

Parole Act

it makes sure that there are proper in depth interviews, that there are good psychiatric reports, and helps to ensure the prison system is encouraging the proper attitude among inmates so that they are ready for work again.

But there is no point in having remission of sentence and putting a person out on the street early just because somebody thinks it might be a good idea, or somebody thinks that if he got out of the institution he would be able to rehabilitate himself. The chances are he will not. The chances are he will be back again. The chances are that the people of Canada will suffer from his crimes again. That is not the answer. What we need is a complete investigation, as a result of which the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) will reorganize the whole system so that we do not have the problems we have had in the past and which continue.

● (1630)

Mr. Speaker, the whole question of putting people to work and getting them rehabilitated is the most important penal reform this country has to face. It can only face it with a Solicitor General and a government that is prepared to look the problem in the eye and not use parole as an easy method of emptying the prisons. We must have a government that is prepared to engage in a concentrated effort to make it possible for those who are serving time in our institutions to be reformed. We must have a government that is prepared to make it pretty clear that parole will not be used as a method of rehabilitation, but that parole will be used for those persons who have been rehabilitated. In the past, parole has been used as a method of rehabilitation and that is not the proper use of it. The penal system must be reorganized to accomplish the rehabilitation. The parole system is a system whereby you say to someone who has been rehabilitated that he can now go out because he can take part in society. It should not be used, however to push people out of jail in the hope that they will rehabilitate themselves in society.

Mr. Speaker, one of the finest institutions or groups that I have seen operating in the province of Ontario, and one of the few good things to have come out of the LIP program, is an organization called "Operation Springboard" which was basically sponsored by the United Church of Canada. This is an organization that, through ex-convicts, attempts to relate to convicts presently in prison so that when and if they are paroled or discharged, they will be able to fit into society. It is an organization of ex-inmates working to help straighten out those persons now in prison. I have spoken to the Solicitor General about this organization and I know he is impressed with its record, but even that record is pretty bad. Members of the organization have told me confidentially that most of the people they work with cannot be helped yet most of them are given parole.

This brings me to the second amendment which refers to the use of ex-inmates as members of the National Parole Board on an ad hoc basis. Operation Springboard is an organization run by ex-inmates. Ex-inmates know what it is all about; they know the problems of rehabilitation and they know the numbers of persons allowed out who are very quickly brought back in again. The success of that organization could well be the beginnings of a model system whereby we might learn how to rehabilitate prisoners, by using ex-inmates.

[Mr. Blenkarn.]

I want to make it clear that I do not believe the National Parole Board should be used as a method of clearing the jails; rather it should be used as a method of allowing those persons who are clearly able and rehabilitated, to leave the prison system. We should not just allow people out because we think they might go straight. That is not the way the Parole Board worked in the past, and I ask that it not be the way the Board works in the future.

Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North): Mr. Speaker, we are at the report stage of the bill which provides for an increase of ten ad hoc members on the National Parole Board, and we are considering two amendments moved by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard), one of which reads:

Two of the ad hoc members shall be persons who have served a period of time in a penitentiary under the jurisdiction of the parliament of Canada whether or not such persons, at the time of their appointment have been granted a parole.

I should like, first of all, to say a few words about a matter which seems to have been misunderstood by the media at times as well as by people considering the Parole Board. We should differentiate between the function of the Parole Board and the function of those persons in authority who are granting temporary releases. If we look at the record of the Parole Board under the chairmanship of George Street, I think we will find that they have done an excellent job. They try to weigh very carefully each case as it comes before them and, except for a few mistakes,—and nothing can be perfect when you are dealing with human beings and human behaviour, especially with this type of person—they have done excellent work. I should like to congratulate the minister for increasing the number of members on the board, but the number of officers should also be increased.

I ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), who is piloting this bill in the absence of the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) who is at a conference, if these two members of the Parole Board were meeting in different regions, whether they would have binding authority to make decisions on any persons coming before them for a hearing. I would hope that to be true because I think the most important aspect is not increasing the number of parole officers, but is to make certain that these hearings are held at the regional level. In this way, the various institutions in western Canada such as those in Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia would be served. I would hope that hearings could be held in those areas so that people could come before the board there rather than having a number of applications of deserving people delayed for a long time.

I know what the hon. member for Skeena is trying to do, and I am somewhat sympathetic to his amendment which would put two native Indian people on the Parole Board. Unfortunately, if you go to a police court you often find a line up of Indian people on drunk charges or some other minor charges. Because many of them do not have the money to pay fines, they find themselves incarcerated. I am sympathetic to the idea, but I am going to oppose it. That is not because I think it is a bad idea. I oppose the amendment on the ground that we should not specify certain groups of people the members of which are eligible to sit on the board. You might say that those serving on