

*Minister's Statement on Penitentiaries*

We are conscious of the fact that some of our inmates are dangerous and we do intend to protect society against them.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind hon. members that these are objectives towards which we strive and we realize that it will take time before the fundamental changes are implemented.

Bearing this in mind we intend to develop a mechanism for consultation with the provinces in order to improve greatly the Canadian penitentiary system.

[English]

**Mr. Eldon M. Woolliams (Calgary North):** Mr. Speaker, this is an important subject because we are dealing with a class of people in Canada, if they might be categorized in that way, who do not have the right to exercise their franchise. They are the only class of Canadians, apart from the judiciary who are independent of our democratic institutions, who have all the qualifications but who, because they happen to run afoul of the law, are incarcerated and cannot really speak in this place or in a community through the ballot box.

The minister presented a lengthy statement. He has taken almost thirty minutes. I will try to keep my speech short but there are some things that I think should be answered. I repeat that if any subject is important in this House this one is, and we discuss many subjects at length. The fact is that there are approximately 7,000 or 8,000 people right now in the penitentiaries of Canada, some of whom are young men and women who do not have the right to express themselves through the ballot box.

I have read carefully during the lunch hour the nine page statement of the Solicitor General with reference to penal reform and corrections. Many of the items contained in the report have been recommended by this party. I hope this statement involves not a question of propaganda, not a question of words but is rather an indication of some action to relieve the situation.

The minister says that reforms are undertaken on the basis of two essential principles. One, he says, is that the inmate is always a citizen who sooner or later will return to a normal life in our society and is basically entitled to retain his human dignity and have his rights as a citizen respected by us to the largest extent. First of all, I want to congratulate the minister for realizing at last that crime is not just a sordid happening but rather a result of human behaviour brought about by our economic and social conditions which we have failed to change.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, Hear!

**Mr. Woolliams:** For years we have pushed for and supported a system of penal reform. We have pushed and fought for a more modern idea of institutions. We have fought against the unnecessary use of maximum security institutions where the lock, the key and isolation were the letter of rehabilitation and retribution was the reason for punishment.

• (2:30 p.m.)

During my 27 years of experience at the bar and in my time as a member of the House of Commons I have visited most of the penal institutions in the country. If institutions are to be used at all, Mr. Speaker, and I have questioned

[Mr. Goyer.]

that throughout my career, I point out that we in this party have fought for the use of more medium and minimum security institutions which would better serve the average incarcerated person who has been convicted of a crime for which the code by law requires the imposition of a lengthy prison sentence.

We have fought for an extension of the concept of parole under which persons could be granted wider and more humane privileges, that would permit persons in penitentiaries to attend outside educational institutions instead of remaining confined in prisons where loneliness and crime prevail, remaining in institutions which are merely crime factories manufacturing more criminals rather than dealing with persons who could and can be rehabilitated. We have fought for a wider system of parole under which a person could either remain in custody overnight and by day attend the ordinary schools in the community or be given freedom to remain out on parole during the period when he is acquiring training and education to prepare him to return to society.

We have asked for more psychologists and psychiatrists. There are not enough psychologists and psychiatrists serving penal institutions. There should be greater availability for persons convicted to obtain this kind of technical psychological psychiatry, to make certain they receive the emotional and mental treatment necessary for their rehabilitation.

I hope the minister realizes that crime is not only the fault of the prisoner but the fault of society as well. Everyone is born as clean as a white piece of paper. It is society that creates the environment which leads to crime. I respect the minister's enlightened views in this field, but in light of the discovery yesterday that employees of Statistics Canada are to be fingerprinted and photographed for security reasons I wonder whether his views will be translated into action.

This is a complex problem. On the one hand we find that the minister is imposing restrictions on Canadians, and on the other hand that he is stressing the rehabilitation of the individual rather than the protection of society. It is not clear to me which priority is uppermost in the minister's mind. It is also not clear to me why there should even be a conflict between the two.

The Solicitor General (Mr. Goyer) has pointed out that at least 80 per cent of the inmates of penal institutions can be rehabilitated. But the important statistic is that which shows that 80 per cent of those people who have been incarcerated in prisons are returned to those same institutions for committing other crimes.

I put this on the highest level, Mr. Speaker, because we are dealing with a matter which is above politics. We need reforms. All of this appears to be contained in the minister's statement. But is it a matter of words or a matter of action? Can the 7,000 or 8,000 prisoners in Canada turn over tonight in their little cots in the loneliness of their cells and say: Something is going to be done for us; things will be better for us in the future. We must be prepared to spend money on reform. It is all right to talk, but we must be prepared to spend money if we are actually to get reform.

Prisons create for the individual an atmosphere of fear, of violence, in which the problems created by lack of