

Capital Punishment

● (1130)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT**ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON REINSTATEMENT**

Hon. George Hees (for the Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council) moved:

That this House supports, in principle, the reinstatement of capital punishment and directs that a special committee on reinstatement, composed of 15 members, be established, hold hearings and make its final report to the House no later than three (3) months following the adoption of this motion, such report to provide recommendations on:

(a) which offence or offences should carry the death penalty, and in what circumstances;

(b) which method or methods should be used to carry out the penalty of death, and in what circumstances;

That, pursuant to Standing Order 107(1), this special committee be hereby appointed as the committee to prepare and bring in a bill no later than three months following the adoption of this motion, founded on the committee's recommendations on (a) and (b) above; such a bill shall be the object of a separate and distinct report of the special committee, and such a report shall be its final report;

That such bill, when reported from such special committee to the House, be deemed pursuant to Standing Order 107(1) to have been introduced and stand on the Order Paper, in the name of the special committee chairman, for first reading at the next sitting of the House; and that subsequent House stages of the bill be considered under "Government Orders", with the bill standing under the heading "Government Business"; and that, when the said bill has been read a second time, it shall stand referred to a Legislative Committee;

That the Striking Committee be empowered to name the Members of the special committee, provided that once the Striking Committee report is laid upon the Table, it shall be deemed concurred in;

That the special committee have the power to sit while the House is sitting and during periods when the House stands adjourned;

That the special committee be empowered to report from time to time and send for persons and papers, and to print such papers and evidence from time to time as may be ordered by the committee and to retain the services of expert, technical, professional and clerical staff;

That the special committee be empowered to adjourn from place to place inside Canada and that, when deemed necessary, the appropriate staff accompany the committee;

That a quorum of the special committee be eight (8) members for any vote, resolution or other decision; and that the chairman be authorized to hold meetings to receive evidence and authorize the printing thereof whenever six (6) members are present;

That any substitution of membership on the special committee be made pursuant to Standing Order 94(4); and

That, notwithstanding the usual practices of this House, if the House is not sitting when the special committee is ready to issue its final report and the said bill, the special committee shall present its report and the bill to the House by filing them with the Clerk of the House provided that the report shall then be deemed to have been laid upon the Table, and the bill shall then be deemed, pursuant to Standing Order 107(1), to have been introduced at the first sitting of the House thereafter and to stand on the Order Paper in the name of the special committee chairman, for first reading at the next sitting of the House; and that subsequent House stages of the bill be considered under "Government Orders", with the bill standing under the heading "Government Business".

Mr. Doug Lewis (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and President of the Privy Council): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy

Prime Minister to lead off the debate on this issue of national importance. I would point out that this is not a government initiative *per se*; the Government neither supports nor opposes the reinstatement of capital punishment. A vote will not be considered a matter of confidence and each Member of the Progressive Conservative Party will be free to vote as he or she chooses on the motion.

In opening the debate it is important that I take some time to explain the background of the debate, the timing of it, the motion, and the process, as well as to present briefly my own point of view as a Member of Parliament. Those members from all sides who follow me will spend far more time than I on the pros and cons of the issue.

The death penalty was abolished in 1976 after a long and, by all accounts, bitter debate in Parliament. Capital punishment was replaced with a mandatory life sentence with no parole for 25 years in the case of first degree murder. However, debate has continued in the country as to whether or not capital punishment should be reinstated. The proponents are concerned that deterrence and protection are not being adequately served under the present law. The opponents continue to argue that capital punishment is not a deterrent. There is a considerable body of public opinion on both sides of the issue.

During the 1984 election campaign, our Government made the commitment to a debate in the House of Commons. Further, the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) made the commitment that there would be no Party line on this issue, that it would be a free vote. The commitment made by our Government was to bring the issue forward for debate during our mandate as a Government.

The House will know that when we took office in September, 1984, Canada was faced with a multitude of social and economic problems, with a complete breakdown of federal-provincial relations and with a deterioration in relations with our neighbour and largest trading partner, the United States. It would have been irresponsible to have proceeded with this debate prior to a resolution or at least a commencement to the solutions of these important problems. We have, fortunately, made considerable progress.

On the economic side we have created jobs in record numbers. Our emphasis as a Government on training and retraining has given hundreds of thousands of Canadians more job opportunities. Government spending has been reduced. Our attack on the deficit is continuing. Naturally, Mr. Speaker, we do not claim complete victory; there are still regional disparities and there is much to be done but we have made a start.

On the social front, we have passed tougher laws for impaired driving and prostitution. We have made divorce easier when marriages have broken down. Equality legislation, plus an aggressive appointment criteria have profoundly increased the opportunities and the influence of Canadian women. Parliamentary reform has increased the influence of the individual Member of Parliament. We have worked hard