

Maximum Security Prison

concerned about what is happening. This concern could be expressed by the establishment of such an institution in a remote area, whether in the Northwest Territories or on a remote island. The reason for putting a prison in such an area is that the environment itself would act as a perimeter control. The Hon. Member for Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) could attest to the fact that if anyone escaped from a prison in the Northwest Territories he would either freeze to death in the winter or be eaten by bugs in the summer. If the prison is situated on a remote island, the same environmental control would exist by its very nature. Such a prison would allow us to segregate hardened criminals from those who are hoping to establish themselves back within society.

Another consideration for such a prison is its cost effectiveness. The amount of security required would be much less in a remote area than at Millhaven or prisons in other highly populated areas.

Another compelling argument is its humaneness. I doubt that there are five Members here who have gone inside a special handling unit in one of our maximum security prisons. Our committee examined the prisons of this country. A special handling unit is a cell that does not have a window and may have one light. There is not even a window in the door. It is a desperate situation for a human to be in.

Studies have shown that that sort of inhumane treatment can be avoided in these special type of prisons. Those prisoners have more opportunity to move freely. In fact, there are some cases in which there are colonies where families can live with these prisoners. At the same time society is protected from those who will be desperate if they get out again.

Let me close by dealing with something which I, as a private Member, believe to be almost even more important than the subject matter of this motion. It concerns the reason why I believe the Government should accept this motion today.

There are basically three reasons. Without a doubt, I think that all of us in the House, including the Government, agree that our criminal justice system is inadequate. I think this has been expressed by the Prime Minister and the Solicitor General. While they may have different approaches to the subject, they have acknowledged the need to study the criminal justice system.

We are now getting increased pressure from the public to make such a review. This is evident in my constituency and it is evident in the House from a number of private Members' Bills calling for a return to capital punishment.

I think it is time that Parliament did something to indicate our concern about what is happening in the criminal justice system and recognized the need to tighten certain aspects of it.

The second point I want to make, which I believe was alluded to by the Leaders of all Parties during the election, is the need for greater authority and recognition to be given to private Members in the House. It is time that private Members were listened to more often.

• (1720)

I can see no harm in allowing an innocuous motion like this that only calls for the study of the feasibility of doing something. It does not permit the Government to do anything except study something. If that kind of motion cannot be accepted, then I am concerned about the role of the private Member in this House.

Finally, if I may have half a minute more, let me say that in this motion we have an opportunity for this House and the Government, if it will accept and pass it, to study some alternatives to capital punishment, for example, the establishment of an institution in some remote area where the public of Canada will be protected.

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry-Prescott-Russell): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate but I am somewhat concerned about the resolution. I recognize that the Hon. Member in his proposal is very sincere and that what he is advocating, in his own words, is only a study and there is no harm in doing a study. I am nevertheless worried about the signals put out by this kind of study which may result in the construction of something which is a crossbreed between Alcatraz and Siberia. It is something that frightens me as a Member. It signals that we are losing faith that we can ever rehabilitate prisoners. I am frankly very worried about that thought.

Another question comes to mind, and I see the Hon. Member for the Western Arctic (Mr. Nickerson) here in the House and he must be worried: Does this mean that if someone is undesirable to one section of the country, we can send him off to another part thus indicating that that part of the country is less worthy? Does this mean that if we choose an island, say in the riding of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie), Belle Isle or some other place, that that would indicate the same message for that part of the country or any other island or remote area? I am worried about doing anything that would be that kind of signal.

We have to think why we incarcerate people. Is it solely to punish them? If the answer is yes, then surely our penal system would look different from what it is today, not that it is the greatest right now, but I would suggest that if to incarcerate people is only to punish them, we would probably still be whipping prisoners, cutting off arms, and carrying out capital punishment. We have decided as a society that that is not what we want to do with human beings. We have decided that we do not want to put people away forever and throw away the key. Even contemplating such an idea would indicate that we are abandoning the hope of rehabilitating people and that we have decided life has no value for certain human beings. In my view and belief, that is very wrong.

One could say that I am a soft touch or that I have a bleeding heart, but I am of the view that there is no life not worth saving. There is value in each and every one of us. If there is such a value, as I believe there is, then we need not think any further whether or not this scheme is feasible or whether we should study it any further.