

### Penitentiaries

reason to doubt it—the first part of his speech was shamefully contrary to the spirit which he indicated in the second part of his remarks. He cannot have it both ways.

It is not possible to introduce a system that tries to remake human beings who have committed a crime, it is not possible to have a system of parole, it is not possible to have a system of temporary absence without some mistakes. No member in the Conservative party could do it without making some mistakes. Mistakes are inevitable because the system is being supervised by human beings. It is inevitable that a mistake will be made from time to time, and in my view it is reprehensible that people take advantage of these mistakes to create an atmosphere of fear and of almost unlimited anxiety about the situation. That is not necessary, because it does not help anybody.

**Mr. Reynolds:** Tell us what helps.

**Mr. Lewis:** I will in a moment. I live in the same country as the hon. member does and I read the same newspapers. He spoke as if at least 50 per cent of the prisoners in the penitentiaries were roaming the streets of Canada. He knows darned well that that is not true. He knows perfectly well that it is not helpful to the people of Canada and to the system to speak in such exaggerated terms about a situation that is unhappy. I think it is shameful that these exaggerated terms are used.

The hon. member says that the worst thing about the situation is that it will do something against the system of rehabilitation. Let me say to people who talk like that, that they are responsible for the spirit abroad in this country that is making it difficult for those who are trying to create a system of rehabilitation that would be of benefit to Canada. On the other hand, I say to the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), and I do not pretend to know the details of his department or the details in every one of the penitentiaries, that it seems to me obvious—there is a Latin phrase that lawyers use, *res ipsa loquitur*, “the thing speaks for itself”—that when these escapes have been taking place, particularly in the province of Quebec but elsewhere as well, at a fairly rapid pace, as it were, there must be something wrong in the Solicitor General's department. These things could not happen if there was no incompetence and inefficiency in high places in his department.

I am not prepared to ask for the dismissal of “A” or the dismissal of “B” without giving “A” and “B” an opportunity to state their case. I do not think that is fair either. But I say to the minister that I give him credit, as do all my colleagues, for being sincere and genuine in his attempts to run his department for the benefit and security of the people of Canada. I say to the Solicitor General that history is full of instances where the good intentions of a minister are destroyed and frustrated by those under him who are incapable of carrying out the policy which he wishes carried out, or who deliberately sabotage that policy.

● (2020)

I say to the minister that nobody can look at the present situation without concluding that even at the level of the Commissioner of Penitentiaries—and I do not think I have had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman, let alone being

[Mr. Lewis.]

in a position to judge him—what has been happening in the system indicates the present commissioner may not be the best person for the job. I say that it is the duty of the Solicitor General to look into the staff in his department and to be tough and ruthless about getting rid of those who do not do the kind of job which alone can support a policy of rehabilitation and efficiency in the system.

The minister ought to look at the situation and, if necessary, clean house without any hesitation so that there may be some competence and some efficiency in the services over which he has authority. Also, I cannot help feeling that in addition to that there must be some very serious loss of morale, if not worse in some instances, in the penitentiaries across this country. If you permit me to put it this way, Mr. Speaker, I have personally been saddened at the way in which over the last number of months, or years for that matter, many people in Canada, in my constituency as well as in others, have developed a sense of revenge against others in society and have forgotten the biblical injunction that mercy and compassion are pretty important in a civilized society.

I think it is not only desirable but urgently necessary that criminals in this country be given an opportunity to be rehabilitated. I, personally, approve of the temporary absence philosophy, although not necessarily in every case where temporary absence has been granted. That has been a matter of judgment which went awry in some cases. But I think it is right to have a program of temporary absence for those persons in our penitentiaries and other prisons who in that way can be reintroduced into their families and can be reintroduced into society on a developing basis, so that when they are paroled they feel themselves a part of society instead of pariahs as many of them are made to feel at present.

Therefore, while I say to the minister that he cannot permit the present situation to continue, that he cannot permit the incompetence which is obviously there to continue, I plead with him, certainly on behalf of my colleagues, that he not permit these unfortunate incidents to affect adversely the decent programs of rehabilitation which have been undertaken by his department and which should be improved in the future.

It will be a mark of courage if he treats those in charge who have failed in their duty as I suggested he treat them, either get rid of them if necessary or give them very severe instructions if he considers that enough. But it will be a mark of cowardice if he joins the ranks of some in this House who, because there have been these escapes and because there is a feeling abroad of anxiety among many people in this country, now wish to end rehabilitation programs. It will be a mark of cowardice if, because these things are facts, he now permits himself to be influenced to deviate from a policy of rehabilitation which includes a policy of humane parole, which includes a policy of carefully vetted and humane temporary absences from prison.

As I have watched our judicial and penology system over the years, I have often wondered whether we realize what we are doing to human beings in our society. The hon. gentleman who preceded me said something about the judges who sentence people. My impression is that the Parole Board does in fact obtain information of that sort.