

Capital Punishment

O'Neil), the Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom) and the Hon. Member for Swift Current—Maple Creek (Mr. Wilson) in the next five minutes. Therefore, let the Hon. Members govern themselves accordingly.

Mr. O'Neil: Mr. Speaker, if it could be clearly established that capital punishment is a form of self-defence, would the Hon. Member be prepared to accept capital punishment? I understood him to say in his comments about self-defence that there was no proof that capital punishment was a deterrent. Is he opposed because there is no proof of its deterrence or because it is unacceptable?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that in the past, books on ethics and morality more or less justified capital punishment as a kind of self-defence mechanism, in which self-defence justifies killing someone. That kind of argument was used to justify capital punishment.

However, at that time our statistical information was very weak and it was hard to tell whether or not that was correct. Now we know that it is not correct.

The Hon. Member's question is hypothetical. I am convinced by the evidence that capital punishment does not effectively protect. However, that is only one argument that I gave against capital punishment. The Hon. Member will know that I gave five or six arguments, including mistake, morality, non-protection, inequitable application and so on.

If there could be proof to the contrary, that would prompt considerable re-examination on that one point. However, there are still many other arguments that would lead one to oppose capital punishment.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grace—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) for the leadership he has provided on this issue over the years. I am proud of his leadership on this particular issue.

I also want to commend the Hon. Member for Ottawa West (Mr. Daubney) who I believe delivered a very thoughtful speech today. My question relates to the speech given by the Hon. Member for Ottawa West. The Hon. Member for Ottawa West referred to the brutalization effect. He said studies have shown that executions evoke more murders within the state where the person is executed. He gave examples of South Carolina, New York, and Chicago, where executions took place and seemed to provoke even more murders.

Does the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grace—Lachine East believe there might be some validity to that theory?

Furthermore, I am reminded of the incident which took place in the House of Commons a few days ago, when someone rushed in and grabbed the Mace. I wonder if that might have been provoked because of the films of Corporal Lortie in the Quebec National Assembly which had been released for massive television use in this country a few weeks ago. One

sometimes wonders whether that might give an idea to a person like the one who came here.

Should we be concerned about the brutalization effect? I am concerned about it, and the Hon. Member for Ottawa West has done a great service in bringing it to our attention.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to prove that one is the cause of the other. However, I am convinced from the evidence I have seen, without being able to prove it scientifically, that there is a relationship between violence that is carried out by the state and the growth of violence in society. If the state condones violence by bringing back the death penalty, whether by hanging, firing squad or the electric chair, it says something about the value it puts on human life. When it carries out executions in these very horrible, violent ways, it is also setting an example for society.

During this debate and similar debates, Hon. Members will bring forward for our consideration some horrible crimes, describing crimes in which some innocent child is brutally murdered by a criminal. Of course when we read about these crimes we are all incensed. I myself feel at the time, even though I am opposed to capital punishment, that if I had that person in front of me I would beat him to death with a baseball bat or something. That is how I feel. However, when we sit down to develop a criminal justice system, we do not base it on the emotions we have when we consider some violent crime. We use our heads. We ask what is going to be effective against this kind of thing. We do not really think about revenge.

• (1540)

If the state says, as a collectivity, that it approves of the death penalty, which is a type of violence, it gives a horrible example to the entire society and one which I think in the long run provokes more violence rather than less.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Hon. Member for Swift Current—Maple Creek (Mr. Wilson) for a very short question, please. We are running over the time now.

Mr. Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek): Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the Hon. Member raised the old argument about miscarriage of justice as one of his points. It is the classic argument that the death penalty must be abolished because there might be the possibility of executing an innocent person. He quoted Adam Bedau who, of course, is one of the most resolute and implacable opponents of capital punishment in the United States. Interestingly enough, Mr. Bedau cited a study of some 7,000 executions in the United States and concluded that the record failed to show that such cases occur. He also said, and I would like to quote from one of his articles:

It is a false sentimentality to argue that the death penalty should be abolished because of the abstract possibility that an innocent person might be executed.

The main point, I think is that if governments were to function only when there was no possibility of error, how on earth could government function at all?