

Capital Punishment

bers who deplored the way the parole Board allowed the release of those who had seriously broken the law.

If we want to be generous, human, understanding, I think that we must accept as a basic law that a person who has deliberately and seriously broken the law must have a penalty equal to his crime.

Maybe this is the conclusion I draw from the pole I made in my riding where I ask many times the following question: if we had a better parole system, if the people who seriously break the law had to suffer longer imprisonment, would you change your view on capital punishment? I obtained a very positive answer.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would not be in favour of a 25-year imprisonment penalty for instance. I think that we must draw the line somewhere. The offender must have the impression that in time he would be in a position to change that society where maybe he wishes to come back because he has understood that the way he followed was not the one he should have followed.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that imprisonment for as long as 25 years could perhaps satisfy some individuals and bring political support to others. It could perhaps hide behind a smoke-screen the real issue which is primarily to put an end to murders and violence.

Some, Mr. Speaker, refer to statistics in order to attempt to justify retention or abolition of capital punishment. It is true and I think that statistics prove it—that murders have increased since 1967 and this, at first sight, seems to support those in favour of the maintenance of capital punishment.

However, before taking a decision based on statistics, we should ask ourselves how many murders, since the passage of the legislation in 1967, were committed to settle a score. How many of those crimes were committed by people who lived in a social environment where they were contaminated, where they experienced an unhappy childhood, where their parents neglected their education and found themselves in such circumstances that they are not entirely responsible for the murder they did commit.

It follows that statistics can be used to justify either the maintenance or the abolishment of the death penalty. I think that it would be unfortunate to quote a whole series of statistics which can be used in one way or another without setting the basic problem, that is to determine if fear prevails. Indeed I think that all our friends in favour of retaining the death penalty are under the impression that fear of being one day put to death prevents people from committing some reprehensible action.

Mr. Béchard: Fear is the beginning of wisdom!

Mr. Marceau: My hon. friend from Bonaventure-Îles de la Madeleine says that fear is the beginning of wisdom. I hope that this fear will be the beginning of his own wisdom and that he will understand that as a member, a capable notary public and an extremely humane fellow, it would be absolutely absurd for him to preach at home that the law of vengeance and of the underworld would be the one that we ought to comply with. I say that in all friendship for this hon. friend who has never given me the impression that he would go that far in his reasoning.

[Mr. Marceau.]

Mr. Speaker, I would not like to stretch this debate, because I think that others have some extremely valuable opinions to express. In concluding I would like to express a view on the cabinet prerogative to commute death penalties to life imprisonment.

I find it rather strange that, on the one hand, the death penalty is advocated in cases where prison guards or policemen are murdered, that the right to protection is recognized where they are concerned and that their murderers deserve to be put to death, while on the other hand the course of the law can be altered by a political commutation.

Personally, I feel that if we favour some exceptions, as the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) mentioned in his question a while ago, we should be logical enough to pursue the reasoning to its ultimate limit. In fact, I believe that if this bill, as it stands, is accepted, we should seriously consider qualifying the political intervention for commutation in such a way as to allow the judiciary to really play its role; when society, acting through a jury and judge, has decided to take extreme measures in some cases, the law should take its course or those exceptions should be removed which, to my mind, are no longer exceptions if they are finally cancelled through political interventions.

Mr. Speaker, I should therefore like to close my remarks by saying simply this, as honestly and seriously as possible: The bill under study and on which we shall have to vote seems to me to be a compromise—and this is unfortunate—that we regretfully have to accept in the circumstances because in my very limited personal experience—although I still represent a significant number of voters—I have to come to the conclusion that outright abolition of the death penalty would be an inappropriate step that should not be taken.

However, full retention of the death penalty would, in my opinion, be a solution that would not meet the needs of our present society because first and foremost—and I say it again—I hope that the Canadian society in which we have confidence will understand how urgent it is that we consider total abolition of the death penalty within a few years. Regretfully, the present situation does not allow it; I think that, rightfully because violence still exists to various degrees—a violence we want to prevent and whose progress we want to curb—people criticize us for passing compromise legislation. However, I hope and I am convinced that soon the Canadian society, which is the best and which we all cherish, will be mature enough to abolish definitively the death penalty that places Canadians under the rule of violence and fear. We would like to eliminate forever the haunting idea of the death penalty and get back to a Canadian society in which it will be pleasant to live. I am convinced that this will be done very soon.

[*English*]

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I wish to express great thankfulness for being able to take part in this debate tonight because I think it is one of the most important debates we have had during the session. This matter has been under discussion since the beginning of this session and, indeed, during almost the whole length of time I have been in parliament. I cannot