

Supply—Justice

Mr. Chairman, I know that being a policeman or a prison guard is a dangerous, delicate and exacting job; I know that. However, my wife, my children, the hon. members' wives and children, any Canadian citizen is a human being just as much as a policeman or a prison guard. If we accept the principle of hanging the murderer of a policeman, I would like the murderer of my wife to hang also, because he would have killed a human being.

I feel that the principle is false even if we are told that for five years, we will try that method, we will not impose capital punishment on the murderers of ordinary citizens but we will execute the murderers of policemen or jailers. Let us be logical; why have one law for the rich and another for the poor? We are equal citizens, we are all Canadians, regardless of our situation. Now, if the population is for maintaining capital punishment, let us maintain it; if it is in favour of its abolishment, let us abolish it. But let us not overlook the wishes of our fellow citizens, of the electorate. And when parliament—

Mr. Mongrain: Would the hon. member allow me a question.

Mr. Caouette: Certainly.

Mr. Mongrain: Mr. Chairman, I presume the leader of the Ralliement Cr ditiste is talking about the maintenance of the death penalty for crimes proved beyond any doubt and not on circumstantial evidence.

Mr. Caouette: Quite so, Mr. Chairman. I say to the hon. member for Trois-Rivi res (Mr. Mongrain) that quite obviously in the past, there have been some terrible miscarriages of justice; innocent people have been hanged, it is true. But some evolution must take place necessarily.

Whether it is capital murder to the first degree, if there is no shadow of a doubt that we have the true murderer, I feel he should hang. We should maintain capital punishment for those people. But if a single doubt arises, if we have one single doubt, the least doubt in our mind, then no capital punishment but imprisonment, possibly life, 25 or 20 years, according to the doubt the jury may have. It seems to me that it would be the logical way to apply capital punishment in Canada, not only for one class of society, not only for a few civil servants, but for the whole of Canadian citizens.

Mr. Chairman, the hon. member for Lotbini re (Mr. Choquette) was saying a minute ago that to all practical purposes, capital punishment was already abolished. It is true. There have been horrible cases and not only in one province, in Quebec. What has happened in these typical cases is that the government has not acted upon the will of the House of Commons. This, it seems to me, is an insult by the government to parliament, not to take the vote of parliament into account.

Another question I wish to bring to the attention of the minister is that of the rehabilitation of those who have been, let us say, for two years or five years in prison. You know that it is very difficult nowadays for a prisoner to get rehabilitated into society, because if he is a criminal, his record will accompany him for the remainder of his life.

We have at this time 18, 19 and 20-year old youths sentenced to five year or ten year terms. Once their sentence is served, they will leave the penitentiary dragging along their record until they breathe their last. Endless problems are encountered when trying to rehabilitate them. Who is going to trust a prisoner, a ex-convict? Who can expect him to become a good citizen after he has been in jail for two, five or ten years? There is a vicious circle here which prompts the ex-prisoner to commit other offences because nobody believes in him. We see that after six months or a year, the same man has reverted back to the same habits, because he was given no chance of rehabilitation.

I think that the Department of Justice or the government should set up a program to facilitate the rehabilitation of prisoners, of these people who have served a term, whether it be one, two, five or ten years, in a penitentiary or a prison. I think this would eliminate relapses into crime, the temptation or sometimes necessity for most former prison inmates to commit the same offences and continue to behave criminally, as happens today.

Mr. Chairman, parole also comes under the Department of Justice. I must confess to the hon. minister that all the discussions which I have had with the parole board have been very warm and the officials of the board are kind. They give good answers, their investigations to know whether so and so can benefit from a parole are cleverly carried out. I have but congratulations to offer to the department in that respect.