

Supply—Solicitor General

These measures, I think, were adopted in the United States in order to prevent police brutality, for the police were ready to resort to any form of physical violence to extort a confession from a prisoner. I believe there were also some very bad cases in the province of Quebec. Therefore, I wonder whether, in that context, it might not be worthwhile to make a thorough study of the American system which declares invalid all confessions made by the accused in the absence of his attorney.

These are the few remarks I wished to make, Mr. Chairman, I wonder if, in closing, I might be allowed to reiterate my great admiration for the minister and to congratulate him again on his excellent performance of his duties.

• (9:20 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. McQuaid: Mr. Chairman, my comments this evening on the estimates of the minister will not be lengthy and will be confined to a plea to him and to the government to devise some way of giving financial assistance to the establishment within the provinces of adequate correctional facilities for short term offenders. I appreciate the fact that the responsibility for the establishment and continuation of local and county jails is purely that of the provinces, but I am afraid my experience in my own province convinces me that, at least in that province, these responsibilities are not being properly carried out. I believe the reason for this is mainly the lack of finances.

I do not think we should forget the fact that many more men pass through the doors of our county jails than ever come to our penitentiaries or other adult reform institutions. In fact almost all of those who do eventually come to our penitentiaries have first spent some time in the county jails. They have spent this time at a period during their sentence when influences are most deeply felt. For many of them it is their first offence and they are perhaps more emotionally disturbed then than at any other time. Perhaps they are passing through a time when they are more conscious of the treatment being afforded to them in the institution in which they are confined.

We must bear in mind that very few of the offenders whom we have in our county jails are what we might call hardened criminals. Many are there simply because of drinking

[Mr. Choquette.]

problems, some minor offences such as common assault, impaired driving, causing disturbances and other offences in the same category. Very few of them can properly be described as criminal type offenders. We must not forget that within a very short time, because they are only short term offenders, these same people are going to be back on the streets after they have completed their term of imprisonment, and their conduct is going to affect you, me and every other citizen of this country. A great many of them are young offenders who, after their release, will be associating with teenagers on whom they are bound to have some influence. If they come out of these county jails embittered, as they probably will, against society and against the type of treatment they have received in the jails, then it is very doubtful if we are going to be able to rehabilitate them successfully.

In my view therefore this is the time when we should make sure that our correctional process is at work, that is when the young offenders are admitted to the county jails. It has been said, and I think quite correctly, that the county jail is the front door of our correctional system. But I am afraid that it is a very forbidding entrance. Let us not forget that prisons today are not hell holes. All inmates of prisons, particularly of county jails, are not vicious. All of them do not carry knives, and all of them live, breathe and die just the same as we do. They are entitled to a certain amount of kindness and proper treatment when they are confined for the first time.

I suggest that society should be most interested in the problems of the local jails because far too many people do not realize what is actually happening there. Not so long ago I was astounded to read some criticisms of the overcrowded conditions of our county jails right here in the province of Ontario. Absolutely no chance of correctional training and no opportunity to rehabilitate is given these inmates. They are simply places of incarceration. This is not as it should be. As I say, I realize this is a provincial responsibility, but I would urge the minister to do something to provide financial assistance to the provinces so they can set up what I would like to see set up in every province, that is jail farms.

Far too many of these short term offenders go to jail for a period of anywhere from a week to a year or two, loll around and have a good time. They are not expected to do anything. I am convinced that a jail farm for men who are sentenced for periods of at least seven days will be the answer to this problem.