

Amendments Respecting Death Sentence

look at it in this context. I should like to say to my hon. friend from Winnipeg South Centre that his concern about our position reminds me of a Presbyterian being concerned because a Mohammedan is not reading the Koran. It is up to each of us to decide what is logical for himself. I make the plea to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, to the hon. member for Calgary North (Mr. Harkness) and others, that they realize that this proposition which we have before us tonight is one more step along the road toward getting rid of capital punishment. I think therefore it is a good step, and that those of us who may wish to go further should support this bill without any question.

In the same context I should like to say a word or two in reply to those who have argued that the government had no right to bring this measure back to parliament only a year and a half after it had been dealt with here in the House of Commons. I should like to say quite frankly that I take the opposite view. I believe the government not only had the right but the responsibility to bring this question back. Some hon. members, particularly those on the majority side of the question a year and a half ago, have argued that that vote settled the question. I should like hon. members to look at the motion that was voted on, and then answer the question: What did it settle? It was not a piece of legislation; it was a resolution by four private members which expressed the hope that such and such would be done. The house did not go along with that opinion and did not agree that a change in the law should be made. That is all that can be said for that vote. We did not decide to make a change.

In the meantime, in this country we have had in power a government which holds certain views on this matter. I happen to agree with those views and happen to be glad that death sentences have been commuted. We have in this country what is known as responsible government. When there is responsible government the government is supposed to find out whether it has the endorsement of parliament for what it is doing. The present government feels that capital punishment is something it does not wish to carry out. That being the case, and since there has not been a clear decision on this issue, I think the government not only had the right but the responsibility to bring this matter back to parliament and obtain a decision on its own proposition. It is, of course, a compromise. I believe the Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell) was perfectly correct in

[Mr. Knowles.]

saying that as a compromise it lacks certain logic. It was difficult for him as an abolitionist to put it forward, but if it is a workable and enforceable compromise, surely it is better than the position we have been in.

Mr. Mongrain: Would the hon. member allow a question? What in his opinion would be a clear decision? He has just mentioned that there was no clear decision. What would be a clear decision of parliament on this question?

Mr. Knowles: I made that statement because the motion which was before us a year and a half ago was in the name of four private members and it contained the words which are always contained in a private member's motion, to the effect that in the opinion of this house such and such be done. It was not actual legislation. Motions of that type when passed do not make a clear-cut decision; legislation does. I believe this legislation, if passed, will contain a clearcut decision. It is precisely because that decision was not clearcut a year and a half ago, precisely because the government differs from the majority and because the government wishes guidance and wishes an understanding on the part of the house concerning its position, that it has both the right and the responsibility to bring this matter back to parliament in the form of actual legislation such as we now have before us.

Mr. Churchill: Would the hon. member permit another question? My question is supplementary to the one which was asked and answered a moment or two ago. What does the hon. member say about the position taken by the Prime Minister in the speech from the throne of January, 1966, when he indicated that the subject matter of capital punishment would be before the house for decision so that—he used these words—the matter might be settled once and for all? The resolution was brought forward by representatives of the various parties in the house and despite the fact that it was a private member's resolution it was in response to the Prime Minister's suggestion in the speech from the throne that it be done in that way. A decision of the house was made, but it was not once and for all.

Mr. Knowles: Mr. Speaker, there are many things in the course of human development which just do not become settled once and for all. We are not that kind of society. I realize this is perhaps difficult for me to say, when I happen to think as I do, but the road