

Adjournment Debate

The decision to terminate all post-secondary university education programs in the federal penitentiary system is a profound mistake. As I said in the question which I asked of the Minister on January 24 last, it represents an exercise in colossal correctional stupidity. Not only are these programs which I just enumerated going to be cancelled, but as well all paid for university level correspondence courses are going to be cancelled. In other words, effectively we are seeing the gutting of all post-secondary education programs within the federal penitentiary system.

The response has been immediate and angry. I am just going to quote a number of people involved. Even the Minister's own director of academic education indicated to me that this was certainly not a decision he made; it came down from on high. As he said, the programs in question are the finest programs of their type in North America. That was Doug Griffin, the chief of academic education.

As well, the co-ordinator of the program at the University of Victoria, Douglas Ayers, stated that the decision in question by the correctional services was a mistake, cancelling probably the only program shown to have a positive effect on prisoners. The unemployment rate following involvement in this program, the rate of recidivism, which is considerably lower than that for other prisoners, changes in residential, marital, friendship patterns, and a number of other indicators, all make it very clear that this program is by far the most successful program with the federal penitentiary system.

A gentleman who evaluated the program, Mr. Ross, although he was somewhat critical of the methodology involved in Dr. Ayers' study said, and I quote:

My observation of the program and my discussions with the prisoners and faculty lead me to think that the UVIC program actually epitomizes many of the principles and practices involved in the vast majority of effective correctional programs.

He further said:

—I consider the principles and goals of the UVIC program to be eminently reasonable and the strategies to be, if not entirely unique, innovative and thoroughly in accord with information currently available about strategies for effective correctional intervention. Given the type of offenders, the length of their sentences and the nature of the setting, it may even be said that it approaches the ideal in its theory and practice, if not in its evaluation.

● (1815)

I do not have time to read from the evaluation of Doug Drouillard who did an evaluation on behalf of the Department of Supply and Services. His assessment was that the program was positive and beneficial.

The Chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Committee at the William Head Institution said that programs that contribute to reduced crime should not be the first to be axed in a cost-saving effort.

The Warden of the institution has made his views on the subject very clearly known and has stated that the axing of the program was a mistake which could have very serious consequences on prisoner morale and could lead to incidents and disruptions within the prison. He and other federal prison

directors tried, apparently in vain, to persuade the Government that this was a mistake.

There was no consultation whatsoever either with wardens or with the Citizen's Advisory Committee before the decision was taken. I emphasize that the decision reinforces the worst kind of warehousing concepts within the federal correctional system and flies in the face of the unanimous recommendations of the 1977 Subcommittee on Penitentiaries. If the Government wants to cut costs, and certainly that is an understandable objective, there are many other areas where the costs could be cut within correctional services.

I was pleased to be able to attend the graduation ceremonies at Kent Institution and the Matsqui Institution in 1981. All persons involved in the program expressed their pride in an obviously successful and positive program.

This is an example of a decision which, if not reversed, in many ways represents a threat to the community that is supposed to be protected. The recidivism rate of the people involved in the program is 14 per cent as opposed to an over-all recidivism rate of well over 50 per cent. While we are talking about saving money, we should seriously consider the fact that we may very well end up spending more money if the people no longer involved in the program return to the federal penitentiary system at a cost of \$20,000 or \$30,000 per year.

The cancellation of these programs is a profound mistake which reinforces the most backward and archaic correctional principles, namely that prisoners are there to be warehoused and nothing else. It does nothing whatsoever to protect the community and ultimately may have the opposite effect.

I should like to close by quoting from a letter sent to the Solicitor General by Keith B. Jobson, Chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Committee. His concluding paragraph reads as follows:

Considering the morale of the institution, the contribution the program makes to dynamic security, the success of the program in terms of reduced recidivism, the need to keep an open door to CCC's and CRC's in times of overcrowded conditions, the contribution of the program to reduced prison costs generally, the importance of the Program in meeting CSC objectives respecting improved community-prison contacts and relations, the contribution of the program to CSC objectives of providing opportunities for inmates to come out of prison better citizens than when they went in, considering its low cost ratio per inmate at William Head, and the large part of the prison population involved in the program, we urgently request your reconsideration of the decision to eliminate post secondary education programs at William Head.

I urge the Minister to take that plea very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jesse P. Flis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): As you know, Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) likes to reply to questions in person. Unfortunately he is not able to be here tonight, but has asked me to reply on his behalf.

On January 24 the Hon. Member for Burnaby (Mr. Robinson) raised questions pertaining to the recent cancellation, by the Correctional Service of Canada, of post-secondary educational contracts in federal penitentiaries and asked whether the