

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to congratulate the hon. member for the Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) for setting this motion down for debate. I should also like to thank him for the non-partisan way in which he has explained this problem, and I hope to speak in the same manner.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: Members on every side of the House have some criticisms of this matter. We hope that the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) will listen to them. It would be dangerous to the extreme if the crises that occur from day to day within the system were used for any narrow partisan advantage in terms of the continuing debate about the prison system in Canada.

The motion reflects the view of this party that there is disappointment and regret that the report of the subcommittee has not been adopted, has not been implemented, and that far too much time has passed since it was submitted. Those of us who sat on that committee did not get what we wanted in the report. Perhaps the Solicitor General has failed to understand that. A variety of views were expressed—views as different as my own, as those of the former member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta, and those of the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt), but there was a tremendous amount of good will among members, which is expressed in the first sentence of the report. It was there because of the description of the crises in the system. All members accepted that fundamental premise and decided, since that is the state of the system, it is more important than anything else. No one wanted to get a vote out of anything, but everybody wanted a change in the system.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: I want to quote from the beginning of the report because it is vital to understanding the disappointment that is going to be expressed by members of this House. The very first recommendation on page 2 reads:

A crisis exists in the Canadian Penitentiary System. It can be met only by the immediate implementation of large-scale reforms. It is imperative that the Solicitor General act immediately on this report as a matter of the utmost urgency.

The disappointment sets in when one examines the response of the former solicitor general which was as follows:

While there are serious problems which must be resolved, doubt is expressed about use of the term 'crisis' to describe a situation which has been of ongoing concern for some time. It should also be noted that the subcommittee was established as a result of disturbances in three institutions in a system containing 54.

I am disappointed that the former solicitor general of that time did not read our report particularly carefully.

The history of the penitentiaries system and the acceleration of the crisis is outlined on page 5 of the report as follows:

In the 42 years between 1932 and 1974 there were a total of 65 major incidents in federal penitentiaries. Yet in two years—1975 and 1976—there was a total of 69 major incidents, including 35 hostage-takings involving 92 victims, one of whom (a prison officer) was killed.

Penitentiaries

That is why the committee came to the conclusion there was a crisis in the system. It is not good enough for the then minister to say it is not really a crisis, that it is an ongoing problem. The acceleration of violence within the maximum security system is a crisis. I would have felt much less disappointment if he had accepted our proposition as stated. Then I would have believed that we were going to move quickly to adopt the report.

My second major regret concerns recommendation No. 65 on page 167, which reads as follows:

The Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs should have a permanent reference during the rest of the 30th Parliament and for the 31st Parliament to enable it to review the implementation of this Report in the context of the criminal justice system.

That recommendation was also rejected. Yet it seems to me it would not have been very difficult for the government to accept it if it was serious about implementing the report. It should have agreed to change the system and allow the committee to function as it has in a non-partisan way. What was the government worrying about with regard to the continuing operation of the committee, Mr. Speaker? What it was worried about was that it did not want to be pushed too hard with regard to making the tough changes. We in this party are ready to accept that there are some hard decisions that have to be made. As we indicated, none of us got all we wanted under the terms of the agreement.

● (1252)

We recognize that the changes, particularly with regard to the public service recommendations, the development of a Crown corporation and putting flexibility into the system, are going to be hard. You will have to fight the bureaucracy on them. One thing this government has to demonstrate is that it is willing to fight the bureaucracy.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Leggatt: It has to demonstrate that it is willing to take on the mandarins who have run the system for so long and who have resisted any change. If it would change that, the Solicitor General would have my whole support. However, I must say that we are getting very impatient. We are tired of waiting. We want to hear from that task force. We could have heard from them in this instance if the Solicitor General had adopted recommendation No. 65, which he has not.

I want to say something else about the crisis in the system. The Solicitor General and his officials must be the last people in Canada to believe still that there is not a crisis in the system. There is a question which the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) was instrumental in inserting in the report. It is a quote from Sir Winston Churchill in the House of Commons on July 20, 1910. We in this party have not been noted as great devotees of some of the statements of Winston Churchill, being a somewhat Conservative politician. However, what he said in 1910, as the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway pointed out, stands just as much today. He said the mood and temper of the public with regard to the