

*Capital Punishment*

Hon. members, you had better not hide behind Burke when you vote against your riding, unless you wish to be seen as an elitist, far removed from the people you represent.

I took particular note of the remarks yesterday by the hon. member for Crowfoot (Mr. Horner). He pointed out that as countries move more and more to a centralized government, there is a corresponding rise in the crime rate. At first there would seem to be no relationship between the two, but on closer examination there may well be. We do know, for example, that as governments become more centralized, by doing so they take away opportunities for individual decision-making. Since the ability to make decisions is one of our most human faculties, there is an irrepressible desire to make choices, even at the risk of making wrong ones. However, when those choices are taken from us, the process of dehumanization sets in. That, in turn, increases the frustration level for all citizens and the larger possibility of criminal activity. Could it be that the hon. member for Crowfoot is right; that the government's recurring determination to bring in capital punishment stems from an overriding guilt complex for dehumanizing man, perhaps helping to drive man to a life of crime, and now cannot therefore bring itself to punish man for becoming what the government itself has made him?

Related to this is another factor, however. Governments, by their very nature, devote their attention to material solutions of man. This is their mandate. However, as they do this they leave the growing impression that those are the only issues that matter. It is the growth of materialism. It begins with ignoring spiritual dimensions of man, and ends with denying spiritual dimensions in him. It seems to me that there is another correlation which may have been overlooked. There appears to be a strong correlation between the rising demand for abolition of the death penalty and a steady decline in a strong belief in immortality. What do they have to do with each other? Simply this: if you believe that all we have is here right now, if there is no more after this, then it follows that you must squeeze out every available minute in this that you can. It follows, also that if you are committed to this materialistic view, the worst crime you could commit would be to take away even a part of the remnant of time left to a criminal. That is what was at the heart of the Greek and Roman tragedies—not that a person might die in the prime of life, but that he would die and go into the black mystery of the beyond and no one would know where he was. It seems that our society has come almost full circle to that one.

Members may call me a medievalist if they wish, but I am here saying that there is more than just this life, that this life is just a preparation for, and in anticipation of, the life to come. The pronouncement of the death penalty may be the last chance the convicted murderer has to learn something about finality; to learn, without any equivocation, that there are inexorable consequences to our actions which we cannot escape. All our lives we spend looking for ways out. This is the one time we have to look ourselves squarely in the face, with no side-glances.

The former solicitor general said that religious convictions are not valid justification for retention of the death penalty. I wonder, would he accept religious convictions for building a hospital, or a school, or for the composition of some of our great music, or the design of great architec-

[Mr. Friesen.]

ture, or art? I am not sure whether he is being a total materialist and would reject religious convictions on all grounds, or whether he seriously wants to isolate them only from this issue. Does he want only the pleasant and attractive elements of religious faith, and not recognize the features that are unattractive for him? It does not work that way. The evil that we see is not the effect of our faith, but the consequences of our behaviour. It is our religious faith that makes us confront that behaviour.

Again, the former solicitor general's statement is symptomatic of another problem we must face, the problem of our identity. There is no doubt that in private life we get ourselves into a pack of trouble when we try to deny our past, when we try to pretend we do not have the background we do. That is the way to mental illness, to a life of pretence, living in a world of illusions. Mental health involves a glad acceptance of who we are, our appearance as well as our family backgrounds. The same holds true on a national scale. We must, and I know we do, embrace our history, appreciate it, and then we can enjoy, as well as understand, our present.

I have, as I know all other members have, been thinking about this debate for many months. Several weeks ago, as I walked toward the parliament buildings, I saw inscriptions above the windows on three of the sides of the peace tower. Above the front entrance I read, "Give the King thy judgments, O Lord, and thy righteousness unto the King's son". On the one side entrance I read, "Where there is no vision the people perish", and on the other, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea".

These are quotations from the Bible. Our founding fathers made certain that they would be eternally chiselled into our history. To deny our past is to deny our identity. One of the great and overriding problems we face as a nation is the fact that absolutes were accepted as a fact of life when our nation was founded. That concept was in the air and was part of a spontaneous thought-form which has become part of the fabric of the British North America Act. Since that time, however, and as John Donne once said, "The new philosophy calls all in doubt". The philosophies of relativism and existentialism deny the existence of any absolutes.

● (1220)

So we are in a state of constant ambivalence, living with a document based on one set of suppositions but debating legislation within the framework of that document from an entirely different philosophical base. That ambivalence leads us along a certain course of madness. We, as a nation, will sooner or later have to decide who we are, what kind of a people we want to be. Let us call a spade a spade and go on from there.

One of the premises on which the present bill is based is the suggestion that we are on a steady path toward an improved civilization, that things are getting better and better, and all we need is a little more time, a little more education, till we come to the great day when violent crime will be on the decline and this kind of a debate would be totally anachronistic. That, Mr. Speaker, is a delusion. It used to be the preachers who were the prophets of gloom and the announcers of Armageddon. Now, they are no