

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Lastly, on December 29, 1967, the legislation was changed for a five-year trial period, or until December 29, 1972. Under the amended legislation presently in force, capital punishment, as provided for capital murder, applies only to murderers of officers of the law. All other murders are subject to life imprisonment.

Thus, by amending Section 202A(2) of the Criminal Code in 1967, we did not abolish capital punishment, but we limited the meaning of the phrase "capital murder". Thus, nowadays, the man who kills a cashier during an armed robbery only gets a life sentence. If under the same circumstances he kills a policeman or a constable, he can be sentenced to death, if the judge or jury so decide.

In short, Mr. Speaker, when we ask that capital punishment be reinstated, we want to phrase "capital murder" to apply to cases other than the murder of a policeman.

I think I should point out to the House a few statistics which show conclusively that there has been a frightening rise in crime since 1967, especially in Quebec. In 1967, there were 52 murders in Quebec; in 1968, 91, and in 1969, 128.

Admittedly, the rate of population growth increased as well, but there was an extraordinary increase in the number of murders committed. For instance, the ratio of murders was 0.7 for 100,000 people in 1966. In 1969, for the same number of people, the ratio rose to 2.1. In Quebec, there has been almost a 55 per cent increase in the number of murders since 1967, whereas the average increase in Canada and the United States was 10 per cent.

Therefore, we face a major problem, and despite what the Prime Minister may think, it is urgent to find a solution. Personally, I do not like at all the differentiation made in the present act, and by which the life of a policeman is considered to be more valuable than that of other citizens.

It is true that some policemen do dangerous work but, among us, who will not at least once in his lifetime have the opportunity of helping justice by stopping a criminal or surprising a thief red-handed?

In any event, the law as it now reads is not logical. Since the amendment in 1967, three policemen have been killed in Canada. The three criminals were condemned, and this government has pardoned the three by sentencing them only to life imprisonment. I suggest that the criminal who kills a cashier is just as guilty as if he killed a policeman. I can see no difference whatever in the gravity of the crime.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I regret that I have to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

[English]

Mr. Barnett J. Danson (Parliamentary Secretary to Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member for Richmond (Mr. Beaudoin), I really had not intended to debate the whole question of capital punishment in this country. I think the question to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) was, when it is intended that the legislation will be presented and when will this House debate it?

I assure the hon. member there will be legislation introduced in the House well in advance of December 31, 1972, which is the deadline, and in ample time to provide the fullest possible debate and decision prior to the expiry of the five-year trial period. I think that is the important point which the hon. member is trying to make, and the important commitment that the government makes.

The questionnaire of which he speaks which was sent to his riding cannot help but reflect the feelings of his constituents in Richmond. Perhaps the hon. member is guided by this. However, there are questionnaires and various polls, the Gallup poll and statistics on this subject from Statistics Canada. These are all interesting to interpret in whatever may we wish to interpret them.

We have to make certain we understand the reasons behind increases or decreases in certain types of crimes. The important thing is that we have the fullest possible debate and the longest possible experience prior to introducing new legislation for full debate when the hon. member and other members of the House will have ample opportunity to express their views and their constituents views on this extremely sensitive matter.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.31 p.m.