

*Criminal Code*

Last May I received a letter from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Veterans' Association containing a resolution urging the retention of capital punishment. Chief constables at one of their conventions recently have gone on record favouring the retention of the death penalty. The president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police in a letter to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Cardin), copies of which were received by all members of parliament, complained that death sentences imposed on three convicted murderers were commuted to life imprisonment.

In his submission the chief of the metropolitan Toronto police, who is the president of the association, pointed out that if the death penalty is not retained he expects to see a greater influx of international criminals who kill for pay. I do not wish to minimize either the danger or the effect on policemen, enforcement officers or jail guards in the discharge of their onerous duty of protecting the life and property of citizens, but I cannot sympathize with their view that only the execution of the death sentence is a deterrent to murder. I realize, of course, that by virtue of their training their attitude on this question is, not surprisingly, negative. However, I do agree that the penal code should be amended so that there will be an extension of detention to a specific number of years to give no hope of release, this being the best deterrent to murder.

Religious leaders of various denominations have gone on record as being opposed to the death penalty. As an example, the Canadian section of the Lutheran Church at one of their recent convocations passed a resolution urging the Canadian government to abolish capital punishment. The 19th general council of the United Church of Canada held in Edmonton expressed similar views, contending that the arguments advanced by those who support capital punishment as a deterrent are inconclusive. I received a petition signed by the parishioners of Broadway United Church, Fort William, expressing opposition to capital punishment and requesting my support for the abolition of the death sentence.

While I respect the views of those who hold the opinion that the death sentence is a restraining force against murder, the experience of other nations is such that it does not bear out their contention. For example, Luxembourg has had no death penalty since 1822, Belgium since 1863, Portugal since 1867, the Netherlands since 1870, and Italy since

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1890. Although it was restored in Italy during the Fascist regime it was again abolished in 1948. Norway has had no death penalty since 1905, Sweden since 1921, Denmark since 1930 and Switzerland since 1942. Eleven states of the United States have abolished capital punishment and one more, Texas, is currently taking positive action to abolish it. Why? Because suddenly public opinion has swung behind abolition.

Then there is a strong horror of executing innocent persons. Representative J. Charles Whitfield of Houston, Texas, an abolitionist, has recently pointed out that six men were executed in Texas who were not guilty. Last year the Senate and Assembly of the state of New York passed a bill abolishing capital punishment for most offences, reserving the extreme penalty for a person killing a person on duty or when a life convict commits a killing in prison or while trying to escape.

Centuries ago the death penalty was imposed for many different crimes which had nothing to do with murder. We have come a long way from the days when people were hanged for stealing a loaf of bread. Following those days the death penalty as a punishment was imposed for treason, rape, murder and a few other special crimes.

● (6:00 p.m.)

In recent years we have come to adopt a more civilized attitude. I was particularly interested in reading of the stand taken for the first time against the death penalty by the United States Department of Justice, under which the F.B.I. operates. In a letter to Congress last year the deputy attorney general declared himself against the death penalty. He said:

Modern penology with its correctional and rehabilitational skills affords far greater benefits to society than the death penalty which is inconsistent with its goals.

One other reason for a change of heart of those who once believed in capital punishment but who are being converted to the belief that capital punishment should be abolished is the tremendous influence of television programs such as "The Defenders" which has done much to educate the public as to the human errors that can occur in a trial. People are beginning to realize that an execution can occur before all the facts are known.

In 1949 a man by the name of Evans was hanged in London for the murder of his wife and child. Five years later a fellow by the name of Christie, living in an apartment in