

*Penitentiaries Committee*

suggest this would be the best possible way to deal with the questions at hand. We would then be studying this problem on a continuing basis and continuity would be established in successive sessions. I ask the minister to take this suggestion into consideration. I also ask hon. members to consider my suggestion when placing their views before the house.

I believe that the adoption of this suggestion would expedite the formation of the committee and dealing with the work at hand. As I say, Mr. Speaker, we agree with the need, we agree with the objectives, and we are interested in seeing the committee get to work at a very early date.

**Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few brief words in support of the motion. We do not think it is so much the name of the committee that is important as the authority of the committee, its responsibilities and the fervour with which the committee members prosecute the responsibility given to them.

• (7:10 p.m.)

If we hark back a couple of years we find the origin of this proposal. At that time the hon. member for Danforth (Mr. Scott), the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) and I took occasion to make a number of rather dramatic visits to that hell hole in Montreal, St. Vincent de Paul penitentiary. This visit caused such public concern that the then minister of justice and the then minister of public works, Mr. Deschatelets, paid an unprecedented ministerial visit to St. Vincent de Paul with an entourage of some 50 or 60 newspapermen, radio and television men, complete with cameras, recording equipment and the like. One of the officials of the penitentiaries branch with whom I spoke said that some of his predecessors would turn over in their graves if they knew this were happening.

It was following that visit by the then minister of public works and the then minister of justice, and following upon our persistent demands for a parliamentary committee to inquire into the whole situation, that an announcement was made that there were going to be two committees. One would be a committee of experts which would look into the sociological and penological aspects of our penal system and the other a parliamentary committee which would look into the state of the penitentiaries. This presumably refers to the physical facilities, the buildings and conditions. The Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell)

nods his head in assent that this is a correct interpretation of the word "state".

We are of the opinion that the committee should not look at the word "state" in the narrow sense of merely going around peering in corners to see whether or not they have been swept out or ascertaining the size of cells, what sort of facilities exist for segregation and the like. The committee should concern itself with the use to which these facilities are being put. There is not much sense in examining a cell to ascertain its dimensions and its sanitary facilities, because a person will be locked up in that cell. There is not much sense just looking at the physical aspects of penitentiaries unless the committee also concerns itself with what is going to happen to the individual who is in that cell once he is released. I think that in this sense the construction of the motion is lacking.

I am afraid there will be a tendency to look purely at the physical state and condition of the penitentiaries rather than looking at the after effects of incarceration. For years we have had the cycle of arrest, conviction, incarceration and release. Upon release the person has been in the position of starting the cycle all over again. History has proven that it does not really matter what the state of the penal institution is because people still manage somehow or other to get into it. As so-called civilized people we deplore the state of some of our prisons. We think that sanitary facilities are not what they should be. We concern ourselves about the paint, the calcimine, the white-wash, whether the bars are shining, whether the clothes are suitable, whether the food is good, whether the shoes are satisfactory, but we do not concern ourselves with what happens to the individual once he walks out through the gates. The whole emphasis of any study of our penitentiary system must be on this point, to ensure that we are doing as much as we possibly can to see that the human being we lock up in a cell is treated as a human being. The state of the cell really does not matter, although our sensitivities may be offended, because we should concern ourselves with assuring that everything possible is done to give the man the best possible chance of not returning.

This is the point with which the committee should concern itself. This should be the mental orientation of every member of that committee regardless of the fact that it is set up merely to consider the physical facilities that exist. I urge upon all the members of this committee, and I say this because of my