

Adjournment Debate

As I told the Solicitor General (Mr. Kaplan) in the House yesterday, we were informed by press reports that sometimes it is the practice to allow prisoners at Archambault to view pornographic films—at what level of pornography we do not know—and that in at least one of these showings topless dancers performed.

Serious questions have been raised in this House and across the country about how the prisons are being run and whether the objective of the prison authorities is to provide security for all Canadians. The Solicitor General denied yesterday that prisoners are being allowed to see these kinds of films. But, Mr. Speaker, why would the guards who work at the prison issue a statement to the press which the Solicitor General said is not true? What is in it for the guards who have to go to work next day? If they have been saying things to the press that are not true, then they have to face the administration which has, in effect, been libelled by them. Why would they issue a false statement in this case?

This points to a double problem. If the films are shown, and the allegations are correct that they are shown because the administration is afraid of the reaction of the prisoners if they are refused, there are two problems. First of all, what is the effect of those films on the prison population? Just this evening I spoke to a psychologist about this and he said that the fantasizing in the minds of those prisoners would be uncontrollable. If they are then released to society, what is to stop them from acting in the vicious manner they have seen in the film?

The second problem is that if the allegations of the guards are correct and the administration is allowing the films to be shown because they are afraid of the reaction from the prisoners if they are not, then who is running the prisons? Who is making the choices? Who is calling the shots?

The Solicitor General also said yesterday, in answer to my question, that the policy of the correctional system is to follow the classifications made by the film censors. Presumably films are classified because the public has a right to be alerted about the destructiveness of some of them. The public ought to enjoy that right, so the classifications are identified in the movie ads. If some are classified as being harmful to our general society, society can accept responsibility for its decisions. If it is possibly harmful to those people, is it not logical to assume that it is even more harmful to a group of people who are in prison because they cannot handle life in a normal society? We are in fact not dealing with a segment of normal society.

● (2205)

The minister says those films are shown according to classification, but what assurance does he have that those classifications are being followed in the showing of those films? How does he know whether the authorities in the prison system are clearly following the classifications issued by the officer in that particular province? Are the regulations being adhered to?

If the classification prohibits viewing under certain circumstances, and those circumstances are very limited because those films happen to be very damaging, is it not reasonable to assume that those very regulations could be met by this society? For example, if a classification officer decides a film can be shown only to a stag club because it is that kind of film and should not be shown in mixed company or to the general public, does it not follow that the segment of the population within the prison would qualify as meeting the requirements of that particular classification, as happened in the B.C. Penitentiary about three years ago?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order.

Mr. Friesen: Just this one comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order.

Mr. Friesen: I call upon the minister to do a study across Canada of the correctional system to make sure that the regulations are being adhered to.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Tardif (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I should like to give the following answer to that question.

[*English*]

The policy in general is to permit inmates to view only films that are approved for public showing by the film classification boards in the provinces in which the institutions are located. This is in keeping with the rule of law that an inmate continues to enjoy all his rights, just like a free citizen, except those taken away by law or by the nature of his confinement.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, the CSC acknowledges its responsibility with respect to both the security of the institution and the protection of the neighbouring community. It also takes the appropriate measures to make sure that the films shown in the institutions are consistent with the acceptable standards of the community and that they are censored by the film classification board of the province where the institution is located. Still, even after that important stage, the director general or the institution warden may decide not to show any film whatsoever if, in his opinion, it might disrupt order in the institution.

Before allowing the screening of a film that has not been censored by the film classification board, the warden must see and approve the film. In keeping with its policy, the department does not allow the screening of pornographic films or shows given by erotic dancers in penitentiaries. Indeed, the Solicitor General did make some comments on such a show a few years ago. The authorities had not in any way approved the show, but they felt at the time that any intervention might have compromised the safety of the artists.

As to the remarks of Coroner Maurice Laniel about the increasing use of cyanide in suicide attempts, I would simply