

Capital Punishment

this morning to vote, to vote no, no, no on this life and death issue.

Mr. Allan Pietz (Welland): Mr. Speaker, the subject matter of the motion before the House is both complex and emotional in nature. It has aroused a great deal of emotion both here in the House and across the country. My constituents have written in great numbers on this issue, both in favour of the motion and in opposition to it. Both sides have presented extensive and well researched points of view. Some argue that capital punishment could well result in the death of an innocent person. There is no reported case of this ever having happened in Canadian history.

Early in my life, I had the experience of being the foreman of a jury in a capital crime trial. The jury process is very complete. In this particular case, the charge was reduced to manslaughter. From that experience, I can only conclude that justice is well served by our current jury system. While I have stated that there is no reported case of an innocent person having been wrongfully executed in Canada, there have been several cases where convicted murderers have killed a second time.

The question in the motion we are considering this evening is a difficult one, and one which requires Members of Parliament to study both sides carefully. I have been on record since 1984 as favouring the reinstatement of capital punishment for certain crimes. During the federal election campaign of 1984, I stated my position publicly, that position being that I would vote in favour of capital punishment for capital crimes. I took that position publicly at the time so that when the electorate went to the polls, they would know how I would vote on this important issue, as my Party had stated that there would be a free vote in Parliament.

I feel that I have given this issue careful consideration, not only in the past few months but throughout my political career, a career which has spanned more than three decades. One of the positions I held was that of a police commissioner. I also served on the Court House and Jail Committee of the Welland County Council when warden of Welland County in 1960.

I gained a great deal of respect for the work of policemen and jail guards, whose work is so often difficult, life-threatening, and thankless. The statistics gathered on capital crimes are based on police reports. I believe those reports are the best source of data we have and are as accurate as possible.

Because the death penalty has not been used since 1962, I think the best way to look at the statistics is by starting with 1962, rather than 1976, when the death penalty was formally abolished. With respect to policemen killed in the line of duty, the numbers go up and down over the years. According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, the number of policemen killed was as high in 1984 as it was in any year since 1963.

The numbers I find the most shocking are those having to do with murder in penal institutions. These figures point, unmistakably, to the inability of our prison system to deal effectively with murderers through imprisonment. The annual rate of homicide within Canadian penal institutions has risen by 400 per cent since 1976.

Since the abolition of the death penalty, we average across this country about 11 murder victims a year in our penal institutions. This compares with an average of two murders per year prior to abolition in 1976. This is appalling. It shows, quite effectively, that when murderers are given life sentences, they have nothing to lose, under current practices, by repeating their crime.

I have no intention of reciting some of the horrible, grizzly circumstances by which innocent people are cold-bloodedly killed each and every year in this country. We have heard a few already. We read the papers. We know the stories. We are all afraid, at some level of our being, that this could happen to one of us, or to one of our family, friends, or colleagues.

We "street proof" our children; we don't take unnecessary chances; and we believe in the essential good which exists as part of our human nature. But, we cannot ignore the exceptions. We cannot ignore the horrifying fact of people who have no conscience, people who will kill for money or to feed their own perversions.

Serial killers, whether they operate within the prison system, or out on our streets, must be punished. We owe it to their victims—people our system could not protect. There is no defence, no court of appeal for the innocent victim of a murderer acting with cold premeditation.

I believe the death penalty also has the potential to act as a deterrent. Not all of the time, of course, but enough of the time that I believe that we will be saving innocent lives through its reinstatement. Mr. Neal Jessop, President of the Police Association of Ontario, points out, quite truthfully, that it is impossible to prove that the death penalty is a deterrent or that it is not a deterrent.

Opponents of the death penalty often quote statistics from 1976 to 1985, when the number of murders in Canada remained virtually constant: 701 in 1976, and 704 in 1985. They will say that because there was no significant change in the number of murders during that period, capital punishment is therefore not a deterrent. However, if we examine the longer time frame, from 1962 to 1985, we can come to a much different conclusion. The last year that executions took place in Canada was 1962, and in that year there were 265 murders.

In the years between 1962 and 1976, all of the death sentences were commuted. So that while the abolition of the death penalty here in Parliament did not take place until 1976, in actual practice no executions took place in Canada during this much longer time period.

Opponents of the motion, who argue that capital punishment is not a deterrent, base their case on a selected nine-year