

### *Capital Punishment*

ment, as well as the state of California which recently reinstated capital punishment. I am somewhat at a disadvantage, being almost the last person to speak on the subject before we are called upon to stand and be counted. All has been said. Even though the galleries are filled with spectators tonight and one is tempted to repeat what has already been said, I will refrain from doing that.

At the outset, I would like to say that I have not heard one speaker who would not much rather abolish capital punishment. However, many of my colleagues are attaching a number of conditions to this luxury. Some of these conditions are worth repeating. My colleagues in the House are saying, "Remove the threat of murder; remove the fear of war; remove the fear that whole generations of young people could be destroyed by some drug that someone may be pushing; remove the terrible, agonizing pain of a mother whose child has been raped, and remove the fear and devastating effect it has on a human being when he is deprived of the freedom to enjoy the accomplishments of a lifetime, or when the goods he has acquired are destroyed or taken from him—then we will fight until we have no breath left in our bodies, to abolish capital punishment."

● (2100)

Because as a child, I can truthfully say, I witnessed almost all of those things I have talked about, I have listened to or read with great interest the comments my colleagues have advanced, and I must say that at times those comments were not made from the heart. I am not being critical of any party in particular. All of us are guilty of that. I am not critical, because many of the things about which I have spoken need to be experienced to be fully understood.

For example, one has to experience the pain it is to be poor in a rich country in order to understand and support some of the social advances which are being made and some of the ideas which certain of our colleagues are putting forward in this field. One has to be old in order to understand how devastating it is to be poor as an old person. And many of my colleagues are not old. Some of my colleagues have made speeches with their lips only, probably to explain their concern to the press and people back home, because the people back home are very concerned—all of us know that—and they are watching us closely because they look on us as the government, as the leaders in charge of the situation upon whom all depends in times of disaster.

They look upon us as the guardians of all that is held true, all that is worth writing down, all that is worth saying and all that is worth doing. These people have been watching us making deals with various groups of people, some of them criminals. They have watched us being pushed into a corner by elements which are threatening to destroy our system from the outside. It is these people who wonder just how secure our system is.

My colleagues who have held referendums, who have questioned their constituents as I have, know what the people want, and some of them have used this debate to justify their own positions. They have tried to use arguments; indeed, they have invented arguments such as, "We shall not call it capital punishment, but murder punishable by death, or, "We would vote to abolish capital pun-

ishment if we could be sure that the prisoner would be locked up for life and the keys thrown away." What a barbaric way to treat a human being! It is true, though, that the prisoners we lock up in jail today are better off than some people who are living under stumps and in snow huts in our country. They say they would vote for the death penalty if the murderer, the guilty person, could be shot instead of hanged, or if the murderer were gassed, cremated or, maybe, drowned. This they say, would be more humane.

Mr. Speaker, all these things have been tried individually and in mass operation ever since the world began. People have been executed by every society in the world as far back as man can remember. The cave man executed anyone who invaded his cave or challenged his seniority over his woman. In our own lifetime we have witnessed executions, singular or en masse, for crimes that have not even seen a court. It happens all over the world. Yet it is significant that not one of my colleagues—not a single one—is in favour of capital punishment if—and this is a big "if"—the reason which prompts society to take this drastic step could somehow be removed.

Mr. Speaker, I shall be very brief. I do not wish to say the last word on this subject; I do not think I have the right. There are signs all over the world that this is actually happening—that the need for society to take this drastic step will be removed. As we become masters of the universe we shall become masters of ourselves. Such is the faith I have in humanity. We shall learn to understand what sickness it is that drives men to commit capital crimes. We shall learn how to cure—yes, how to prevent such a disease—as we advance, continuing the pace of our advance in the last 50 years. The world population will advance to a point at which this is possible. I will go even further. I predict that this evolution will take place within the next 50 to 75 years; we shall understand so much about the human body and the human brain that we will be able to prevent these things.

I believe that some of my colleagues are ahead of their time. They have achieved this intellectual status now. They are ahead of their constituents and they ought to follow their own consciences. They are not only ahead on this subject but in the application of some of the other things with which this House concerns itself. Our social laws are, to my thinking, too far advanced in some areas. They say they do know better than the people they represent, and I agree. But until all people, not only Canadians and those living in the western world, have had a chance to evolve to the same extent intellectually as some of my colleagues, the abolition of capital punishment is premature. It is a luxury. I say that, and I sincerely believe it, and all my colleagues believe it. It is a luxury we cannot afford at this time. Until we have mastered all the things I have talked about we must, as those charged with the responsibility of protecting those in our care, discharge our duty.

**Mr. Kenneth J. Higson (Lincoln):** Mr. Speaker, it is a distinct honour and great privilege for me to rise in this chamber to speak for the first time on behalf of the people of the constituency of Lincoln, which riding is in the heart of the Niagara peninsula in the province of Ontario.

[Mr. Oberle.]