

Capital Punishment

his family as anyone else is dear to theirs. It is all very well to show leniency but what about the victims?

I am against abolition. I would go so far as to substitute the gas chamber for the gallows but that is as far as I would go.

Mr. Speaker, that was the view I expressed the other evening and that is the view I hold tonight.

Miss Margaret Aitken (York-Humber): Mr. Speaker, I am supporting this bill because I believe the time has come when parliament must give the lead in abolishing our barbarous punishment of hanging. I feel it is a very good thing that parliament is going to have an extended debate on this important and complex question. I must confess I was somewhat surprised that the hon. member for Richelieu-Vercheres (Mr. Cardin) should object to a private hon. member bringing in such an important bill although perhaps I should not be surprised because I know that in the days when the hon. member sat as a backbencher on the government side he and his colleagues certainly were not permitted to play such an important role in parliament.

It is quite obvious that there are many hon. members in this house who feel hesitant about withdrawing the punishment of a life for a life. There are others who feel that we should go slowly in this matter. The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Browne) was adamant when he simply rejected all the arguments in favour of abolition.

I do not feel that disposition of the matter is as simple as that. In the House of Commons there are 265 members representing roughly 17 million people. I am sure that what we are hearing in this debate is a reflection of the varying opinions held by these 17 million people. We are a cross-section of Canada and I believe it is a very good thing that all these opinions are being aired. If after this extended debate the majority decides that we should go slower in this matter and if it decides that we should accept one or other of the other bills relating to this subject I will certainly support that decision because I believe that every step toward the abolition of capital punishment is a forward step.

At this time I should like to commend the *Ottawa Citizen* for the series of articles it recently published on this subject. I read every one of them with interest. They presented the viewpoints of many people, mostly experts on the subject. They were as varied as the opinions we have heard in this debate. I must say, however, I read all of the articles and still emerged feeling that we in Canada have reached the time when we should abolish capital punishment.

As I mentioned in a previous debate on this subject last year in this house, the deterrent effect of capital punishment has had a

great influence in my thinking. I served as a member of the joint parliamentary committee which was established, I believe, in 1954, and which sat for two years studying this whole problem. I listened to the testimony given by law enforcement officers from our police and prisons. Generally speaking they claimed that capital punishment was a deterrent.

On the other hand in volume 1 of the committee proceedings at page 605 there appears testimony presented by representatives of the John Howard society which also is an authoritative voice in this area. The society through its representatives stated that four types of people commit murders; the insane, the emotionally overwrought—this condition induced by alcohol or natural causes—the calculating, self-centred egoist and the professional gunman. Officials of the John Howard society claim that the normal shackles of any restraint are absent in regard to the first two categories, the insane and emotionally overwrought. As for the third and fourth categories, the calculating, self-centred egoist and the professional gunman, they have no intention of being caught. They consider themselves smarter than the police and therefore entertain no thought of being caught. No thought of any punishment is a deterrent.

I am one of those who believes—and this despite some of the man-made tragedies of the past three decades—that the world is becoming more civilized and I think capital punishment is too barbarous a practice for a civilized nation to continue. I should like to see Canada take a lead in this civilizing force and one way we can do that is by abolishing the outrageous punishment of hanging.

In all my searching for an answer to this question the deterrent effect has always weighed heavily. I agree with those who say that our law-abiding society must be protected. I believe that those who do commit murders should be confined to prison, that we must take the murderers out of circulation. One eminent law enforcement authority who believes in capital punishment admits that the deterrent effect is a matter of opinion. In an interview Colonel L. H. Nicholson, former Royal Canadian Mounted Police commissioner, had this to say:

The deterrent effect of capital punishment is a matter of opinion. I doubt if statistics can prove or disprove it.

It is his opinion that the threat of death does have a deterrent effect on the professional criminal, the holdup man or the man who robs with violence in any form. But murder is certainly not confined to professional criminals. I do not believe the threat