

waffled on the issue. They have not demonstrated to the people in their ridings that they have a firm and true conviction regarding where they stand on this issue. Indeed, the record shows that there are those who stand squarely in the middle of the fence, and I only hope that the fence is a picket fence.

I was particularly impressed by the contribution to this debate of the hon. member for Pembina (Mr. Elzinga). In the brief period that this member has been in the House of Commons much of what he has said has made not only good sense but good reading. The hon. member happens to be a retentionist, and although I am quite prepared to speak favourably on behalf of any member who may support the other point of view, I just wish to go on record as saying that I have been particularly impressed with his contribution.

I should also like to single out for special mention the contribution made by the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles), the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling), and also the very singular and dedicated manner in which the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta (Mr. Reynolds) has conducted the fight for those who, like myself, firmly believe in the retention of capital punishment.

I recognize that members on both sides are most anxious to see this debate come to a conclusion. Frankly, I do not believe that anything I have said, or for that matter anything many other members have said on this side, is going to change the thinking of any other member of the House; indeed I would be surprised if it did. But at least, Mr. Speaker, the people of Canada know where I stand; the people of Canada know where we all stand.

Mr. Peter Elzinga (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, prior to getting into my comments I should like to pay special tribute to the member who has just concluded his remarks on third reading of this very important piece of legislation, the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Brisco). In regard to this issue and in regard to the majority of issues on which he has shared his views with the House, he has always given an extremely fair analysis. I am sure the constituents of Kootenay West are truly proud of him and happy to have him represent them in this chamber.

Since I spoke on this issue when it was before the House on second reading, my remarks will be extremely brief. I should like to go back to what I said on second reading when I questioned the about-face of the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. I asked the minister whether he would be kind enough to explain to this House and to his constituents what prompted him suddenly to support abolition when at every other time he had supported retention in this chamber. To this date, Mr. Speaker, he has not shared that information with us, and that is his right. But I think we also have an obligation to share our views and concerns with the country as a whole.

I believe that if this piece of legislation is passed tomorrow in this chamber, it will truly be a sad day for Canada. I say that because in essence what it will mean is that the government has demonstrated there is no such thing in Canada as participatory democracy. I think surveys have indicated that close to 75 percent to 80 per cent of the Canadian people are in favour of capital punishment. I ask

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the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) what makes him feel that his conscience is so much wiser than the collective conscience of his constituents. It will indeed be a sad day for participatory democracy in this country; it will take us back into the dark ages when we almost lived under a dictatorship.

Those members who support the abolitionist stance say the reason they do so is that the country will be totally abolitionist. If this bill passes, Mr. Speaker, Canada will still not have total abolition. I had hoped to be recognized today during the question period to ask the defence minister whether he could give the House any indication of what the government's plans are regarding the introduction of amendments to the National Defence Act. As I understand it, this act presently provides capital punishment for 36 offences, some of them as strange as an individual getting drunk on watch. We will not have total abolition, since these provisions are still contained in the National Defence Act. I would appreciate very much some indication from the government side of the House as to what the government's plans are in this area, whether changes are planned or whether we are going to have a certain segment of our society that has a special responsibility to Canada, in a sense discriminated against; a situation where for the ordinary citizen there will be total abolition, but for military personnel there will not.

Let me conclude by emphasizing once again that if this bill passes tomorrow, it will be just one more sign that this government has no concern for the will and wishes of the people of Canada—and that will be a sad day for participatory democracy.

Hon. Robert Stanbury (York-Scarborough): Mr. Speaker, four times since I have been a member of this House the subject of the death penalty has been debated in this chamber. Until now, on each occasion I have, for one reason or another, not been able to participate in the debate, even though on the first occasion I was one of the movers of a tripartite resolution for abolition during my earliest days as a freshman member. Therefore, I welcome this opportunity to speak briefly and to state my position in what I hope sincerely will be the last and decisive debate on this subject in this parliament.

● (1620)

My concern about the death penalty extends back not only a decade but goes back about 30 years to the time when, as a teenager, I took time off high school to attend the first murder trial I have witnessed. It was a trial of a very poor, friendless man who was accused of a very heinous crime, the killing of a young girl and the disposal of her body in a furnace. It could hardly have been a more horrible crime or one calling more for the ultimate penalty. The accused was convicted, and he was executed. Only a few months after his execution it became apparent that his defence was entirely inadequate, if not incompetent, and there was grave doubt about his guilt. From that day forward I have been asking myself what possible rationale there could be for such an irrevocable penalty in our law. Whatever the arguments for capital punishment, and there have been many persuasive ones put forward in this House, we must bear in mind that the death penalty is the one penalty that is irrevocable. There is no way we can