

Amendments Respecting Death Sentence

was hanged. The clergyman is dead; nevertheless, he confided to this woman that after speaking with Coffin a few minutes before the hanging he, the clergyman, would be convinced to his dying day that Coffin was innocent.

If there is no evidence that the death sentence is a deterrent and if we are not interested in maintaining it, should we not abolish it if only to protect the odd person from being found guilty of a crime of which he is innocent?

Many hon. members in this house are lawyers and I respect them sincerely. Surely they must have anxious moments in criminal cases when their clients are found guilty; surely they must ask themselves whether they have overlooked anything, whether they have been negligent, or whether the conviction has resulted from their inability to defend the accused. Bearing in mind the case which I read into the record, it is only reasonable to suppose that judges and juries in cases where the accused has been convicted of capital murder have anxious moments when they consider whether they have acted properly.

Only last year in New York there was a case that might have become another miscarriage of justice. Only the interest of a policeman, who tracked down the real criminal, saved an innocent man. I shall not repeat statistics; to do so would be to repeat what others have said.

• (3:40 p.m.)

The hon. members for Northumberland and Athabasca (Mr. Bigg) said that we must do more to rehabilitate our criminals. The hon. member for Bow River, who has been interested enough in the matter to introduce a private bill touching on the matter, feels that crimes may be prevented in certain ways. It has been suggested that the time to reform criminals is when they begin to engage in crime, between the ages of 10 and 12. I, as a member of parliament, have had some experience in this regard, as have no doubt other hon. members. We have heard of the youngster who for various reasons did not attend school classes; he may have found them too difficult or he may not have been able to keep up with his classmates. He and others like him stay away from school, and graduate to stealing hub caps. Before long they are breaking into local drug stores. When they are 16 or 17 they become bolder and, finally becoming more reckless and having run into the authorities and acquired a

[Mr. Mackasey.]

record, in the commission of a crime or in a great fluster they shoot someone with a defective pistol.

It seems to me we should be directing more attention to guiding these youngsters between 10 and 14 years old—youngsters who have all the potential of our own children, but who have been deprived of opportunity to display it. I think we could make a tremendous case in this house, if we were really socially minded, for the reduction of our slums, for the cleansing of the rotten cores of our great cities. I think there is a direct relationship between the slums of this nation and the production of criminals. It is unbelievable we should be able to spend millions of dollars on rockets and the exploration of space while being unable to eradicate the slums of this nation, the breeding grounds of crime. With every dollar we spend on clearing the slums and putting up better housing we take a step nearer the day when crime is reduced to a minimum.

I doubt whether I have added anything to the debate. I doubt whether I have persuaded anyone, but I do not think we can justify the continuation of the death penalty as a deterrent. The one statistic I have read into the record shows that only two parolees have ever been convicted of murder a second time. The fact that no one has advanced the argument that the death penalty should be retained as a form of punishment indicates to me that the house should pass the measure before it for the sake of removing, once and for all, the possibility of innocent people being hanged.

Mr. Woolliams: The hon. member for Verdun said he would answer a question. He has been most courteous in his argument, looking at both sides of the question. But let me read him an extract from the debate reported in *Hansard* at page 4108 last night. I want to ask the hon. member whether he agrees with the Solicitor General (Mr. Pennell) in this:

I hesitate to interrupt the interesting remarks of the hon. member (Mr. Flemming) but it is a deterrent. My point is that it is not a special, unique deterrent. I acknowledge that it is a deterrent.

Does the hon. member agree?

Mr. Mackasey: The Solicitor General is here, and will correct me if necessary, but my hon. friend probably means that though the death penalty is a deterrent in some cases it is probably no more effective than a life sentence would be, or a sentence of 20 years. I suspect the Solicitor General means they are deterrents of equal value, and if this is the case, we should choose the one which