

Capital Punishment

this House. We have been treated with contempt, and now we are being asked to go along with this very same policy for another five years. Mr. Speaker, if the federal government is determined to abolish the death penalty for all crimes, then why should we not debate that issue instead of taking part in what all of us know now to be a sham? We know and the government knows, that we are in effect avoiding the issue of abolition or retention of capital punishment. In a few days we are going to vote on a bill that says one thing and yet we know the government intends to do quite another, if we can go on the government's past performance. I think we can judge the government on its past performance in this area, Mr. Speaker, and I find it very disturbing.

I would have preferred the government to table a bill that sets out what the federal cabinet really wants, instead of asking this House to vote for or against something that does not even apply. If we say again to this government that we want murderers of policemen and prison guards executed upon conviction, can we be sure that our wishes will be carried out? I do not think so, Mr. Speaker. If we say by majority vote that we insist on the death penalty being applied for capital murder, can those who follow careers in our police departments and the penitentiary service be assured that they have our support in carrying out their duties? I do not think so, Mr. Speaker. How can they have any faith in our resolve to exact heavy punishment on capital murderers when the cabinet has allowed so many of them to escape the penalty?

We have a strange situation here, Mr. Speaker. Those who favour abolition of capital punishment will vote for this bill because it is the closest thing to abolition. Yet if they vote for this bill, and if the government discharges its responsibility under the terms of the bill, the abolitionists will be voting for capital punishment. On the other hand, if the federal cabinet follows its practice of commuting all death sentences for capital murder, the retentionists will in effect be voting for abolition. When viewed in that light I think we have the right to ask why the government did not table a bill that draws sharper lines of distinction.

It has been pointed out that in granting stays of execution the cabinet has not distinguished between those convicted of deliberate and brutal crimes and those who really had no intention of committing any crime as serious as murder. We all know that even in crimes of murder a case can sometimes be made for temporary insanity and for other circumstances that might influence juries in the favour of the accused. We also know that the ability of an accused to obtain the services of an experienced and talented criminal lawyer can weigh the scales in his favour.

It would follow that the government's policy of commuting all death sentences has the effect of providing those legal services to convicted murderers of policemen after the fact. The way it is now, a cop killer who is not successful in having his charge reduced to manslaughter would only have to bide his time. He would know that if he received the death penalty, he would in fact get a life sentence. I repeat, Mr. Speaker, this is mockery. If we do not say now that we really want abolition or retention of the death penalty, then we are all party to mockery. I say the government should have tabled a different type of bill

[Mr. Scott.]

altogether, instead of asking us to debate an issue that has been proved to be neither fish nor fowl.

I do not intend to repeat the passages from the Bible that are used by both the abolitionists and the retentionists in support of their views. It would only indicate that one man's interpretation of the passages would be as good as the next man's. However, I would like to say that it could hardly be considered Christian to put legislation before this parliament that in effect places the life of a murderer on a higher plane than that of his victim.

That is what we are really saying when we vote on a bill that will not have the effect of deterring people from cold-blooded, calculated murder. The victim of a murder is quickly forgotten by the general public, while the murderer gains public attention for months on end while his guilt is decided. If he is found guilty and sentenced to die, he is again made the subject of groups and individuals determined to see that justice is not done. The life of the convicted criminal becomes sacred, Mr. Speaker, while the victim is out of sight and out of mind. It is almost as if he did not even matter. The forgotten victim means a great deal to me, I cannot stand by silently while the natural order of things gets turned upside down by a government that tries to take the easy way out.

There might be some hope of salvaging something from the motion and the debate, Mr. Speaker, after the bill passes second reading and goes to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. Perhaps when we are able to have dialogue, in place of prepared statements, we will be able to put some safeguards into this bill for policemen and prison guards. Perhaps we will be able to put as many safeguards into the bill for the lives of potential victims of the murderers as we have placed in it for the lives of murderers.

The sanctity of human life is certainly a valid and acceptable argument for those who favour abolition of the death penalty, but it should not be used as a crutch by those who are only trying to avoid facing up to an unpleasant problem. I do not want to see it used as an excuse to avoid coming to grips with this serious problem and making a decision as to who we should be protecting.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, my sympathies are reserved first for the victims of crime. When I have exhausted my sympathy for the innocent victims of brutal, senseless crime, I will direct some to the criminals. However, I cannot accept the position that our responsibility today is to ensure that no person shall suffer the death penalty for deliberate, premeditated murder. My own responsibility is very clear; that is, to erect some sort of safeguards for law-abiding Canadian citizens against violence or loss of their lives and property. That is the issue I want to debate, Mr. Speaker, and I call on the government to table legislation that comes a lot closer to what we really want and what we should be trying to do.

● (2130)

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to take part in this debate on Bill C-2, I follow many members of this House who, I am sure, have done a lot of soul-searching and agonizing over their position in their concern to give leadership to the country and to represent