

[Mr. Eldon Griffiths]

he eliminates the witness and greatly improves his chances of getting away with the loot. And even if he is caught and convicted of murder the worst that can happen to him is life imprisonment. With remission, that can mean little more than 10½ years, though I noted what my right hon. and learned Friend said about the length of sentence served by the murderers of policemen. I do not accept, and I doubt if the House would accept that the difference between five to seven years for armed robbery and only 10 years for murder is worth the life of a police officer.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr) *rose*—

Mr. Griffiths: No. In deference to Mr. Speaker's wishes I shall seek to end my speech as quickly as possible.

Mr. Rooker: But the hon. Gentleman's statement is not true.

Mr. Griffiths: There is a further consequence. Whereas, before abolition, unarmed police officers would not hesitate to tackle armed criminals because they knew or they believed that they were protected by the invisible bullet-proof waistcoat of the capital sentence, today even the bravest of policemen hesitates. He often sends for a gun.

What the Police Federation and I predicted when the House abolished the capital sentence has come to pass. We have put an end to the once-proud tradition of our unarmed police force. We therefore face the risk, whether or not we like it, that we have not succeeded in abolishing the capital sentence. On the contrary, it will be administered more and more not by due process of law and by the courts, but by armed criminals and, on occasion, by armed police officers defending themselves and the public.

I wish to deal briefly with terrorism. I declare an interest in that I frequently visit Northern Ireland and have some connection with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. I say one thing to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. He made an eloquent statement—and I respect his judgment—about Northern Ireland, but I find it singular that he should have consulted the Chief Constable of Northern Ireland and arrived at conclusions on his advice, while making no attempt to consult the statutory body that the House has set up, the Northern Ireland Police Federation—100 or more of whose members have died. Their view is the direct opposite to that in his statement. They want the capital sentence and that fact should be placed upon the record.

I say with some temerity in the presence of Northern Ireland Members that not long ago I stood in the ruins of a dance hall in Ballymena where dozens of young people were killed, maimed and blown to bits. I reached one firm conclusion—that it is the victims, past present and future, who have a far stronger call on Parliament's sympathy and practical assistance than any murderer or terrorist.

I wish also to give one warning to the House. We all know that technology plays an important part in terror. The advance of micro-miniaturisation is tilting the balance in favour of the terrorist and against the security services. There are new micro-detonators which can be secreted in body orifices. Precision guided missiles are also becoming increasingly available to terrorists not only in Northern

Ireland but all over the world. I must further warn the House of a new threat—the advance of micro-circuitry that makes it possible for the bomb-maker to plant a device—perhaps 50lbs of gelnite—and to blow it up four months later. The possibilities that that engenders for, for example, the ceremony at the Cenotaph, with that kind of technology being available to terrorists illustrate the magnitude of the risks that we face.

I conclude with one simple point. The death sentence would not deter the terrorist fanatic. I concede that he might even welcome it. The death sentence might have some influence on those who are motivated into terror by a whole ragbag of emotions such as braggadocio, hero-worship, theatricality and so on. But what is certain is that the death sentence can have some impact on the professional assassins who, more and more, in Northern Ireland and internationally, do the terrorists' dirty work for them. The professional assassin—the jackal—is, above all, a calculator. He calculates the odds. It is right and moral that the professional assassin who prepares a bomb and places it in a public hall to blow up large numbers of innocent people, and does so for pay in advance, should take into account when calculating his crime the possibility that he, too, might suffer the same capital sentence that he himself imposes on the innocent without due process of law.

It is for that reason, as well as the others given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, that I shall vote in favour of the amendment on terrorism and also the other selected amendments.

7.10 pm

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): This debate is about law and order. There can be few Members whose constituents have such a desperate need for law and order as those whom I represent. I live in the middle of the Bogside in the city of Derry, an area so ravaged by violence and so disturbed by extremism that outsiders cannot usually understand how normal life can be possible there. Normal life, as it is understood by most people, is not possible in Derry because there is no law and order, in the usual sense of term. I therefore think that I can understand better than most the yearning for law and order that motivates those who support the motion.

The desire for order is innate in human nature. It is a deep and powerful instinct. It can protect us against chaos and can be the foundation of democracy and freedom. But because those who are lucky enough to have a system of law and order often seem complacent and because those who do not often seem turbulent or cowed into despair many people forget that no people on earth yearn more for law and order than the deprived, the oppressed and the minorities. If the House does not understand that, it will never understand Ireland, will never understand our awful and terrible history, will never understand that what we all want to stop for ever is terrorism in Ireland.

My people want law and order more than any Member in this House because they need it more than any Member in this House. We must ask ourselves firmly, will the death penalty for terrorism, will hanging Irish terrorists, promote law and order in Northern Ireland or will it destroy law and order in Northern Ireland? That question is central to the debate. It has been made even more central by the remarkable position taken by the Home Secretary today.

