

Adjournment Debate

might also say that that report will be made public as soon as it is translated and printed.

PENITENTIARIES—WILLIAM HEAD—POSSIBLE
CONVERSION TO MEDIUM SECURITY INSTITUTION—
REQUEST FOR CONSULTATION

Mr. Allan B. McKinnon (Victoria): Mr. Speaker, I wish also to thank the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) for being in the House tonight to hear my representation. On March 5 and March 13 I directed two questions to the Solicitor General concerning the change in grading of William Head prison from a minimum to a medium security prison. I will not take up the time of the House by reading the questions and answers. In brief, I requested the minister for assurance that this action would not be instituted without prior concurrence of the people of that area, and he replied that he could not give that assurance.

I would now like to tell some of the history of William Head prison and particularly some of the implicit conditions under which it was accepted by the local residents in the first instance. William Head prison was formerly a quarantine station. It is some 12 miles from Victoria, in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It comprises 85 acres of beautiful waterfront property, bounded on one side by Weir beach, a public beach, and on the other by Pedder Bay, where the newly named Pearson College of the Pacific has acquired some 74 acres.

In 1958 a three man committee on correctional planning recommended that a trial project be started at William Head quarantine station. The aim of the project was to segregate first offenders and those with an evident desire to reform from hardened criminals. This was the major consideration, to separate the curable from the incurable. There was a certain amount of unease among the local residents of Metchosin and a petition was started. Their fears were allayed by government assurances. For example, the RCMP Quarterly, volume 26 of 1960, in recording the transition remarked:

• (2220)

Assurance was voiced that all inmates chosen were not dangerous criminals, that each and every man is carefully selected. Most of them will be tradesmen who are nearing the end of their sentences, and the object of the establishment is to serve as a pre-release centre, where the final and intensive effort is made to prepare inmates for re-entry into society.

On July 27, 1969, Superintendent Grant stated:

There is no intention of putting any kind of fence around William Head minimum security prison.

The final assurance to the citizenry was given when a minister of the Crown stated in 1959:

William Head is only temporary and will be discontinued when overcrowding at the main penitentiary at New Westminster has been relieved.

The institute started off rather well and there has been much favourable comment about it over the years. However, during the last couple of years there has been a change in the type of inmate. The drug culture product has been showing up in larger and larger numbers. While everyone can agree that rehabilitation is necessary for them, it is not the same kind of rehabilitation required or envisaged for the inmate which authorities had in mind

[Mr. Allmand.]

when this prison without bars was instituted. As a result, escapes or walkaways increased from three in the first year to 35 last year.

To compound the problem, the Solicitor General now proposes to introduce medium security risks to this rehabilitation centre. This will, I predict, have two deleterious effects. First, it will increase the number of escapes, and the escapee will not necessarily be the innocuous type of the past. Second, the security arrangements will need to be considerably strengthened, which will destroy the rehabilitation attitude of the institution.

A good part of the rehabilitative climate of this institution is engendered by the feeling of mutual trust and respect between inmates and staff. I visited the institution a week ago and was impressed with this helpful attitude on the part of the officials. The officials, and indeed many of the local residents, feel a certain amount of pride in the rehabilitative work being done and wish it to have the best possible chance of continuing its success.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in order, first, to give the institution and staff clear support to continue their rehabilitative work, second, to continue to receive the tacit support of the community and guarantee their security and, third, to try to maintain William Head as an institution that physically blends with its beautiful surroundings, I respectfully request that the Solicitor General not proceed with his plans to increase the security status of William Head prison but, rather, conform to the original pledge made to the people of that area. If William Head must remain the location for a penal institution, then it should be a rehabilitation-oriented minimum security installation with minimum risk inmates. It should remain as defined by a solicitor general's report:

An institution where those inmates are sentenced who require neither fence nor wall to keep them confined, who will respect the invisible boundary that surrounds them and who, in any event, are not likely to be dangerous in the community if they do walk away.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Solicitor General): Mr. Speaker, since there is a serious problem of overcrowding in our federal penal institutions in the western region, consideration is presently being given for the construction and/or acquisition, either by purchase or by lease, of physical facilities required to accommodate the increasing inmate population. A study of the present inmate population in our institutions indicates that an overpopulation condition exists in the institutions of maximum and medium security degrees. In these types of institutions in the west there is an actual shortage of close to 200 cells. However, the same study reveals that there are still available some 90 cells in minimum security institutions.

Because of the time period required to make maximum and medium security facilities available either by construction or by acquisition, which cannot be made available before the next year at least, it is urgent that consideration be given to the conversion of the William Head institution from a minimum security institution to a medium security institution in order to satisfy the present needs of the Canadian penitentiary service. From experience, minimum security institutions such as community correctional centres and minimum security correctional camps can be made available more rapidly, that is, within a matter of months.