

Capital Punishment

Mr. Geoff Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): Mr. Speaker, I am indebted to my friend, the hon. member for Kindersley-Lloyd-minster (Mr. McKnight) for yielding his position on the Speaker's list to allow me the opportunity to address the House on capital punishment.

This is probably the most important and difficult subject any member of Parliament can deal with during his tenure in the House of Commons. Capital punishment is important to many thousands of constituents in whatever riding a member is honoured to represent and whatever his political persuasion. It is difficult because, while the 75,000 people I represent in my riding of Hamilton-Wentworth expect me to speak on their behalf, I know I will be placing on the parliamentary record views with which many will disagree. I know that there are colleagues around me in this chamber who will strongly disagree with what I am about to say.

I have heard some very reasoned arguments today from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark), from my friend from Hillsborough (Mr. McMillan)—and a very excellent speech it was—and even from my friends the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grace (Mr. Allmand) with all his reasoned arguments. Those gentlemen are convinced abolitionists. I know, too, that most of my former colleagues in the parliamentary press gallery will profoundly disagree with my stand on capital punishment. However, my colleagues in this House cannot disagree with my stand on the right of Parliament to debate this issue and to hold a free vote on capital punishment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (2120)

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): I will leave it to the lawyers and the self-styled criminologists to set down their learned arguments on the benefits to society or otherwise of capital punishment. I am not going to get involved in the statistics game in terms of whether the number of murders in this country since the death penalty was abolished is up or down. In fact, the most recent statistics today show the murder rate is down. But, as my distinguished colleague, the hon. member for Parry Sound-Muskoka (Mr. Darling) has just pointed out, no one is talking about the number of attempted murders. Because of science and medical skills, over the last few years many lives have been saved which might otherwise have become a number in murder statistics. Who knows what would have happened to the President of the United States, his press secretary and his bodyguard if they had been shot in the same way ten years ago? I do not believe statistics. I simply observe what is happening. I see international terrorism on the rise. I hear the head of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation say that this is the most violent period in contemporary U.S. or Canadian history.

I read of a man who had been convicted on a previous charge, who telephoned a policeman, asked him to come down to make an appointment, and lay in wait for two or three hours. This was the policeman who had nailed him on the previous charge. Then he gunned him down, leaving a young widow and three children to mourn the death of that policeman who had only been trying to do his job. That one incident

in Delhi, described by my colleague, the hon. member for Haldimand-Norfolk (Mr. Bradley) convinces me, more than any number of statistics which one could cite here, that society can do without that kind of offender.

Is the death penalty a deterrent to murder? It probably is not to the person who, in passion, shoots a girlfriend, or a wife, or the wife's boyfriend, or whoever. I am not arguing the "shoot first, ask questions afterwards" syndrome. I am concerned about premeditated first degree murder. I am zeroing in on the convicted murderer of a young Portuguese shoeshine boy in a homosexual slaying a few years ago in Toronto. The killer was publicly quoted as saying: "If I'd known the death penalty was still in, I'd have thought twice about doing it." I am zeroing in on a known terrorist who almost fulfilled his vow to assassinate the Pope. I am zeroing in on kamikaze terrorists who hold innocent people hostage and keep the world in suspense while trying to force countries to release their terrorist comrades from jail so that this vile network of guerrillas can continue to plunder and pillage a world that is striving for "peace".

In this motion today, we in the official opposition are zeroing in on the question of capital punishment to hear the views of the people of Canada through their elected representatives; because deterrent or not, statistics to the contrary, there is a silent majority out there, and a very sizeable silent majority, that wants a return to capital punishment. The government, the media, surely must ask, why, is this just another part of the sway to the right that we have seen in Great Britain, the United States and in other countries? Can it simply be revenge? Is it a reaction to the increase of violence and terrorism on the international front? Is it a disbelief of statistics, a disbelief of those who say that there really is no deterrent with the death penalty? Is it a combination of all these factors? Or is it something deeper?

You would never know it by reading the papers recently, Mr. Speaker. The surest indication that today's motion has touched a raw nerve with committed abolitionists is to read what the media heavyweights are writing lately. *The Toronto Star* calls this exercise "inexcusable Tory mischief". Southam News Services' Christopher Young, under a Montreal *Gazette* headline, "Tories Grab Own Throats Again", asks, "Why divert attention from (other) valid issues by trying to stir up a new campaign for capital punishment, which could not in any case be successful?" The *Toronto Globe and Mail* reported: "It is an issue that is charged with emotion, a base emotion in many cases. Capital punishment was permanently abolished by a free vote in the House of Commons in 1976."

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Scott (Hamilton-Wentworth): I will have a little more to say about that statement in the *Globe and Mail* editorial in a moment; that 1976 vote was anything but free. Let us not leave without a word from Mr. Allan Fotheringham, who characteristically describes this debate as "grasping at the noose when there are pressing problems before us is not only sleazy, it is super cynical". In his eyes, we on this side are