

think there is any question that the majority of public opinion in the country is decidedly against not only what has been done but the way in which it has been done. I want to say no more than that. I think this government, if you will excuse the expression, should hang their heads in shame over what they have done on this issue. I think it is a betrayal of the principles and concepts of democracy. They may think it is sour grapes because of the way the votes have gone, and there may be an element of that.

I would point out that I did not speak on the second reading debate because I believed that this time the government was going to win. This is the fourth time in ten years that this matter has been dragged before the House of Commons. It is usually brought up when the temper of the House is getting pretty crotchety due to a prolonged session and the heat of Ottawa in summer. I think all the elements surrounding the introduction and passage of this bill through the House by the government has been despicable, and come 1978 they will rue the day. The people of this country will then have an opportunity to express their opinion. The government is counting on the public having a short memory. Maybe, they have, and maybe they have not.

If I have anything to do with public opinion in the next general election, the whole question will once again be an issue. It is not only the principle of capital punishment that will be the issue but also the moral integrity of those who have been running this government and this House and the manner in which they brought in this bill. I think they are very foolish indeed to add an extra weapon to the arsenal of retentionists by behaving this way.

For several weeks I have managed to bottle up my mental outrage at what has happened here, but on third reading debate I feel I can be silent no longer. I am sorry the Solicitor General is unavoidably absent for the remainder of the debate, because the final thing I want to discuss is the abuse by this government and its predecessors of what used to be commonly known as the royal prerogative of mercy.

Mrs. Holt: But your backbenchers supported that.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) has the floor.

Mr. Lawrence: I do not think the principle of the royal prerogative has been recognized throughout the country. When questions have been put to the Solicitor General, he has attempted to shrug them off by saying the only commutation that has taken place since he has been Solicitor General is the one case that was openly discussed in cabinet, and only after a great deal of discussion was a decision made. Nevertheless, the Solicitor General and the Prime Minister are on record as enunciating the general principles of capital punishment and unquestionably, whether they were fully discussed or minimally discussed in cabinet, the final outcome was that every death sentence that has been imposed has either been stayed or commutation has been granted outright.

Capital Punishment

There has been a terrible abuse of a worth-while discretionary power in the hands of the parliament of this country. I am firmly convinced that due to the actions of this government and the principles respecting capital punishment which have been enunciated by various ministers of the Crown, that although the royal prerogative of mercy is based on a sound principle, it has been sadly abrogated and the whole matter has been brought into disrepute. They have made a mockery of the whole procedure, and that is a shame because it is a worth-while procedure.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that the present ministry has completely destroyed the concept of the royal prerogative and the discretion of the Crown. I am a member of this House, I am a citizen of this country and I am no longer going to trust the word or the integrity of the people who make up this government. I do not believe that such discretion should longer be vested in them.

There are many other discretionary matters which, although they may not be built into the statutes of this country, are traditions of this country. Most of them from Great Britain. Many of these discretions exist because they are a matter of tradition, not a matter of statute. I, for one, having watched the way in which the government have abused that discretionary privilege with regard to the royal prerogative of mercy, do not trust it with any further discretion. That is not a nice thing to say, and perhaps it is not even a polite thing to say, but it is something I must say as we debate the third reading of this bill. I cannot let this occasion pass without indicating to the front bench opposite that my opinion is neither unique nor exclusive.

● (1450)

Mr. O'Connell: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question?

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry; if the hon. member merely wishes to raise a question, I will not entertain it.

An hon. Member: Chicken!

Mr. Lawrence: The way in which the front bench opposite has acted in the last couple of years and, indeed, in the last couple of weeks—I am speaking about their handling of this bill and the capital punishment issue—leads me and many others in this country not to trust their word any longer.

With that, sir, I will sit down. If the hon. member for Scarborough East (Mr. O'Connell), or any other prattling member opposite has a question to ask me, I will be glad to try to answer.

Mr. Sharp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The hon. gentleman who has just resumed his seat made some comments about the duration of the debate on third reading. I assure him that the government does not intend to ask for completion of the debate today. If we run out of speakers, I will take the opportunity to move the adjournment of the House so that debate may resume on Monday.

Hon. Martin O'Connell (Scarborough East): Mr. Speaker, I intend to say only a few words on third reading. The hon. member for Northumberland-Durham (Mr. Lawrence) built his case of mistrust in the government on false