

Capital Punishment

this bill, because it has been established to my satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of the Solicitor General, that capital punishment is not a deterrent.

Until we make some positive progress toward eradicating poverty and the symptoms of poverty—the slums and ghettos—we will continue to have crime and violence. Until society and our national government, working with the provinces, provide funds to make available proper day care facilities, a healthy environment, and good sound education for the children of broken homes and of single parent families, I believe we will have young people growing up feeling socially disadvantaged, having no respect for authority or for the law.

I believe too that until we take positive and meaningful steps to teach our children the danger of alcohol and drug abuse, we will continue to be faced with major social problems in this country. We can make a start, Mr. Speaker. I laud the concern expressed by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) over the excesses of beer and alcohol advertising in this country, this tendency toward the peer group kind of advertising. Until we curb this sort of thing and recognize that we have a major social problem in Canada of teenage alcoholism, we will continue to have youngsters going astray.

Our jails and penitentiaries are populated by the young, the socially disadvantaged, and the poor. A few months ago I had a very moving experience, certainly one of the most traumatic experiences in my life, when I toured Dorchester penitentiary, an institution that really has no place in modern society and which should have been torn down years ago. What struck me about that institution, apart altogether from its medieval-like walls, cells, and solitary confinement areas, were the inmates. They were the poor, the disadvantaged, the socially short-changed, the young—the minority groups.

I believe that the words of the Solicitor General have great relevance here. If I may paraphrase him, he said that the application of capital punishment in the past has been unfair because it has been applied disproportionately to the poor, to the unrepresented, and to the minority groups. If hon. members want to see evidence of that, Mr. Speaker, they should visit the maximum security institutions of this country.

I am voting for this bill, Mr. Speaker. I will support it although I am not at all happy with some of its aspects. Nevertheless I support it because I am opposed to capital punishment. I support it not out of any sense of arrogance. I do so out of no sense of moral superiority or of superior judgment. I do so out of very sincere conviction, conviction that is very deeply held. I do so out of the conviction that it is morally wrong to take the life of another, be the executioner the state or an individual.

Mr. C. Douglas (Bruce-Grey): Mr. Speaker, for many of us in the back row on both sides of this honourable House the question now before us is before us for the first time in our capacity as legislators. I am sure that no matter what position we take, that of retention or that of abolition, there is not one new member who has not agonized over this most important of all questions for many weeks, yes many months. The decision that we make as to retention or

[Mr. McGrath.]

abolition of capital punishment will have long lasting and far reaching effects on this great country of ours.

I do not have the background that many members of this House have in bringing forth their points of view and arguments either for retention or for abolition. I simply want to state my view, a view that I have spent many hours agonizing over and considering.

Without fear of contradiction, Mr. Speaker, I would class this deliberation which we are embarking on now as the most important one that we will make in our young careers as legislators, and for that matter the most important decision for this honourable body since January of 1973 when the five-year extension of abolition of capital punishment was passed. You know, Mr. Speaker, it is not too often that politicians get a second chance at legislation, a chance to reconsider their position, perhaps a chance to correct a mistake—if the extension that was agreed to in 1973 was a mistake. But we have it now, and I for one hope that we will take a very close look at the decision we are going to make within the next few weeks.

You may be aware, Mr. Speaker, that there is a current saying going the rounds among the public at the present time—one I am not altogether pleased with. It is "Try it, you'll like it". The people of Canada have been trying abolition of capital punishment to some extent or other for close to 10 years, and I think it is fair to say that society in general has found that it does not like it. Judging from all the reports I have heard, people have emphatically given the indication that they do not like what is happening in society and would like to see a return to capital punishment. They have let the members of this House know in every way they can that they wish the death penalty reinstated for premeditated murder, for premeditated murder not just of a police officer or a prison guard but for crimes of passion to a certain extent, as well as, for the hijacker, the terrorist, and those who commit murder through the perpetration of an offence such a bank robbery or armed holdup.

If there is one thing bothering the police officer and the prison guard in carrying out their duties, Mr. Speaker, it is being segregated from the rest of our population. Should we return to the death penalty I think this is one aspect we must take into consideration.

Take the case of police officer whose wife is a bank teller. If a holdup should take place in a bank and that police officer goes to investigate, perhaps the individual involved, the perpetrator of the crime, would fire two shots, both at the police officer, both missing, but one striking the police officer's wife who was still carrying out her duty as a bank teller. The person who fired those shots while committing the indictable offence of holding up the bank could not be sentenced to capital punishment if he hit the policeman's wife, yet both of them were taking the same chances in carrying out their occupations.

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While I must express my concern and appreciation for the feelings expressed by various members of this House, particularly the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand), who are all opposed to capital punishment, I certainly say I respect those feelings and the feelings of members who have given a similar indication tonight. However, I do not share them,