

Inquiries of the Ministry

The first type concerned the fact that an inmate was reportedly beaten. As hon. members will recall, about three months ago two inmates of the Kingston penitentiary detained hostages and eventually the guards were left uninjured. Still, one of these inmates had a knife which had to be taken from him by force. No serious injuries were inflicted on the inmates. Later, a Mrs. Redmond, who had been called to intervene and convince this inmate to surrender his knife and his hostages, was able to see the inmate and discuss with him and she told us firmly that no more force was used than was needed.

The second grievance was related to the fact that when members of the House write to inmates, letters are opened and remarks from the Warden of the institution are added to them. This problem has already been raised in the parliamentary committee and I indicated that we were considering the possibility of revising this practice.

The third grievance was related to the fact that the acting assistant director of the institution had denied an inmate a remission of 15 days that had been granted to him. I inquired about this and it turned out that this is not in the least consistent with the facts. This inmate was never denied 15 days of remission.

[English]

Mr. Douglas: A supplementary question. May I ask the Solicitor General if one of the complaints transmitted to him by the inmates' committee through the citizens' committee was the boredom arising out of the fact that the inmates are not given adequate opportunities for training? If this is the nature of the complaint, I ask the minister whether steps are being taken to rectify it, particularly with regard to those who are moving to the new institution at Millhaven?

[Translation]

Mr. Goyer: Mr. Speaker, this was not a matter of complaint on the part of the inmates. On the other hand, I know that a problem exists in our institutions with regard to the industrial programs which must be implemented. In this connection I am expecting the report of an inquiry commission which was established a few months ago, and I will certainly study this report very closely in order to find out how this commission's recommendations may be carried out.

[English]

MILLHAVEN—ALLEGED INSTALLATION OF ELECTRONIC SPYING DEVICES

Mr. S. Perry Ryan (Spadina): Have electronic viewing and/or spying devices been installed in the new Millhaven maximum security prison and, if so, where have they been set up?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Goyer (Solicitor General): No, Mr. Speaker. If there were spying devices, I would not want to reveal them, but I can say that there are no bugging devices at the Millhaven institution.

[Mr. Goyer.]

[English]

Mr. Ryan: Will the Solicitor General say categorically that there are none of these bugging devices in the cells or bedrooms of these prisoners?

[Translation]

Mr. Goyer: I say, Mr. Speaker, that there are no spying devices. That is the question I was asked. Now, if the hon. member has information, he might give it to us.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It seems to me that the minister has replied to the question.

[English]

SUGGESTED VISIT BY PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE TO KINGSTON AND MILLHAVEN—STEPS TO REDUCE PRISON POPULATION

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): In view of the fact that the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs has the power to visit Canadian penitentiaries, will the Solicitor General facilitate attendance of the committee at the Millhaven and Kingston institutions to observe the conditions there, speak to the inmates and report back to the House?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Goyer (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, the members of the committee and myself were to visit the whole Kingston complex and take the opportunity to visit Millhaven as well. Unfortunately, I did so in rather unusual circumstances, in which I should not like hon. members to find themselves, all the more so since a coroner's inquiry is now under way as it was discovered that one of the inmates was dead. Besides, the inquiry board has to look fully into the circumstances surrounding events and will certainly want to visit the institution before anyone else. Therefore, taking the situation into account I shall give the hon. member's proposal the most sympathetic consideration.

[English]

Mr. Gilbert: Since the Ouimet Commission expressed the view that the prison population should be reduced very quickly, and requested that a research committee be set up to study conditions affecting prisoners held in maximum, medium and minimum security institutions, would the minister make a statement on motions setting forth what he has done to reduce the prison population and set forth the criteria with regard to inmates of penal institutions?

[Translation]

Mr. Goyer: Mr. Speaker, to reduce the prison population is directly related to the number of persons sentenced to jail terms by the judiciary system.

That being said, perhaps we have stressed too much in the past the punitive aspect of the law and detention in general. Also it may be that the judiciary system should be revised so that the sentence be more consistent with the criminal act which has been committed.