

Capital Punishment

Mr. Speaker, I shall conclude on these words, asking my colleagues to think again about the seriousness of the situation and to trust those who are responsible for administering and enforcing our laws, for promoting as well the justice we are asking for. These people must have confidence in us. Within a few days, the Olympic Games will take place in Montreal. There will be 16,000 members of the Armed Forces, thousands of policemen who will risk their lives and will be the advanced guard; those people will be there to protect society against those who might wish to take advantage of the situation to cause trouble and disturbances or to take barbaric action. We rely on them to protect us, to ensure public protection. But for God's sake, tomorrow, let us give them the necessary tools to enable them to carry out their duty, which will hopefully prevent us from going through unpleasant events that would damage the reputation of our country, our province and the city of Montreal. Thus, policemen will be able to carry out their duty while feeling protected, and should potential murderers plan to do something, they would act very carefully to avoid being sentenced to death.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that I do not fear capital punishment at all because I do not intend to murder anyone. Now, if the present act is amended, capital punishment will apply only to those convicted of murder. With Bill C-84, all these provisions are removed, there will be life sentencing, and God knows how many life sentences, in the past, have been commuted to a few years in prison only. Then, life sentence is changed again; they speak of 15, 20 or 25 years. This is not even a life sentence, but a specified period in prison.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I will certainly vote against Bill C-84 on third reading and I hope that meanwhile, the government will review its position and introduce a better legislation.

● (1200)

[English]

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend hon. members who spoke today and yesterday at this stage of the proceedings. I have been extraordinarily concerned with the turn of events in this particular debate. First of all, this bill was advanced, not because there was a demand by the government caucus, nor because there was a demand from the public, but merely as a cabinet relief bill. It was introduced merely to relieve the cabinet of a decision that it has assumed over the years, a practice which I have deprecated, placing itself in the position of the final court of appeal on capital sentences.

As a body, the cabinet is totally unsuited for that position. Nowhere else do we have questions of justice or legal decisions taken by a civil body as a final decision. This is a practice that grew up in the 1960s. Certainly it was the practice when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) was leader of the government. It is a practice that I protested then and during the years following under Mr. Pearson. We know there were political considerations in the determination of whether the sentence against this or that condemned person, whose rights had been fully protected by the courts all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada and in respect of whom the

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

courts had decreed the penalty according to law, should be exacted. There has been this 14 years of practice.

I can understand that the cabinet, having backed itself into a corner as a result of the illogical law of 1967—that is, the limitations on capital punishment at the time, renewed in 1972—is now facing some cases where it actually would have to carry out the law. As a result, the cabinet brought forward this bill under the guise of a free vote.

Yesterday, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner), the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette), and others in this House demonstrated—and I will not repeat the arguments—just how free the vote really was. This is the biggest hoax on the public in years and, goodness knows, there have been real hoaxes perpetrated on the public in the last few years. The very circumstances surrounding the introduction of the bill, under the principle of cabinet solidarity, ties up the cabinet. The cabinet had no free vote in this regard. There will be pious confidence that as a result of a free debate and a free vote, this House adopted on second reading the principle of abolition of capital punishment. I will speak about the second reading vote in a moment. The suggestion that there was a free vote is the laugh of the century.

Government supporters found themselves, for one reason or another, under various pressures—which were not applicable to members on this side of the House—in spite of the so-called right to exercise a free vote. I could even go to the extent of suggesting that the hon. member for Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) was restricted in his role as Conservative House leader in negotiating certain aspects of this debate because members of the Conservative caucus said this was not a party position, and if there were to be arrangements made with regard to the debate they would be made between supporters and opponents of the bill. That was not apparent on the government side.

Yesterday, during discussion on a question of privilege, the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe indicated quite conclusively that there were pressures put on certain members, as did the hon. member for Témiscamingue, and no one would dare controvert their positions.

It is now said by some pundits that parliament seems irrelevant to the public scene. Well, I do not agree with that, but certainly this debate can be used as an example. There is no public demand for the abolition of capital punishment. To the contrary. Those hon. members who are honest enough to speak about the reaction among their constituents, either through polls or otherwise, know that there is only a small fraction of the Canadian public which advocates the abolition of capital punishment. Therefore, this long debate on Bill C-84 is not as a result of public demand. The situation is to the contrary.

● (1210)

There is another point on which I should like to comment.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): If junior hon. members of the House—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!