

Accordingly, the Speaker with the House went up to the Senate Chamber.

And being returned:

Madam Speaker: I have the honour to inform the House that when the House did attend His Honour the Deputy to His Excellency the Governor General in the Senate Chamber, His Honour was pleased to give in Her Majesty's name the Royal Assent to the following Bill:

An Act to amend the Export Development Act.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS— MOTIONS

[*Translation*]

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

FREE VOTE ON REINSTATEMENT

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Fennell:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should consider the advisability of allowing a free vote in the House of Commons on the reinstatement of capital punishment for first degree murder.

Mr. Marceau: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the three traditional knocks on this door to summon us to the Senate were meant to ask me to reflect on the comments I had already made before Royal Assent, but in any case, I believe that I can repeat these same comments and say once more that the central argument on which I base my decision not to support the reinstatement of capital punishment concerns justice and equity towards the people most often involved in serious crimes of violence.

As I was saying earlier a society which to show its disapproval and express its anger for an infamous act, commits itself such an act by throwing into jail or taking the life of people who are already disadvantaged, is not behaving with fairness and decency.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about premeditated acts. However, it has been established that 70 per cent of all premeditated murders are committed by people who are on welfare or unemployed. They are not the ones who are responsible; society is to blame, and if we were to commit such a reprehensible act against people who are already disadvantaged, what we would be doing ourselves would also be unacceptable as we would be forcing people who do not deserve it to pay the price that we should all collectively pay for the acts committed.

Needless to say, there are also cases of miscarriage of justice. I remember the famous Coffin case of the fifties. It

Capital Punishment

now seems virtually established that Mr. Coffin, who was hanged for the crime, did not commit the murder for which he died.

In any case, Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that we must be guided in this debate by logic and the interests of the people we want to defend. I invite my colleagues who believe that the reinstatement of capital punishment might be the answer, to reflect on the fact that it is not by adding to the violence which has already been committed and by having the government or the Parliament retaliate with a similar act, that we will solve the problem; on the contrary, we would be playing into the hands of those who want to break up our society by promoting violence, who want to destroy it by making us forget that whatever the act committed, someone is involved, a family is involved, and that while a penalty must be imposed, no government and no Parliament is ever allowed to take the life of someone who received it from God. In view of these facts, I believe that we should not reinstate the death penalty.

● (1800)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Before recognizing the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie), perhaps it would be useful for the Chair to inform the House that the full hour of debate will expire at 6.34 p.m., since the House took nine minutes to go to the other place for Royal Assent.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of comments to make in the course of the debate on Motion No. 44 concerning the advisability of allowing a free vote in the House of Commons on the reinstatement of capital punishment for first degree murder. I would mainly like to direct my comments to the whole question of free votes.

I was interested in the remarks of the Hon. Member for Mississauga South (Mr. Blenkarn) when, in speaking in favour of the motion, he indicated that he saw a lot more room for free votes on matters having to do with what he called moral issues or, as they have also been called, issues of conscience. He cited capital punishment as one of these. There are others which have traditionally been regarded in this way, such as issues having to do with the question of abortion. The Hon. Member for Mississauga South cited the legalization of marijuana as another example of an issue which, in his view, belonged to this category of moral issues and issues of conscience. He felt such issues should stand somewhere beyond the reach of Party discipline where Members of Parliament could make decisions either according to an understanding of having a responsibility to make their own best judgment, which is the traditional conservative view of the role of a Member of Parliament, or according to an understanding of themselves as having a responsibility to respond to majority opinion in their constituencies, which is a more modern, liberal view of politics. In either case, the Hon. Member contended that certain issues ought to be beyond the reach of Party discipline because they belong in the category of moral issues.