

## Private Bills

Bill No. 135, for the relief of Phyllis Violet Perlson Wright.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 136, for the relief of Margaret Eadie Kerr Britton.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 137, for the relief of George Robert Stirling Henry.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 138, for the relief of Margaret Elizabeth Thelma Webb Crothers.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 139, for the relief of Pauline Liliane Baron Brumby.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 140, for the relief of Madeleine Blain Cousineau.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 141, for the relief of Angelina Maria Di Battista Gill.—Mr. Winkler.

Bill No. 142, for the relief of Charles Snoade Hilder.—Mr. Winkler.

## CRIMINAL CODE

## AMENDMENT TO PROVIDE FOR ABOLITION OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

**Mr. W. Ross Thatcher (Moose Jaw)** moved the second reading of Bill No. 108, to amend the Criminal Code (capital punishment).

He said: The purpose of this bill is to abolish capital punishment and substitute therefor life imprisonment. It is similar to a bill which I introduced on April 18, 1950. On that occasion I dealt at some length with the arguments against hanging, and I do not intend to go into the same details at this time.

I know some hon. members doubt the wisdom or desirability of this kind of legislation at the present time. Many are of the opinion that opposition to the death penalty is based on ill-advised and sloppy sentimentality. However, I feel that the practice of hanging is so revolting that parliament should consider its repeal once again.

I might say, Mr. Speaker, that in deciding to proceed with this bill in the current session I have been influenced somewhat by correspondence which I have received from various religious and fraternal groups across the country. For instance, on January 9, 1953, the *Toronto Telegram* quoted an editorial in the *United Church Observer*, organ of the United Church of Canada, as follows:

Execution by hanging is brutal, cruel and inhuman, a sadistic spectacle shocking to the Christian conscience.

The annual meeting of the Carmichael United Church in Regina passed this resolution this year:

Whereas the execution of criminals by hanging is cruel, inhuman and brutal; we the congregation of the Carmichael United Church of Canada vigorously protest the continuance of such manner of execution.

The Rev. H. Howey of the United Church of Aurora, Ontario, wrote me as follows:

Our whole church should support you. I have preached against it. And our presbytery I believe would support you.

These are typical of many letters I have received in recent months. I think they indicate a growing revulsion against this savage and inhuman method of execution. Since confederation approximately 700 people have been hanged in Canada. Speaking in the 1950 debate the then solicitor general (Mr. Lapointe) said that an average of about ten people a year were hanged. Actually in 1951 and 1952 the number was greater than ten.

I agree with most of the classical observations which have been advanced over the years by social reformers advocating the abolition of capital punishment. I think in considering the question hon. members should keep these objections in mind. In the first place capital punishment violates the Christian belief in the sanctity of human life, because if it is wrong for an individual to kill, surely it is equally wrong for the state to take a human life. Second, there is always the danger of hanging an innocent man. Once the punishment has been inflicted there is no possible rectification in the case of error.

**Mr. Gibson:** The guy has no future.

**Mr. Thatcher:** One hon. member said that humans err and judges and juries can make mistakes. We had a grim example of that in the city of Toronto last week. I hold in my hand a copy of the *Toronto Globe and Mail* of February 13. It is headed: "Mistake jails man ten months" and reads as follows:

A Toronto detective's sense of fair play led him to help uncover evidence that resulted yesterday in the acquittal of a man who served 10 months in the Don jail for an armed robbery he never committed.

It was a case of mistaken identity, and it cost Ronald (Rocky) Power, a 22-year-old Nova Scotian who had no criminal record, his freedom, his job, his personal papers, including his U.S. birth certificate, two topcoats, three suits, 12 shirts—and a lot of worry.

**An hon. Member:** And no compensation.

**Mr. Thatcher:** And no compensation. If young Power had been condemned for a robbery where someone had been shot, by this time he might have been hanged. Therefore I say that there always is the danger of an innocent man being hanged. History recounts numerous instances where that has happened.

My third objection to hanging is the brutality of the actual execution. There was a parliamentary committee in 1937 which studied this question. Mr. S. Wills, Toronto deputy sheriff, testified that in eleven hangings which he had attended, there had not