tion and the actions of individuals on the treasury benches, if the Prime Minister or other senior ministers have the personal persuasion that total abolition is right, no cabinet minister is going to make an issue of a matter which, if his views were to prevail, would mean the death of an individual. There are far better grounds for dissent than that.

I do not think there is any member of this House or many people in this country who, as a matter of principle and after consideration, would go to a showdown vote in order to execute a man if there should be a change in the law. One reason for using the royal prerogative is the view of the Prime Minister, whoever he may be at the time, and we have had a succession of abolitionists at all times. I find it uncomfortable that odd kinds of pressure of a political nature can be brought to bear in any case. There is a political aura or atmosphere that applies in the final determination of the exercise of the royal prerogative. This makes me uncomfortable, because whether a man shall die or not usually depends upon the political situation.

Earlier this afternoon I said that I very much doubted that with the cabinet we had in October, November and December of 1970 at the time of the Quebec unrest, when a brave stand was taken by this government in invoking the War Measures Act, anyone involved in a killing during that crisis would have benefited from the royal prerogative. The situation has now changed. There have been appeals, and so on, and we do not know how these cases are going to turn out. I will not comment on them because they are still subject to appeal. However, that is the wrong type of influence that can apply in the exercise of the royal prerogative.

● (2010)

I do not know what the ultimate answer might be. Perhaps we should return to the days when the royal prerogative was used sparingly and in appropriate cases; it then had much greater value. To my mind, the royal prerogative has been abused and as a result it has become somewhat meaningless. One could say it has been used as a device to bring in the abolition of capital punishment by the back door. If there is to be abolition it ought to be as a result of a decision of Parliament.

Let us approach the issue in a straightforward manner. Then, I am sure, if the majority is in favour of abolition everyone will accept the decision. I am not in favour of abolition, but if that is the will of parliament I will certainly accept it as I have accepted other legislation passed by the House over the last 16 years which I have not greeted with much enthusiasm. However, since it was passed by majority decision in a democratic country, one accepts these things and loyally tries to fulfil the law.

I know that many of my hon. friends wish to speak on this subject. I will say, in resumé, that I do not believe a case has been made out for an extension of the moratorium. Certainly there is much need for us to spend our time on other and more important business. Again, I do not favour what one might describe as the spurious nod or bow toward abolition which is embodied in the present bill. Either the government should have the courage of its convictions in applying the moral and logical principle of abolition, or it should abandon many of its present arguments. I do not agree with those arguments, but I certainly support the right of others to hold those views—and they hold them strongly. But let us bring them out in clearcut fashion, not in a crablike, sideways fashion. What I did five years ago with regard to the bill then presented, I propose to do with the bill before us now. I do not think it should go any further.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, if I were an abolitionist I could not support the bill before us as it would retain the death penalty for certain crimes. Those who in conscience are against any form of capital punishment should reread the bill before voting on it this coming Tuesday. Indeed, I would urge them to read it and then ask themselves whether in all conscience they, as abolitionists, can support it.

As a retentionist, I cannot support the bill on second reading, which is agreement in principle. In my view the bill is too limited in its definition of murders punishable by death. Should the bill carry, however, I hope to be able to propose certain amendments which, if adopted, would widen the number of cases in which murder would be punishable by the loss of the offender's life. Later I intend to outline in more detail the nature of my suggested amendments in that respect.

First, let me summarize my position on this measure, one which causes a great deal of concern to many people including myself. I am pleased that 89 speakers have already taken part in the debate, including the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) and the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) who is sponsoring the bill. These speeches have given me the opportunity to review the thrust of the arguments put forward by those who support this legislation and those who oppose it.

One might ask whether, as the ninetieth speaker on the subject, there is anything left for me to say. I am sure there is a great deal to be said. The sponsor of this bill, the Solicitor General, and his leader, the Prime Minister, are abolitionists. Their speeches are quite clear on this point. Yet they wish parliament to accept a bill which is retentionist to at least a limited extent. Read the speech of the Prime Minister and then try to justify his support for the bill as an abolitionist.

The fact is this: what is taking place is a sham. Let us judge the government on its record. No one has been executed in this country since 1962, yet many have been convicted of murder and sentenced to be hanged. All sentences have been commuted by this government or its predecessor. In fact, on one day in 1968, January 4, they commuted 18 death sentences. Is it just coincidence that the amendments to the Criminal Code which provided for the death penalty in circumstances similar to those outlined in the bill now before us came into force on December 29, 1967? This was six days prior to the 18 commutations.

Is it not fair to suggest that those in the government at that time who supported the bill in the House in November and December, 1967, deliberately delayed commuting the sentences so that their action would not influence the passage of that bill through the House? I am suggesting