

*Capital Punishment*

It is also interesting that at virtually all of those meetings where Conservative Members of Parliament were invited to share the platform, they refused to come. They did not show up on the platform in my province. They did not want to debate the issue in a public forum. It was a matter of some great regret that we were always debating with an empty chair, but that fits the same kind of attitude we have seen prevail, yesterday and today.

Those Hon. Members are afraid to debate. They have their own minds already made up and are afraid to face the kind of dynamic process which should take place in Parliament and across the country where free men and women are allowed to present arguments and then allowed to decide. I wonder sometimes if Government Members are learning their parliamentary tactics from South Korea rather than from the British tradition, because that is the kind of attitude which prevails day in and day out in this House.

Members of the Government are not trying to expand freedoms in the way they use Parliament, but are trying to restrict and circumscribe. They are afraid of debate and that is the first tell-tale sign of an authoritarian mind. They are afraid to put their own ideas and commitments out for public view and a free exchange of deliberate debate. They do not want to hear the other side of the case, and once we allow that to happen we are well on the road to a very different kind of Government, one which none of us would want to see exist in this country.

In part, we are engaged in the wrong kind of debate. If the Government was trying to read the public mood, it misread it. I participated in those forums and discussions everywhere from a grade 7 classroom in my constituency to the church forums. It is true that people are concerned about the increase in violence. It is true they are concerned about the problems in the penal and judicial systems and the fact that sometimes people are out on the streets who should not be there. In my own City of Winnipeg, there has been a substantial increase in violent crimes. Only the simple-minded would regard capital punishment as the panacea. Instead of debating capital punishment, we should be debating the root causes behind the increase in violent crimes. There is a fear and uncertainty in the minds of Canadians in respect of the increase in crime, and we should be trying to determine the cause for that increase, thus enabling us to come up with the right solutions.

● (1050)

That is the type of debate that Canadians would like to see this Parliament engage in. Canadians want to know how to deal with the issues that have led to the present situation. But, we are not being allowed to do that. The Government has said that it is capital punishment that is the answer; that it is the death penalty that will solve the problem. And it does so in total contradiction to all of the available evidence. The advocates of capital punishment have not been able to prove a cause-and-effect relationship between the absence of capital

punishment and the increase in violent crimes, the increase in the murder rate and in heinous crimes generally.

During the course of the debate thus far, Mr. Speaker, all kinds of statistics have been paraded out on the floor of the House. The advocates of capital punishment cite the increased crime figures in certain cities of the country. Of course, we on the other side of the question can just as easily say that in jurisdictions where there is capital punishment the murder rate has increased exponentially, geometrically.

What we have to look at are the differences in such cities as Miami and Detroit, where there has been an explosion of violence, and places like South Dakota, where there is no such explosion. It may be that it has more to do with the stability of a given society than anything else. It may be that it has more to do with the fairness of the system in place. It may be that it has more to do with the way in which a particular community deals with the strains and stresses of every-day living.

Taking the City of Winnipeg as an example, one of the fundamental sources for the increase in the incidence of violent crime in that city is the tremendous increase in the stresses and strains of every-day living in the inner city. People are living in poverty, without the kind of educational and housing support they require. That situation is the reason for the increase in the incidence of violent crimes, not the absence of the death penalty as a punishment.

But, the Government's motion does not permit us to debate the root cause. It seems to me that the resolution should be for the establishment of a committee of the House to study the serious problems that exist in the inner cities across this country, the fact that the native and aboriginal people of western Canada are mistreated and discriminated against and do not have a fair chance, the fact that there is tremendous turmoil and turbulence in our urban areas. It is that situation which should be debated and studied, with a view to changing society to eliminate those stresses and strains.

Such a debate would be a valuable contribution to the public interest of Canada; such a debate would make good sense. That is the kind of debate, the kind of examination that Canadians would like to see their Members of Parliament engage in.

The role of Parliament on this issue should be one of the educator, one of the examiner. Parliament should be holding these problems and issues up for public examination. Parliament should not be responding to prejudice and emotion; rather, it should fulfil its responsibility to provide a forum for the full articulation of the issues facing society. In that way, the people of the country will know what are the choices and the options. Such a course would provide Parliament with a noble role to play in society, which is something that the resolution now under debate does not permit.

It is important to underline why this debate has taken such a perverse turn. At this point in time in our society, I think Canadians were ready for something better. I think they