

*Penitentiaries*

respect the one we are being asked to consider tonight. I did so not because I had any profound knowledge that there was something wrong in respect of the penal system of this country. I did so at that time because we were engaged in a debate on the subject of capital punishment. We are still engaged in that debate. It was my contention then, and it is now, that most of the people of Canada who have expressed themselves rather vehemently in some cases in favour of the retention of capital punishment have done so not because of any well-founded concern that they might be murdered in their beds or out on the streets, but because they are concerned about the rise in violent crime. They are worried that they might be assaulted in public. A woman might have a well founded concern that she stands in good danger of violent assault and rape.

I say they have this concern with good cause and with the best of all possible reasons. They have watched these things happen. They have seen situations such as that which took place in Ottawa not too long ago where two men were involved in an armed holdup in which an innocent bystander was murdered while they were out on bail, on a charge of possession of a sawed-off rifle. They have read of incidents such as that in Toronto where a man who had committed a series of crimes, including assault on a police officer, was released on his own recognizance and not too long afterward murdered another policeman. They are aware of situations inside prisons, such as the situation which within a few months resulted in riots, murders and beatings. I think they have a good right to ask themselves precisely what their government placed first on its list of priorities and whether or not it was the protection of society. I believe this must be the first priority.

If people are not convinced that the system will protect them, they will panic. I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, this is part of the reason members of all parties in this House are having a very difficult time making up their minds whether the government's bill to re-impose the banning of capital punishment should, in fact, pass.

● (2250)

I have spoken for only a few minutes, but in closing I will ask the government not only to make this inquiry a meaningful one, not only to search out every defect in its penal system, its bail system and its parole system—because defects there are without going into tiresome detail—but to consider very seriously withdrawing the bill on capital punishment from debate until there can be a meaningful inquiry which will have the effect of reassuring the people of this country that there is no need to revert to that kind of savage punishment.

**Mr. Donald W. Munro (Esquimalt-Saanich):** Mr. Speaker, without any reflection on the impartiality or the eyesight of the Chair, I do feel that I might be allowed to mention that I have been on my feet for two days in the last week to ask a couple of questions about the William Head Prison. I was on my feet again yesterday and today to do the same on another sort of question, because unfortunately I have to make it clear that all the problems with penitentiaries are not concentrated in the province of Quebec. Regrettably, British Columbia has its share of them.

[Mr. Reilly.]

I was pleased to see that the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) was on the west coast last weekend. Although everything else was working to have him enjoy that particular visit—and I was there too—the penitentiary system failed to co-operate. While the minister was in the area, a dangerous criminal, confined on a grievous sex charge, escaped from William Head Penitentiary. He was not the first to do so, but surely the first to do so when the minister was actually in the area. I do not say that the minister was in the prison at the time because I do not know where he was, but he was in the area.

Since that escape, two elderly people have been attacked brutally in a trailer camp in an area where that prisoner might have been, and a third person has since been attacked, also in an area where the escaped prisoner might have been lurking. All three victims are now in hospital. The man from William Head was still free when I spoke to Victoria about seven o'clock this evening. This is not all. There are accounts circulating in Victoria that a prisoner serving a five year sentence for manslaughter has been absent without authorization from William Head since March 12. The police were unable to say why they did not learn, until the beginning of this month, two months later, that this man had failed to return after the expiration of the pass, which was believed to have been a weekend pass, not a two months pass.

The third matter I had in mind to ask the minister was about the physical measures that were to be taken in William Head in the light of his decision to convert that institution from a minimum to a medium security institution. It was my hope that I would get the answer that those measures would be taken prior to the introduction into that institution of medium security prisoners. I do not yet know whether those additional measures have been taken. But is this why we have been having escapes from William Head, because those to which I referred were not taken. Is it because those measures have not been taken? I am told, for example, that in certain tidal circumstances which I need not elaborate it is possible to walk out of William Head quite easily. This may be an exaggeration, but it is certainly symptomatic of the tales that are circulating and the insecurity that is felt in the area about the institution that is there. The guarding at that institution must be tightened up; physical barriers must be improved, and parole procedures likewise need to be tightened. Finally, I suggest that another site should be selected, one that is not so near the centres of high density population.

These are only the most recent evidences of laxity in the penitentiary system in British Columbia, and let me make it clear that I am not criticizing the guards for this. I have the greatest respect for them. Their duty is an onerous one and we should be proud that they are performing it to the best of their ability. Let us not attack them. They cannot defend themselves from attack in this place. What we must look at are the policies formulated by the government that permit these things to happen. The government which, for some unexplained reason, has decided to place the emphasis, not on the public, which asks for security, or on the injured party, but on the man who has caused the injury. Society demands security. It is up to parliament to ensure that society's safety is assured. The criminal has placed himself outside the law and has earned his penalty.