

Capital Punishment

in that context is brought into this debate. Certainly society can be protected in many ways other than the use of the death penalty.

My argument in this case is that I do not think society is protected through the use of the death penalty, nor has it ever been. That is the way in which I would approach it.

Our police officers and prison guards have a very difficult job. We are all in agreement in that respect. I do not know of any other group of people who get more respect from Canadians generally than do our police officers and prison guards. However, I do not think—and this is where my friend and I do part company—that the imposition of the death penalty will make the jobs of our police officers and prison guards any safer whatsoever.

• (1230)

Perhaps I could return to my opening remarks in terms of the various classes of criminals, why people murder, and whether or not they think of the consequences of murder. I do not think it makes any difference whatsoever. I suggest that the Hon. Member ask the policemen in the State of Florida whether or not it makes any difference. They would say that it does not make any difference, and capital punishment is in place in the State of Florida.

I do not think anything I have seen would lead me to the conclusion that reinstating the death penalty, bringing back capital punishment, would make anybody's life easier. I think it takes a little away from each and every one of us.

I remember listening to John Diefenbaker when he was Prime Minister and had to deal with the particular question. In my opinion we must realize that each one of us is responsible for pulling the rope which opens the trapdoor or pushing the button which starts electricity flowing in the electric chair. That is the kind of vote in which we are involved. I frankly could not do it for the reasons I have outlined.

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I commend the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta). I think we have seen something in the House today which is very rare—a Member having gone through a thinking process and changed his mind on the issue. That takes tremendous courage, and I think he ought to be complimented from all sides of the House for doing what he has done today.

The Hon. Member for Lisgar decided to have the courage of his convictions and to follow his convictions on this very sensitive and difficult issue. I want to go on record as publicly complimenting him. I have known him since the 1971 by-election. I know he is a very sincere person.

He would agree with me when I say that in the ultimate, in addition to listening to our constituents, what we owe our constituents most is our judgment and to have the courage of our convictions in terms of making judgments on important issues of the day. That is the most important thing we can do as Members of Parliament.

I am one of those Members of Parliament who really looks askance at some colleagues—and I will not mention them—who conduct surveys in their ridings and respond as a result of those questionnaires. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you are one of the better political scientists in the House. You are a long-time organizer. You know the volatility of surveys and public opinions. You know that how the question is asked can often determine the results of the survey. I think we are doing a great disservice to Canada, to society, and to our constituents if we use that kind of shallow device in terms of making a decision on the issue.

The Hon. Member for Lisgar is a shining example of what should be done. He made the decision that he owes his constituents his judgment and his conscience. He has put a lot of thought and a lot of meditation into the issue. I just want to say in this question and comment period that he ought to be complimented, because we in one Party or another often do not do enough of that in the House. Being a democratic socialist, and he being a Conservative, there are times when we disagree. However, we know where the Hon. Member for Lisgar stands. He is a straight shooter and a very sincere person.

Perhaps I could ask a little question at this point. Since the Hon. Member referred to the church, the teachings of Jesus Christ, and other references to religion, could he inform the House on what role the major churches in Manitoba are playing in this debate? One very positive thing which I saw in my constituency is that the Catholic Church and others are now starting to play a very major role in terms of providing information to the public about the immorality of a society intentionally taking the life of human beings, as is done in the Soviet Union, in Turkey, or in many dictatorial states in the world. I am very proud of the position of the churches in Saskatchewan, and I want to ask the Hon. Member if he could give us information about the campaign of the churches in Manitoba.

Mr. Murta: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for Yorkton—Melville (Mr. Nystrom). He and I have been long-time colleagues in the House of Commons. Regardless of Party lines, we have been very good friends for the last 17 or so years.

The churches in the Province of Manitoba are taking a far more active interest in this debate than they were two or three weeks ago. Obviously the churches are not all together on this particular issue, as I suppose they should be. They certainly reflect their congregations and from where, in effect, their members come.

The national church organizations in the Province of Manitoba are solidly against the reintroduction of capital punishment. That goes right through the gambit, from the United Church, to the Catholic, to the Mennonite Central Committee, et cetera. Of course individually the positions of churches are somewhat different because their members have the freedom to view the issue as they see it. I guess that is what I tried to outline in my speech. I view the issue from a religious