

police and prison guards. I am not satisfied that the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) and the government are concerned about the safety of this country.

I note with considerable interest some remarks that the Solicitor General is reported to have made to the John Howard Society in Ottawa on April 8 last. It is my understanding that he was asked whether the 25 year prison term was too harsh. Apparently his reply was to the effect that the object of the exercise was first to obtain the abolishment of capital punishment by providing the alternative of a life sentence, and the authorities would then work toward the reduction of that sentence once abolition had been achieved.

Mr. Allmand: That is not true.

Mr. Neil: I hope that after I have completed my remarks the Solicitor General will rise on a point of order or question of privilege to clarify his position.

Mr. Allmand: I will send you a copy of the speech.

Mr. Neil: I would welcome a copy of the speech.

● (1630)

I should also like to quote briefly from a report in the *Hamilton Spectator* of remarks made by the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain (Mr. MacFarlane). I assume it was after second reading of the bill that the hon. member was reported as saying:

Now that we've passed this bill we can move on to produce a more effective law and order bill.

It seems that if those remarks that are attributed to both these individuals are correct, the Solicitor General and the government have been less than honest with the citizens of Canada. I think it is important that, if the Solicitor General has a plan to bring in amendments to the Criminal Code some time after this bill passes, he should make this information available to this House and the public.

I am a retentionist; I voted for retention in 1973, I voted for it again on second reading of this bill a short time ago, but I have no hesitation in supporting these amendments of the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Halliday). From observing the vote that took place on second reading, while it was proclaimed to be a free vote, I realize it certainly was not a free vote on the other side of the House. There is no doubt in my mind that the same situation will exist when we reach third reading stage, and that the bill will probably pass. For that reason I think it is important that we make whatever improvements we can to this bill, and I see the amendments proposed by the hon. member for Oxford in that light. I shall vote for these amendments but, Mr. Speaker, I shall vote against the bill.

I listened with interest to the remarks of the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. O'Sullivan) and I should like to compliment him on his presentation. He had the opportunity of travelling to various penitentiaries in Canada with a committee which observed at first hand the conditions that exist in the institutions, and he tabled a report afterwards. Two other reports were also tabled, one by the hon. member for Louis-Hébert (Mrs. Morin), who unfortunately is not with us to participate in the debate on

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capital punishment, but I should like to quote briefly from her report which began:

It has been said time and again in the past that it was very difficult to "experience" the true climate of a penitentiary and understand all the pressures that seem to exist there.

Later she said:

During the 15 visits we made to the various penitentiaries across the nation, we could not help but notice the great lack of activity that exists in nearly all of these institutions.

And further:

Yet evidence that has been collected points to the fact that this inactivity and idleness are a constant problem and lie at the root of all penitentiary discontent and dissatisfaction.

The hon. member for New Westminster (Mr. Leggatt) was also a member of the committee that toured the penitentiaries, and he had this to say:

Though the committee travelled a great deal and discussed prison problems with a great many inmates, both staff and lay people, it is almost impossible to develop any kind of consensus about the obvious malaise in the system.

His report finished as follows:

I would like to go on record as saying I am most unhappy with what we found generally. We continue to operate maximum security institutions that are a disgrace to any civilized country and the continuing excuses that we haven't got the land, we haven't got the money to replace these archaic dungeons such as Prince Albert and the B.C. Penitentiary, are just no longer acceptable.

What these reports point out, and what the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth was pointing out, is that penitentiaries are inhumane; that the individuals who are confined to them for a long period of time become vegetables, people who are almost impossible to deal with. Yet these people who are sent to prison for a long period of time are people who have committed the most heinous crime of murder and, in my opinion, are deserving of capital punishment, but to the mind of the hon. member for Oxford deserve life imprisonment with the option he proposes.

It has been suggested that to allow the individual who has been sentenced to life imprisonment the option of asking the state to take his life is in fact suicide. I disagree with that, Mr. Speaker. I do not believe that this option is in fact suicide. Suicide is the taking of one's own life. There is no question that the state has the right to take life under certain circumstances. Under these amendments the individual would not be taking his own life; he would be asking the state to take his life.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): A great distinction!

Mr. Neil: A life that he has forfeited by committing murder. Mr. Speaker, to me this is not suicide. I do not see either how such an amendment can lead to euthanasia.

Mr. Cafik: It is a subtle distinction not worth making.

Mr. Neil: Euthanasia is a different situation entirely; it involves taking the life of an innocent person. In the case of euthanasia I am certain there would be a long drawn out debate in this House, much longer than the debate that has taken place on capital punishment over the years. I do not agree with the argument of the previous speaker that by passing these particular motions we would be opening the door to euthanasia.