

Criminal Code

Mr. Speaker, shall we run the risk of exposing the life of hundreds of citizens in order to protect some people who are truly responsible for the death penalty in Canada?

It is said that the death penalty is no deterrent. Let us ask those who commit hold-ups whether they fear the death penalty. I should like to quote from an item published last week in a newspaper of my area about two thieves who broke into a private home and found a woman and a young girl. It reads as follows:

Armed with baseball bats, the two men wearing hoods, a cap and gloves, struck Mrs. Cournoyer in the face. Miss Cournoyer was severely beaten over the head, the arms, the back and the legs. And throughout the beating, they insisted to know where the money was hidden. Before leaving, the hooded bandits struck the women again warning them not to call police because their days would be numbered.

Did those thieves fear the death penalty? For instance, if one of the hoods had fallen off by accident and the man had feared one of the women could have identified him, would he not before leaving, have done away with such an incriminating witness?

We cannot see it through statistics. It is impossible to see from statistics whether capital punishment prevented someone from committing a crime.

Mr. Speaker, if fear is the beginning of wisdom, I am of the opinion that this deterrent measure or this punishment for a crime against society must remain in our statutes.

Mr. Speaker, today I should like to turn the tables and say this: Those who are really opposed to the death penalty will vote for its retention in our statutes. Personally, if I vote as I am going to vote for the retention of capital punishment, it is because I want to remove the penalty of death at the hands of criminals from my fellow citizens, my brothers and my children, and above all, because I want society to retain the feeling that it is protected by adequate laws.

• (6:20 p.m.)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Roxburgh (Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, I intended to say a few preliminary words on this question but because of the time I shall deal immediately with the subject of capital punishment. There are two questions I wish to deal with in this connection. First, is it fair to people in all walks of life? Second, through rehabilitation is there something to be gained by replacing capital punishment with life imprisonment?

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Before dealing with these two questions may I say that when one speaks of a sentence of life imprisonment and uses the phrase "life imprisonment" it raises the argument, voiced by many, that it will cost too much to keep these people in prison. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, it is extremely difficult to believe that Canadian people have become so dollar-minded and callous in their thinking that they could not care less and are willing to snuff out a life in order to save, so they think, a few paltry coppers in taxes. Actually this argument is totally unfounded. People who think this way forget or ignore the tremendous cost involved in capital trials and their aftermath of appeals, and they do not know the realities of prison life.

Certainly, there may be the odd lifer or prisoner who gives no adequate return to the state in terms of dollars and cents. Let me say here, Mr. Speaker, that most lifers work in prison. They work in the printing shop or in tailoring or clerical work. I should like to point out also that if the prisoners were paid a wage commensurate with their services they would be able to pay the cost of their own maintenance. Since they receive nothing, it is easy to forget that they are a source of financial profit to the institution in one way or another. May I add, Mr. Speaker, that practically any warden will testify to the fact it is from the group of lifers that he draws a considerable number of his most trusted workers.

I come back to the question, can something be gained by the convict and by society through life imprisonment rather than capital punishment? In order to illustrate my point I should like to cite a few cases in which prisoners have been given life imprisonment rather than the death sentence. Let me start with the case of Robert Stroud, a case of a truly life sentence. Robert Stroud, the celebrated bird man of Alcatraz, spent 54 years of his life behind prison bars. About 43 of those years were spent in solitary confinement during which time he was raising and studying birds. Robert Stroud was an impatient killer who fought off despair through those 43 years in solitary confinement. He studied birds and started with two sparrows. At one time he had as many as 300 birds crammed into his little cell. His book, "Digest of Bird Diseases", made him a world authority on birds. This same man, who spent all of his life in prison, also became an authority on legal strategy and wrote a book on penology.