

Parole Act

Mr. Wally Firth (Northwest Territories): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few brief remarks on Bill C-191, although I do not think there is very much I can add to what has been said within the last hour or so by other hon. members. I was however, happy to hear the favourable remarks concerning this bill, and in particular the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) that two of the ad hoc members of the board should be persons of native origin. I think it is time we had something like this on the statute books to accommodate the native population of the country.

I was also very happy to hear some of the remarks of the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner). I was rather surprised by some remarks made by the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette). He being a member of one of the minority groups of this country, I would have hoped to hear from him some favourable remarks concerning the bill and in particular the two amendments.

● (2120)

I wish to direct the attention of the House to some shortcomings in our justice and legal system as a number of people are not fully familiar with the facts. Not many of the native population of this country are judges or magistrates. Not many of the native community are parole officers. Few of our native community are lawyers or justices of the peace. Few of our people are policemen. Very few of the native community are members of the RCMP, the force which polices a large part of our wonderful country.

In the earliest days, the RCMP or the Northwest Mounted Police, whichever one wants to call them, depended to a large extent on the native people of this country. Actually, one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Northwest Territories occurred not far from my home village of Fort McPherson. It involved the patrol between Fort McPherson and Dawson City in 1910 or 1911. The mounted police patrol was not accompanied by the special constable, the native person who acted as guide. The patrol went ahead without the guide, and perished. The mounted police, even today, take with them special guides in the Northwest Territories who act as interpreters, and so on.

Looking on the brighter side, there are today people of native ancestry who work as court personnel. They explain people's rights to them. This is not enough. Very few of our people serve on juries, including coroners' juries. A large part of our population of native ancestry is serving time in correctional institutions. This is deplorable. That is why I was happy to see this amendment brought forward by the hon. member for Skeena and to hear the remarks of certain hon. members.

To sum up, I feel that the hon. member's proposed amendment will bring improvements. May I point out something else which may be of interest. In early days when the Indian people governed this entire land, this country's policies were slightly different from those of today. Our immigration policy in particular was pretty good. The result now is that we are outnumbered in this country by immigrants. In the matter of jails, we are the prisoners of our guests.

Our justice was also of good quality. Under our policy, lawbreakers of the land were dealt with more humanely.

[Miss MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands).]

Under our system they were rehabilitated without being locked up behind bars. We did not do what is done today. After lawbreakers had gone through our system, they had paid for their wrongdoing and became useful citizens of our country. We should bear that in mind when voting on the hon. member's amendment. Those are the only remarks I wish to make at this time, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. W. G. Dinsdale (Brandon-Souris): Mr. Speaker, the bill before the House tonight has already received favourable comment from most hon. members who have participated in the debate. I have been checking the debate on second reading and note that there was general support for the motion that the Parole Board should be reinforced with additional new members.

The bill has been brought back for further consideration. It was almost inevitable that amendments would be moved during committee stage for consideration in the House. When hon. members considered the matter, they soon realized that Bill C-191 does not constitute a really comprehensive approach to the problem of parole services. Rather, it was felt that it is an emergency response to the difficulties which have been hitting the headlines of Canadian newspapers for the past few months. The bill suggests that the parole service has suffered from a breakdown in administrative efficiency and that this requires some immediate response from the government.

When the minister introduced the bill, he pointed out that its subject matter deals only with one small aspect of the problems confronting the Canadian parole service at present. We have the excellent report of Judge Huguessen before us. The legislation put forward by the government hardly considers any of the recommendations of that excellent report. The report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs still has to be brought down. Those of us in the House who have been following the deliberations of that important committee realize that we will have to go much further if we are to bring Canadian parole services into line with the needs of the Canadian penal system.

The hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) has brought in an amendment which points out one of the weaknesses and deficiencies in our parole service. It highlights the special problems of the native population of Canada. During the period of rapid change and transition in lifestyle, mostly brought on by the fact that our native peoples are migrating in increasing numbers from the rural environment, or the environment of the wilderness, to urban centres, our native people have been finding it extremely difficult to make the necessary adjustments. Inevitably, many of them have run afoul of the law.

Those of us who come from western Canada and have had occasion to visit penal institutions both at the provincial and federal level have been increasingly disturbed by the fact that a large percentage of the population of our penal institutions is made up of native peoples. In most cases it is younger native people who have found it impossible to make the adjustment to living in our complex, urban environment.

I want to speak briefly tonight on penal reform because I have followed the problems of penal reform most of my adult life. Actually, my first employment, at the end of the