

Capital Punishment

of capital punishment will greatly reduce the number of offences is not completely tenable, or indeed tenable at all.

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There are many other arguments against capital punishment; for instance, the discriminatory implementation of capital punishment, the use of capital punishment against the poor in disproportionate numbers, the kinds of mistakes that can be made in implementing capital punishment, and the fact that there are those who seek glory. I am thinking of the Gary Gilmores of this world who, if capital punishment existed, would murder for that purpose itself.

There are many reasons why some on this side of the House oppose not only capital punishment but also the political cop-out of a referendum on this question.

In closing, I say that we oppose this motion. We oppose the use of referenda on questions such as this. We oppose the use of capital punishment. We believe that the value of life in this society has to be respected by all citizens, and that surely includes representatives of the people.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. John Evans (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I am more than happy to rise to speak to this motion.

An hon. Member: A point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. With due respect, there is a procedure under which members are recognized in this place, and the Chair is bound to respect that procedure. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Evans) has the floor.

Mr. Evans: Like the two members before I oppose capital punishment. I do not agree with this motion and will not in any way, shape or form vote for a motion that does allow a return of capital punishment in Canada.

I think the two hon. members who spoke before me have indicated quite clearly the kinds of problems that arise when a

referendum is used to settle moral issues in the country. The referendum in the province of Quebec, which was resolved on May 20, at least for the time being, would indicate the divisive effects a referendum can have. Certainly referenda on issues as emotional as the death penalty and abortion will have divisive and long-lasting effects.

I would not want to repeat what other members have said before me. However, I would look at some of the statistics available to us that are relevant to the effects of capital punishment as a deterrence to capital crimes, or what used to be called capital crimes. If we look at that evidence and relate the rate of homicide to 1974, the time when the death penalty was abolished in Canada, to subsequent periods—in fact, relate it to information as recent as 1978—we will find that the rate of homicide in 1978 was the lowest it had been since 1974. Indeed, in 1974 the rate of homicide was 2.46 per 100,000 population, and in 1978 it was 2.62 per 100,000 population; in the interim it had increased. It has fallen since then. It is now the lowest it has been since 1974.

If one breaks homicide down into the various forms of murder; for instance, premeditated murder, manslaughter, infanticide and so on, we find precisely the same pattern. There is no evidence whatsoever, that is statistically valid, which would indicate that the abolition of capital punishment in this country has led to a higher incidence of murder, or other forms of death, whether they be homicide, infanticide or manslaughter. As a result, if the basis of the argument is deterrence, there is no evidence to support the case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hour provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired.

[Translation]

It being five o'clock, pursuant to Standing Order 2(1), the House stands adjourned until Monday next at 2 p.m.

At 5 p.m. the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.