

*Capital Punishment*

have a higher responsibility to the law abiding citizens of Canada than to those who take the law in their own hands.

Our responsibility is all the greater in that we cannot pass the buck along to someone else, and wipe our hands of the unpleasant duty of making a firm decision on this matter. The buck stops right here. It is an awesome responsibility to have to assume the responsibility of deciding whether or not a person convicted of deliberate, premeditated murder, should pay with his or her own life. I have never pretended that it is easy to say simply that someone or other must die by order of a court, and ultimately by order of the parliament of Canada.

We can make it easy though, if we want to, Mr. Speaker; we can say that state-ordered executions are murders in themselves, and pass the buck along to our courts, our prison system, our parole boards and along to the sociologists and criminologists and the rest of the bleeding hearts. We can wash our hands of this matter easily enough, and in fact the cabinet has been doing just that since the majority of members in this House decided several years ago to adopt this government's compromise solution to the problem of capital punishment. We decided that only murderers of policemen or prison guards should suffer the death penalty, but although several death penalties have been imposed by our courts under that law, not a single penalty has been carried out. The cabinet has commuted every sentence imposed during that period.

I said that we could make it easy on ourselves by passing along the responsibility for making a decision on capital punishment, Mr. Speaker, but that is not the same as saying that we have a moral right to do so. We know that no one else will make a decision, even if we were able to give them the authority. We know that everyone else, except our courts, takes the easy way out by adopting the holier-than-thou position of opposing capital punishment on moral grounds. This great liberal morality does not extend to the victims of murderers, however; it extends only to the murderers, as though they suddenly become a part of some higher civilization, or a cult of people who are above the law and above the condemnation of the very society against which they have raised their hand.

I maintain that we cannot avoid the moral responsibility before us any longer, Mr. Speaker. We must make a decision without too much delay that we will not and cannot look upon deliberate and premeditated murder as anything but what it is. Wilful murder and treason against one's own country are capital crimes. The argument that a civilized and sophisticated society does not condone state-ordered executions does not hold water. As the member for Frontenac-Lennox and Addington (Mr. Alkenbrack) pointed out a few days ago in this House, a state that maintains a judiciary like ours, with its avenues of appeal and our reverence for justice, cannot commit murder.

Some people have used the argument that the state commits murder if it sentences its own citizens to death for capital crimes, but I consider that argument to be feeble and baseless. I consider it to be a cop-out. If the time comes when we consider murder and treason to be less than capital crimes, then I think that our days as a free and democratic country are numbered. When we decide that we do not want to fight back, that we do not consider it important to win the war that is being waged within our

country between the law abiding and the lawless, then this great country of ours from that time on will be less than great.

When we are elected to parliament, those who vote for us must surely believe that we are capable and competent, and that we have the courage to make decisions and stick by them, no matter how distasteful those decisions might be to us personally. Not all of the decisions that we make here can be entirely to our liking. The alternatives to avoiding unpleasant decisions usually are more unpleasant in the long haul, and this is one of the reasons I insist that capital crimes in our society must carry the death penalty. The alternative that has been proposed by the government, 25 years in prison, has already incurred the wrath of the do-gooders and the social experts. They say that this is just as inhuman and inhumane as the death penalty. They wonder out loud how any civilized society could even think of caging up one of its own citizens for 25 years. Of course, Mr. Speaker, none of these experts and bleeding hearts propose any credible alternatives to the death penalty, or to the longer prison sentence. The best they can do is to condemn our proposals, and renounce our decisions.

When this House adopted the government's compromise solution to the question of capital punishment, it was a trade-off. In place of abolition we adopted selective capital punishment for murderers of policemen and prison guards. This presumably satisfied the abolitionists and the retentionists as well. The abolitionists could feel satisfied that the majority of murderers would escape the noose, and that in the cases where the death penalty applied, there was always the possibility that the cabinet would commute the sentences of convicted murderers of police officers. They had everything going for them, including a justice minister who was a public-avowed abolitionist.

On the other hand, the retentionists believed that the government would live up to the mandate of parliament. We believed that the government would honour their own commitment to execute convicted murderers of policemen and prison guards in exchange for this limited application of capital punishment. The fact is that they did not live up to their mandate from parliament, and they did not honour their own commitment. We have de facto abolition of capital punishment, and this speaks louder than anything else I can think of against the conscience of this government.

● (1140)

The trade off did not work, except to get the Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) and the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) off the hook. I have always maintained that we do not have a moral right to engage in trade offs on an issue as important to our society as capital punishment. We have a moral responsibility to face this issue head on, and if we are called to make an unpleasant decision or if we are called upon to decide that persons convicted of a deliberate murder should pay with their own lives, then we must do that and live with our decision. It would take a lot more courage to do that than just to pass the buck along, but I hope that we possess that much courage.

During the years that the capital punishment issue has been before parliament many members have suggested