

promote meaningful penitentiary reform and to prevent further hostage incidents.

I would like to conclude my remarks with this observation particularly to the Solicitor General. Almost every time there is a hostage taking incident in the B.C. penitentiary, some of my constituents seem to be involved. I have visited them. One is a cook who had a knife pointed at his throat for a while. Some of them were in the classification centre in 1975 when Mary Steinhauser was killed. So I personally know what is going on. However, I hasten to add, lest the Solicitor General wants to ask some discreet questions about the system, that I did not get this information from my constituents. Therefore, I hope there will be no scurrying around to try and find out where the information came from, because it did not come from my constituency.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude-André Lachance (Lafontaine-Rosemont): Mr. Speaker, I have seldom been so proud of being a member of this House. The tone of the debate today, its content, its seriousness, the lack of partisanship are an indication of the real concern shown by the House for the problem of the penitentiary system as well as the fact, and I think it is an essential one, that the House can on some unfortunately very few occasions give excellent performances.

Mr. Speaker, I must congratulate the member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) for his motion and his introduction. It is rather noteworthy that all members who have risen to make comments up to now have basically endorsed the concerns stated in his motion. In this respect, Mr. Speaker, it is perhaps an indication that what should be a basic character of this House, that is an enlightened debate on our institutions with as little partisanship as possible, can only be found in such circumstances.

Several of the former speakers, Mr. Speaker, have stressed the fact that the Subcommittee on the Penitentiary System produced a unanimous report and that its deliberations were, much to its credit, devoid of political considerations. I myself, Mr. Speaker, found it a fascinating experience, as a member of Parliament, as a parliamentarian and as a man, to work with people who are normally political opponents but who managed to set aside those political differences to reach unanimous conclusions on a problem which, though not political but rather institutional, is very serious and demands a quick solution. A solution must be found quickly, Mr. Speaker, and of course, I support the recommendations of the report.

I could not but accept the subject of the motion of the hon. member for Yukon because, once again, I support recommendation I of the report which states that the penitentiary system is in a state of crisis, and the unfortunate incidents in the last few weeks prove that. Despite the efforts made until now to improve the atmosphere, despite the recommendations and changes brought to the system since we have been working at it, the situation is still very serious, and we must give it our whole attention.

Mr. Speaker, that committee worked as a team. That committee, once again, solved internal differences to achieve a

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unanimous report and I think it is the duty not only of the government but also of the penitentiary system itself, of the administration, to give serious consideration not only to the report itself, for I think the predecessor of the present Solicitor General took this report very seriously, but also to the prompt and extensive application of its recommendations, in order to improve the system by making a number of changes in its operation and particularly in the attitude of the people who work there.

Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important to change the attitude of the people because you can always change the institutions or establish new ones, but it is always the people who are part of them who see that they work or not. I also believe that the committee fully realized that the main problem with our penitentiary system was a problem of permanent misunderstanding between the various constituents: the guards, the directors and the prisoners. There was and, as far as I know, there still is a wall of mutual misunderstanding we want to break by implementing our recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important at this point to mention the major role the press has played in the work of the subcommittee. Indeed, there is no doubt in my mind that if the press had not covered the work of the subcommittee on a daily basis and if some press members had not covered the work of the committee and developed an expertise in this area, the committee, Mr. Speaker, could certainly not have achieved the credibility it has been gaining as its work kept progressing.

Indeed, when the chairman of the committee, the hon. member for Windsor-Walkerville (Mr. MacGuigan) tabled its report, the newspapers, the electronic media, and the editorials lavished their praise for days on the committee for its work and urged the government to implement its recommendations as soon as possible. And then the matter fizzed out and we heard no more for several months until this week, when, following a very legitimate question by a member of the opposition, the press hinted that not only had the report not been implemented but that it had been shelved and not made public.

Mr. Speaker, we know, of course, that the press has to cover many areas and sometimes fails in its responsibility to seek proper information and make a thorough examination of the problem. We are used, Mr. Speaker, to the press sometimes jumping to conclusions and sometimes making irresponsible comments. But in this case, Mr. Speaker, I was deeply shocked to read that the media were suggesting the report of the subcommittee on penal matters had been swept aside, and more could possibly have been done while hon. members know fully well that over the past six months members of the subcommittee, the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, have been working in co-operation first with the former solicitor general and hopefully with the present incumbent towards their implementation on a regular, continuing basis. To date, over 50 per cent of the recommendations have been implemented.