

Capital Punishment

I can tell the Hon. Member that many criminals who are arrested after one, two or three hold-ups may receive sentences of ten years of imprisonment, but are often out on the streets after two or three years.

What happens then? When they get out after two or three years, they are told that if they are caught committing another hold-up, they will finish their ten-year sentence and receive an additional sentence of perhaps eight or ten years. The criminal therefore sees to it that, if he commits another hold-up, he will not get caught. What is the result of this comedy? It can lead to murder.

As the Hon. Member said, Mr. Speaker, the first thing should be to reform our penal system. He was also right when he said that we are all human beings and that those who are in favour of the death penalty are not any less so than those who are against it. As for me, Mr. Speaker, I started off by being in favour of the death penalty, but it is very easy outside this place to say that you are for or against the death penalty. However, when you are elected to this place and you have to vote and say: Yes, I support the death penalty in this beautiful country of Canada, I want us to hire executioners to kill other human beings . . .

I am therefore asking the Hon. Member: Should we not improve our penal system first? As we are all human beings, if you were asked tomorrow to serve as executioner, would you do it?

[English]

Mr. Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, when I rose earlier I simply wanted to make the point to the Hon. Member for Bourassa that I thought this was a non-partisan, non-party issue and therefore it would obviously be up to Mr. Speaker to choose individual Members in terms of questioning, not with a view to switching back and forth from one Party to another. I think that is really the essence of this debate.

The Hon. Member suggested that capital punishment was the number one item on my agenda back in the campaign. That is certainly not so, far from it. My basic interest was to try to get the economy of the country working again. Indeed, that is what the Government has been trying to do.

There was a commitment to air the matter of capital punishment. A great many other items had to come ahead of it. It is now finally being given its expression, and I think it is an important fulfilment of a commitment.

I appreciate where the Hon. Member is coming from on the matter. I did, in my remarks, refer to the Standing Committee on Justice and Solicitor General, under the chairmanship of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Ottawa West, which I understand will be undertaking a review of the parole and release system. I think that it is a very important initiative.

In the meantime, I also believe that the return of capital punishment for certain circumstances is necessary in order to

beef up our system of justice and in order that law-abiding Canadian citizens may feel free to walk the streets of the country in safety.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Before recognizing the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier (Mr. Gauthier), I believe there is a point of order from the Hon. Member for Victoria (Mr. McKinnon).

Mr. McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, my point of order has to do with the tabling of petitions again. This morning the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper) tabled a petition which he stated quite clearly contained several thousand names. He may have wished that it contained several thousand names, and they certainly went to a lot of effort to collect these across the country. The petitions all have at the bottom "please return postage free to" and it names the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre, NDP Postal Critic, House of Commons, Ottawa.

Instead of several thousand names, there are 607 names. I wonder how long we have to put up with this distortion, this exaggeration, to try to make the case which they do not have, to try to make the people watching think that there are many thousand or several thousand signatures when in fact the best effort they could come up with was 607.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Keeper).

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to reply to my hon. colleague. I want to make it clear to him that I still have another stack sitting on my desk which I did not have enough time to sign this morning and which I will sign and table—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): This is debate—

Mr. Keeper: Allow me—you allowed him, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): This is debate, and it has no place at this time. The Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier—

Mr. Keeper: A point of order, Mr. Speaker, you allowed him to get away with it; when it comes to the Opposition, you sit down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have already listened to the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre—

Mr. Keeper: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have listened to the Hon. Member for Victoria. I don't consider it to be a point of order, and I do not consider yours to be a point of order. On debate, the Hon. Member for Ottawa—Vanier—

Mr. Keeper: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—