

*Amendments Respecting Death Sentence*

am concerned, puzzles me, since the amendments proposed to the act as it now stands are such that they will mix things up much more than they will improve them.

Some months ago I was having dinner at the Chateau Laurier with another member of the cabinet and the conversation took a turn to the abolition of the death penalty. I then asked the hon. minister why the government wished to have this subject debated again in the house, since parliament had reached a decision on the matter just about a year ago. He told me quite candidly that it was because the bill had not been introduced in the house in a proper manner at that time. When I asked him whether the government would introduce the same bill or reopen the debate on capital punishment, if parliament had taken the opposite view, of course, he said no.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I feel that by raising again such a controversial matter as capital punishment, the house is caused, so to speak, to lose valuable time which could be used to consider much more essential pieces of legislation than the one now before us. In fact, this leads me to believe that if the bill of the Solicitor General is rejected, the house will be called upon again to express its opinion on this matter next year.

So, Mr. Speaker, for all these considerations, taking into account what has happened in the country, within the province of Quebec as well as in the country as a whole, I reached the conclusion that I have no reasons to change my views on capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, an argument which is rather frequently put forward is that we should be sufficiently civilized in Canada to abolish the death penalty. But, let us look around at what is happening now, when we hear the news on radio or television or when we read the newspapers. For instance, the pages of the newspapers are filled with reports of all kinds of crimes from murder to rape to robberies of bank, drug stores and all kinds of business establishments. Old people's homes are broken into, and the oldsters are bound, mistreated and robbed and if they are strong enough to resist, they are even murdered sometimes. So, in view of all these things, of the facility with which people obtain narcotics, in view of increasing alcoholism and contempt for authority which is noticeable almost everywhere, I am beginning to wonder whether we are civilized enough to abolish capital punishment at this time.

• (5:10 p.m.)

Since this matter was placed on the order paper, Mr. Speaker, we have heard several well-informed persons having authority to express opinions. I have before me an editorial written by Roger Bruneau, in the October 23, 1967 issue of the newspaper *L'Action* of Quebec, where he was asking himself certain questions in connection with this bill introduced by the Solicitor General. This journalist observed, and rightly so, that:

If it is true that by maintaining the death penalty against murderers of police officers or prison guards—

It must be understood here that the bill sponsored by the Solicitor General is an amendment to the present act providing for the death penalty in cases of capital murder only.

So the amendment stipulates that only murders of police officers, police constables, constables, sheriffs, deputy sheriffs as well as wardens, deputy wardens, instructors, keepers, gaolers or guards are considered capital murders.

If it is true that by maintaining the death penalty against the murderers of police officers or prison guards those people are being protected and the number of victims is being limited as much as possible, why could not the same line of thought be applied in the case of murder in general?

Well, Mr. Speaker, if it is true that considering guilty of capital murder anyone who kills or murders a police officer or a prison guard can incite potential criminals to reconsider their action and refrain from murdering those people, it seems to me that the same situation could exist, for instance, for the father or mother of a family. Why then should we not ask the same question about the druggist who is robbed day or night in cities like Montreal or Toronto, or elsewhere, or about a bank manager? Their lives are just as much in danger, I would say, as those of policemen or jail guards. Why should not this principle apply as well to any business owner? We could ask ourselves the same question.

If, by making the murder of such people capital murder such crimes could be prevented, the same reasoning would apply with respect to any other citizen in Canada and, accordingly, the same result would ensue.

There is another aspect I would like to deal with here. It concerns the death penalty for capital murder, which, in principle, no longer exists in Canada since 1963; this penalty still exists, but it is not applied. Accordingly, this government does not comply with the law of the land, duly enacted by parliament.