

*Capital Punishment*

voice my opinion and to show that I am not unwilling to speak. You will agree with me that if we all did as some members who like to make speeches at every turn for the obvious purpose of being in the limelight and afterwards making the headlines in our newspapers, our proceedings would be interminable and the Canadian people would be waiting still longer for the beneficial legislation which the government would like to pass. Moreover, I am unhappy to have to deal with the same matter, that is the death penalty, for a third time in this House. I will not repeat my previous speeches.

On the previous occasions, I will frankly admit that I had been disturbed, not on account of a difference of opinions with a few colleagues but on account of my love for my fellow-being and my duty as a legislator which is to protect society and which drives me into a corner. It is like the surgeon who must decide to remove an organ or not to operate and run the risk of finding out later on that the disease will cause the death of his patient.

It is somewhat the same in society. The legislator must make decisions likely to please most people. In this case, it seems that the majority is in favour of retaining capital punishment. Why? Maybe through lack of information—I did not say “formation”.

The population at large would appreciate a little more security. A citizen would find comfort in knowing that his dear ones or himself will be not be attacked, beaten up, raped and killed. What happened since 1967, notwithstanding the provision to the effect that the murderer of a policeman or prison guard would be sentenced to the death penalty? I say, how many of these murderers have received this penalty? None so far. What can the abolitionists answer to this? Have they gone down in the street to inform the people, to explain their view concerning the reasons which have motivated the 1967 decision? Have they gone down in the street to listen to the opinion of the people? Certainly not.

In the course of the five years following the provisional abolition of the death penalty, statistics have kept on showing an upward trend concerning murders, even killings of policemen. Perhaps they will play on words saying that the population having increased, it is therefore normal that crime should increase. Let us be frank, let us consider percentages. People in favour of the abolition of the death penalty having lost their cause in 1966 came back in 1967 and won their point: the abolition of the death penalty would be in force for a trial period of five years, except in the case of killing a policeman or prison guard. That is a lot of bunk, in my view.

So why not apply the death penalty for a similar period of five years? Such an experience would allow us subsequently to make comparisons and it would then be seen what best serves the interest of public security. Besides, the public would understand better.

Mr. Speaker, concerning premeditated murder, we lawmakers must assume a heavy responsibility. The fact that society is deemed guilty is no reason to leave the same society in insecurity. It is therefore our duty to protect it, and what are we doing to this end? Should we increase policemen's salaries? Will that make them better detectives? Will an increase in salaries of judges increase their ability to make objective decisions? Would increasing

salaries of ministers and members of Parliament make them better legislators? Money certainly does not endow us with the enlightenment of the Holy Ghost and make each of us better in his sphere.

When a child is observed to be hot-tempered or shows symptoms of a bad disposition, that is when parents should strive to correct him and they should not wait until he has grown to be an adolescent, a young man or even an adult.

A tree should be straightened while growing and not when it has achieved full growth. So, all this, Mr. Speaker, boils down to say that since 1966 and 1967 I have not succeeded in convincing myself that I was wrong. So I examined the problem and I realized that there is a cause for every ill.

During the Middle Ages and the following centuries, there were fewer murders because the authorities used to judge instantly and on the public square even those who were charged with simple theft. With the passage of times and everything it entails, we now realize that because of our tolerance and Christian charity we are now faced with an undeniable fact, which is that proportionately, the criminal is judged less severely than the poor guy who has committed a simple theft; the latter begins his tribulations and learning of hatred of his equal and the established authorities.

Why? I think it is because we did not have then a “more human” rehabilitation mechanism, and I emphasize the words “more human”.

Ask former inmates how they were treated in prison. I understand better today why they have become revolted, worn out and, in some cases, social discards. Indeed, they were not offered a helpful hand, treated like human beings. Is it more likely that a criminal will be brought to realize his mistake through bad treatment, or through good reasoning? This is what we have got.

Had we had 25 years ago the rehabilitation system that we are developing today, perhaps we would not have to discuss this serious problem. I think it is due to a bad investment of the interest accrued since, that is mistakes and errors, that we are now faced with this dilemma.

• (1700)

However, since it is never too late to mend, I offer my small contribution to our proceedings by making a few suggestions which might prompt us to make acceptable amendments, thus putting us in a better position.

Let us begin with judges, lawyers and future judges. Why not ask them to review the Criminal Code and to propose amendments to the section dealing with the heavy onus of proof.

Furthermore, paroles should only be granted after consultation and discussion with all those concerned with the supervision, the behaviour or the mental state of the prisoner. I mean the classification officer, the correctional officer, the psychologist, the psychiatrist and even the governor of the institution. On the strength of a report signed by all those people and not only one of them, the parole officer would make the necessary recommendations to the parole board which would make a decision on the basis of complete instead of partial reports.

[Mr. Thomas (Maisonneuve-Rosemont).]