

*Criminal Code*

out, thereby giving it priority, that one reason they were in favour of the retention of capital punishment was that this morning they received a letter from the Communist congress supporting abolition. I received that same letter this morning. But over the weeks I have been receiving communications from major church organizations across Canada and only this morning I received letters from priests in Montreal asking me to support the abolition of capital punishment. Am I to deny the hundreds of thousands of true Christians in Canada, am I to deny the religious organizations in Canada supporting abolition, because the Communists also support abolition? How nonsensical can those two members become in putting that forward as an argument for the retention of capital punishment?

I also could not help noting that those who have spoken in favour of retention of the death sentence have quoted from the Bible the Mosaic law, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, and those that live by the sword shall die by the sword. Yes, that is in the Bible. But the Bible also says "Thou shalt not kill", and to me this applies to society collectively as well as to members of the human race individually.

I truly appreciate the fact that as a member of the House of Commons I am present when for the first time there is to be a full debate and a free vote on this most important question of the retention or abolition of capital punishment. I first became interested in this matter approximately 30 years ago when I was a member of the British Columbia legislature.

• (5:00 p.m.)

The guards at the provincial jail got in touch with me because the week before three Indians had been hung in Oakalla. They were dropped through the trap-door at the same time. Two of the Indians were husky men and one was small. The guards told me that the small man got jammed between the other two in the drop and strangled to death. His neck was not broken. I raised this matter in the British Columbia legislature I was told by the then attorney general that in order to speak on capital punishment one must have seen a man hung. What relationship there is between the retention or abolition of capital punishment and whether or not you have seen a man hung, I do not know. However, if that was important, I would see a man hung. A few weeks later I saw a young man die by hanging.

He did not commit the actual homicide but since he was the driver of the getaway car he was guilty by association. In British Columbia, Mr. Speaker, they hang people by dropping them through a disused elevator shaft. It is something to stand four feet away when a man is dropped to his death by order of society. I was about four feet away. It is something to see that rope and hear it whanging back and forth across the trapdoor, and to hear the gurglings and sighings coming up from below. This was my second introduction to the meaning of capital punishment.

When I first came to the House of Commons I had the privilege of being named to the joint committee of the Senate and the House of Commons which dealt with corporal and capital punishment. This committee met from 1953 to 1955. I know, because I have seen press reports, that it is now being stressed that the finding of the joint committee favoured the retention of capital punishment. I was a member of that committee. I am not too greatly influenced by its decision. My reason is that the decision was made when all the members who had been sitting for two years on that committee were not present. The vote was a close one. The decision was made not on the basis of those who were there but on the basis of telephone calls to those who were not there.

I have on my desk, sir, the two volume report of that committee. There is something you will not see in these volumes because it was too grisly. I refer to a meeting of the joint committee with the official hangman of Canada. Even some of the members of the committee could not stay at the meeting all had to head for the women's and boys' rooms fast. The official hangman said he was skilful and was proud of his skill. However, he told us what had occurred at previous hangings. There was a woman from Quebec who had put on a lot of weight while she was waiting for the day of execution. When she was dropped her head was torn off. Another case was referred to in which a man was strangling to death, so when the hangman was down below with the coroner's jury he got up on a chair, put his arms around the man's waist and pulled him down so he would die more quickly. None of these things are in the report. These are some of the things we heard from the official hangman.

Yes, "thou shall not kill", but society in Canada kills. We can understand and we can speak emotionally whether we are speaking