

Mr. Brewin: Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tardif): Order, please. It may be a good idea to reserve questions until we have heard all speakers or until the bill is in committee.

Mr. Cowan: Mr. Speaker, the Chair allowed the hon. member for Parkdale to ask a question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Tardif): Order, please. That was entirely owing to the incompetence of the incumbent of the Chair at that time. The hon. member for Greenwood.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, the Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell) has presented Bill C-168 with sincerity and eloquence. I shall try not to repeat what he said, but I agree wholeheartedly with almost everything he did say. We are all conscious of the extensive debate on this subject that took place in March and April of last year on the resolution dealing with the subject now before us. During that debate the arguments for capital punishment and for abolition were fully canvassed and I do not think it is necessary for members of the house to repeat in detail all matters that were then discussed.

The first thing to be noted about the bill is that though it does not abolish capital punishment in form, because it limits the definition of capital murder to cases where the victims are police officers or prison officials, capital punishment will be all but abolished in Canada. The legislation is to be in force for an experimental period of five years.

I think all members of my party agree that this is not a party matter but a matter for the individual conscience of each hon. member. However, it is well known, I think, that all members of our party in parliament are against capital punishment and favour its abolition. Naturally we are not too happy with the present bill, which proceeds indirectly rather than directly to the abolition of capital punishment and leaves exceptions which, for reasons I shall discuss later, I do not think are justified. Nevertheless I think the Solicitor General will have reason to be pleased with our views on the bill. It is our considered opinion that the bill represents a tremendous step forward and that those who believe in the abolition of capital punishment should support it. We propose to do so on second reading. However, Mr. Speaker, because of our convictions we propose to put forward amendments at the committee stage which would have the effect of

Amendments Respecting Death Sentence
directly and completely abolishing capital punishment in Canada. I think many of the arguments put forward by the Solicitor General would justify support of our proposed amendments.

• (4:40 p.m.)

As I said, there is no need to repeat at length the case for abolition of capital punishment but, nevertheless, I would like to summarize a few of the points. Both those who support capital punishment and those who favour its abolition accept the view that the basic consideration is the sanctity of human life and respect for human life. This is essentially a religious and spiritual principle. It has been recognized and enunciated by religious leaders throughout human history, and by humanists of all nations.

Those who support capital punishment presumably do so because they believe there is no crime more shocking, more deserving of punishment, more necessary to be deterred than the wilful taking of human life. These people believe that the death sentence is uniquely appropriate for this kind of crime, and they also believe it is a uniquely effective deterrent of murder. Others, such as myself, Mr. Speaker, believe that the great weight of evidence and study of this matter establishes, or if it does not establish it certainly indicates, that the death penalty is not the only and, indeed, is not the most effective deterrent. We believe that the state itself should not impose or sanction the deliberate killing of human beings.

I could not put this point more clearly than it was put by the great Archbishop Temple, formerly Archbishop of Canterbury, who said, and I commend these words to hon. members:

I believe that the example of the state taking life, even when it does so in return for a life already taken, does more to lower the value of human life in the mind of its citizens than the deterrent influence of this penalty can do to protect the lives of its citizens. In this way, I believe that the main influence of the retention of the death penalty is rather to increase than diminish the number of murders.

There has been much discussion of the deterrent effect of capital punishment but it is a fact, well established, that in those jurisdictions in many civilized quarters of the world in which capital punishment has been abolished this step did not lead to any increase in the rate of murder. Many volumes have been written about this matter of the deterrent effect of capital punishment. The Solicitor General referred to some of