

Supply—Solicitor General

This will be of benefit to them. I do not think there is a more serious morale breaker than to have men lying around with nothing to do. How in the world can we hope to rehabilitate somebody who has gone off the straight and narrow path by throwing him into a jail, letting him lie around in his cell playing cards, smoking cigarettes, telling stories all day and not being asked or required to do any work? I suggest that this is not as it should be. Unfortunately the provinces by themselves—and here I speak of my province in particular—cannot afford to set up a jail farm within the confines of the province. Instead of that, they have small county jails which are far from adequate and which are certainly not doing a good job so far as the rehabilitation of the offender is concerned.

I therefore urge the minister and the government to give some consideration to the granting of financial assistance to the provinces so that institutions of the type I have mentioned can be set up and properly staffed, not by men who perhaps have sufficient political influence to have themselves appointed as guards or guardians in these institutions but by properly trained men who know how to handle prisoners even though they are only short term offenders. The prisoners should be put to work and given a real chance to rehabilitate themselves. If that is done, the rate of recidivism among the offenders in county jails will not be so high and this will eventually reduce the number of offenders who go into our penitentiaries, and cut down the cost of the maintenance and upkeep of the penitentiaries all across the country.

● (9:30 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lachance: Mr. Chairman, I also have some short remarks to make to the Solicitor General.

I have already dealt with the matter during the debate on the address in reply to the speech from the throne, namely the matter of rehabilitation of prisoners.

It seems that this subject is in order tonight. Indeed, most members raised this question and I appreciated particularly the remarks on maximum security penitentiaries.

But there is also the matter of the abolition of capital punishment. I have dealt with this matter in the past. I know, like the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Choquette) just said, and like other members of this house, that there will be introduced government legislation in this regard, and I can already

see the ardent supporters of abolition trying to bow and scrape in every way and to make all sorts of compromises to push it through.

Personally, I have already made it clear and it is duly reported in the official report that I voted last year in favour of maintaining the death penalty. Mr. Chairman, for the government bill to have any chance of carrying—and the hon. member for Lotbinière noted it quite rightly a while ago—the government, I feel, must make concessions and seek a compromise, possibly as follows: “the condemned will have to spend, say, 20 years in jail, in the penitentiary;” or again: “they shall never be liberated except under an order in council”. Those are compromises, ramshackle solutions.

I think that if the government brings down excellent legislation on prisoner rehabilitation in our penitentiaries, it might catch the ear of the members of the House of Commons. To my mind, the most important legislation is one that will enable the prisoner to be restored to society. I am thinking mostly of the prisoners, not of those condemned for capital murder, because I do not see how it could be agreed to liberate these people before, say, ten years.

I think that, after ten years behind the bars of a penitentiary, it is difficult for a man to find a place in society, at a time when this society is moving and progressing very rapidly.

However, I think of those who are sent to the penitentiary for two, three, four or five years. Those people are likely to relapse if they are not provided with all the means necessary for their rehabilitation. Moreover, it is a loss for the Canadian manpower and economy. It is even a nightmare for society, because they become a burden for their families and also, obviously, for society, from an economic point of view. Indeed, we must take care of these people who, very often, relapse and return to the penitentiary. We must also provide for their families through all kinds of social security measures.

I think that the government should propose legislation that would enable those people to educate themselves while they are detained as prisoners. There is evidence that the majority of people who are sentenced to penitentiary have a rather low I.Q., which leads us to believe that they were not free to make up their mind about their future. They are at about the same level as 13 or 14 year old students who have to make up their minds about their profession or their trade.