

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, July 12, 1976

The House met at 11 a.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

MEASURES RESPECTING PUNISHMENT FOR MURDER AND OTHER SERIOUS OFFENCES

The House resumed, from Friday, July 9, consideration of the motion of Mr. Allmand that Bill C-84, to amend the Criminal Code in relation to the punishment for murder and certain other serious offences, be read the third time and do pass.

Hon. George Hees (Prince Edward-Hastings): Mr. Speaker, I would like to enter the debate at this point to indicate to the House what my position will be when the third reading vote on this bill is taken.

When I voted in favor of the principle of abolition of the death penalty on second reading of the bill, I did so after a great deal of study, in which I learned that in no country has it been demonstrated that capital punishment is a deterrent to committing murder, and it is for that reason that I believe that the most effective punishment for the crime is life imprisonment.

However, since the second reading vote, I have learned from my riding that the overwhelming majority of the people living in Prince Edward-Hastings strongly favour the retention of the death penalty for the crime of murder committed against any person. I have always believed that when a member of parliament is made aware that a clear majority of those living in his riding hold a strong opinion on an important matter which is before parliament for decision, it is the duty of the member to express that opinion in parliament on behalf of those he represents, and to back up that opinion with his vote.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to vote against this bill when the third reading vote is taken, and by so doing, express the very strong opinion of the overwhelming majority of those I represent in parliament that the death penalty should be the punishment meted out to those who commit first degree murder.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Arnold Malone (Battle River): Mr. Speaker, I am sure all hon. members recognize that at this time there is not very much new which can be said with regard to the retention or abolition of capital punishment. I think, however, that the events of recent weeks have demonstrated quite clearly to Canadians that Canada, in all likelihood, is about to become an abolitionist state.

● (1110)

I should like to take some time on third reading to put on the record what I think becomes the obligation, now in view of the fact that we are likely to abolish capital punishment, of some sectors of our society other than parliament. The real issue that we have been talking about has been the issue of law and security or law and order. That is not a goal that can be attained by legislation alone. The attainment of that goal is an obligation that must fall on other groups of our society, and it is highly important that some of these people take on the full responsibility of achieving peace and security.

In this debate I should like to refer to what happens in radio and television, that is the emphasis on negative concepts in which we keep marinating our minds, the soaking up of what we find is bad in society and making that the main subject in our news. Obviously, this is one of the factors leading to the violent crime which takes place in our society. The fact of the matter is that we never hear all the news, we only hear part of the news; we hear the bad news, the negative aspects of the news which enter into the newscaster's script. If advertising sells Chevrolets, bubble gum or beer, then surely it is also true that if we marinate our minds in negative concepts it will have an effect on how we behave, it will have the same effect as advertising on our behaviour. If every time we turn on the television to listen to the news or open up a newspaper and the predominant issues we hear or read about are the negative aspects of what has happened in society, that will have an influence on people who are wavering between behaving acceptably according to the mores of our society and behaving not in accordance with the norms of prescribed behaviour.

Recognition is more important to a human being than whether that recognition is obtained through good or bad behaviour. People have a psychological need to be recognized, and if they know that in the newspaper, the television or the radio we give recognition to the negative aspects of what happens in our society, then obviously that will have an influence on how people will behave. I believe that the spreading of the news has largely been the cause of the hijackings that have taken place around the world. The first hijacking was very novel, but it hit the news every hour following the incident. It is interesting to note that within the first week of that hijacking more hijackings took place. Aeroplanes have been around for a long time but the hijacking concept is very recent and it is interesting to note that following the first hijacking there was a rash of them. I believe the cause was in large part prominence and attention given to it by the media.

I should like to underscore another situation which I think was an inexcusable example of how the press focuses on the negative. This past summer I attended a national student debating seminar for high schools students from