

*Criminal Code*

Unfortunately, I did not have time to make statistical research in the other provinces, but I should like to put in the record anyway the statistics I have for the province of Quebec.

A survey conducted on the number of homicides committed in Quebec from 1946 to 1965 provides us with the following figures: In 1946, 36 murders; in 1947, 32 murders; in 1948, 32 murders; in 1949, 29 murders; in 1950, 34 murders. Or an average of 32 murders a year for the five year period.

In 1951, 40 murders; in 1952, 42 murders; in 1953, 43 murders; in 1954, 32 murders; in 1955, 36 murders. Or an average of 38 murders a year for the five-year period and an increase of 13 per cent over the five preceding years.

In 1956, 40 murders; in 1957, 37 murders; in 1958, 39 murders; in 1959, 44 murders; in 1960, 47 murders. Average for these five years: 41 murders, or an increase of 12 per cent over the five preceding years.

In 1961, 57 murders; in 1962, 45 murders; in 1963, 63 murders; in 1964, 54 murders; in 1965, 65 murders. Hence an average of 57 murders a year for the five year period 1961 to 1965 incl., and an increase of 28 per cent over the five preceding years.

I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that between 1961-65, a period during which the cabinet commuted death sentences, in addition to the statistics which I mentioned earlier, there was a considerable increase in the number of murders in the province of Quebec.

The following figures refer to our population:

In 1951, the province of Quebec had a population of 4,055,681.

In 1956, the population reached 4,628,378 inhabitants, an increase of 14.12 per cent of the five-year period; there was a 13 per cent increase in crime in the same period.

In 1961, the province of Quebec had a population of 5,259,211, an increase of 13.6 per cent for the five-year period, but during the same period, there was a 12 per cent increase in crimes.

On December 31, 1965, there was a population of 5,700,000 in Quebec, an increase of 11.4 per cent over the previous years, whilst the murder rate for the corresponding years showed an increase of 27 per cent.

In Quebec, since 1959, all death sentences have been commuted, and there was no execution; but at the same time, the rate of murders has doubled in our province in the last five years.

These statistics, Mr. Speaker, indicate an alarming and nearly desperate situation. All the members of this house understand that the province of Quebec has had a sad experience for the last few months in this respect.

We may recall the case of an ex-convict who had been sentenced to life imprisonment and who, having been released from the penitentiary after some years by the National Parole Board, a few months later cut the throats of four children.

We all remember vividly the murder of two policemen which occurred in Montreal last year and in which the criminal, without batting an eye-lash, shot down two peace officers who were endeavouring to arrest the perpetrator of a bank robbery who had killed a person in the commission of his crime. All this shows that to my mind the time is ill-chosen to abolish the death penalty.

It will be said that it is not proven that the death penalty acts as a deterrent and can prevent a criminal from committing a crime. But what is not known is that there is no certainty either that the abolition of capital punishment would not lead to a greater number of crimes precisely because of the removal of this deterrent which is the death penalty.

It is impossible to assert that individuals who are not criminals now would not let themselves be led down the path of crime if we were to abolish capital punishment.

• (7:30 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, from my experience in the practice of law, I believe that criminals give great importance to the penalties provided in the criminal code. How many times, in the practice of law, have we realized it.

Indeed, the bill before us provides no alternative, since the death penalty is to be replaced by life imprisonment; I submit that that is not a proper alternative.

Indeed, we do not have the assurance that the person sentenced to life imprisonment will remain there all his life since this resolution provides that the responsibility will lie with the governor in council to carry out his prerogatives concerning mercy.

Does life imprisonment mean a term of 10, 15, 20 years or more in this resolution? We do not know.

Experience has shown to date that in many cases, the parole board has released murderers sentenced to life imprisonment after a period of 10 to 12 years; and the same thing could happen when the governor in council chooses to exercise his prerogative of mercy.

We have been told, during this debate, that the abolition of the death penalty would show that our country has achieved a certain maturity, that our civilization has evolved; however, in a well-organized society, there are laws which ensure the preservation and protection of its members. Its rules and its laws must be adhered to by all individuals.