

### *Capital Punishment*

through our church service the fact that Jesus had been hung on the cross, the ultimate form of capital punishment, in terms of promoting suffering and pain. For days and days people hung on crosses until they expired. Jesus was also tortured while he was hanging on the cross. My father said to me at that time, "Son, what was the response of Jesus to those who were doing this to him? Father, forgive them for they know not what they do". To this day that has stuck with me. Over the years it has assisted me in maintaining my position on capital punishment, which has always been as an abolitionist.

● (1230)

It is not as though my constituents are surprised, because in 1980, and again in 1984, during the federal election campaigns, my position on capital punishment was made clear. It has been made clear at every public meeting at which it has been raised. Every letter, every telegram, every postcard, every phone call I have received on the subject have had an immediate response, with my position on capital punishment stated very clearly.

Given all of that, I do not believe that the electorate in my constituency are surprised that once again, after examining the pros and cons on the issue, the arguments made on the issue, I maintain my position as an abolitionist on this very critical issue.

The remark made by Edmund Burke more than two centuries ago holds true today; "Your representative owes you, not his industry only but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion".

I realize that many Members of Parliament have decided to hold polls on this issue, either straw polls or commissioned polls conducted by various polling companies. In that way they gain an appreciation of the various views of their constituents, and in many cases the majority has come down on the side of the reinstatement of capital punishment.

The trouble with that line of reasoning is that it leads to government by opinion poll. Instead of electing Nelson Riis as the Member of Parliament for Kamloops—Shuswap, the voters, if they use this approach to important decision-making, might just as well use a polling firm to conduct polls on critical issues, as opposed to having a Member of Parliament apply his or her judgment to the issue.

The assumption behind this type of polling contradicts the whole theory of representative democracy. The electorate sends people to the Parliament of Canada to exercise judgment on their behalf. As Edmund Burke put it two centuries ago, Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors but a deliberative assembly of one nation whose job it is to discuss and arrive at what is good for the whole country.

One chooses a Member of Parliament, Madam Speaker, as the first area of responsibility for that individual. The Member of Parliament who uses methods such as polling, in my opinion, belittles himself or herself in substituting the

mechanical operation of a poll for individual conscience and judgment.

I know that on some occasions Members of Parliament have had to cast their ballots on the side of an issue that went contrary to the public opinion of the day. I refer to my colleagues of the New Democratic Party at the time of the imposition of the War Measures Act, and earlier than that, members of the CCF Party in respect of the relocation of the Japanese during World War II.

At the time of the imposition of the War Measures Act, the popular view in the country was that the Prime Minister was right to introduce the War Measures Act; yet, members of the New Democratic Party stood up and voted against it, against popular opinion, feeling at the time that it was wrong.

In retrospect, in hindsight, we see now that that was the appropriate position to take on the part of the New Democratic Party members; that the imposition of the War Measures Act was an inappropriate measure to take in the circumstances.

To go back to one of the more dastardly historic initiatives taken by Parliament, the decision to relocate, by force, the people of Japanese heritage from the West Coast into the interior parts of Canada, again my colleagues in the CCF voted against that measure, as popular as it was at the time. Hindsight being 20/20, we realize again that the decision to oppose was a correct one.

It is in that same mode that I shall be casting my ballot later today against the reinstatement of capital punishment.

When it comes to this issue, I think we are all agreed that there are significant changes that must be made to our judicial system, our corrections system, and our parole system. I believe that Canadians see the system not working as they perceive it should. Consequently, Canadians are looking for some way to improve the system, to bring justice back into our judicial system. People are of the opinion that, by having capital punishment on the books, this will lead to a more equitable and judicial system.

Unfortunately, such is not the case. Ample evidence exists now to prove that the reimposition of capital punishment would not fulfil some of the more obvious requirements that people ask of us. For example, when it comes to the whole matter of capital punishment, a lot of people believe that it acts as a deterrent; that the fact of having capital punishment on the books will lead to fewer murders. The facts simply disprove that.

In 1975, prior to the total abolition of capital punishment, there were 701 homicides in Canada, for a rate of 3.09 per 100,000 people. In 1980, long after the abolition of capital punishment, the number of homicides totalled 593, for a rate of 2.47 per 100,000. In 1985, there were 686 homicides, for a rate of 2.78 per 100,000; and in 1986, the most recent year for which we have statistics, there were 561 homicides, the lowest since 1973.