

*Capital Punishment*

Ruygrok. It would have been the ultimate deterrent, not only in this case but in the eight other recent cases of repeat killers.

My colleague, the Hon. Member for Simcoe South (Mr. Stewart), sent a questionnaire to 1,231 individuals serving life terms for murder in federal penitentiaries. Of the 303 responses he received on the question of whether capital punishment would have acted as a deterrent, 37 said yes. That means that 37 people would be alive today if there was capital punishment.

I would like to read a letter from one of my constituents dealing with brutal murderers like Sweeney and Olson. He wrote:

With every right goes an obligation. It's society's preoccupation with "rights" divorced from "obligations" that is giving us a warped view of justice. The Government has a clear duty to govern and keep society safe from those who take life for their own ends rather than defend life and the right to life of all—

I would like now to turn for a moment to the concerns I have heard expressed during this debate about our justice system. In my view, and in the view of most Canadians, our system is in need of serious reform and certainly needs a bit more common sense. A life sentence of 25 years does not mean that any longer.

During this debate, I have heard a number of Hon. Members address the specific subject of justice reform. However, these same Hon. Members were with the Government that brought us mandatory supervision, something which this Government had to return last summer to toughen up. These Hon. Members were with the Government that gave us the Young Offenders Act, another piece of legislation that had to be toughened by this Government. These were pieces of legislation which made our justice system more lenient for the convicted.

The reason for my reservation is that I genuinely do not know at this point in time whether or not the view expressed on this subject by those Hon. Members who are mainly abolitionists is a commitment today because of a belief or rather because of convenience. I sincerely hope it is the former, particularly if this motion should be defeated.

Earlier I indicated I would address the matter of the innocent victim, but I consider this matter to be twofold. There is the possibility of the innocent being convicted and as well there are the innocent relatives of the murdered who are left with grief for the rest of their lives. If I personally were to pick anything to which I have given the greatest profound thought, it would be this subject.

We cannot be certain that the system will not at some point allow an innocent person to be convicted. To minimize the possibility of this, I do not support capital punishment for those who are convicted purely on circumstantial evidence. As well, I support the idea of a double jury vote. The jury would vote once to determine guilt or innocence and a second time to determine whether or not to recommend a capital sentence.

Earlier I referred to eight victims of serial killers. Frankly, I would not want to trade the lives of these eight innocent victims on the chance that one day our justice system might make one mistake.

I want to turn for a moment to the tragic side of this issue that we all too often hastily dismiss and that is the situation of the families of victims of murder. They are truly victims because they live with their grief for the rest of their lives.

A great deal of attention has been paid to the letter written by the mother of Alison Parrot, but I would like to read a letter I received from Mr. Donald Sullivan of Ajax whose daughter was brutally murdered. He said:

It has been said that execution will not help the victim, well my family are victims also. When my daughter's killer himself was killed we felt not joy, not satisfaction, but relief. Why relief? We sat in court in Whitby, Ontario and heard doctors say that Shannon is the type of killer who, once he kills will kill again given the chance. We now know this will not happen to another young girl in the future. For this reason we felt relief.

The final topic I want to discuss is that of religion. This is somewhat like the deterrence debate, because each side can use biblical quotations to support their cases. The question I have had to answer personally is why am I at odds with my own church.

I do not necessarily think that the belief in God of the leaders of my church or of any other church, synagogue or temple is necessarily any stronger than mine or than that of any other Member of the House. I do not think that their being leaders of a church gives them a particular divine guidance on this moral issue, and I think that many church leaders are finding themselves at odds with the vast majority of their thoughtful and religious members.

I would like to take a moment to read a letter written by a member of the Second Christian Reform Church in Etobicoke. The letter reads:

The average person does not have the money to produce slick brochures nor the chance to wrap their personal opinions with the names of committees and church agencies, but I would urge you to listen, please, to the voice of the long-suffering Canadian public, the majority of whom want capital punishment restored. We have confidence that the courts and Government will act with utmost restraint in this matter to ensure that justice is done by meting out capital punishment with due care.

As a member of the United Church, I have a great deal of difficulty reconciling the church's stand on the abortion issue with its stand on the capital punishment issue. This was brought to the forefront when I received a letter from the Reverend Robin Smith on May 8 in which the United Church's stand on the abortion issue was outlined. He wrote:

While life is sacred, it is not as many of our national policies and practices illustrate, of absolute value.

● (1550)

It seems to me that my church is saying that the life of an innocent unborn baby is not of absolute value whereas the life of a convicted murderer, rapist, or serial killer is. To me this is unacceptable.