

Minister's Statement on Penitentiaries

education, lack of help for physical and mental illness, and the prevalence of drugs, homosexuality and so on, combine to unsettle the most stable individual. Prisons create the starkest possible segregation from the community. Months or years are spent in a prison environment, followed by sudden release and full personal responsibility. We could not devise a more traumatic social experience.

For those who make up our crime problem, penitence has little meaning. By and large their lives are so empty, they are so full of frustration and despair, they are so sick in mind and body, and their entire life experience, providing them grist for thought, is so totally lacking in charity that contemplation is more likely to cause anger at society's sins rather than remorse for what they themselves have done.

At the beginning of these remarks, Mr. Speaker, I said that I had visited many penitentiaries, both as a Member of Parliament and as a counsel. I have seen the terror, the emotion on the faces of young people incarcerated as late as 1968 after having been sentenced to five years for trafficking in, being in possession of or using non-medical drugs such as marijuana.

We can only rehabilitate the convicted if the law is reformed to bring it in line with the 1971 concept of what is expected in a highly complex, technological age. Political and economic reforms must come now. Above all, those who have been given the privilege to govern must respect and obey the law themselves. The flouting of the law by the government will do more to encourage crime in society than any other factor.

I would like to read a newspaper clipping I received this morning which was sent to me by somebody in my home town. I do not know who sent it to me, but it reads:

The University of Calgary called yesterday for 400 volunteers to take part in its research project on the non-medical use of marijuana. The two-year project, financed by a \$100,000 grant from the federal government, will be an attempt to determine the physical and mental effects of marijuana smoking under controlled test conditions.

The point I am making here is that young men attending our universities and colleges are charged under the Narcotics Act for doing the very thing that the government will now be paying other young people to do. There cannot be one law for one section of the population and another law for another section. That is what I mean by flouting the law. You must have respect for law and order if you are going to try to prevent crime.

The social and economic changes about which I am talking include the development of a creative society in which all young persons will have an opportunity to succeed. Last year thousands of young people in universities were turned down and failed simply because of a matter of a decimal point in their marks. Thousands were denied the right to study medicine; thousands were denied the right to study accounting; thousands were denied the right to study law, pharmacy or other professions, and thousands of others were denied the right to be trained in some skill simply because we do not have enough institutions for all our young people. These young people are being denied by a system of human computerization. Somebody makes a differentiation of .06 in their academic marks and that is sufficient to set them apart from

somebody else. The time to start reforming our institutions is now in order to give all our young people a chance and remove their frustrations.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I wish to read one short excerpt from a book which I think everybody should read, "Crime in America", written by Ramsey Clark, the former Attorney General of the United States. In it he writes:

If rehabilitation is the goal, only the indeterminate sentence will be used.

In other words, what he is saying is that under a modern, streamlined criminal code a judge could make more use of indeterminate sentences, because what judge knows how a man or woman will react six months, one year, or five years after their appearance in court? Indeterminate sentences would be one way by which young people would have a chance to become rehabilitated and attend educational institutions. That would be a starting point in reform.

I have been speaking for just ten minutes, Mr. Speaker, while the minister spoke for 30 minutes. I want to repeat that this is the most important matter raised this session in reference to human dignity and the quality of life of the individual. The minister is a young man and I congratulate him on many of the views he holds. I hope he will translate his words into action in order to relieve the terrible frustrations of the convicted and to change our prisons from factories of crime to factories of rehabilitation and prevention of crime.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I would like to preface my remarks by thanking the minister for sending us a copy of his statement in sufficient time so that we could make an adequate reply.

• (2:40 p.m.)

The minister has brought to his new portfolio a great deal of vigour and concern with regard to the problems of the penitentiaries. But, Mr. Speaker, I hesitate to congratulate him because his government is the one responsible for not implementing reforms many years ago in order to develop an adequate penology system. When one looks at our prisons today I think we are fortunate that we have only experienced the incidents at Kingston and Dorchester within recent times.

Another reason why I hesitate to congratulate the minister is that for most of his reforms no definite period of time for implementation is given. For example, in his statement the minister said, "We anticipate the creation of a greater number of release centres", "we are considering the adoption of a leave system", "we intend to give increasing application to the living unit concept", "we are proposing a cafeteria system". Such words as "anticipate", "considering", "intend to give increasing application" and "proposing" are not sufficient. When the reforms are definitely implemented we in the New Democratic Party will be the first to commend the minister. At this time, however, we are not prepared to congratulate him on a mere statement on motions in the House which only sets forth indefinite future actions.

I had the privilege of travelling with the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs when it crossed the country visiting different institutions such as St. Vincent de Paul, Prince Albert, New Westminster, Archambault,