

*Private Members' Business*

he do it to put himself at the front and centre of some political column or controversy. The hon. member for North Vancouver put forward Motion No. 431 because his constituents are calling for Parliament to revisit the capital punishment debate.

The majority of Canadians who support the revisitation of the capital punishment question did not simply wake up one morning and remark that we should create a death row. They are quite upset to see a person murdered in cold blood only to see the murderer get out of prison on parole a few years later. Who can blame them for being upset?

Canadians have a right to a national referendum on capital punishment. They have a right on these types of matters to have policy reflect mainstream values.

Opponents are saying that the murder rate will not decrease if the death penalty is reinstated, that a murderer will still commit murders regardless. It is not possible to make the country free of murder. We will never live in a sinless world. Capital punishment is not put forward as a panacea, and neither is it a simplistic solution.

Canadians want one thing: they want real justice. I do not think that the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General really know what that is. They have their thinking clouded by some misguided social philosophy as they go on and deride the democrats, the Reformers, for speaking up on behalf of Canadians.

Let us make it specific. On September 6, 1995, Melissa Deley was sexually assaulted and murdered in Surrey, British Columbia. She was kidnapped from her own home. There was no reason for that to happen. It was a senseless killing. The offender should have been in custody at the time. The murderer hanged himself in his own jail cell just days later. That was not justice; that was suicide. The justice system failed us in this case. The system fails again and again.

As is to be expected with such a heinous crime, many constituents in Surrey wrote letters to the editors of our local newspapers. In one column a citizen wrote:

Where are our lawmakers when these atrocious murders are taking place? Don't they hear the anguished cries of these parents for their children? Why are these monsters allowed to walk free while our country mourns its losses? For God's sake, wake up, people. The laws have to be changed to protect the innocent. Don't ignore what's happening because it hasn't happened directly to you. You could be next.

• (1815)

June 29, 1987 was the last time Parliament had a chance to debate capital punishment. When the motion came up for debate at that time it was defeated by only 21 votes: 148 to 127. Amazingly enough the Angus Reid poll taken in 1987 showed 73 per cent of Canadians in favour of the death penalty. One would assume that if 73 per cent of Canadians were in favour a similar statistic should have been displayed in the House at that time—not so.

If all MPs in the 1987 Parliament were true to the fact that they would represent their constituents perhaps the vote would have been more like 200 to 75.

This past month notorious murderer Paul Bernardo was sentenced to life imprisonment for the brutal slayings of two Ontario ladies. There was no disputing that Paul Bernardo committed the crimes. The evidence was black and white and the jury declared him guilty of first degree murder. The psychologist even showed that he was sane when he performed the murders and he remains sane today. If he is released from prison he will likely murder again.

On the witness stand observers said he showed no emotions and no remorse at all for the crimes. Now he will spend the rest of his life in a federal prison. Canadians are hopeful that Bernardo will not have the chance to murder again. However, they are sad he was given the chance to live while the innocent were not.

Opponents of capital punishment firmly state there is no need for any debate because the homicide rate in Canada is decreasing. The opponents may be correct in this statement according to Stats Canada. However the category of homicide includes first and second degree murder, manslaughter and infanticide. At the same time we checked that no person either in Canada or in the United States has ever been given the death penalty for a non-capital crime; that is, only those who commit first degree murder can be given the actual death penalty.

The vote on capital punishment in 1987 was not fair. The vote clearly did not represent the real wishes of Canadians. Members at that time did not consult with their constituents sufficiently. They simply came into the Chamber and voted for what they wanted. That historical action has never been accepted by the public as legitimate. Manipulation was rampant and every conceivable arcane rationalization was used by members to justify their vote. It was a day when the elected left their constituents behind and went their own way. We have suffered the consequences for the justice system ever since.

That is where Reformers are different. Not only do we try and listen to what the masses are telling us, we endeavour to put their words and aspirations into concrete action.

The motion is simple:

The government should support and work toward enabling legislation for a binding referendum on capital punishment to be held concurrently with the next federal election.

Let the people speak. The Prime Minister has enough excuses to ignore such a plea. There would be little extra cost since it would concur with the next election. Individual members of Parliament would not have to worry about party lines. The people of Canada would simply decide. There would be no blame on an individual political party since the people would be given the chance.