

Capital Punishment

cent of this grade 13 class agree with the retention of capital punishment."

I believe this is an overwhelming indication of how the people of Canada feel. I thought the 90 per cent figure was too high, but I have also heard 80 per cent and 70 per cent expressed as being in favour of retention. My great concern in this respect is for the people and their viewpoint. During my political life, including my background of 11 years in municipal politics, I have always tried to remember what the people want. I was told many years ago never to forget the people, because they are the ones who put us here and they are the ones who will take us out. If we do not listen to the people, we are in trouble because we are not doing the job we have been put here to do.

I am not endowed with an intellectual background. My background, rather, has been one of hard work, getting things the hard way, sometimes by using my shoulders and arms to a greater extent than my head. It is my belief that the people of this country feel that our basic problems can be related to hard work, and their existence may be the result of a lack thereof. When they look at this parliament and see its members completely disregarding the feelings of the people, they lose confidence; and when people lose confidence in government they lose confidence in the basis of the democratic system—this is, government for the people, by the people, something that is said many times in retort. But in this case, on this bill, in making this important decision we come right down to the crunch that these things can be rhetoric no longer.

● (1220)

Let us get back to the grass roots. If I were an abolitionist I would have no qualms about going back to the people and listening to them. There has been some discussion but it is obvious that the abolitionists have not been listening. I feel that at this time perhaps we should take more time and let the abolitionists talk to their people, get their feelings, not just through the newspapers but directly from the people who elected them. It is important to listen to the people of this country if we are to keep it united. There is always the danger that this great union of ours will be broken up, and I would hate to see that done through this bill. I am sure the abolitionists would be glad to talk to their constituents over the summer. If they believe in abolition, they will come back at the end of the summer and vote for abolition. There is no problem there.

So, Mr. Speaker, I propose a motion, seconded by the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles):

That all the words after "that" be struck and the following substituted therefor:

"this bill be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day three months hence".

Mr. J. P. Nowlan (Annapolis Valley): Mr. Speaker, I considered speaking on third reading prior to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Middlesex-London-Lambton (Mr. Condon). My reason was twofold. I will not go into all the pros and cons of abolition and retention put forward in the philosophic debate we have had on Bill C-84 for several weeks. I am one of the members who has been confronted with this question three other times in parliament and, like the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt), who in my opinion made a very powerful

[Mr. Condon.]

speech at the third reading stage and mentioned that she had been an abolitionist, in the philosophic sense, prior to her election as a member, I voted the first time on capital punishment in 1968 in favour of abolition, and the second time I voted for a qualified abolition, or retention, depending on how you define that vote.

I believe that perhaps the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway was more interested and involved in the matter than I was when I was practising law in Vancouver for some years and used to read some of her columns. I must confess that I was not all that involved in the issue before I became a member of parliament, and since then, quite frankly I have been overinvolved in this issue, as has the parliament of Canada, because four times in 11 years this House has debated the issue.

I believe that this issue should have been resolved some time ago. This bill flies right in the face of 70 per cent to 80 per cent of Canadians from coast to coast, and that is one of the reasons I wanted to speak at this time. I do not think this is a normal debate on capital punishment. Before this time we were supposed to be in a trial period, and perhaps Canadians were uncertain as to the conclusions to which such a trial period might bring us, and thus the public, in my opinion, has not been as aroused or irritated and certainly not as frustrated as they are today with Bill C-84 which does not propose a trial period but proposes the total abolition of capital punishment.

We all know that the law until now has been for capital punishment for the murder of prison guards and policemen, yet it has not really been followed, and therefore there has not been a reasonable trial period. In a general sense, that is one of the reasons the Canadian public has been more exercised over the debate on capital punishment this time than at other times. I also think that the Canadian public at large has never been more frustrated, and capital punishment has become the focal point for the frustration of Canadians over a good number of issues, even more than the law and order issue.

It is the feeling of the Canadian public from coast to coast, regardless of their political leanings or beliefs, that the government in Ottawa—that "far away" government if you live in the east or the west, and even sometimes if you live close to Ottawa, geographically—is very far removed from the pulse of the people of Canada. This time it is the feeling of the people that capital punishment is not only symbolic of law and order and the punishment for heinous crimes, but an assurance that law and order will be applied more strictly so that people perhaps will be able to walk on the streets with a greater sense of security.

On this occasion, because of the circumstances in which the country finds itself, capital punishment has become the focal point of people's frustrations on a good number of issues. I will not name them all, but if you pick up the paper you read about air traffic controllers, the Olympics, the unemployment insurance fund, almost any other issue which makes headlines in the papers. There is a feeling among people that the government which they elected is so far out of the mainstream on an issue with which they can identify as much as the member they elected, namely, capital punishment, that, ipso facto, the government must be out of the mainstream and out of touch on other issues.