

*Adjournment Debate*

Justice made that statement also said that Canadians have lost confidence in the criminal justice system.

What is going to give Canadians back that confidence? One of those things will be a dramatic change in our parole system. For heavens sake, surely we must have some criteria built into the system as to what the basis of parole is.

We know there are a lot of studies going on. For instance, Mr. Ingstrup said that the National Parole Board itself is studying the whole idea of what criteria should be used in granting parole. We know there is a study by the correctional law review of the parole system. We know that the sentencing commission has delivered a report which had a lot to say about parole aspects. We know that a few months ago the Law Reform Commission of Canada had something to say about parole. We know there is a task force in the Solicitor General's Department right now that is looking at recommendations of a coroner's jury dealing with parole in one particular instance and the shocking circumstances surrounding that.

We know that as all of these studies are progressing, a lot of questions are being asked. I have looked at some of those questions and they are good ones. For instance, what is the purpose of parole? Should we have parole at all? Should not a sentence of six years in prison mean a sentence of six years in prison? Is parole interfering with the court's sentencing? Does a judge take parole into account when he is sentencing? What minimum time should be served before parole is granted? What types of offences should be subject to parole? What types of offenders should be granted parole? Are the offenders receiving the maximum benefits from their prison sentence? Will parole help to rehabilitate people? Have prisoners been properly prepared for parole? Is there a risk to society in granting parole and how do you determine that risk? Is the only reason for parole to grant people time off for good behaviour? Is it because of overcrowding in the prisons? Is it because we would rather have problems created on the outside of prisons than on the inside?

● (1825)

There are all sorts of questions that are being asked, and they are good questions. I too have some questions for the Parliamentary Secretary.

Will the studies come up with similar conclusions and similar answers? Will those answers be the kind of answers that make the public feel confident and comfortable with the parole system? How long will it take to institute some of these changes to the parole system? Will the Government in fact have the intestinal fortitude to put these changes into effect?

There are many questions that I have to ask and many questions the public has to ask about the parole system. I see that the Parliamentary Secretary is here tonight. He had better have the answers for us.

**Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada):** Mr. Speaker, we have all heard it said that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done.

That holds true for the entire criminal justice system, including corrections and parole.

It is true that the system can always be improved. It is also true that appropriate major adjustments are a continuing program in a system such as ours that is in full evolution. We are taking steps to improve the system, beginning with providing the public more accurate information.

Canadians should be able to see clearly how things are done in Canadian criminal justice. If they saw this, they would be proud of the direction of our justice system. More important, the quality of their lives would be improved because their fear of crime would be diminished considerably.

This brings me to a remark made by the Chairman of the National Parole Board who said that there are no clear-cut criteria at present for the granting of parole. There are criteria, but how clear-cut they are is another question. In fact, the Chairman of the National Parole Board has said, and the Solicitor General (Mr. Kelleher) agrees with him, that those criteria are too broad and too general. They are too general to allow the public to see how they are applied in each case and too broad to be applied consistently, uniformly and effectively.

To remedy the situation and in the interests of making the parole process more transparent so that the public can clearly and readily see how the board arrives at its decisions, the chairman is having more refined and elaborate criteria developed against which all releases will be measured. These will be in place before the end of the year. The Solicitor General certainly welcomes this initiative. It speaks well of the orientation being given to the National Parole Board and its very acute sense of accountability to the public.

These criteria or decision-making policies will also give guidance to the board members considering release for the various categories of offenders, offenders who are so very different from one another and whose crimes are necessarily, for purposes of conditional release, measured in terms of mitigation and aggravating circumstances.

Many decisions in the correctional field cause reactions in the mass media and often among practitioners in other parts of the criminal justice system. This means that decisions must not only be easy to explain but also that the process by which decisions are taken must be easy to explain and fair to the individual and to society. It also means that the correctional system must operate in an efficient way. To that end, it is often necessary to be able to demonstrate that decisions have been taken in an accordance with legal provisions, administrative regulations or general guidelines.

Obviously public agencies, and particularly the criminal justice system, must pay much more attention to the question of communication with the public to engender public understanding of its policies and its way of operating, including the degree to which power has been delegated and the extent to