

*Capital Punishment*

● (1805)

I both agree and disagree with the Hon. Member on this and I will try to say why. I agree with him because I think that there ought to be a wider range of issues than at present on which there is occasion for free votes, an occasion for Parliament to express itself without the constraints of Party discipline. In that respect I agree with the Hon. Member.

Where I have some hesitation in agreeing with him is when he wants to limit what is viewed as moral issues to issues such as capital punishment, abortion and so on. That sets up a distinction between those issues and other issues which I find hard to accept. In my view, how we organize our economy is a moral issue. It is not as though we have a little group of issues on one side which have a moral dimension and another group of issues, such as how we organize our economy, how we treat the poor, what our social programs, international relations and policy are as far as the Third World is concerned, on the other side.

Whatever issues lie outside the group of issues which the Hon. Member for Mississauga South articulated also have a moral dimension to them. Everything we do in this House of Commons, every policy that we consider and debate in this House, has a moral dimension to it. My hesitation therefore about that part of the analysis of the Hon. Member for Mississauga South is the danger of setting aside certain questions having to do with morality and, by doing so, implying that there is a broader range of issues which are purely administrative in nature, or technical or managerial and do not have a moral dimension. As I said, everything we consider in this House has a moral dimension.

● (1810)

Returning to the question of free votes, I would agree that there has to be a wider range of issues on which Members of Parliament have occasion to exercise independent judgment and judgments which are independent of Party discipline. I say this for two reasons. The first is that I think there does exist a range of issues on which independent judgment is more appropriate than Party discipline and the second is that the heavy hand of Party politics is more omnipresent and pressing in Canadian politics than in the politics of almost any other democratic country of which I am aware.

Now the United States of America is often cited as an example of a political system in which people who belong to one political party or the other feel that there is much more freedom to criticize positions taken by members of their own party or positions taken by Presidents who belong to their own party. That is the Congressional system, but that is not what I am advocating.

I am advocating something that can be found simply by going to the mother Parliament in Britain. As I understand the British parliamentary system from having spent some time there and from having considered these matters as a member of the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedure, there is a much broader range of issues on which it is understood and is conventional that Members of Parliament will

exercise their own judgment. This occurs, for instance, on matters having to do with the House of Commons itself. The first example of this sort that comes to my mind is because I remember a vote which caused tensions in all caucuses here dealing with pay raises for Members of Parliament. That is just an example of issues which impinge upon the life of the House of Commons itself. Those are issues on which, in my view, Members of Parliament should exercise independent judgment. Caucuses and Parties should feel no compunction to take a position on every issue in this area.

As I understand it, it is also the case in Britain that there is a much more relaxed acceptance of the fact that on issues such as capital punishment, for instance, there will be independent and individual judgments rendered by Members of Parliament. This was demonstrated most recently by the result of the free vote which was taken in the British House of Commons on the subject of restoring capital punishment. The House of Commons in Britain was fresh from a massive Conservative victory. The Government and the Parliament could easily have been dominated by the policy or at least the tendency of the party in power which, I understand, is in favour of the restoration of capital punishment. However, the vote had a strange outcome. The motion to restore capital punishment was defeated in a House of Commons dominated by Conservative members.

There we can see how the free vote works, though perhaps not in the same way as those who advocate a free vote on capital punishment generally hope it would work. Nevertheless, that is an example of what I mean. We would have liked to see a free vote here in the House, as we so often asked for, on the testing of the Cruise missile. Issues dealing with disarmament are other issues for which I think it would be good if Members of all Parties felt freer to express what they truly felt.

● (1815)

In the final analysis it is not just for the sake of individual Members and their feeling this independence that I should like to see more of this; it is for the sake of Parliament itself. I think there is too much emphasis in Canadian politics on Party discipline and Party unity in the sense that too much negative attention is paid to the fact that people who belong to the same political Party may disagree with each other on certain matters, probably not on what is regarded as the core platform or emphasis of that Party, but on a range of issues that are not regarded as essential to the Party's self-understanding. I do not know which came first, the chicken or the egg, in this case; but I think what reinforces this is the fascination of the media with any disagreement within a political Party. Politicians become almost paranoid about doing anything which can be construed as an attack on either their leader or on their Party policy. Any creative debate within political Parties has become almost impossible as a result of the paranoia created by the negative attention paid by the media to any so-called signs of disunity. Probably the same media people complain about political Parties being monolithic, autocratic and that there is not any real debate going on within the Party. Of course, the minute there was debate going on they would be there like a