

Oral Questions

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I am afraid the hon. gentleman would have to give me specific instances because his question is very general. We are presently reorganizing the post office on about 35 different fronts, so he would have to be a little more specific.

Mr. Friesen: Mr. Speaker, I do have a specific case regarding which the minister will be receiving a letter momentarily. As a supplementary question, may I ask the Postmaster General this. In view of the fact that the Vancouver post office does not even have the equipment to handle the postal code, does he think this expense and inconvenience was at all necessary?

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, there are only five centres in Canada that do have this equipment. We think it is only logical that Canadians be educated to the code before we buy the equipment. So far as letters to the minister are concerned, I prefer to get the letters first through the mail or delivered by hand, rather than read them in the press or hear them in the House of Commons.

SUGGESTED DELAY IN REORGANIZATION OF POSTAL CODES

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the fact that the new automated plants are coming on stream on a staggered basis, would the Postmaster General issue orders that there be no drastic changes in postal codes until such time as the code is actually in operation?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Postmaster General): Mr. Speaker, I think I am quite prepared to review the whole situation, as the hon. gentleman suggests. My main problem is not so much the staggering of equipment but the Postmaster General arriving on the job staggering!

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PENITENTIARIES

SUGGESTED RESTRICTIONS ON GRANTING OF TEMPORARY ABSENCE PASSES—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask a question of the Solicitor General which I address jointly to the Minister of Justice. I ask him this morning whether Gagné, who was given a temporary pass after having been convicted for killing a taxi driver for a theft of \$20, has been rearrested. I should like to know who granted the pass and why it was granted. There is presently a high incidence of murder, with two cases in Calgary in one week, one a young fellow 17 years of age who had his throat slashed, the other a child of three, and with a doctor and a policeman killed in Montreal. With the administration of justice now at such a low ebb, is there going to be a change in this policy, or are we just going to continue to drift and make society an unsafe place?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I believe Mr. Gagné was convicted in 1967, at which time the eligibility date for parole was seven years. Since that time we have amended the law twice. The most recent amendment made last year was to fix the minimum parole

date at ten years, with the possibility of increasing it up to 20 years. We also put in the legislation the provision that no temporary absence pass can be given until two years prior to the full eligibility date. But that law was not made retroactive; consequently the rules relating to temporary absence passes applying to Mr. Gagné provided that he had to wait three years, I believe it was. The first temporary absence pass that was given to him was five years after he started to serve his sentence. The rules that apply today provide that the minimum period will be eight years, and it could be up to 18 years before any temporary absence pass is granted.

Mr. Woolliams: A supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister talks about parliament passing those amendments. It was a government piece of legislation which was rammed through by the government. I should like an answer to my question. Has this man been rearrested? Whatever the rules and regulations provide, they are always subject to interpretation. This is a serious matter. I am getting dozens of letters from people across the country regarding the high incidence of violent crimes, particularly murder. Irrespective of what the regulations provide, here we have a man who was released and who killed a doctor and a policeman.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member has put his question; I do not think he should argue it.

Mr. Woolliams: Do you want murder?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out to the House, the law has been amended and temporary absence passes have now been restricted quite substantially compared with the situation formerly. I do not think there was any objection in this House last year, when we introduced and passed the capital punishment law, regarding these longer eligibility dates for parole and for temporary absence passes. If I remember correctly, the hon. member supported that part. I think he was suggesting yesterday that there be no temporary absence passes at all, that a life sentence would mean a life sentence, with no opportunity at all for release. We did improve the situation last year.

INQUIRY AS TO REARREST OF ESCAPEE GAGNÉ

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Well, Mr. Speaker, I see the minister does not want to answer the question; perhaps the answer is obvious. I ask him again, has Gagné been found and rearrested?

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Not to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker.

TEMPORARY ABSENCE PASSES—DATE OF APPLICABILITY OF AMENDMENTS TO LEGISLATION

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I have endeavoured to follow the minister in his peregrinations and explanations. Did I correctly understand him to state that the amendments made by parliament in the last two years concerning length of time that an inmate must serve before he can be granted parole apply only to those inmates who were sentenced since the