

*Supply—Justice*

the commissioner of penitentiaries A. J. MacLeod, who was a member of a commission which investigated conditions among young prisoners in penitentiaries in this country. I should like to congratulate Mr. MacLeod for bringing these matters to light and I hope we shall quickly get some real reforms in this field through the Minister of Justice. It is true that the hon. gentleman, like the former ministers of justice, Mr. Fulton and Mr. Fleming, inherited a great many of these problems. Changes are not made overnight. But it is only when we raise our voices in the House of Commons that these reforms come about. I think one of the most shocking things revealed by this investigation is that there are young children of 12 and 13 years of age in our penitentiaries serving terms alongside hardened criminals. I wish to read from the February 23 issue of *Weekend Magazine*. Remember it was the hon. Davie Fulton who set up this investigation so that the facts could be brought before the Canadian people. This is what the article says:

It was difficult for me to find anything wrong with this cheery classroom in St. Vincent de Paul, near Montreal. It was brightly lit, well ventilated, had a good collection of books and educational aids for both public and high school courses and was presided over by a man anybody would have been proud to have had as a teacher.

The only thing wrong was that the children in this classroom, some of them no more than 14, were penitentiary inmates.

The federal training centre, an institution for offenders below the age of 25 which forms part of St. Vincent de Paul penitentiary, often gets 14 and 15 year olds as inmates.

Later, it is disclosed that children of the ages of 12 and 13 are serving terms of more than two years in the penitentiaries of this country. One of these children was so small in physical size that he was able to squeeze through the bars, the article says. It seems to me it is a disgrace in a country such as ours that we should have a situation of this kind in our penitentiaries. The article goes on to say:

Most have been convicted of theft, breaking and entering and automobile stealing. All have been sentenced to two years or more.

You see children in prison uniforms carrying history and geography books and arithmetic tables and you know they may be finishing their homework in their cells.

Not so long ago, a 12 year old boy found himself in St. Vincent's federal training centre.

And everybody in the prison for women in Kingston remembers the tiny 14 year old girl who went behind the walls to serve a two year term—for stealing a bicycle.

In Dorchester penitentiary in New Brunswick one of the boys was so small guards were afraid he might squeeze out between the bars.

If John Howard were to investigate some of the penitentiaries of this country he would be more shocked by the conditions there than by those he found in Britain during his

[Mr. Woolliams.]

time. I may say I am happy to see the hon. member for Vancouver East in his place. He is one of the persons in this house who has pressed for prison and penitentiary reform over the years. He was doing so long before I came to this house. I am sure that some of that pressure rubbed off on Davie Fulton, the former minister of justice, as a result of which certain reforms and investigations took place. The article from which I have been reading goes on to say:

We are putting more children in penitentiary today than we were 10 years ago. Last year, we put away almost three times as many as we did in 1952.

This is a statement which was made by the commissioner of penitentiaries. This is not something we did 50 years ago; it is something we are doing today. Many people may ask: how did it come about? Well, under our criminal code children over the age of seven can be confined in penal institutions. That is shocking. The Minister of Justice should take a look at that, and there should be an amendment made immediately. Any child of the tender age of 7 to 12 years surely should not be confined in a penitentiary with hardened criminals. I could name one or two that are now released but I will not do so. It was alarm over figures like these showing a general penitentiary population increase that resulted in a five member justice department team going out across the country last year to examine the whole field of delinquency in Canada. The committee on juvenile delinquency was established by a former minister of justice, Davie Fulton, and made its report to former justice minister Donald Fleming.

I am quite sure the Minister of Justice has read the report. I hope he does something about it immediately. This is an urgent matter. It is something that should not be left for a year from now or two years from now. These children are still in the penitentiaries of this country. These children are like our own children, except that they ran afoul of the law, which could possibly happen to our own children. Because they ran afoul of the law and because the Criminal Code says that any child seven years of age or over may be placed in the penitentiary they have been coldbloodedly placed in the penitentiaries of this country with hardened inmates.

Imagine how you would feel, members of the House of Commons, if a son of yours eight or nine years old was in a penitentiary, if his only classroom was in a penitentiary, if the only place where he could study and do his homework if it is called homework in a penitentiary, was a cell.