

Capital Punishment

I would be more severe, or less severe, in that instance based on the dictates of my constituents. I will not retract from that pledge.

The written and verbal submissions to me from September, 1984, have indicated a strong support for the reinstatement of capital punishment among the residents of Sarnia—Lambton. Of 3,500 responses to a recent questionnaire on capital punishment, some 88 per cent of the respondents were in favour of the reinstatement of capital punishment for first degree, premeditated murder. Additionally, over 77 per cent of those who responded were also in favour of the death penalty for the killing of law enforcement officers and the murder of children. I believe that in addition to this survey the cards, letters, and telephone calls, the personal interjections that I receive supporting capital punishment, give me a mandate to vote in a positive way on the motion that is before us tonight.

If the motion passes and the legislation is tabled in the House of Commons, I have also pledged to my constituents that I will arrange for a professional survey on the acceptance of the actual Bill. The survey will be conducted in my riding of Sarnia—Lambton when and if legislation is tabled. This survey, combined with representations I expect to receive in the future, will determine how I will vote on the actual legislation if and when presented.

I have received some very disturbing letters and calls from my constituents on the death penalty issue. I have read letters from senior citizens who have broken faith with their churches over the issue. I have talked to and received submissions from families who have some very, very personal involvement in the issue. I received a heart-wrenching letter from a young boy who had a very close friend brutally murdered a few years ago in Sarnia—Lambton. I have spoken to parents afraid for their children and to other parents who feel that further violence may not be the answer, but that clearly something must be done.

It would seem to me that the majority of Canadians, whether or not they favour the death penalty, are deeply concerned about safety and security in our country. Statistics show our society has an increasing number of violent crimes. It seems to many Canadians that law and order has been suspended. Clearly, through their support for capital punishment, the majority of citizens are indicating their belief that their lives are not being afforded sufficient protection. Throughout the many letters that I receive daily are comments such as "insufficient sentences", "parole too easy to qualify for", "inadequate supervision of parolees", and the most common "what about the rights of the victims?"

It is my strong belief that the majority of Canadians deserve to be heard. We must remember that this motion could be the first step in a lengthy legislative process. Nevertheless, it is an important step in the recognition of the rights of Canadians to be represented in the Parliament of Canada.

My constituents have given me a mandate, and I intend to vote for them this evening. It is with conviction to democracy

and to the recognition of the very personal issue in the minds of Canadians that I will cast my vote this evening on behalf of the residents of Canada and, in particular, the residents of Sarnia—Lambton.

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I rise with regret, regret that as this session of Parliament closes for the summer we should have to debate and make a decision on whether or not to legislate killing when there are so many very positive reforms that we should be considering and with which we should be dealing. I regret that many parliamentarians with very firm and sincere conviction, I now, feel that we should move backward in history to restore the death penalty. Perhaps my greatest regret is that there are also parliamentarians for whom I have great respect and who, in their own conscience, perhaps are neutral or even against killing by the state but who have made a decision to vote for the reinstatement of the death penalty because of a survey of their constituents.

Perhaps a positive aspect of this debate is the change which has occurred in public opinion which seems to have resulted, I think, from Canadians having learned more about the facts. They are perhaps considering the issue somewhat more rationally as opposed to only from an emotional point of view. They have realized that killing by the state is no solution to the murders which we all deplore.

As the debate has continued and more and more Canadians have weighed all the facts and all the moral arguments, support for the death penalty has declined. Support for the death penalty is now at its lowest since its abolition in 1976. I think it is a shame that the Government is forcing an early vote on this matter since it is clear that as time goes by Members of Parliament, like all Canadians, are having an increasing number of reservations about the death penalty.

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The recent *Maclean's/Decima* survey of 1,500 Canadians shows that, of the 61 per cent of Canadians who are in favour of capital punishment, only 36.7 per cent are convinced that Canada should bring back the death penalty, with 24 per cent only leaning toward the idea. As well, the poll indicates that 33 per cent of Canadians are not fully committed on the issue, and that over one-quarter of those, or 10 per cent of the whole population, might change their minds. So, it is evident that the population as a whole does not have a rigid position on this matter. One of the positive aspects of this debate, and one reason why we should not have had closure, is that the trend is moving toward the rejection of capital punishment.

I hope that this trend will cause those Hon. Members who took surveys of their constituents to reconsider. We all know how volatile polls are, and particularly so on such a volatile issue as the death penalty.

I am concerned that the Government has imposed closure on this debate, something which runs contrary to parliamentary reform rules, the rules for a free vote, which this is. I am