

Honourable senators, I would like to read again from the letter of the Canadian Catholic Conference, because it expresses better than I can what should be our guiding role in this matter:

The question of the death penalty, in our opinion, ought not focus on whether a convicted murderer, no matter how wanton, "deserves" to die. The focus should be on us: should Canadians as a community try to break the escalating spiral of violence by refraining from violence even as a deterrent?

Personally, honourable senators, I think we would be doing a noble work if we were to break the escalating spiral of violence by abolishing the death penalty in Canada.

May I read one further excerpt from the same letter from the Canadian Catholic Conference? For your information, I add that this Conference is the Association of the Roman Catholic Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops of Canada. Of course, no one has to accept their conclusions, but they are deserving of consideration. I wish to place before you this part:

There is also a pragmatic, statistical question whether the death penalty is an effective deterrent. We will not enter this debate. Our question is not whether the death penalty is an effective deterrent; our question is whether it is an absolutely necessary deterrent, required by good order in Canada today. Unless you are convinced that it is, then we feel that the presumption should be for suspension. Furthermore, in our opinion the case for retention of the death penalty has not been proven.

Hon. Mr. Martin: May I ask Senator Macdonald for the date of that statement?

Hon. Mr. Macdonald: January 16, 1973.

Hon. Mr. Martin: Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Macdonald: Honourable senators, in my opinion the arguments advanced for the retention of the death penalty for murder are not convincing. As a punishment it is a relic of barbarism; as a deterrent it does not deter. I urge you, therefore, to support Bill S-8.

As I have mentioned, the bill before us would abolish capital punishment altogether. If you look at the sections of the National Defence Act mentioned in the bill, you will agree with me that the time has come to bring that act into line with present day thinking and present day conditions. Personally, I believe it is an insult to our armed forces to leave these sections of the act as they are. Indeed, we

should give that whole act a thorough examination, with a view to introducing appropriate amendments. The Canadian Armed Forces have served with great distinction in every theatre of war in which they have been engaged, and that applies also to peacekeeping operations. I say it is an insult to brave men and women to have an act on our statute books which says they will be put to death—shot, I suppose—if they do not do their duty. Let us, at least at this time, do away with the death penalty.

Honourable senators, believing as I do that the retention of capital punishment cannot be justified, believing as I do that we should break the escalating spiral of violence, believing as I do that human life from the moment of conception is a God-given right not to be taken away by man except under extraordinary circumstances, I ask you to support this bill.

Hon. Lionel Choquette: Honourable senators, I want to say a few words in this debate. As I told my good friend Senator Macdonald, I intend to support the bill. This might sound a bit illogical on my part, owing to the fact that five years ago, when we had before us the bill to keep capital punishment in force in the case of the murder of a guard or a police officer on duty, I spoke in favour of retaining capital punishment. But I can say that in Canada capital punishment has in effect been abolished for almost ten years. Moreover, we know, since we passed that bill five years ago, that prison guards have been murdered; we know that police officers have been murdered; and we know that in a few cases their murderers were found guilty, and then their sentences were commuted.

● (1450)

Honourable senators, I imagine that the bill providing for renewal of the abolition of capital punishment for another five years, and which I consider to be a joke, will be coming to us. It had been my intention to speak at that time along these same lines. I really want to be logical by saying that if capital punishment is going to be abolished, it should be abolished completely in the manner advocated by Senator Macdonald.

Had I been here at the beginning when he introduced his bill, I should have seconded it. It was so arranged. However, since I was not here, he found another seconder.

I am pleased, therefore, to support this bill now introduced by my honourable friend, Senator Macdonald.

On motion of Senator McIlraith, debate adjourned.

The Senate adjourned until Tuesday, June 26, at 8 p.m.