It is a central question for other reasons. It is central statistically because far more murders are committed in

Northern Ireland than anywhere else in Great Britain. It is central legally because, as has already been said, it would be illogical to introduce the death penalty for Britain alone. It is central politically because the political consequences of hanging Irish terrorists would be so overwhelming as to dominate every other issue in Ireland for the foreseeable future.

Who are the terrorists who would be hanged? An Irish terrorist is a person who for good reasons distrusts British democracy and its application to Ireland and for bad reasons thinks that violence can solve the problems of Ireland. The distrust of British democracy in its application to Ireland is widely shared in Northern Ireland, for good reasons. It is shared by me and I do not have to give lectures on Irish history from 1912 onwards or on the silence of the House between 1920 and 1969 to explain why a substantial section of the people in Northern Ireland have a deep distrust of British democracy. Neither do I have to reiterate my opposition to violence because I do that on my own doorstep every day.

As almost everyone has admitted that the death penalty will not deter terrorists, we must ask ourselves what effect the death penalty would have on society, particularly on a society where terrorists flourish because they move among people who, because of their personal experience, are deeply distrustful of Government.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North) *rose*—

Mr. Hume: I will not give way. Mr. Speaker has asked hon. Members to be brief.

As terrorists are moving in a society that is deeply distrustful of Government and which, in consequence, is deprived of any real sense of security, the effect of the introduction of the death penalty is certain—it would destroy any hope of democracy in Northern Ireland and, in addition, would undermine the reality of democracy in the Republic of Ireland. What is now a disaster in Northern Ireland would, if the death penalty were introduced become an unmanageable clammy throughout Ireland. There would be many more deaths, both in Britain and in Ireland. If we try to solve a problem by methods that will create even greater problems, is it sensible even to discuss the issue?

Mr. Marlow *rose*—

Mr. Hume: When reassessing the British decision to execute the leaders of the 1916 uprising in Dublin, Winston Churchill said that, as a consequence of that action,

“the keys of Ireland passed into the hands of those to whom hatred of England was the dominant and almost the only interest.”

Hatred of Britain, the result of grisly experience of generations of Irish life, has, alas, strong roots in Northern Ireland, particularly among young people. It was magnified two years ago by the Government's handling of the hunger strike. Never in its wildest dreams could the IRA have expected to recruit the support that was won for it by the British Government's tragic mishandling of the hunger strike.

Rev. William McCrea *rose*—

Mr. Hume: Those who are interested in Northern Ireland will remember the images of that time; the black flags on almost every telegraph pole, the grotesque wall paintings, the nihilistic slogans, the pornography of death, the street violence and the deaths of innocent people.

That hatred, the instability and the macabre display of that time, are as nothing compared with the reaction that would take place in Ireland if Irish men or women were hanged under British law. If the House wants the IRA to win, then hang them.

Reference was made today to the murders which took place in Northern Ireland last night. A UDR convoy was blown up and four UDR soldiers were killed—

Rev. William McCrea *rose*—

Mr. Hume: An Attempt was made to kill every man in that convoy—

Rev William McCrea *rose*—

Mr. Hume: Does any hon. Member not believe that that attack was timed to influence the result of our debate? The leaders of terrorist organisations want to see the introduction of hanging. I live among them and I know their thinking. They would be delighted if hanging were introduced. Let not the House think that the leaders will be hanged. The leaders are not in gaol. It will be the young followers who are sucked into the organisations because of the desperate position in Northern Ireland.

If the House wants the whole of Ireland to be convulsed in a frenzy of hatred, if the House wants once and for all to remove the prospect of a lasting peace, a political solution to the problems of Northern Ireland and the prospect of friendship between our two peoples, nothing would be more certain to bring that about than the hanging of Irish people under British law. This House would then hand over the keys of the whole of Ireland to those who want to come to power by the bomb and the bullet.

Churchill was right when he wrote, in reference to British attitudes in Ireland:

“The grass grows green on the battlefield, but never on the scaffold.”

If the House again erects a scaffold in my country, it will turn the whole of Ireland into a savage and bloody battlefield. For the sake of democracy, for the sake of friendship, for the sake of ordinary men, women and children, and for the sake of peace, for God's sake, do not do it.

7.20 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The gallows has already been erected in Northern Ireland, not by the hands of this House but by the hands of the Irish Republican Army. There is a cry to this House from those who have already been hung, drawn and quartered—murdered and tortured by the Irish Republican Army—and the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) should keep that in mind.

It is all very well to say that if something happened here, there would be such an outrage that neither the North nor South of Ireland could be governed. I too have read Irish history and studied the situation in Northern Ireland, having been brought up there. There was a parallel in the history of the South of Ireland with what is happening in the North today. Irregulars under De Valera were doing the very same as the IRA is doing today—killing, bombing and murdering—to bring down the treaty Government of the Republic. They murdered not only ordinary individuals but their own colleagues who had fought against Britain in the war before the civil war. There is a page in Irish history that is not mentioned by Republicans; it is the darkest page of the troubles—the civil war when Republicans of various hues fought one another.