

*Amendments Respecting Death Sentence*

act as machines and cast a vote without thought.

• (4:20 p.m.)

I express this regret because when parliament makes a decision on a matter of major importance, and this is such a matter, I doubt very much that it should be asked to reconsider the matter until there has been a sufficient lapse of time to bring about changed circumstances; and I do not see that there have been any changed circumstances. I express a further regret at the nature of the bill, which is for partial abolition only. I feel truly disturbed and sorry for some very good friends of mine who are deeply concerned about the subject and who spoke in favour of abolition. I feel sorry for those who for years have attempted to have the law changed and last year voted in favour of abolition. I know from conversation with them that they are very disturbed over this bill which proposes partial abolition. As I have said to some of them in all seriousness: How can you vote for the principle of the bill, the principle being partial abolition, when for years you have favoured and are still in favour of total abolition? I believe the government should not have placed members in that embarrassing situation. I think it is unfair. Although one party in this house has already, through its spokesman, said that they will vote for the bill as it stands and then endeavour to change it in committee, again I do not think that party should have been placed in that position. It is a more difficult decision than had to be made 16 months ago. So I criticize the government on that ground.

I said I do not want to repeat the arguments that I used a year and a half ago. I have read them over twice and I cannot for the life of me find that I can, in all conscience, make a change. I am even satisfied with the wording that I used on that occasion. However, I am prepared to have my mind changed with regard to the subject of capital punishment. This is the way I have approached the problem.

When members of the press or the news media have asked me in the last two or three days how I am going to vote on this bill, I have said to them that I cannot give them an answer for the simple reason that I want to study the bill and listen to the debate. Anyone who asks me to say in advance how I am going to vote on the subject, ignores my conception of the function of parliament. I think that the decision should follow debate and not precede it. So it is only for that

[Mr. Churchill.]

reason that I have declined to state categorically how I am going to vote. If we have further debate on this subject, the opinion that I may express this afternoon may be changed. I am open to persuasion. If the arguments convince me, or if I find, on consideration, that I have been mistaken or that I am wrong, I may have to change my mind, as did the hon. member for Digby-Annapolis-Kings (Mr. Nowlan), who has said quite frankly that his opinion has changed after having given deep thought to the subject. The debate therefore has served the purpose for which it was designed, namely to alter the opinion of hon. members.

Unfortunately, up to this point I have not heard arguments which would bring me to change the way I voted a year and a half ago. Later today, or on Monday or Tuesday I may hear from others who will persuade me to alter that vote, but up to this point no new argument has been advanced which would be sufficiently powerful to make me change my mind. I have expressed my regret at the method that has been followed on this occasion and I have expressed my regret with regard to the nature of the bill. However, my opposition to this bill is not the result of my irritation at the course that has been followed. I would not found it on such a reason. I object often to the way things are done here, but on this occasion I have not been induced to oppose the bill merely on these technical grounds. However, if I were a convinced abolitionist, I would certainly be very vigorous in my condemnation of the present bill.

I remain unconvinced with regard to the statistical record. I dealt with that matter last year and I do not want to repeat what I said at that time. I do not think that the statistics prove the case one way or the other. When I dealt with that subject on April 5, 1966 I quoted from the white paper which had been put in front of us. I remain unconvinced that fear of death is not a deterrent.

People can only go by their own experience of life, and my experience is that the average person does not want to die. So fear of death operates in our society. I go in fear of death every day when I walk to and from the House of Commons. I do not step off the pavement when the hot-rodgers go by here at eleven o'clock at night, or in the way of trucks, buses or uncertain drivers, for the simple reason that I do not want to be killed in that manner. I like to obey the law, but it is not because the law says that I must