

Penitentiaries

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With regard to the first obligation, to hold the inmate in custody for the period of his sentence, penal institutions over the last 50 years have not changed from the times that Dickens described in England. However, back in 1962 the Conservative party attempted to make changes with regard to penal institutions and their design. To the credit of Mr. Fulton, moneys were set aside for a ten-year period to build institutions which would not be a repeat of the past but would be more modern in design and in comfort. We have taken a step in that direction. The \$200 million that was set aside for that program has not been used; in fact, less than \$100 million of it has been used. It is time the government undertook a new initiative with regard to continuing the building program that was launched in those days.

The second problem of preparing an individual for permanent return to community living as a law-abiding and contributing citizen is a very difficult one with which to contend. It is difficult to rehabilitate and reform people to become law-abiding and contributing citizens if after we convict them we place them in an institution which deprives them of many things, which takes them away from their family, their community and employment and isolates them in an abnormal society. The lack of opportunity for an inmate to practice decision-making worsens the problem.

To the credit of the solicitors general of the past ten years, they have attempted to solve the second problem with regard to rehabilitation. They embarked upon a program which had the support of most Canadians. They developed programs with regard to prerelease centres. They allowed visits for the family of an inmate, with a condition of privacy. They developed a permanent advisory board. They developed a committee of eight psychiatrists to study the particular problems in that field. They provided additional medical services. They set up inmate committees whereby the inmates could relate their problems to the officials. They corrected the correspondence problem whereby when a letter was sent to an inmate it was read by officials before being given to him. A style of haircut was adopted which did not make the person look like a criminal. Identity numbers were removed from uniforms and the living unit concept was developed as well as the cafeteria system. These are some of the accomplishments for which the government of the day and the solicitors general of the past can take credit.

● (2150)

Mr. Speaker, that is a long list of reforms in connection with the rehabilitation of inmates. These are steps in the right direction towards restoring the dignity of an individual which will enable him to take his place in the community after he has served his sentence. In the past few years the government has attempted to develop an educational program. Some of the inmates have been given the opportunity to upgrade their education and some have received university training. There has been a better development of trade training and this is to the credit of the present government.

[Mr. Gilbert.]

There have been mistakes, Mr. Speaker, and I guess the reason we are having this debate tonight is that some of the mistakes have come to the attention of the public. I agree with the Solicitor General's (Mr. Allmand) view of the Parole Board. They have had an 82 per cent success rate and that is to their credit. I agree also with him that the composition of the board is a fair mix of members of the bench and members from the social sciences, but it may be that we have to strengthen the criteria used when a person is released on parole. On the question of the temporary weekend passes, there have been mistakes and there will be mistakes in the future because we are dependent on human factors in making these decisions.

The Commissioner of Penitentiaries gave his evidence before the Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs this morning and he said that one of the things that would be done, in fact was being done now, would be to give more protection at the perimeter of penitentiaries. That made me hope that we were not taking an approach that is too harsh. I agree that we have had problems and that maybe more protection at the perimeter is necessary, but I had hoped he would concentrate on some of the more fundamental problems that may arise, those that the Solicitor General set forth tonight, such as staff morale. There is a gap between the custodial officials and the administration officials in the penitentiaries across the country. Many feel that this problem has to be resolved. The idea of having a custodial official as a warden is not acceptable in my view. I think we should have a person who not only embraces the custodial view but embraces the rehabilitation and training concepts that are necessary to solve the problem.

We in the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker, welcome the debate that is taking place tonight. We welcome the motion that has been agreed upon for the committee to study in depth the matter of security, the matter of parole and the matter of temporary weekend passes. I hope that the committee will travel across the country and visit the different institutions, not only to see the physical aspects of the institutions but to talk to the officials and the inmates and get their response with regard to the problems that face us. We should not despair because we have made a few mistakes, Mr. Speaker. We have to continue our approach to rehabilitation and we have to take the necessary steps to tighten security so that the public are protected.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Bill Clarke (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, rehabilitation is the magic word in the Solicitor General's department. The penitentiary service appears to be more interested in having the criminal's fears allayed, his hostilities washed away and preparing him to put up with a society that failed him than it appears to be in punishing the criminal or protecting the public. This would be a laudable idea if it worked but it has been tried and the crime rate continues to climb.

In British Columbia we have the Agassiz correctional work camp and the William Head minimum security prison, both about 12 years old. The idea was that the "best" criminals would be allowed to go to these institutions. They would know that they had one chance to visit