

Capital Punishment

Finally, I would like to associate myself with the members of all parties who, in response to the question, "Will you vote according to your conscience or the views of your constituents?" have pointed out that a member of parliament owes his or her constituents both industry and judgment, as well as attentiveness. The views of constituents are important and deserve careful consideration, along with all other information one can examine and assess.

The final responsibility of the parliamentarian is to legislate effective measures to protect the public and this responsibility is taken seriously by parliamentarians. To suggest that we vote on a basis of "conscience", "instinct" or "gut feeling" only, rather than on a basis of painstakingly acquired knowledge, carefully assessed and rationally applied to the best of our ability, is to ascribe to us a degree of moral and intellectual laziness which is not typical of members of the House. Hon. members may examine the same data and reach different conclusions, but that is a very different situation from one of failing to examine data and having the kind of arrogance in ignorance that lets one cast an uninformed vote. I repeat that I know of no member of this House who operates in such an irresponsible fashion.

Because the question of capital punishment is literally a question of life and death, it is generally seen by the media as a vote of conscience, but every vote we cast in this House or in committee, every policy we advocate in caucus affects people's lives and is a matter of conscience as well as judgment. And one important function of a conscientious member of parliament is to be well informed, to appraise information, and to try honestly to take positions that are in the national interest.

I think the provisions of Bill C-84 offer an improved measure of security and protection to the Canadian people and, therefore, I intend to vote in favour of the bill.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether I should say I am delighted to have the opportunity of taking part in this most important debate or whether I should say that I feel it necessary that I take part in this very important debate.

I listened to the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Malone) and was extremely impressed with his sentiments.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: I hear the government whip saying "hear, hear", Mr. Speaker. I would think that all hon. members could agree that it was a speech of some significance.

The part I appreciated was when the hon. member indicated that governments should earn the right to an abolitionist state. They have not earned that right. The hon. member went on to speak of environmental malaise and what it would mean to both urban and rural dwellers. He said the government had not paid attention to this and was concentrating on punishment alone because it had not earned the right to abolition. My hon. friend, for whom I have a great deal of respect, indicated that he will not vote for the bill. Be that as it may, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what my position is on this subject.

[Miss Nicholson.]

I have listened to other hon. members speak and have been extremely impressed with their remarks. I have been fortunate enough to have taken part in many debates in this House, but this is a debate without rancour, a debate that is sensitive and allows members to give concrete reasons for their views, whether they be abolitionist or retentionist. I appreciate that.

How easy things would be for us at this time if easy bail were not a thing of the past as is early parole. If I have received one letter on those subjects I have received hundreds. These two matters account for a considerable amount of fear and frustration felt by the Canadian people. They are concerned about easy bail and early parole, but now we have taken steps to counter this so perhaps their fears will be allayed somewhat. How much easier would our task have been if we had moved in those two directions earlier.

● (2050)

Let me not hesitate in bringing into focus my position on this bill. In doing so I would like to read the preamble of a notice in the *Ottawa Citizen* of April 27, 1976. I suppose it was part of blanket newspaper coverage throughout this land. This is a statement by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. That is an organization of some significance composed of men and women from all professions, of the cloth, law, people who are concerned about justice and civil liberties. I want to read it because I accept this statement. It is part and parcel of my argument. It says, and I quote:

Capital punishment is an exercise in senseless violence.

The killing of even the worst killers will gain nothing for society that could not be gained by less violent means, for example, by imprisonment. Scores of studies in many countries over long periods of time fail to show that capital punishment reduces the number of murders.

This is also true of the killing of policemen. A 25-year comparison of more than 80 similar American cities showed that the death penalty made little difference to the rate of policemen killed. In fact, in places using the death penalty, the rate of police homicides was slightly higher.

We share the grief of those whose dear ones have been murdered. We share the anxiety about the innocent victims of brutal crimes. But understandable distress must not divert us from facing facts.

The death penalty cannot help yesterday's victims and it is unlikely to save tomorrow's targets. What it is certain to accomplish, however, is the legitimization of useless killing. That is a result we must strive to avoid.

I am an abolitionist, Mr. Speaker, and will vote for the bill.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: I say this not in an arrogant and self-centered way, but with every concern, respect, and sympathy for the opposite view, particularly as expressed by many of my constituents who have asked that I vote against this bill.

As members of parliament we are placed in a very peculiar position. Why? Because there is some question as to what is a representative. I believe with all my soul and heart that I was elected in 1968, 1972, and 1974 to discharge my duties and responsibilities as best I can under the circumstances.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!