

Supply—Solicitor General

Mr. Diefenbaker: It would save time going over these matters again. The minister is going to cover the entire picture and there are a number of matters I wish to bring to his attention briefly.

Mr. Pennell: I would be pleased to yield the floor, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not wish to delay the minister's reply, but possibly some of the questions I shall raise will enable the minister to answer at one and the same time. I shall deal with matters that are of immediate importance. The first has to do with the granting of the Queen's mercy on her visit to Canada. It has been the regular course over the years that a visit of Her Majesty the Queen or her predecessor the King has been accompanied by a general reduction in prison sentences or an amnesty.

This matter has been referred to on previous occasions and the answer given by the government has been that a parole system is in effect and therefore there is no reason for a general amnesty. I have been communicated with by several prisoners serving long sentences. In each of the four cases to which I wish to refer particularly they are model prisoners. The reduction of sentence by a matter of months would not be of particular interest to them in so far as their servitude is concerned, but it would amount to a recognition of the exercise of the authority of Her Majesty the Queen in a prerogative way and it would give new hope to these prisoners and thousands of others who are today incarcerated in our penitentiaries.

Few Canadians realize the degree to which crime has been expanding. I do not have the statistics before me but I recall that a year ago one and a half million offences of various kinds outside the field of traffic offences were committed. In respect of those offences there were some 500,000 convictions. Crime is mounting on every hand in the western world, in the United Kingdom and the United States. It is not crime in those fields where ordinarily one might expect an increase but rather it is across the board.

Everything that can possibly be done should be done to give hope to those who make a false step. I hope that even now, in so far as those prisoners are concerned who are not recidivists there will be the exercise of the Queen's mercy on the occasion of her visit. This course has been followed through the years. The failure to follow it this time will leave a feeling of resentment among the prisoners in the penal institutions. I would have

asked that across the board consideration be given to this matter but because of the decision already made I am restricting it to those who have not been repeaters.

I ask for this consideration because some hope must be held out to those who have not repeated. This would be of advantage. It would carry on the general tradition of the amnesty that is granted on the occasion of such visitations. It would penalize none of those who have continued their life of crime by repetition, but those who have committed their first offence would be placed in an advantageous position in that there would be particular consideration given to them for not being repeaters.

I urge the minister to give consideration to my suggestion. He does not know the feeling in the penitentiaries of our country if he does not realize that, taken all in all, there is being engendered a feeling of remonstrance that is not conducive to that order and equanimity which should prevail in our penal institutions. I therefore ask for a reconsideration of this matter. We made parole regulations and changes during our administration. We advanced the whole field of correctional punishment and correctional institutions. But the adoption of parole in no way, except as a dialectic argument, can relieve the feelings of those in our institutions.

I have mentioned the question of crime. There has been an amazing increase in this field. I believe the United Kingdom is the only nation in the western world in which any diminution in crime has been shown, and the diminution last year compared with the previous year was insignificant. Crime is expanding everywhere. We have in Canada reports of the close connection with the underworld of leaders of the Mafia and other disreputable organizations from across the line. This brings me to my second suggestion.

The time is overdue for the appointment of a royal commission on the subject of crime, its incidence and a full public revelation of the degree to which master criminals find themselves allied with one another internationally. Such an investigation has been asked for by provincial attorneys general. The previous attorney general of the Lesage administration was strongly in favour of such a royal commission. There is support for my suggestion. The responsibility for investigation into the facets of crime rests on the federal parliament.

Royal commissions are appointed for everything under the sun. A royal commission on the subject of crime would pay dividends.