

Capital Punishment

that our constituents are asking us to reconsider the capital punishment issue.

I dislike the thought of taking a human life as much as anyone else, but I have become concerned over the drift toward almost casual murder.

What do we do with a person who takes another's life, be it deliberately, planned, through passion, hatred, jealousy, greed, emotion or just for a thrill? That is a very serious question. I tell you Canadians want us to reconsider our answer.

How can we ignore the petition which was presented today by wives of OPP officers from the Huntsville detachment? This petition contains 30,000 names of concerned Canadians, concerned about the answer which this House has given to them on capital punishment. I ask members of the Liberal party and members of the New Democratic Party to put their party lines aside—

Mr. Kaplan: They are aside.

Mr. Bradley:—and help the people of this country by taking another look at this issue. New evidence has been presented tonight from both sides of the House, both pro and con. That evidence should be studied.

In my constituency last year a young OPP constable, happily married, with two children, was called at home and told that if he met the caller at a certain spot he would be given important evidence regarding drugs. The officer went to the designated spot, recognized the caller and approached the man's truck. As the constable reached the truck, the caller emptied a hand gun into the officer. As the officer fell to the ground, the man drove over him numerous times to ensure he was dead. This murder was committed because the constable, as a result of an accident, had charged the man with impaired driving about a year previously. This man was judged insane at the time of the crime. However, it could be said this murder might have been premeditated by as much as a year, and with a proper deterrent it may have been avoided at some sane point along that path.

I grant you, situations and conditions have changed since the 1960s. Statistics have changed, people have changed, morals have changed. Society as a whole has changed since capital punishment was abolished.

I do not feel we can apply today's statistics as valid benchmarks for comparison against those of the 1960s any more than we can compare today's society to that of the 1960s.

We have taken great steps as a government in the last 20 years toward seriously damaging our judiciary system, and indeed our society. Let us pause a moment and reflect. Let us review the pros and cons of capital punishment as a deterrent. The committee report could well prove me wrong. If so, I shall accept it. But let us at least have a look.

It is like a sign on a road warning you about a curve and telling you to slow down to 50 kilometres an hour in order to navigate the curve safely. Statistics tell us how many did not slow down and thus did not make it. But there are no statistics to tell us how many heeded the warning, slowed down and

safely rounded the curve. Statistics tell us how many were not deterred by capital punishment, but there are no statistics available to tell us how many were slowed down by the deterrent of the death penalty.

Perhaps we could relate to that dangerous curve in the road. That warning sign is very necessary. I feel the time has come to return to that curve to take another look at that warning sign.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, this evening I will not go into the arguments against capital punishment. I think they have been made and made well during the course of the debate today in the House. Instead I would like to do something else. I invite all members of this House to reflect along with me on the continuing desire of many Canadians for the reinstatement of capital punishment. Why, in spite of the fact that the murder rate has actually gone down since capital punishment was abolished, do some people still have the feeling that restoring capital punishment would somehow be a good thing? Obviously we have here more than just a practical opinion about the deterrent effect of executing murderers. Something else is going on.

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It appears that people are particularly inspired to argue for the restoration of capital punishment when either the innocent, such as children, are murdered or when law enforcement officers are killed in the course of their duties. The pain and anger which such deaths create in all sensitive human beings is not to be ridiculed. It is a legitimate response to the finality and brutality of murder.

People feel that the moral order has been transgressed, as it has, and that something must be done to show that these are not mundane events but rather events which, if permitted or regarded lightly, would eventually call into question the very basis of civilized society. They are morally outraged that such things can happen. It is moral outrage we are dealing with when we talk about the call for a return to capital punishment, moral outrage and powerlessness.

I add powerlessness because, as we encounter the mystery of death and our powerlessness to bring the dead back to life, we are tempted to turn away from the mystery and imagine that there is something we can do to make things all right again, something we can do that will atone for things already done. This is a temptation that must be resisted.

In the case of moral outrage about individual acts of murder, it is particularly tempting because there is an easily identifiable agent of our distress, the murderer. In an age when everything seems to be permitted, there is a desire among people to say that there is indeed a limit, that there are things which shall not be tolerated. In my view, the restoration of capital punishment has become a symbol for many Canadians of that need to show that there are limits.

The desire to restore capital punishment is also a response to the increasing confusion and impotence we all feel as we look around us and notice the increasing breakdown of private and