

Penitentiaries

Had we done so, it is my belief that these incidents could have been avoided. Only by the adoption of this package of recommendations will peace be restored within the system.

While I am not attributing the slaying of Michel Roy in Montreal directly to faults in the system, there can be justification for drawing the conclusion—perhaps speculation is more accurate—that the slaying occurred as a result of the conditions which still exist in the federal system, largely around Montreal, Quebec. Nothing is improving there, and hence the violence. I think the Solicitor General (Mr. Blais) can expect more of it unless the government ceases its foot dragging.

I want to emphasize recommendation No. 65, that is, for the ongoing work of the subcommittee. In response to a question asked of him yesterday, the Solicitor General said he had no intention yet of reconstituting that subcommittee. He could on his own initiative see to it that that is done by discussing it with the chairman of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs, and I am certain that that standing committee would, with alacrity, accept its responsibility and reconstitute the subcommittee so that we could have a steady and ongoing review and exercise a monitoring input to assist the government to achieve a solution to this very serious problem.

One of the central features of the report is inmate labour. Idle hands turn only too often to evil intent. Inmate labour is essential to any well functioning penitentiary system. In Denmark, if I may draw a contrast again, a sanction against recalcitrant inmates is to take away from them the right to work. It is the reverse here. If they wish, inmates are allowed to sit around all day. They do not have to participate in any work programs, and much time is available for frustrations which they encounter in the system to seep to the surface and to break out into violent incidents.

I recommend to the Solicitor General a close study of that Danish system. A state corporation has been set up to market on a worldwide basis prison products made by inmates within the prisons. Essential to the success of the Danish scheme, the labour union movement there is deeply involved. That labour union co-operation must be had in order to achieve success. We are moving far too slowly on the recommendation of the subcommittee with respect to inmate work programs in this regard. The approach seems to be to get back into the market gardening business as an experiment. Some institutions are getting into the manufacturing business, but our suggestion is that all inmates who are physically capable of working should be required to work.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Nielsen: No more than 20 per cent of the inmate population should be employed in institutional maintenance, and those who are should be paid a reasonable wage for their labour. I think all subcommittee members were unanimous in their feeling that it is absolutely disgraceful to set up a wage structure in a prison which does not permit even the bare necessities of hygiene to be purchased on a daily basis. That wage structure is so niggling that it ought to be disposed of.

[Mr. Nielsen.]

Under the Danish system inmates earn an hourly rate, plus bonuses for over production. The inmates have banks in their prisons. The system adopted over there not only pays inmates a reasonable rate for the work they do but also enables them to pay for their room and board, which prevents the state from having to pay that cost. Inmates are able to send money to their wives and children, but inmates' wives and children in this country are supported by welfare.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have to interrupt the hon. member because his time has expired. However, there may be unanimous consent for him to continue his remarks. Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Nielsen: We suggest that the penitentiaries in this country be allowed to compete for contracts on the open market. In choosing its areas of production the system should bear in mind both the degree of job training a given industry will provide inmates, and the financial profits to be made from such industry. A Crown agency should be established. This is one of the heart and core recommendations of the report.

● (1242)

A Crown agency should be established to oversee the administration, accounting, sales and marketing operations of the prison industries. The individuals serving in this agency should be selected by the commissioner on the basis of their business enterprise.

Each individual inmate in prison industry should be paid on the basis of the amount he produces. There should be other, non-financial incentives offered as well, such as paid holidays and extra earned permission.

Vocational training programs could be vastly improved. Perhaps the minister will have an opportunity to visit the prison at Ringe in Denmark to view the beauty of that maximum security institution and its functions. The recidivism rate is less than half that of Canada because inmates leave there with a work incentive, able to cope with society, and make a useful contribution with far less chance of ever returning to prison. I believe the recidivism rate in Denmark is in the area of 40 per cent. One of our provincial institutions about which the hon. member for Oxford will speak later, has a similar rate because of policies adopted there which are applicable to highly dangerous criminals.

I charge the government with neglect, Mr. Speaker. I do so in the kindest possible way and in the hope it does not disturb the establishment of the subcommittee pursuant to recommendation No. 65 of our report. I want the attitude that was present in the committee to continue. If the committee is not reconstituted, if the recommendations are not adopted and implemented rapidly, the neglect which is apparent in British Columbia and Dorchester will get worse. I am sure this feeling is shared by all members of the subcommittee. Unless the government acts on this report with alacrity, I am sure the next time the committee embarks on this exercise we will be looking at ashes. I thank the House for the extra five minutes, Mr. Speaker.