

Capital Punishment

last year for a period of five years. I agree, Mr. Speaker, that we should put it to the test, but not for five years. In 1973, Bill C-2, an Act to amend the Criminal Code, was introduced in the House of Commons. It attempted to add some provisions to the present act to provide that only murderers of policemen or prison guards would be charged with capital murder. Today, the hon. member is asking us to wait for five years, and this same government has not been able to wait for five years to find out the results of the law we adopted.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is important to listen carefully to the demands of our people. Here, in Ottawa, I heard today in the news that policemen's wives from the city of Ottawa were circulating a petition precisely to force the government to hold a referendum or to restore capital punishment. How many policemen and prison guards have been killed since we abolished capital punishment? Unfortunately, I do not have the figures, but a great number of policeman and prison guards have been killed since we abolished capital punishment in Canada.

We also heard some hon. members tell us earlier that the first vote on capital punishment was a free vote. How strange it is; I discussed with hon. members on the government side whom I shall not name and who said that people asked them to restore capital punishment when we were examining this piece of legislation. How strange that these same hon. members voted once again for the removal of capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important that the House, once again for the benefit of the Canadian people and for the security of honest citizens, support the hon. member's motion asking for a referendum, to follow a guideline which will be set up for us by the Canadian people. I am sure, Mr. Speaker that, after this referendum and several inquiries like those I made in my constituency, and where 89 per cent of the population said they are for the restoration of capital punishment, again 89 per cent of the population will want to be able to walk quietly and securely in the streets. Mr. Speaker, I would not like to be told this evening that I have been the one who talked out the hon. member's motion.

Mr. Speaker, I end my speech by urging all hon. members in the House to support the hon. member's motion, to give once and for all the Canadian people the right to vote on this serious problem of capital punishment.

[English]

● (1742)

Mr. Gus Mitges (Grey-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I support unequivocally the motion of my colleague, the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Friesen), with regard to the necessity of a referendum on capital punishment.

I do not think there is anything so dastardly to the thinking of Canadians everywhere than to have a murder committed that was either premeditated, planned, a hired murder or murder committed in the pursuit of a crime, than to have one who commits such a murder not pay the supreme penalty as the laws of Canada provided and insisted on prior to the

[Mr. Caouette (Villeneuve).]

passing of the legislation which abolished capital punishment in 1976.

The hon. member for Kenora-Rainy River (Mr. Reid) stated that voting at that time was a free vote. I agree that it was certainly a free vote in every respect from this party's point of view, that it was indeed a free vote in our party. However, I must say that the hon. gentleman exaggerated beyond extreme when he stated, I think with tongue in cheek, that it was a free vote on the government side.

The hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. Holt) asked the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) prior to the taking of the vote whether he could confirm if the vote was to be a free vote. I remember being in the House at that time. The Prime Minister's answer was so inaudible that I do not think anyone got the right answer. I do not think he made any kind of answer. In any event, no audible reply was made by the Prime Minister.

The solid vote by the Liberal cabinet for the abolition of capital punishment was not an accident. You can take from that what you will. I feel sure that if some cabinet ministers had voted as they privately wished to do, the vote would have resulted in the retention of capital punishment.

The murder of our policemen in the carrying out of their duties in ever increasing numbers, six this year alone, is having a most unfavourable reaction among all our police forces from one end of Canada to the other. It has had serious effects on their morale and desire to carry out their duties, or even to continue in their careers.

I suggest, despite all the opposition to capital punishment, that it is a deterrent. Its re-establishment in our laws will be once again a step forward to a greater respect for our laws by all criminal elements. It will give our law enforcement agents the tool that they so desperately need to carry out their duties with zeal and determination. That zeal is now somewhat lacking because of the murders of their brothers in the pursuit of their duties by assailants who know that, if apprehended, they will only have to serve a few years for their crime and then be free to commit murder and other crimes again.

In conclusion, I support my colleague's motion for a referendum. The government should go along with the desires of our country as expressed in many polls. More than 80 per cent of Canadians want a return of capital punishment.

Mrs. Simma Holt (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this debate with mixed feelings. During the prelude to the capital punishment debate, I wished for a referendum, yet I knew that many of us here were acting as representatives of our constituents. In order to represent our constituents and their wishes on issues that they have extremely strong feelings about, as they did in the capital punishment debate, a vote must be completely free.

I say to the hon. member who just spoke that there was not a free vote on either side. Those who subscribe to his leader's wishes on abolition followed him. I know there was pressure of various types on members, the worst kind of pressure—the feeling that you have to vote with your leader to get ahead.