

Capital Punishment

white and poorly educated. It is my belief and my fear that if we were to reimpose capital punishment in this country, we would have a very similar situation. Of those who committed murders, the poor, the uneducated and the non-white might suffer the final penalty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I will recognize the Hon. Member for Burnaby, and then the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby).

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I know my colleague, the Hon. Member for Halifax West, wants to speak as well. My colleague, as he has indicated, has participated in four previous debates on this issue. I would like him to comment on an event which occurred last week when the national leaders of the youth wings of Canada's three major political Parties issued a joint statement urging the Parliament of Canada to vote against the reinstatement of the death penalty. I, as a Member, was not present in this House in 1976 and during previous votes on the death penalty, but to the best of my knowledge, this kind of statement in which the youth wings of the national political Parties speak out in unison, calling upon this Parliament not to take this step backwards as a society, is unprecedented. The statement was signed by Elaine Fox, the chairperson of the Youth Steering Committee of the New Democratic Party, Jonathan Schneiderman, President of the Young Liberals of Canada, and Irene Porter, President of the Progressive Conservative Youth Federation.

To the best of my colleague's knowledge, does this extraordinary statement from the leaders of all three of Canada's political Party youth wings not represent a very fundamental and profound statement, which indeed is unprecedented in the history of debate on this very important question?

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member for Burnaby is correct. This is indeed a profound change and a very significant statement coming as it does from the leaders of the youth wings of the three political Parties. I want to say to the Hon. Member that I was not only impressed by that, but I was impressed by statements made by the leaders of all the major churches, to whom I referred earlier, and profoundly impressed by the large number of letters from individuals and individual congregations of all churches. I am referring not just to the leaders of those churches who are speaking out, but to a broadly based coalition of local residents speaking through their churches. Certainly, we have seen what I believe is the beginning of a major change in the thinking of Canadian people on the subject.

• (2050)

Mr. Crosby: Mr. Speaker, fortunately for us all the official report *Hansard* records our remarks, and they are there to be read by all. My remarks stand on their own merits.

Let me explain to the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) what exactly I said and what exactly I meant when I drew comparisons between capital punishment and the

International Monetary Fund, since the result is the exact opposite of what he indicated in his remarks.

The International Monetary Fund is not something on which most Canadians are knowledgeable. It can be left to experts. We can rely on the expert opinions to form the basis for our decisions. But capital punishment is an issue that belongs to each and every Canadian. It is not for an elite few to decide what to do with capital punishment. It is not for sociologists, the clergy or professionals—it is for every Canadian. We ought to regard the view of every Canadian on this issue. That is what I meant.

The Hon. Member is totally wrong if he frames those remarks in any other way. What is at issue here is the opinion of all Canadians on a matter on which all Canadians have an opinion.

I simply want to say this to the Hon. Member. Although the point is made about voting in principle, if the motion passes, then all Canadians will have an opportunity to express their views. In that process a consensus can be formed on the issue of capital punishment.

Because the Hon. Member does not agree with capital punishment and because he has decided for himself that he is against it, does he not want that process to take place, a process that can bring about a consensus on the issue that may result in a negative vote in the House of Commons against capital punishment, which will be satisfactory to all Canadians?

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, first, let me say that if I misunderstood the Hon. Member's comments earlier then, of course, I apologize. I have no intention, nor have I ever had any intention or desire, to misinterpret any Member's statements.

On the question of the views of the Canadian people let me say this. There are countries, and I will use the example of Switzerland, which have built into their democratic systems a procedure whereby if a certain percentage of the people want to have a referendum on any question, then they prepare a petition and obtain enough signatures so that that question goes on the ballot at the time of the next election. That is a part of the democratic system in Switzerland, and I respect it. If we had that in our system, then I would accept it. But we do not have that. We have a system in which Members of Parliament are elected to do and to say what they believe and to vote the way they think is correct. The penalty for them, if their electors think that they did wrong, is that they will not be re-elected.

I ask the Hon. Member for Halifax West (Mr. Crosby) why he and his friends say that we should follow the views of the people of Canada on this particular question because it is what the polls state. Why have they not said—and I am not saying that they should—that Members of Parliament should vote on the question of abortion or on the question of price and wage