

*Criminal Code*

must say I am one of those who hope that party leaders will give their supporters more opportunities to deal with matters before us in a non-partisan manner and let them free to vote as they wish. This debate is proceeding with such serenity that, in my opinion, it is setting an edifying example.

In any case, I want to repeat what others have said earlier and what I have discovered many times myself, and that is the great surprise of a fairly large number of Canadians when they learned about the great ease with which the cabinet commuted sentences even in cases where no recommendation for mercy had been given or, indeed, in cases which involved crimes that had shocked the Canadian people. I think that such a situation has been going on for too long and it is time we put a stop to it.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, I listened with a great deal of attention to the comments that were made. Some very instructive things have been said, but I think that the speaker who impressed me most was the hon. member for Bow River (Mr. Woolliams), who made a dispassionate review of the situation. I realized that the hon. member is surely an excellent lawyer, and if I were ever charged with some crime and needed a good criminal lawyer, I think I would go to him.

There was no cheap display of emotion about his speech and I found his arguments most effective. He asked disturbing questions which I am sure will prompt the members of the house to try to find answers in all conscience.

I think this has been the debate for which members were best prepared, since I would say thousands of references and documents were quoted on the subject. We could, if necessary have agreed to forgo this debate, so that the question could be put forthwith because I feel that everyone has a rather good idea as to how he will vote. But as it is also our duty to throw light on these timely topics for the benefit of those whom we represent, this probably explains why each member wants to make his own comments.

Let us, therefore, assume our responsibilities in all conscience, in what I think is one of the most typical examples of the responsibility of the members of the house and after consulting the electorate and, up to a point, involving their conscience also.

I have studied all the letters and circulars which were sent me, and I have been struck by certain things. For instance, the letters from pressure groups or organized groups,

[Mr. Mongrain.]

seemed to me in some cases prompted by certain leaders rather than by the natural desire of each individual to participate in the discussion.

• (7:10 p.m.)

I wonder if this has not precisely tended to blow up artificially the influence of those organized groups which favour the abolition of capital punishment.

I have been much more impressed by the large number of individual letters I received from my riding and from all over the country because I have had contacts all over the place. I told myself that those people who have gone to the trouble of writing me personally without outside pressures, without being urged by a well incorporated, organized and set up association probably expressed more authentic personal opinions than members of organized groups.

The personal testimonials I have received at home appear to be, to a very large extent favourable to the retention of capital punishment.

Mr. Speaker, there seems to be some sort of misunderstanding on this question. I heard members talk of those mediaeval methods, of that barbaric attitude which consists in killing people, but it should nevertheless be realized that progress has been made in that area. People are no longer hanged for peca-dillos, or quartered on the public square; since 1961, capital murder has been defined.

Miscarriages of justice are almost impossible in the present circumstances and the people who are sentenced to the gallows have been found guilty of capital murder beyond all doubt, and on the basis of complete evidence.

I say, Mr. Speaker, that capital punishment must be retained in the present circumstances, because we are not ready for abolition.

I shall even add, at the risk of seeming cruel to those who are against the retention of the death penalty, that a great many of them give me the impression of dreaming. They tell us that in our enlightened era, the death penalty is no longer required and, at the same time, we hear in this house very urgent requests for the setting up of judicial inquiries on organized crime, which would indicate that our enlightened era is perhaps resorting to modern methods to kill with more refinement than in the past, to commit mass murders as in the past perhaps, in short,