

Capital Punishment

are sent to prison for a long period of time? How do we change those programs to make them more rehabilitative, more secure and more humane?

Fourth, a committee could very well study how we could better assist the victims of crime. Very often parliamentarians forget that by executing the killer, we do not bring back the murdered person. But there is a great deal we could do to assist the victims of crime. I would certainly support any party in this House which would refer those matters to committee.

There has been some suggestion in this debate that there really was not a free vote in 1976, the last time we dealt with this matter on an official basis.

Mr. Siddon: Right on, it was a fraud.

Mr. Allmand: I want to assure members of this House, as the minister who had to pilot that bill, that it was very much a free vote. As a matter of fact, 30 per cent of the members of this party voted against my bill. On the three votes which we had to face in this House, we only won those votes by margins of five to 15 votes. If we had not had the support of the New Democratic Party, of which all members voted for abolition, we would have lost the vote. The whip of my own party, whose views I respect, campaigned against the bill and against me on the issue and persuaded many members of this party to vote against the bill. In a speech I made at that time I can recall stating that the vote on the bill was to be a free one for everyone except the cabinet. I presumed that since the cabinet approved the bill, they would be exempted from the free vote situation. Within a day of having made that speech, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and the then House leader, who was Mr. Sharp, stated publicly that I was wrong and that the free vote applied to everyone, including members of the cabinet, despite the fact that they approved the bill.

Mr. Kilgour: Just coincidental.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, members opposite will believe anything they want to believe to suit their purposes. I am telling you, Sir, that the vote caused many of us an awful lot of trouble. I think I was the only minister in at least 25 years who had to go to the House with a serious bill and not know that I had my caucus behind me.

We did get the majority in the caucus behind us, but 30 per cent of this caucus voted against the bill. They say that because all the cabinet voted together, therefore it was not a free vote. Yet all the social credit members in the House at that time voted against the bill. Was that not a free vote for them? They all voted against the bill because that is what they believed in. Members of the cabinet decided to support the bill because that is what they believed in.

I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, that in principle I am opposed to having free votes on these types of issues. I believe that if a government has to administer a penalty, then it should take the responsibility to see that the penalty is one with which it can live. I do not see how the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Clark) can state, as he did when he was prime minister, that

he would allow a free vote on the issue, even though he did not believe in capital punishment. He said he would live with the result. On a question of principle such as this, I do not see how a government which believes in one thing can administer a law which is completely contrary to its beliefs. As far as I am concerned, I think that if a government and a party believe in something they should stand together on an issue and either survive or go down with it. That is the way I feel about this particular situation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Allmand: Some members of the opposition have suggested that a true parliamentary democracy is one in which the members in this House vote on the basis of opinion polls and referendums. One after another members of the opposition have stood up in their places and said "I have conducted a poll in my riding, the results of which are such and such." If parliamentary democracy is to be equivalent to voting on the basis of opinion polls and referenda, then we have descended to a very low level.

As the New Democratic Party spokesman who preceded me pointed out, the Conservatives have certainly not read one of their great philosophers and inspirations, Edmund Burke, who pointed out—and this has been repeated time and time again—that in the British system of parliamentary democracy members are elected to represent their constituencies by studying issues in depth, by considering all arguments and then making a decision which they consider to be best for the country based on all the evidence. They then go back to the electorate the next time around and face the music.

I have voted against capital punishment four times in this House already. Twice I have presented bills to abolish capital punishment. I have gone into six elections, three of them following the bill I presented to abolish capital punishment, and I was re-elected. The issue was raised in every election campaign, as was pointed out in this House in debate. People disagreed with me, and I disagreed with them. But we put our views on the table honestly, and despite that it was felt that this was an issue in which one should see balance. As I said, we were re-elected.

Mr. Gamble: You say you know more than your constituents.

Mr. Allmand: I will be glad to distribute those comments about my constituents at the next election. In fact, I will give a copy to the Conservative candidate.

In conclusion, if the supreme value in this country and in this House is human life, then society should never repeat the act of the criminal. A criminal justice system based on revenge is not appropriate to civilized society. We must look for solutions that are humane, civilized but also effective and that offer security. Capital punishment, Mr. Speaker, is not effective, it does not offer security, it is not humane and it is not civilized.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!