

Criminal Code

far beyond any imagination we had a few years ago. We are about to put a man on the moon, maybe quite a few of them. We are able to devise computers that can do our work for us and perhaps raise our standard of living. We are having a tremendous explosion of knowledge in the scientific field, in the humanities, in all areas of life.

This is a tremendous age. Sometimes it is pointed out that more is being discovered in our lifetime in terms of scientific knowledge and know-how than was achieved through all the eons of time since people came on this planet. Yet in the face of this explosion of knowledge, in the face of the tremendous capacity which the human race is developing, we say if we have a criminal in our midst all we can do is lock him up or if we have a murderer in our midst all we can do is get rid of him by the application of the death penalty.

I submit that this is not good enough for the human race in this day and age and this counsel of despair is a terrible indictment of our whole approach to the problem. So, Mr. Speaker, I take my stand with those who have come out unequivocally for the abolition of capital punishment. Like the Leader of the Opposition I feel there should be no exceptions but I am willing, and I suspect there are many who will agree with me, to try abolition for a five or ten-year period.

In actual practice we abolished capital punishment three and a half years ago and Canada's name is better because we have done so. If a trial period would make it a little easier I am sure there would be support for such an amendment. But if I may I should like to return to the statement I opened with by pointing out that for three and a half years we have had no hangings in Canada and in the years immediately prior to that we had very few.

The status quo in Canada is one in which capital punishment is just about abolished. This is not a debate to abolish capital punishment. This debate is on the question of whether or not we should go back to it. I submit that the onus of proof is not on the so-called abolitionists but on those who want us to go back to a barbaric practice. I hope in the light of all this we will realize that we have a chance to keep Canada moving forward, and it is for this reason I urge support for the motion for abolition.

[Translation]

Mr. Gaston Clermont (Labelle): Mr. Speaker, the subject matter of the resolution [Mr. Knowles.]

before us is very controversial. It has produced a long and heated discussion in which the participants have expressed divergent views.

When the time comes to put to a vote the resolution and the amendments, each hon. member will have to take his responsibilities, because the vote will be free. As for me, I want to start by saying that I am in favour of retaining the death penalty as prescribed by the Criminal Code.

Those who advocate the abolition of capital punishment bring forth various arguments, but I wish to consider only a few.

The first one is that the death penalty does not deter anybody from committing murder or has but a slight deterrent effect and that life imprisonment is just as effective.

In our society, Mr. Speaker, opinions are divided as to the deterrent value of capital punishment concerning murders. I do not think statistics can be used as an argument for or against.

Statistics lend themselves to various interpretations and cannot be depended upon. It is almost impossible to establish a useful comparison between countries because of differences in the legal definition of crimes, practices laid down in public administrations and the courts, methods for compiling criminal statistics, standards of morality and behaviour and finally political, economic and social conditions.

It is impossible to determine the number of people who are prevented from committing a crime by the fear of being hanged. They are careful not to admit it. In any case, such a confession would be suspect. Those are data which do not lend themselves to a valid evaluation. The severe application of the death penalty does not prevent of course the commission of all deliberate murders. That is because murderers count on their cleverness to escape either the police or a conviction because of insufficient evidence. That explains, Mr. Speaker, the trouble they go to not to be recognized. Caught red-handed, they kill the police officers who want to arrest them. In anticipation of criminal proceedings, they do not hesitate to murder witnesses who could have them convicted. That shows that they are terribly afraid of the death penalty.

The arguments which I found most conclusive come from the wishes expressed by most provincial attorneys general and by several authorities responsible for the enforcement of