge the House to support the bill, which is one that will help us to deal more adequately with the problems of parole in Canada.

Mr. Woolliams: Mr. Speaker, will the minister permit a question. I am putting this question now because there is some feeling on the part of members that this bill should go to committee for study and consideration, as this would save time. My question relates to section 684(3) of the Criminal Code. The minister is well aware of it, because it is a section that was previously dealt with in committee. It reads:

(3) Notwithstanding any other law or authority, a person in respect of whom a sentence of death has been commuted to imprisonment for life or a term of imprisonment or a person upon whom a sentence of imprisonment for life has been imposed as a minimum punishment, shall not be released during his life or such term, as the case may be, without the prior approval of the Governor in Council.

That section, I put it to the minister, has not been repealed. Am I correct?

My second question is this. Is it intended to repeal that section when the bill to abolish capital punishment is brought forward. There is some suggestion that this section may be repealed. Is that correct?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, the section referred to by the hon. member is to be dealt with in the bill on capital punishment, which is before the House. It is my understanding, if I recall correctly—and I am not dealing with that bill today—that that section would still apply. If the bill on capital punishment is passed, we would still require cabinet approval for temporary absences with respect to people serving life sentences.