

Mr. MacEachen: I am glad to say that the New Democratic Party has agreed to that proposition. Today, the Leader of the Opposition has rejected it.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, the last recorded word in this House of Commons with respect to the position of the New Democratic Party is that it would deal with that bill quickly. We intend to deal with that bill quickly. When will the government bring it forward?

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, hon. members opposite respond to headlines. They ask about House business on a Wednesday because there happened to be a headline story relating to the international boycott. Tomorrow is the normal day on which we deal with House business.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. MacEachen: Tomorrow I will tell the hon. member the business for the future. But I am unhappy and disappointed at receiving a statement from the Leader of the Opposition that he is not prepared to pass this bill with the same speed and the same concern as the New Democratic Party.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): John Roberts looks pretty worried about that answer.

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PENITENTIARIES

PROGRAM FOR WIVES AND MOTHERS TO VISIT INMATES— CRITICISM OF CUTBACK

Mr. Stuart Leggatt (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Solicitor General. It concerns the program of the John Howard Society for visitations by wives and mothers to the inmate population in various prisons in Canada. That program costs the federal government some \$27,000 a year.

In view of the fact that the government is spending some \$250 million on prison construction, can the minister explain why it is cutting back the very modest amount of money which allows wives and mothers to visit inmates? Is this part of the continuing government policy of cutting back on all services to women?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, I will take the information advanced by the hon. member and the point he has made as a representation and consider the matter in the spirit in which it was advanced. I will be pleased in the very near future to announce to the hon. gentleman the course of action I propose to take with exact reference to his representation.

● (1440)

Mr. Leggatt: I am a little surprised that the minister was not aware of this, because it has been covered in the press; but

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I appreciate the possibility it may be restored and I am sure these people would be very happy.

My supplementary question is as follows. Part of the recommendations of the subcommittee on penitentiaries dealt with the question of increasing visitation rights for inmates. This House unanimously accepted the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs that a further reference be dealt with in a variety of matters which affect the prison system. Can the minister now tell the House what the terms of that reference will be, whether we will receive a reference and whether there will be limited travelling privileges for the committee in the event that the reference comes forward?

Mr. Blais: That question, generally, was asked yesterday of the House leader. I am reviewing the terms of reference and undoubtedly will either be making an announcement to the committee or tabling the order of reference before the House.

REQUEST FOR ASSURANCE THAT CHAPLAINCY SERVICE WILL NOT BE REDUCED PENDING STUDY

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Solicitor General and it concerns the chaplaincy service in the penitentiaries. It is my understanding that as a result of a meeting yesterday of the Inter-Faith Council and of the senior management committee of the penitentiary service, a further study will be undertaken of the chaplaincy service within the penitentiaries.

Can the minister give us his assurance now that during the time that study is being conducted there will be no cutbacks or lay-offs in the penitentiary service of either full-time or part-time chaplains?

Hon. J.-J. Blais (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the pleasure of meeting with the Inter-Faith Committee. An undertaking has been given to them that there will not be any cutbacks with regard to full-time personnel; but in terms of the part-time positions, certain positions were identified that could be subject to redundancy. I want to reserve my position on that until I check the facts further, but I would advise the hon. lady that we will do everything within our power to alleviate any uncertainty that is presently felt among the chaplaincy staff.

I might point out, as well, with regard to the further study to which the hon. lady referred, that in no way can it be interpreted as anything but an attempt to provide additional precision in terms of the function of the chaplaincy service, in view of some rather major changes that are taking place at present within the penitentiary service.

Miss MacDonald: Can the Solicitor General table the terms of reference of that commission's study so that we will know whether or not it fits in with the recommendations of the subcommittee's report; and also perhaps he could give us an indication of the cost of this other commission, so that we will have some idea of whether or not the cost of this commission