

Penitentiaries

The role of police officers is not an easy one and neither is the role of prison wardens and prison guards. That is why when we considered in this House Bill C-84 to abolish the death penalty, we asked that the death penalty be at least retained to ensure the protection of police officers and prison guards. However, such was not the will of parliament. I feel it is now advisable to reconsider this matter in order to ensure the full protection which a well-organized community is entitled to expect. According to the report, living conditions are unacceptable in penitentiaries. I realize that the inmates are not enjoying a holiday on southern beaches. However, they are entitled to the essential, that is cleanliness, food and lodging. I feel that we should look into the problem more fully and I urge the Solicitor General to examine my suggestion.

● (1452)

Some four or five years ago, if I remember well, our party put forward in this House the suggestion that inmates should be taught a trade according to their abilities and the products they made from day to day could be sold on the market, providing they did not compete with domestic firms. The revenue accrued to inmates would be put in trust, so they could collect it on being released. In this way, they could leave with some money and hope to remain in the straight and narrow path.

I believe this should be tried. There is nothing like work to keep someone's mind on the right track. When there is nothing to do, the only pastime is to listen to someone else boasting about his past deeds. In our penitentiaries those people talk and brag. Younger inmates are exposed not only to bad examples but also to brainwashing. They are led to believe that once out there is no way they can start anew, they are bound to slip up again.

If shop work were established, and I am sure this could be set up with adequate security, considering the means we now have, I believe this would be true rehabilitation. As I said, it would give some incentive to those at least for whom there is still hope, and when they got out they would have a certain amount of money, it would not have been a totally futile exercise. While doing their time they would maintain good working habits, they would enjoy doing something tangible that would bring them something. We must always leave some incentive. I do not mean paying a salary, not in the least. Only, by working they could expect to accumulate some funds that would allow them to lead a useful life.

Mr. Speaker, this is no joke. I do not want to dramatize, but the day after the director of the Institut Archambault was killed, in the Quebec area, which I know very well, two inmates are reported to have knifed a warden in the Orsainville prison, close to Quebec city.

What is an inmate doing with a knife? Where did he get it? How did it get there? Come on, it must surely be a lack of supervision somewhere. There is something wrong, because if there had not been someone close by to rescue that guard who was being held at knife point, I think we would be talking about another murder today.

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

I think it is important to hire competent staff which could develop a friendly relationship on a daily basis with the inmates so as to gain their complete confidence. You can gain someone's confidence. Take the lion tamers. The lion is not always a gentle animal but you find that with patience, day after day, you can create a friendly relationship with it and turn that ferocious animal into a docile one. I think the example might be stretching it a bit, Mr. Speaker, but I do want to make the point strongly in order to make sure the Solicitor General really understands. He has a very great responsibility in this respect and must find the most competent and patient staff possible. Of course, if a prison guard runs the inmates with the boot and the stick, he is not going to make friends with them, and they are going to say, to hell with the rules. If I were there, I think that is how I would react. So that is why we must train the guards. We must have a training school for our penitentiary guards. There must be a general attitude, a humane attitude, an attitude that could bring the inmates to consider themselves as human beings who are respected and who, while they are paying their debt to society, can nevertheless live decently, at least in an acceptable way.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to draw the attention of this House on the parole system, another extremely serious matter that must be reviewed, because I understand paroles have been granted in recent months. I am not blaming anyone. I am not blaming the psychiatrists either. But in any case, there were two murders I know of and a third one not long ago, a very savage one, in Lévis: a seven-year old girl was raped and ripped by an ex-inmate. I cannot say any more about it because the case is before the courts, but the fact remains that there is something wrong. That an accident should happen, I am prepared to accept that, but when that happens too often, then one wonders. What is the Parole Board doing about it? What are psychiatrists doing? What is happening? Is society sick as a whole or is there nothing left to save? I am not prepared to accept that. Here again, a suggestion I make to the Solicitor General is to have the Parole Act reviewed with a view to bringing about improvements, corrections and the necessary amendments so as to make that board more responsible and avoid mistakes as much as possible.

The subcommittee reports also deal with the same subject and I wish the recommendations made by the subcommittee would be implemented. It has been said that 53 of them had been adopted—and I was here when the former solicitor general said so in the House—but there are 65 recommendations. The others should also be considered and implemented as soon as possible to improve our penitentiary system in Canada and I think that, if the government moves in that direction as soon as possible, Canadians will be happy to realize that they can count on the government to ensure their security and their protection everywhere.

But there are preventive measures to take: it is not enough to talk about the failures of the systems, they should be prevented. In our society, under the present system, we have a considerable number of unemployed and when unemployment insurance benefits come to an end they have much difficulty to