

er. Are they permitted before ten years of the sentence has been served?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, temporary absences are authorized under the Penitentiaries Act for three days. Section 26 of the Penitentiaries Act which authorizes temporary absences for humanitarian, medical or rehabilitation purposes permits absences for three days, and up to 15 days. Those absences may be with or without escort. Yes, they have been authorized prior to the conclusion of the ten-year period, but that matter is under review right now.

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, the government has now chosen to introduce capital punishment as a subject for debate. This is a matter of extreme importance for all Canadians. I feel, however, that its introduction at this point is not related to its importance but is, rather, related to the government's embarrassment over Bill C-125 which it hustled out of the way as soon as the NDP indicated that it would not support it. So, in the guise of seeming to be active and in the hope of prolonging its life, aided and abetted by those on my left—

Mr. Lewis: If the hon. member keeps on talking like that I will become a retentionist.

Mr. Nielsen: It seems to me the hon. member and his party are already the best retentionists in the business.

Mr. Baldwin: They are retaining the government in power.

Mr. Nielsen: The government's embarrassment is most evident. After the capital punishment debate with what other urgent matter has the government to deal? There is the bill on pilotage, yet we still have masses of unemployed, still have the highest inflation rate, the highest cost of living, and no old age pension bill has been brought forward. Nevertheless, the government has brought forward this matter for debate at this time. This is the time when this House should be dealing with urgent legislation, to get the country back to work. The government's concern ought to be directed to curing inflation and getting the economy going again.

Mr. Woolliams: That is right.

An hon. Member: The debate is on capital punishment.

Mr. Nielsen: If hon. members in the back rows wish to rise and make their comments, I will yield to them. They should not attempt to smuggle their remarks on to the record or retain the safety of obscurity in the back rows. It is my view that the government is playing politics with this bill.

• (1250)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: And this is not the kind of issue which should be the subject of a political game. Hon. members over there are going to debate this bill for a day or two. They have control over the business of the House. Then, they will take it out of circulation to bring in the pilotage legislation. Then, they will bring it back again, only to

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drop it after a while when they wish some other measure to be considered. So it will go on. The bill will be used as a means by the government to avoid any embarrassment or any impending defeat. In this, hon. members opposite obviously have the support of those who sit to my left.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: I wish to say something about one point the minister specifically mentioned. He referred to the special planning and research group, and indicated there had been a change in name and indicated that the name of this group had been changed to "Police and Security Planning and Analysis Group". I believe this is the first time any mention has been made of such a change, either in this chamber or outside the House. I was surprised and, indeed, somewhat alarmed to hear the minister mention this change within his department, because when the special planning and research group was set up the House was assured that the group would have nothing to do with police work, that it would not be an operational group. This name change makes me highly suspicious that the group is now involved in police work and that it is entering into the sphere of RCMP responsibility. Obviously, it has gone beyond planning and research and become operational.

Mr. Allmand: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the hon. member and the House that the group is merely doing research and planning on criminal activities. It is not an operational group.

Mr. Nielsen: I must accept the minister's statement, but I shall certainly reserve my right to exercise my own judgment with respect to the functions of this group. My suspicion is that the functions of this group are not now what we were assured they would be when it was set up. The name change implies that the group is now operational. Otherwise, why would the word "Police" appear in the new name? Anyway, I can deal with that matter again at another time.

The minister mentioned the RCMP. The RCMP, he told us, were leading the way in crime prevention. Mr. Speaker, this is about the only area in the minister's speech with which I can agree. The RCMP is probably the most accomplished and the most sophisticated police force in the world.

An hon. Member: Was.

Mr. Nielsen: And it still is, not "was". The force is being hampered by many factors, some of which I shall discuss a little later. I can inform the minister that morale is not good. That is putting it mildly. Traditional symbols within the force are being eroded, symbols with tremendous traditions behind them. No further effort should be made to undermine the solid basis of tradition upon which the force has been built. There are other factors disturbing the morale of the force. There is the provision made for the temporary leave of absence of prisoners; there is the way in which parole is granted; there is the failure of the bail reform provisions which the government introduced. With respect to statistics—if I might have the attention of the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) for a moment—

An hon. Member: He is listening.