

Capital Punishment

“fang-toothed slobberers after revenge; narrow-eyed yahoos who cannot wait to get back to the rope”.

An hon. Member: Show us your tooth!

An hon. Member: Show us your fangs!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Well, we media types always did like to feel we were in the vanguard of public opinion. Given real public feeling on this issue, I really think that these media sources speak for themselves.

Let me dispense with the free vote myth that my colleague, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) dealt with and that has been mentioned as well by Chris Young. I covered that 1976 debate and the crucial vote in detail as a reporter for many broadcasting outlets across the country. I know for an absolute fact that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) ordered his entire cabinet to vote abolition, that he put his chief government whip, the then hon. member for Hamilton Mountain under excruciating pressure to change his mind on the issue, and then Mr. McFarlane was exhorted to put some pressure on other wavering Liberal colleagues to tow the government line. I have no idea. I do not even want to know.

An hon. Member: Pure nonsense!

An hon. Member: Pure garbage!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Do not get too excited over there. This must be touching a nerve.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): I do not even want to think about some of the political carrots that were dangled before those Liberal members who were sufficient in numbers to tip the scales and, by a very few votes, succeed in abolishing the death penalty in Canada.

The point I want to leave with the House is that the 1976 roll-call on capital punishment was anything but free. It is clearly the most dramatic example of this government flouting the will of the Canadian people. There are others: unification of the Armed Forces; its force-marching us into metric shopping. But in no area has this government, indeed this Parliament, been more out of tune with Canadian public opinion than on the capital punishment question.

There is one consistently true argument made by the media movers and shakers of public opinion: capital punishment should not be the highest priority issue, either in our ridings or in the Progressive Conservative party at this time. There is absolutely no question that the economy, gas prices, energy pricing arrangements, the uranium cartel, issues before the public these days, are deemed to be more important and more newsworthy by the media.

I want to put on the record today that we have sought for many months the chance to bring the death penalty matter before Parliament. Since 1978, through three federal election campaigns, I have promised the people of Hamilton-Went-

worth that I would raise the capital punishment question in the House at the earliest opportunity.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): The Liberal government has refused to reconsider this controversial issue since I became a member of Parliament. Indeed, the Prime Minister stated during at least one of the election campaigns he would see to it that capital punishment would never again come before Parliament so long as he is in charge. We have therefore been forced to use one of our allotted opposition days to make one simple request of the House; and that is, to refer the capital punishment question to the appropriate standing committee, and to recommend that there be a truly free vote on this issue. This is our one chance. A great many people will be watching what we say here today and how we vote later tonight.

Let me deal with another myth surrounding this debate, namely, that we are merely a bunch of right wing yahoos—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): —who have pressured our leader—I figured we would get some reaction—into agreeing to this opposition day subject because he does not dare deny his caucus this opportunity to appeal to a certain segment of society. That is the kind of media bilge people have been reading. If the CBC were not still on strike, we would be hearing a lot more of it.

I want to remind the House and my former media colleagues that it is our leader, the right hon. member for Yellowhead who, through two federal elections, agreed to allowing a truly free vote on capital punishment, and who informed our party's caucus that, as prime minister, he would abide by Parliament's decision. No other party leader has made that commitment. I am proud to have a leader who keeps his promise and who allows members of his party to speak their minds on a fundamentally moral issue on which we and our leader can disagree. The Leader of the Opposition has the guts to listen to his MPs and to bring this intensely personal matter where it belongs, and where the Liberal government has prevented it from coming to the floor of this House of Commons, then to be sent to a parliamentary committee in the glare of a concerned public opinion. That is the way a democratically elected assembly should be able to operate.

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I firmly believe that we, as elected representatives in this chamber from whatever party, should do the best we can to accurately reflect the views of the people who sent us here. I do not know how my hon. friends on the Liberal and NDP side of the House can deny their electors the pledge they made during past election campaigns to speak on their behalf? Are we not all honoured to be members of Parliament because the majority of our constituents felt that we would truly represent