

Capital Punishment

With regard to those who advocate capital punishment led by the Hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Domm), it is clear that they have lost the battle. If I were a betting person, I would bet at this point that the motion to reinstate capital punishment will be defeated. Even if it is not defeated, it is clear that the vote will be a close one. It is clear that public opinion has moved somewhat over the last number of months since this resolution was tabled in the House of Commons. Canadians in increasing numbers have been convinced that it is not the right thing to do.

When the time comes for me to cast my vote on this resolution, I intend to vote against it. I intend to vote against the reinstatement of capital punishment for a very simple reason. I will vote against it because it is wrong. It is wrong to kill a human being. Capital punishment in my view is the mark of an indecent, uncivilized and immoral society.

To reinstate capital punishment is to revert back to the law of the jungle, to the law of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Vengeance is the only justification for the return of capital punishment. In their heart of hearts, those who argue for capital punishment know that it is not a deterrent. Later on in my comments, I will look briefly at some of the statistics to show that in fact it cannot be proven on a balance of probabilities that it is a deterrent.

To take human life is wrong. It is interesting to note that a great many of those who support the reinstatement of capital punishment are opposed to abortion. That is a somewhat hypocritical position to take. Those very Hon. Members who rose in the House of Commons and argued in favour of capital punishment rose a few short weeks ago to argue about the sanctity of life. It is somewhat strange for those Hon. Members to decide all of a sudden that human life is no longer sacred, that in certain circumstances human life can be taken. I suggest that if it is wrong to kill an innocent unborn child, it is wrong to kill a human being.

It is interesting to note as well that a few months ago, I put a question to the Hon. Member for Peterborough in committee. I asked him if he would execute Colin Thatcher, and he did not answer me. Mr. Thatcher, a former politician, a former cabinet Minister in the Saskatchewan Government, was convicted of first-degree murder. One would have thought, given the fanatic nature of the beliefs of the Hon. Member for Peterborough, that he would not have hesitated to say that indeed, Colin Thatcher ought to be executed because he was convicted of first-degree murder and the Hon. Member supports capital punishment for first-degree murder. It is strange he did not say that Colin Thatcher should be executed. I asked myself why he did not say that Colin Thatcher should be executed and it is because in his view, Colin Thatcher does not fit the mould of a convicted murderer.

It is clear that as far as the Hon. Member for Peterborough is concerned, the debate is lost. I take solace in the fact that even though the motion to put together a committee composed of 15 Members might carry, I am convinced, given the

closeness of the vote, that we will never see legislation to bring back capital punishment carry in this House.

Eleven years ago, this matter was decided here in the House of Commons by a very slim margin. The arguments were made 11 years ago both in favour of and against capital punishment. Parliament, in its wisdom, decided not to restore capital punishment at that time. Why are we here again 11 years later talking about capital punishment?

We know that the Prime Minister made an election promise and we know that he has not kept too many of his election promises. However, one of the promises he made was to have an open, free vote here in the House of Commons in spite of the fact that he is opposed to capital punishment.

I commend the Prime Minister for the position he has taken. I am appreciative of the fact that he took the opportunity a few days ago to speak in the House of Commons, but it was wrong for him to make that promise. If he was in fact a true leader, if he was as principled as he says he is, he would not have allowed this matter to be debated again.

• (2230)

It is not often that I agree with the Prime Minister but I agree with the position he has taken on this issue. I agree with his words:

—we uphold one simple principle: the inherent dignity of a human being, the inherent worth of a human life. I will resist with all my strength, all of my life, any action that would diminish that reality and would lessen that value.

A few weeks ago the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) said:

I believe the state must aspire to a higher ideal than simply killing people who cannot be fitted into our scope of conduct.

The Leader of the New Democratic Party a few short weeks ago said:

In coldly taking the life of a murderer, the state would simply compound the real unacceptability of the original violent act.

Eleven years ago former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau said:

Are we, as a society, so lacking in respect for ourselves, so lacking in hope for human betterment, so socially bankrupt that we are ready to accept state vengeance as our penal philosophy? To retain (capital punishment) in the Criminal Code of Canada would be to abandon reason in favour of vengeance; to abandon hope and confidence in favour of a despairing acceptance of our inability to cope with violent crime except in violence.

It is obvious that even if capital punishment were reinstated it is unlikely that any responsible Prime Minister, any reasonable, rational Prime Minister, would ever allow another human being in Canada to be executed.

Some of the advocates of capital punishment say that they must respond to their constituents. Yes, public opinion polls have been somewhat consistent over the years, although in the last number of weeks and months those in favour of capital punishment, according to the public opinion polls, are fewer in number.