

Amendments Respecting Death Sentence

to the young man's or old man's life so that when he goes outside the prison walls he will be as close to a normal, happy, healthy Canadian as we can possibly make him. There is no longer any room for punishment for its own sake. The only excuse for punishment is to try to reform the man. In many cases society as a whole has been delinquent in this regard. Poverty is still with us and it is the chief cause of the downfall of these people.

• (3:10 p.m.)

Another point I would like to make, although it may sound as if I were straying from the subject, has to do with the sanctity of human life. Many hon. members will probably make reference to this. The sanctity of human life will be used in arguments both for and against capital punishment. One argument is to kill the killer and the other one is to let off the killer. In a week or two we will be debating the subject of the sanctity of human life in respect of abortion and we had better be careful that we are consistent. If killing is so terrible, this should be true both before and after birth. In my opinion, human life is important from beginning to end. I beg hon. members again to try to keep personalities out of this debate. I do not believe it helps the argument one bit if I disagree personally with any member in the government, in the opposition generally or in my own party. This question, I suppose, is a mixed question of law as we try to administer it and of our own consciences as we try to shape the law to bring about a happier, healthier human race.

Mr. B. S. Mackasey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, first of all I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Athabasca (Mr. Bigg) when he emphasizes the necessity in a matter of this seriousness of debating the point at issue rather than yielding to the temptation to take advantage of the debate for petty, partisan political purposes. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that all of us who participated in the discussion of this subject 18 months ago are aware that this is one of the more important debates that present members of parliament will be called upon to deal with. Since I am not a lawyer and my contact with people who have run afoul of the law has been rather remote and certainly infrequent, I have tried to listen to the arguments to see what, if anything, is new compared with the debate that took place a year ago. I found

[Mr. Bigg.]

that the debate is indeed following very predictable lines. I think this is not something to make us discouraged because students of many previous debates that have taken place not only in this house but in England and all the countries of the world throughout the decades have found that essentially the arguments for and against the abolition of the death penalty have been constantly repeated.

We all begin in as objective a manner as possible but eventually the debate assumes an emotional character. For instance, Mr. Speaker, there are always those who, in participating in such a debate, quote from the Bible. They ignore the fact that in a country such as Israel, which has closer ties with the Old and New Testaments than any other country, the death penalty has been long since abolished. They ignore the arguments or causes for the death penalty that appear in the Old and New Testaments, causes which were so eloquently put into the record by previous speakers.

There is an old saying, Mr. Speaker, that there are lies, liars and statisticians. During the debate last year, as well as in other debates I have read in the books available in the library, I have noticed a tendency to ignore statistics. Statistics are boring. They are of interest purely to the people who are involved in a way of life that makes statistics more important to them than to us. However, statistics play a very important role in Canadian society. The statistics which the Dominion Bureau of Statistics makes available periodically cover just about every aspect of our economic life, pattern our legislation, influence the public and denote friends.

I believe it is safe to say that one change today compared with 100 years ago is that statistical records are more meaningful today because statistics are carefully analysed in a much more scientific manner. This results primarily from the fact that we have much more sophisticated instruments at our disposal. I do not intend to take the time of the house by reminding hon. members of the modern means of communication at the disposal of our political scientists, criminologists and others who are particularly interested in this topic.

There were three speeches particularly, Mr. Speaker, that interested me. I have just mentioned the one by the previous speaker. Then there was the one made by the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Woolliams) and a third by the hon. member for Northumberland (Mr. Hees). I mention these two gentlemen in particular not because I have any