

Capital Punishment

(Text):

Mr. Lucien Cardin (Richelieu-Vercheres): Mr. Speaker, I do not propose to detain the house for more than a very few moments. I feel it is only fair and right that all hon. members have the opportunity to explain their vote on this very important, indeed very personal, matter that is before the house at this time, upon which I presume we will be asked to vote.

May I say, with all due respect to the mover and seconder of the bill, that I believe that the subject matter under discussion is so complicated, and the consequences of our decision in this matter are so far reaching, that the bill should have been sponsored by the government rather than by a private member. I do not think it would be right if we lost sight of the fact that if this particular bill passes the house it will become law after third reading and after passing the usual procedure in the other place. An extremely important and consequential amendment will have been made in our Criminal Code.

The government, in my opinion, is shirking a serious responsibility in this matter under the guise of magnanimity in letting a private member introduce this bill on which it is still rumoured, though not yet confirmed, there will be a free vote. Recently there has been hesitation and confusion on the part of the government with regard to this matter and this has made it very difficult for members of the opposition to find out the plan which the government intended to follow in bringing this measure before the house. Even now the government is playing this particular matter by ear as is evidenced by the necessity of obtaining the unanimous consent of the house to permit the widest scope in discussing this bill and to allow discussions of the other bills on the order paper which deal with the same subject matter. This, of course, is an extraordinary procedure.

Mr. Pallett: May I ask the hon. member a question? Does he think only one day could be allotted for this debate?

Mr. Cardin: No, on the contrary.

Mr. Pallett: Then what is the hon. member complaining about?

Mr. Cardin: If the hon. member would let me finish my speech—

Some hon. Members: Playing politics.

Mr. Cardin:—I think he will find I will be very objective throughout this whole thing.

An hon. Member: Get on to the bill.

Mr. Cardin: The very fact that the house will be allowed to discuss other bills, the principles of which are not only different from the bill we are now discussing but which actually prejudice the issue, because the bills which are already before the house and which we can discuss here are based on and suppose the retention of capital punishment—

Mr. Speaker: I am not sure I follow the hon. member when he talks about a decision of the house. It does not lie within the competence of the hon. member to discuss the power of the house to come to its decision. It seems to me he is criticizing the subject matter of the debate.

Mr. Cardin: It is my understanding of the situation that in discussing this particular bill we would be allowed to bring in the subject matter of the other bills which deal with the changing of the method of execution and so on. My point is that if we are going to discuss the subject matter of these other bills there is an inconsistency in that the bill which is now before us deals with the abolition of capital punishment whereas with regard to the others we would obviously be discussing—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is some hours late in making that point. The house has already made its decision on that point, unanimously.

An hon. Member: And at their request.

Mr. Cardin: I am trying to bring out that this is an inadequate and unsatisfactory way of dealing with this question, and I think that if hon. members would just look over what is happening they would see immediately that it is not even fair to the mover and the seconder of this motion to have them prepare and argue on one particular bill and then let the debate be open for the house to discuss other matters.

An hon. Member: Why did you not object?

Mr. Speaker: Order. If any hon. member wishes to rise and take a point of order he is at liberty to do so, but not to interrupt the hon. member who has the floor. As I follow the hon. member who is speaking—and I do not wish to prevent him making a point which is proper in this debate—it seems to me that his remarks are entirely directed to the action of the house itself, and that is not in order. The house itself set the course of this debate and set the time to be allowed to members in discussing it by its own order, and it is not open to the hon. member now to review that decision.