

*Criminal Code*

I am unlike the last speaker. I rise to take part in this debate, not to try to change anyone else to my own way of thinking, but simply to report to the people I represent in my constituency, and to Canadians generally, why I feel that I have no other choice in conscience but to vote against this resolution.

I know that many hon. members sincerely hold the opposite point of view, and I have no quarrel with them. However, I recognize that in common with others who will wish to vote against this resolution, I shall be branded by some as being opposed to progress, as being reactionary, and perhaps being even less civilized than they are. I accept these unjust and unjustifiable charges as one of the burdens of conscientious public service, in an age when the majority of people may not yet have realized that haphazard change is infinitely more likely to be retrogression than it is to be progress.

● (8:40 p.m.)

Progress is not so easily attained. Progress is achieved only by a carefully judged assessment of the possible courses open to us and by rejection of those which cannot reasonably be demonstrated to be expected to lead to an improvement on the course we are already steering. The theory that because progress is change, therefore change is progress is so outrageously illogical that it is a mystery to me why so many seemingly rational people reason in this way. It is as illogical as saying that because people who live in London live in England, therefore the people who live in England live in London. It is even less logical than that, because the chance of an Englishman being a Londoner is much greater than the chance of change for the sake of change being progress.

A great philosopher once said that when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. We shall be accused of being reactionary. I do not accept this charge. I stand where I do on this question because I believe that those who favour the abolition of capital punishment have not been able to establish that what they propose would likely be an improvement over the law as it now stands.

Third, I wish to deal with the implication that nations which retain capital punishment are in some way less civilized than those which have abolished it—stemming from which, I suppose, is the inference that those of us who support the retention of capital punishment are in some way less

civilized than those who wish to abolish it. This is nonsense and I reject it categorically as being wholly unproven. As a matter of fact I could cite cases which would seem to support the opposite view. Three hundred years ago my own ancestors in the western isles of Scotland feuded among themselves, and with the ancestors of many other hon. members here. In those days it was not considered a capital offence to knock off some of your neighbours during these feuds. There were other penalties. You might be fined or outlawed or something of that sort, but capital punishment was not the usual thing. I should like to think we are more civilized in this respect in this day and age than my ancestors were 300 years ago.

Capital punishment is, of course, not a pleasant thing. It is a gruesome thing, no doubt. But there are many things in life which are necessary and which are unpleasant. Today, especially, when contract murder is being carried out as part of organized crime throughout North America we must be very careful where we go. The fact that capital punishment is not a pleasant thing is no reason for rejecting it. It is hard to find a suitable comparison to make, but the abolition of capital punishment would, in the thinking of many people, be similar to our passing a law prohibiting surgeons from carrying out extensive and gruesome operations on persons suffering from particularly bad diseases. It is the only choice. It is not a pleasant one, but in my judgment it is the least of a number of evils in a given situation.

Capital punishment has been referred to by some as just legalized murder. To me this is a shamefully irresponsible statement. I think the main difference between capital punishment and murder, legalized or otherwise, is the effect on the citizens of this country. No citizen who has even a minimum of respect for the law or for the rights of his fellow men need have any fear that he will be the victim of capital punishment. A citizen can even commit murder—as a crime of passion—and not suffer capital punishment. Yet what about the victims of murderers? The most upright citizen in the land may be slaughtered in cold blood, or his children may be abducted and murdered on their way from Sunday school, as has happened many times in the past. To call capital punishment legalized murder is a complete distortion of anything which is logical. It is, I suppose, an attempt to play on the emotions of those who must deal with the