

mentary sub-committee on the penitentiary system in Canada, and to report thereon.

[*English*]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, we will give consent for the motion to be presented; but when it is moved, the hon. member for New Westminster would like to say a word.

Mr. Speaker: A motion can only be presented at this time with unanimous consent. Is there unanimous consent for its presentation?

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, on the copy of the motion which was handed to me, the words "and to report thereon" appear. I did not hear those words read by the hon. Solicitor General. I am wondering whether that was intended.

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, on the copy of the document I will table, the words "and to report thereon" and "et de faire rapport" appear.

Mr. Leggatt: Mr. Speaker, before adopting the motion I should like to point out that the committee did not have very much opportunity to discuss the terms of the motion. Would the Solicitor General take the opportunity now to explain why the motion proposes that meetings be held in camera, rather than leaving it to the committee, at its discretion, to determine what is appropriate to be heard in camera or otherwise. The uniqueness surrounding this motion is that it is fairly limiting on the committee. I thought the Solicitor General would want to give the committee its head in terms of determining what should or should not be heard in-camera. Would the Solicitor General care to respond to that question?

Mr. Fox: Mr. Speaker, this matter was discussed in committee and it was agreed to by all members present at that time. The best way to ensure that a parliamentary committee has access to relevant officials, and the best way to ensure that the committee report is implemented, would be to hold in camera hearings. Also, it was indicated that the main estimates of the Department of the Solicitor General would be before the committee some time in February and that there would be ample opportunity to discuss all matters which would be of interest.

● (1512)

It was thought by all members of the committee who were present at the time it was discussed that it was more important to have input into progress being made in the implementation of the report than into the possibility of making a few partisan political points.

Mr. Jarvis: I think the Solicitor General has outlined to the House quite accurately what occurred in the committee. However, I take some objection to his reference to partisan political points, because it has been my information that that particular subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs has worked very well and very productively. I think I would have preferred, on balance, that the motion

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today had not included the words "in camera" and had let the committee be the master of its own fortunes. But the countervailing force that exists here is the very sincere and deep concern of the committee to get back to work as quickly as possible.

I would take more comfort—and I think my colleagues share my view—if the Solicitor General would take the occasion now to indicate to the House his receptiveness, should the situation arise—as I anticipate if might—that the committee might ask for an amendment to this motion so that all its meetings need not be held in camera where no good reason exists.

The Solicitor General's reference to partisan political points does not have much application to that particular standing committee on penitentiaries. When it comes to some other matters the Solicitor General might bring before the committee, we agree the meetings should not be held in camera and there will be many partisan points scored.

Mr. Baldwin: Mr. Speaker, I will not detain the House long. I take strong objection to the House agreeing to a motion of this kind. I do not want to precipitate a crisis or a vote, and I understand my friends' views on this, but I think for this House to give consent of this kind, in advance, without someone saying something about it, could launch us into a precedent which we might have reason to regret. I simply say, as my friend, the hon. member for Perth-Wilmot said, that when a committee comes to a decision which suggests that in its opinion it should make a decision on its own and come to the House for confirmation, that is one thing; but to give blanket approval in advance is quite wrong, and I want to register my objection to it.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I want to join in that objection. I am not a member of that committee, but I have been one many times—more often than my hon. friend, I presume—and I am interested in the deliberations of the committee and in the decisions and recommendations which the committee made previously. We are interested in knowing what progress has been made on those recommendations and why some meetings cannot be held in public.

I am quite aware that there might be reasons for having some meetings in camera to discuss, for example, why a certain person has or has not been fired, or why changes have been made in personnel. Those meetings are normally held in camera. They have been held in camera because the committee agrees to that.

I agree entirely with the hon. member for Peace River that if the minister thinks there is any political mileage to be made on the committee, he is wrong. Most of the penitentiary officials do not vote, and the staff members probably have already made up their minds on how they will handle this matter, so I do not think that is a good explanation. It is necessary that we protect the individuals involved in the changes that have taken place; but I for one, as a member of parliament, am very interested in knowing what the minister has done.