

Amendments Respecting Death Sentence

years, let the matter be tried. So I may end up, not being an abolitionist nor a retentionist but an abstentionist. I do feel that it would have been better in many ways for this measure to have been brought up at a later date in a new parliament after it had been tested a little more by public opinion. We are in an age where we are reacting against what went on in earlier days. I heard the Prime Minister talk about the barbaric practices of the 18th and 19th centuries. Nobody wants them back. Nobody wants to hang a pickpocket, although sometimes we are disturbed when a bright young man who steals a boat gets a sentence which is longer than the man who murders.

There is a law of motion known as Newton's law which says that every action produces an equal and opposite reaction. I wonder if that is not a law that applies equally to public emotion. We are perhaps reacting rather too strenuously against some of the viciousness and the callousness of earlier days. But humans are still free, and we are moving a little further on the way toward dismantling society's basic protection. For all of these reasons, and they are only some of the ones in my mind, I find it impossible to support this measure. I regret its introduction at this time because I feel there are other ways in which this house could be more gainfully, more usefully employed.

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax): Mr. Speaker, the day the government moves to introduce into this house a measure to help the victims of murder will be the day I shall become an abolitionist. This will be the day when the abolitionists achieve a balanced sense of the values of human life, and show those feelings in a practical measure. Until that day, and it certainly is not today, sir, I shall be a retentionist. We are only being asked to expand our consciences for murders, and not their victims. The question really rests on the sense of justice of the people at large. The punishment of the taker of human life on the basis of eight years, ten months and one day in jail, even if it leads to his rehabilitation, does not satisfy the community desire for justice. The public acceptance of the idea that justice is being done in all criminal cases is surely the foundation of our society. We do not satisfy that basic appetite by considering a measure whose sponsor says that hanging is wrong in principle, but applies it anyway in certain cases.

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

I am making these very brief remarks, sir, despite the experience I have had of actually seeing a hanging.

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Donald MacInnis (Cape Breton South): It is regrettable, Mr. Speaker, that members on both sides of this question find it necessary, for the second time in a short period, to face the same problem. It is regrettable also that members presently sitting opposite are so impatient they are now asking for the question to be decided, when only a few short days ago it was that side of the house which refused to face the issue. But refusing to face an issue is something this government has been doing continually for a number of years. The fact this measure has been introduced for a second time is made quite evident by the Prime Minister's (Mr. Pearson) approach on Thursday last, his indication that he will get on with the job of giving leadership on this particular question, and that the government will settle the question of capital punishment if parliament will make their job somewhat easier. I believe his statement amounts to exactly that.

Parliament made a decision on this matter, but the Prime Minister and his government have not had the intestinal fortitude to carry out that decision, despite all their pronouncements about respect for parliament. This government has absolutely refused to carry out a decision made by this house, but comes back with the appeal: We will see that your decisions are carried out, provided you make our decisions easy enough. The hon. member for Queens (Mr. Macquarrie) has made a most eloquent speech and one to which I think the Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell) should have paid close attention. No doubt the Solicitor General recalls that he showed the nation how emotionally upset he was when the decision went against his wishes last time. After listening to the remarks by the hon. member for Queens he must realize that this emotion is not only on one side of the question, but on both sides. I have every respect for the minister. However, there was no real need for him to show emotion. The government has complete control of this situation and have been exercising that control for a number of years. It would be a different matter if the Solicitor General were placed in a position where the decision of parliament had to be carried out.

When I say the government has complete control of this situation, I mean they have