

Capital Punishment

the Nazis from that country and the restoration of civilization that capital punishment was eliminated.

Mr. Winegard: Mr. Speaker, I have a comment in terms of the discussion of the Hon. Member for Eglinton—Lawrence (Mr. de Corneille) concerning prisoners of war. It is quite true that once an enemy was unarmed the general rule was that you would take no action and you would treat that life as sacred until—and this is the important thing—you found out whether that person had taken any action which, even under the rules of war, was considered an atrocity. If under the rules of war, that person had committed an atrocity, that person was liable to execution and sometimes was executed.

I think we have to remember that one was dealing with the same kind of thing, the same kind of freedom, liberty and respect as soon as that unarmed soldier appeared, but he had to go through a trial if it was thought that something had been done wrongly, even under those conditions.

Mr. de Corneille: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the observations of my colleague in terms of the way in which people who were convicted of military offences were dealt with.

What is important in this context is that in our country, as I have pointed out, we have the responsibility to deal with all of the problems to which I have referred in trying to prevent murder. I suggest that bringing in capital punishment will not direct our minds as much to the correction, the elimination and prevention of murder, as it will to having felt that we have dealt with the subject. But far from dealing with the subject, the matter of violence is so rooted in our society that it seems to me that we have a lot to deal with that should occupy the minds of this House if we really care about the victims of murder and crime.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate. The Hon. Member for Edmonton South (Mr. Edwards).

Mr. Jim Edwards (Edmonton South): Mr. Speaker, as has been remarked so many times, this is a painful question. It is a question which has been probed during these many hours of debate very thoroughly. I rise to state my view on the issue and to give some indication as to how I have arrived at that view and to give for those who elected me intentions as to how I will vote.

My own involvement with this issue began in 1959 when, as a young delegate to a national convention of my Party, I presented a motion calling for the abolition of capital punishment in Canada and calling for the appropriate amendments to the Criminal Code in order to see that carried out. I presented it with all of the conviction that I could summon. When I had completed my presentation to the resolutions committee, I was congratulated by one or two people. They said that I obviously felt that point of view very strongly. I am not making light of what then happened, Mr. Speaker. I must tell you that I was not in favour of the resolution that I was

presenting although I saw it as my duty to present it with all of the conviction that I could muster.

In the election of 1984 most of us, if not all of us, were called upon to give our views on this issue. Some of us have altered our views. Others, I suppose, are listening attentively to this debate, praying for the wisdom that will give them guidance as to how they will ultimately vote.

As I think all Members have, I have done my utmost to inform myself, to study the issue, and to be aware not only of the facts but of what thinkers have said on the matter, including a number of thinkers who are Members of this House and who have been Members of this House. This involved considerable reading and study. It involved discussion and consultation with Members of the clergy. In the course of my preparation, I met with representatives of most if not all of the major denominations of the Christian clergy, with Jewish clergy and with others of less widely held persuasion. I met with a panel of criminologists from the University of Alberta who put together what I think is one of the best and most cogent positions opposing the death penalty.

I have heard, as we all have, from a great number of constituents on the issue and, indeed, others who are not constituents but who are caring Canadian citizens. I wish to quote very briefly from two of those letters just to dramatize the intensity of the views. These were both received in my office within the last week, and are both from constituents of mine.

● (2000)

Dear Sir:

I am writing to voice my concern over the possibility that the Canadian Government may reinstate the death penalty.

I object to the death penalty because I do not feel that it serves any useful purpose. Extensive studies of the deterrent effect of the death penalty indicate that it does not serve as a deterrent; in fact, in Canada in the ten years after the death penalty was abolished in 1976, the homicide rate actually dropped.

I do not feel that the death penalty can be justified on the grounds that it would prevent murderers from murdering again because in the history of Canada only four people have been paroled for murder and then murdered again. Furthermore, assuming that a person will repeat an offence also contradicts one of the basics of the Canadian justice system, namely, that people are innocent until proven guilty.

I feel that our money and efforts would be better spent trying to discover why people murder and cycles of violence can be stopped instead of debating whether or not we, as a nation, should return to the barbaric practice of state-sanctioned violence.

The only issue that I would take with that letter at this point is that this resolution is not a resolution of the Canadian Government. It is not the Canadian Government which is proposing to reinstate the death penalty.

On the other side of the issue, I just received another letter from a constituent, and it reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Edwards:

As the debate on capital punishment drags on I think so often of a young friend of ours who was murdered in cold blood.