

Capital Punishment

We must think in terms of dividing our Criminal Code into categories for organized and non-organized crime. Also, in the re-examination of our parole system I urge the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) to give every consideration to the problem which I have outlined. What do you do with the organized criminal who happens to be caught and convicted in spite of all the expertise which his backers can amass? This fellow then behaves like a model prisoner and is eligible for parole quickly, even though he is not reformed. What do you do in such instances?

I would argue that with the officials one must devise a parole system that will take into consideration the kind of crime in which a person was involved prior to his conviction. If it was organized crime, there must be different parole procedures. I would also submit that in the case of individuals who show no indication of remorse for what they have done, and no wish to reform, there should not be automatic eligibility for parole. I am 100 per cent in favour of an even more liberal parole system. We should be putting more people on parole. But there is a real deficiency in the way in which we are examining convicts who become eligible for parole. I do not think we are being liberal enough with many of them; yet a large number who become eligible, in my view should never become eligible because of the nature of the crime and because they were part of organized crime or a criminal association prior to their committing the offence, and they will be looked after by this association once they get out, in one way or another—in some cases in a rather unpleasant way, but in most cases financially and otherwise.

Mr. Allmand: There are special rules now.

Mr. Watson: I would hope that these special rules would be further refined to take care of the types of criminal activity which concern me and which I think are engendering among the public at large an unreasonable lack of confidence in our judicial system. I for one believe that our judicial system is immeasurably better now than it was 50 years ago, and vastly superior to what it was 50 years before that. But having said that, I think there is no reason for us to sit back and accept that what we have is good and will be acceptable in the years to come. There is much room for improvement, and that is the area where I believe improvement can take place more effectively and in a way which will increase public confidence in our system.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, in rising to speak on this amendment I would like first of all to commend most sincerely the hon. member for Louis-Hébert (Mrs. Morin) for being so courageous as to introduce this amendment for our consideration today. I believe her action demonstrates that although, presumably, some discipline has been used within the party ranks of the government to avoid such amendments, there are some hon. members who felt sufficiently strongly on this issue, including the hon. member for Louis-Hébert, that they were willing to suggest that this amendment be added to the amendments which were agreed to with respect to Bill C-2 when it was at the committee stage.

Having said that, I would like to add that while I hope to keep my remarks with respect to the amendment reasonably brief, I also hope to have an opportunity as this

[Mr. Watson.]

debate ensues to reiterate some arguments that I feel justify having the death penalty retained in Canada for at least some criminal acts. I would be the first to admit there is almost an inevitable argument raised by members in the House, and sometimes by the public, that it is necessary that this matter be decided by a free vote. It is stated that in a sense it is a matter of conscience whether or not the death penalty should be retained.

I find it very odd on the part of the government—having followed to some extent the actions of the Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand) with respect to this bill when it was referred to committee—to find now that the government still insists that there be a free vote on this matter in the House. Surely if the government, as represented by the Solicitor General, believe in abolition—as I understand the Solicitor General's representations to the standing committee, he feels there should be complete abolition—why does the government not introduce an abolitionist bill, get the party whips working and be done with it? Surely there is no question of conscience if you are suggesting that there should be no death penalty. Surely if there is no question—incidentally, I understand that the vast majority of the Liberal caucus support such an abolitionist measure—that it has nothing to do with conscience, why should the Trudeau government worry about the matter? Yet we find that the government does not have the courage to introduce a complete abolitionist measure into the House.

● (1620)

I can only assume that it is, therefore, not so much a matter of conscience that is disturbing the government as a matter of votes. It knows on this particular issue that it is out of step with the people of Canada, namely, the electors. For reasons that I am earnestly trying to discern, it intends, by devious means or otherwise, to have us accept a postponement of the death penalty provisions for another five years.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is unfortunate that a government is so indecisive in this respect that it does not have the courage of its convictions to bring in a bill which specifically does what the government intends to do anyway, regardless of what we do in this House today, this week, or at any time with respect to the death penalty. They are abolitionists, yet they will not admit it. This is not being fair to the people of Canada. If its members are in truth part of an abolitionist government, let them stand up and be counted, and explain during the next election to the electors why they ignored the popular demand and refused to allow the death penalty to stay in our criminal procedures.

Mr. MacGuigan: They explained that during the last election.

Mr. Stevens: I am very pleased that the hon. member has made that interjection, because obviously something went wrong for them in the last election. I would suggest to him that one of the things that went wrong for the government is that people feel throughout the country that law and order has deteriorated under the Trudeau government.

Mr. Pelletier (Hochelaga): We need a Nixon.